

ECHOES OF "PURE SPEECH": AN INTERTEXTUAL READING
OF GEN. 11:1-9, ZEPH. 3:8-20, & ACTS 1-2.

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

WESTERN SEMINARY

PORTLAND OREGON

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS IN BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BY

PAUL J. PASTOR

FEBRUARY 21, 2011

© 2011, Paul J. Pastor.

*Please use and copy freely,
giving credit where credit is due.*

Paul J. Pastor

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

APPROVAL

Faculty Advisor

Date

Program Director

Date

Academic Dean

Date

To my wife Emily,

patient, kind, and beautiful,
without whom this project would have been impossible,
and who gently reminded me during its research, writing and revision
the importance of purifying my speech;

this paper is lovingly dedicated.

-P.J.P.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures -----	<i>pg. 2</i>
Acknowledgments -----	<i>pg. 3</i>
Abstract-----	<i>pg. 4</i>
Chapter 1: Subject, Significance, and Methodology-----	<i>pg. 5</i>
1.1 “Pure Speech” - Setting the Stage -----	<i>pg. 5</i>
1.2 Significance for Biblical Studies/Exposition -----	<i>pg.6</i>
1.3 Methodology -----	<i>pg. 7</i>
Chapter 2: Intertextual Method and Literature Review -----	<i>pg. 9</i>
2.1 Reading Intertextually -----	<i>pg. 9</i>
2.2 Selected Relevant Exegetical Literature -----	<i>pg. 13</i>
2.2.1. Incompleteness of the Babel Narrative -----	<i>pg.13</i>
2.2.2. Zephanaic Genesis Accession -----	<i>pg.14</i>
Chapter 3: Textual Demonstration -----	<i>pg. 18</i>
1.1 Literary “Echo” and Narrative Movement -----	<i>pg. 18</i>
1.2 Themes/Motifs of Genesis 11:1-9 -----	<i>pg.18</i>
1.3 Development of the “Pure Speech” Narrative in Zephaniah 3:8ff. --	<i>pg. 22</i>
1.4 Lukan Accession and Development -----	<i>pg. 35</i>
Chapter 4: Conclusion and Next Steps -----	<i>pg.49</i>
4.1 General Comments -----	<i>pg. 49</i>
4.2 Recommendations for Further Study -----	<i>pg.49</i>
4.3 Implications and Suggested Responses for Faith Communities ----	<i>pg. 51</i>
Bibliography-----	<i>pg.53</i>

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 3.1 - *Themes/Motifs in Genesis 11:1-9* -----pg. 9
Figure 3.1 – *Chiastic Structure of Genesis 11:1-9 and Zephaniah 3:8ff* -----pg. 26
Table 3.2 – *Themes/Motifs in Genesis 11:1-9 and Zephaniah 3:8ff*-----pgs. 34-35
Table 3.3 – *Themes/Motifs of Acts 1-2* -----pgs. 36-37
Table 3.4 – *Summary of Theme/Motif Contributions* -----pg. 45

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The list of people whose care and energy contributed to this project is long. I particularly want to thank:

My wife Emily for her love and support,
My daughter Elaia for her cuteness and affection,
The Pastor family for encouraging my love for the scriptures,
The Downing family for providing “thesis retreats” with great food and a writing attic,
Dr. Ray Lubeck for his example and influence over the last seven years,
Dr. Jan Verbruggen for his Hebrew expertise and great patience,
Dr Gerry Breshears for reminding me of why the heart and head must always work together,

And the many friends, past and present, who have pointed me to Jesus as I searched the Scriptures.

Grace and peace to every one of you.

-P.J.P.

ABSTRACT

Pentecost as a reversal of Babel has been widely seen by exegetes since the early days of the Church. However, these two stories are by no means simple “bookends” with empty narrative space between them. Rather, it shall be shown that an extremely significant instance of textual connection comes from the often overlooked text of Zephaniah.

It will be argued that the Babel narrative of Genesis 11:1-9 is accessed and developed by Zephaniah 3:8-20; and that that text in turn provides a guiding paradigm of Babel-reversal that is utilized by Luke in the Pentecost account of Acts 2. Seen in this way, Zephaniah's prophecy provides an indispensable link between the two texts of Genesis and Acts; simultaneously looking back into the seminal history of the covenant community and forward to the radical in-breaking of the Spirit at the harvest feast of Pentecost.

Intertextual “echoes” of themes and motifs will be traced at length through the three texts, noting linguistic parallel, narrative similarity, and intertextual dependence for the developing trans-biblical narrative.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Subject, Significance and Methodology

“Pure Speech” - Setting the Stage

For those who claim a reasonable familiarity with Biblical literature, the narrative of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) is a familiar one. The overwhelming hubris and united industry of the builders, their impressive (though uncompleted) feat of blasphemous architecture, and YHWH's decisive action against them through the confusion of their language are all vital themes of a story that has captured the imaginations of Jewish and Christian theologians, Medieval painters, and writers of children's songs.

Perhaps of slightly less wide cultural notoriety, but still well known is the New Testament story of Pentecost and surrounding events found in Acts 1-2. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the nascent Church with fire and wind, and its subsequent linguistic consequences is one of the key moments of the Church's narrative, and perhaps of history itself.

But do not these two accounts - one near the very beginning of the Tanak¹, the other as part of a text traditionally placed as the last narrative book of Scripture - seem dynamically interrelated? Pentecost as a reversal of Babel has been widely seen by exegetes since the early days of the church. However it is vital for the biblical theologian to note that these stories are not mere “bookends” with empty space between them. In fact, one of the most significant instances of textual connection comes from the often

¹ The Hebrew Scriptures, as is becoming well known outside of Judaism; “Tanak” is a vowelated acronym for Torah (Instruction), Nevi'im (Prophets) and Kethuvim (Writings).

overlooked text of Zephaniah.

My argument is that the Babel narrative of Genesis 11:1-9 is accessed and developed by Zephaniah 3:8-20; and that the Zephaniah text in turn provides a guiding paradigm of Babel-reversal that is utilized by Luke in the Pentecost account of Acts 1-2. Seen in this way, Zephaniah's prophecy provides an indispensable link between the two texts of Genesis and Acts; simultaneously looking back into the seminal history of the covenant community and forward to the radical in-breaking of the Spirit on the great first feast day of the Church. The concept of “pure speech”, so vitally embraced by the authors of scripture, must not be overlooked in one of its clearest instances: Zephaniah 3:8-20.

Significance for Biblical Studies/Exposition

But why does this even matter? Perhaps the dusty book of Zephaniah, found (or lost) in the most overlooked corner of the Old Testament has been largely forgotten for a good reason? Smith notes that “...the book of Zephaniah is neither well-known nor well-liked²”. Perhaps it may be ignored without major detriment to outside exegesis?

With Paul's relevant “all scripture is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16) aside, I propose that we need to re-engage our reading of Zephaniah's text, noting its own merits and contributions, and benefitting from its unique beauty and literary intricacy.

This reading of Zephaniah breathes a life and fire into both our reading of Genesis and our reading of Acts that should be indispensable for the thorough scholarship, exegesis, and preaching of those two more widely read texts. Though the contribution of Genesis 11:1-9 to the Lukan narrative of Acts 1-2 has been widely seen, the paucity of voices citing the existence and the importance of the relationship of Zephaniah 3:8ff to these two texts ought to be addressed.

2 Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Dallas: Word Pub., 1990), 47.

Furthermore, this reading is beautiful, exegetically sound, and intellectually fascinating, and biblical scholarship ought to capture the imaginations and hearts of the academic community, while at the same time advancing our knowledge and appreciation of the Scriptures. The wind and fire of the word flames on its own power – but of what good is it if scholars, pastors, and the wider community are not present to be warmed and lit by it? This study seeks to bring its readers to that fire – though it may be burning in a more “out of the way” portion of the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, it is my hope that the contribution of this paper to the field of Biblical scholarship will advance in a small way the beneficial trend of dedicated intertextual studies as a major element of biblical theology. The demonstration of textual access, allusion and reinterpretation by the Biblical authors in this instance has implications for our wider reading of biblical literature on the hermeneutical and conceptual level. A sustained study of this type (in part an applied case study of intertextual reading), is timely and relevant.

Methodology

At the outset of this study, it is vital to note the steps necessary to describe and demonstrate this thesis with adequate thoroughness and support. With this in mind, I offer this brief introduction to my line of inquiry.

In chapter 2, from an introductory discussion of the relevant hermeneutical values applicable in a study of this nature, we will move into a brief review of relevant literature on the three passages here (placing the majority of our attention upon Gen. 11:1-9 and Zeph. 3:8-20). After noting a strong precedent in the text of Zephaniah for intertextual connections with Genesis, establishing an expected pattern for the prophet's use of the

earlier work, we will venture into original textual interaction.

Noting strong textual and thematic connections between Genesis 11:1-9 and Zephaniah 3:8-20, we will exegete in Chapter 3 the relevant sections of the Zephaniah passage with these intertextual considerations in mind. We will follow textual “echoes” of the Babel narrative, focusing on theme and motif.

From this foundation, we will broaden the study into the Acts 2 narrative through the now established pattern found in the previous 2 passages, concluding this section with the indispensability of Zephaniah's contribution to the scriptures on this point.

Chapter 4 will tie this study together, offering suggestions for preaching, reading, and further scholarship. Final conclusions of the study will be applied on a principle level to the lives of our faith communities.

Chapter 2

INTERTEXTUAL METHOD AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Intertextually

At the outset of this inquiry, it is vital to acknowledge key hermeneutical values that guide our tracing of the “pure speech” narrative through these passages. If the concept proposed here can be demonstrated, it will require a coherent application of principles derived from a theory of biblical literature that widens the context of the examined passages to include parts of the canon that are (in some views) seemingly unrelated by anything except their traditional classification as scripture.

In particular, we must ask what principles of intertextuality accurately account for our text in its current “final form”. It is undisputed that Biblical authors build upon the work of others in their writings, but to what extent can this be demonstrated, and by what rules is the interpretation of this phenomenon governed? Is such usage limited only to explicit textual appropriations such as the superscription of Psalm 34? Or can such usage be *implicit* as well, accessing earlier writings with more subtlety, but no less validity to their borrowing? Does the concept of Lukan literature accessing Zephaniah accessing Genesis push the borders of the biblical reader's credulity, or is it in fact consistent and to be expected as part of a literary strategy seen throughout the canon?

Though a discipline whose nascent beginnings can be seen outside of the scriptural corpus as early as the advent of midrashic tradition (for the Hebrew Bible) and the Apostolic fathers (for the present canon), the study of biblical intertextuality has

received a great deal of attention in recent years. The legacy of the term has grown to include multiple (and occasionally jarring) distinctions, however the root concept as applied to biblical studies has maintained enough inherently defined identity to maintain its value.

Fundamentally, intertextuality is a term used to describe *those literary phenomena that occur when two or more texts are brought into some manner of direct textual relationship*. These connections can be verbal or allusive, but they always constitute some degree of shared literary reality. The eventual implication of this reading in light of the transmission and editorial history of the Christian canon and the burden of widely recognized intra-textual evidence is that *the entire canon represents a level of context that contains the entirety of the Scriptures*.

The dramatic widening of context beyond the borders of book or scroll afforded by this approach has become a fixture in much significant exegesis throughout history, and has allowed for the uncovering of an ever growing body of textually demonstrable and exegetically meaningful readings that (though by no means limited to recent scholarship) have offered a compelling alternative to the longstanding historical and/or redactionary emphases of many 19th and 20th century students of biblical literature³.

Gary Schnittjer, in seeking to define the context within which biblical narrative must be interpreted, points to “the relationship of story and echo. Biblical narratives

3 A key aspect of this development is the increased emphasis placed by a segment of the scholarly community upon the “final form” of the text as demanding our attention, rather than a search for historically prior developments or redactions of the text. This view will be adopted here, with no attention being given to possible earlier redactionary forms of the texts we are engaging. This of course, does not disclude appropriate textual criticism, which may be given attention as relevant to the determination of the text's final form.

contain echoes which seem to invite, simultaneously, reading within the boundaries of the scroll or book itself and crossing the scroll's edge to read the narrative in relation to other biblical writings which can be 'heard' in it."⁴ Though the term is imperfect for describing the range of intertextual connections demonstrable in Scripture, for our purposes this literary "echo" - as a "signal of retrospective intertextuality" (231) is useful.

A primary reason for this is the expansion of the intertextual concept to potentially include more than explicit or implicit verbal repetitions or similarity. These intertextual echoes may perhaps even be heard in biblical literature sheerly through allusion -with or without the added textual weight of exact or closely similar shared language⁵. The force of shared scene, shared setting, shared plot motifs, etc. can all independently or synergistically link texts in profound and surprising ways⁶. The canonical Scriptures may thus be seen to constitute a complete and self-contained literary universe; a coherent textual world unto itself.

Schnittjer goes on to observe: "The biblical reader can rightly appreciate multiversal biblical narrative contexts only from within the universe of the scriptures. Biblical context, according to this hypothesis, has some borders that cannot be crossed and others that must be crossed. Knowing where and how to cross borderlines is the magic of good interpretation." (232).

4 Gary E. Schnittjer, "The Narrative Multiverse within the Universe of the Bible: The Question of 'Borderlines' and 'Intertextuality'" (*Westminster Theological Journal* WTJ 64:2, 2002), 231.

5 A pertinent example is arguably found in Jonah 4, where a subtle yet striking intertextuality of scene exists with the Genesis 3 "fall" narrative arguably independent of direct verbal connection. The garden of Eden is ironically recreated on a pitifully small scale, as Jonah sits "East" of Nineveh. Says Jonkers and Lawrie of this allusive set-piece "...his miniature garden of Eden, his 'paradise regained' with its single tree, does not lack its own miniature serpent" (187).

6 Of course to preserve the validity of this methodology, it is essential to avoid the gross error of what Schnittjer terms "parallelomania". The determination of intertextuality is both a science and an art, and we must meet the text upon its own terms. As Schnittjer urges, "Patience and caution, rather than premature interpretation or interpretive zealotry, should characterize any kind of comparative literary study" (233).

If then, this “magic” were applied to the texts of Genesis 11:1-9, Zephaniah 3:8ff, and Acts 1-2, what would be found? Are the “borders” of scroll, genre, language etc. that these three texts evidence uncrossable, or *must* we cross them in the interest of responsible exegesis? The answer can only be half answered by theory alone. Direct textual interaction (as will be seen in chapter 3) is needed to explore any textual echoes that may be present. The narrative universe of the scripture must be allowed to be tested beyond its borders for legitimate and necessary textual insight.

Michael Fishbane advances the discussion with the following assertion:

"...intertextuality is the core of the canonical imagination; that is, it is the core of the creative imagination that lives within a self-reflexive culture shaped by an authoritative collection of texts... put in a nutshell, I would say that intertextuality is a form that literary creativity takes when innovation is grounded in tradition."⁷ Thus, for Fishbane, the intertextual phenomenon is essential to a final-form canon, including that of the Tanak. The "authoritative collection" of the canon exists because of a mode of creation that built upon itself. As a primary guiding force for the creation of the self-contained textual universe of scripture, this imaginative function can be seen as indispensable for establishing an integrated literary whole, rather than a collection of disparate texts.

If Fishbane's assertion is correct, then it stands to reason that exegesis done within a self-reflexive canon (if seeking authorial intent as the locus of a text's meaning) must also be done self-reflexively. If we fail to read a text in literary juxtaposition with works that to one degree or another guided its creation, we run the risk of missing the "point" of

⁷ Michael Fishbane "Types of Biblical Intertextuality," (Congress Volume: Oslo 1998, VTS 80, 2000), 391.

the text, defined for our purposes as the meaning which its author intended to convey.

Only to the degree that we share an author's train of thought through a text that we encounter can we be said to share that author's meaning. If Zephaniah's (and subsequently Luke's) innovation is grounded in the Genesis tradition, then it is essential that we follow in the footsteps of the later author, striving to embrace the textual echoes that may be ringing.

Selected Relevant Exegetical Literature

Having stated the view of intertextuality being used in this study, it is important to carefully interact with existing exegetical literature that contributes to our discussion . Though comparatively little intertextual exegetical work has been done in Zephaniah when contrasted with other texts from the Latter Prophets, outstanding work has been done by a few scholars.

Incompleteness of the Genesis Babel Narrative

But would we be prompted from the Genesis narrative to look for more than that text offers us? Is this later text-accession simply tacking on an unnecessary development of a theme? Ross observes:

So it is with this story that the common history of all mankind comes to an abrupt end, which leaves the human race hopelessly scattered across the face of the entire earth. It is this that makes the present narrative so different from those preceding it: In each judgment there was a gracious provision for hope but in this judgment there is none. It does not offer a token of grace, a promise of any blessing, a hope of salvation, or a way of escape. There is no clothing for the naked sinner, no protective mark for the fugitive, no rainbow in the dark sky. There is no ray of hope. The primeval age ends with judgmental scattering and complete confusion. *The blessing is not here; the world must await the new history*⁸.

After reading the Genesis 11 narrative, a careful reader should remain in suspense;

⁸ Allen P. Ross, "The Dispersion of the Nations in Gen 11:1-9,." (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 138,1981), 127 (italics mine).

is this the end? Has humanity experienced a judgement for which there is no remedy? Is unity impossible after the divine dispersion? The answer to these questions demanded by the Genesis text are not provided by the Genesis texts. Rather, it will take two more installments of this divine serial to bring resolution to the plot: the promise of the “new history” (Zeph. 3:8ff), and the new history itself (Acts 1-2).

Zephanaic Genesis Accession

Is there a textual precedent for reading these texts in close narrative unity, though? As will be shown, the answer is a resounding yes.

By far the most recognized of these instances is seen the opening of the Zephaniah text, in 1:2-3a. The text is widely acknowledged by scholars as constituting a reversal of creation that upends the Genesis world-making narrative. Here all the original categories of breathing beings are present – humanity, beasts, birds, fish, but their order is reversed from the Genesis account, and it is stated that they will be “swept away” (Heb. 'אָסַף') by YHWH⁹. This is noted by a plethora of scholars, notably by Michael DeRoche in the 1980's¹⁰.

The Babel narrative in Genesis 11 is also widely seen as having a strong kinship

⁹ The text shares its creature categories with Hosea 4:3, a parallel example of YHWH “undoing” his work in Creation as judgment. However, these categories must be viewed in context in a representative manner. DeRoche observes that “Hosea and Zephaniah choose to mention only these three groups of animals because they represent the three spheres in which the animal kingdom lives; the sea, the heavens, and the land. Thus, the list is representative of all animal life, and the prophets mean to announce a total destruction.” (“Reversal of Creation in Hosea” 403-404). This total destruction is surely evident from the context.

¹⁰ Michael DeRoche "Zephaniah 1:2-3; The "Sweeping" of Creation." (*Vetus Testamentum* XXX.1, 1980). His other articles, "Contra Creation, Covenant and Conquest (Jer. VIII 13)." (*Vetus Testamentum* XXX.3, 1980) and "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea." (*Vetus Testamentum* XXXI.4, 1981), add to this discussion as well, though in a more oblique manner.

with Zephaniah 3 by numerous scholars, notably McComiskey¹¹, DeRoche and Ross.

Ross observes that “Zephaniah 3:9-11 appears to be constructed antithetically to this passage with its themes in common with Genesis 11:1-9: the pure speech (i.e., one language), the gathering of the dispersed people (even from Cush), the removal of pride, and the service in the holy mountain.” (120).¹²

Hilber reads it powerfully in this manner as well, observing that

Zephaniah borrowed from Genesis motifs for announcing the reversal of creation by a flood like judgment. He again borrows a Genesis motif for his announcement of universal salvation... Therefore, as judgment was pictured in Zephaniah 1:2-3 as the undoing of creation, salvation in Zephaniah 3:9-10 is pictured as the undoing of the judgment at Babel.¹³

Hilber's linguistic support work for this claim is excellent.

Hendel as well reads these texts (in addition to the Pentecost narrative) in close relationship, pausing a discussion of Derrida's view of necessary linguistic multiplicity to note:

In fact, the vision of a single, primal, shared tongue is as much a legacy of the Babel story as that of a confused and disastrous multiplicity of languages. The prophets spoke of a world in which all humanity worshipped God in a single tongue, reversing the Babel story in a divine prophecy: 'For then I will make the peoples pure of speech. So that they invoke the Lord by name, and serve Him with one accord' (Zephaniah 3:9). Acts 2 similarly records a miraculous translation event at Pentecost in which people of different ethnicities could understand each other's speech; patristic writers have described the Pentecost event as a transcendence of the punishment of Babel in the Holy Spirit. Translation, in these intrabiblical readings of Genesis, appears as a miraculous vision,

11 See Thomas Edward McComiskey *The Minor Prophets: an Exegetical and Expository Commentary. Vol. 1, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998). McComiskey's contribution is of particular interest as he views Zephaniah's Babel accession as specifically preceding a return to an Edenic state of security and restoration in 3:13, etc (951). His interpretation is compelling, adding another layer of Genesis accession to the Zephaniah text.

12 Ross rightly interprets the Babel story as being one primarily of *dispersion*. “A quick reading of the passage shows that the predominant idea is not the Tower of Babel, but this scattering” (119). Language and unity are thus related in these texts, as arguably union is the biblical counterpoint to dispersion. This theme is apropos for Zephaniah's setting in the Twelve, and in the Latter Prophets as a whole. As a literary corpus, “dispersion” is indisputably a key theme of these texts. This motif can be claimed as foundational to both the Zephaniah and Acts 2 texts as well, where a reversal of dispersion (ironic in the Acts context as preceding a second diaspora resulting from persecution) is in view. Ross's compelling demonstration in the above article of the chiasmic structure of the Genesis 11 passage further highlights unity/dispersion as the narrative bottom line of that text.

13 John W. Hilber, *A Biblical Theology of Zephaniah*. (Thesis. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 26.

a messianic dream reversing the disaster of Babel.¹⁴

Elizabeth Achtemeier also recognizes the validity of the link between these passages saying:

That Zephaniah pictures here what is tantamount to God's new beginning with his creation is shown by the fact...that verses 9-10 bear echoes of Genesis 11:1-9... Here, pure language is restored and the peoples worship God "with one accord"... When we consider that the one universal fellowship in the world, begun with the Spirit's transformation of its language (Acts 2) is now the church of Jesus Christ, this proclamation by Zephaniah is seen to contain within it wondrous glimpses of God's future.¹⁵

The recognition of important connection between these texts is not strictly limited to the theological community. Renowned literary critic Northrup Frye, in his excellent work on the Bible and literature titled *The Great Code*, connects the Genesis and Zephaniah texts for large level thematic reasons; a move that ought to catch the attention of anyone whose textual ears are already pricked for the literary affinities demanded by an intertextual reading. Frye observes that:

Jerusalem is on top of a hill, and symbolically it is therefore the highest point in the world... its temple thus touches heaven, as its demonic parody the Tower of Babel also tried to do (Genesis 11:4) The building of Babel ended in the confusion of tongues, in contrast to the "pure speech" promised to the restored Israel in Zephaniah 3:9^{16, 17}.

Thus, even a cursory study of the literature quickly establishes the intertextual influence of Genesis narrative upon the text of Zephaniah. Though the "uncreation" of 1:2-3 is the most established example of this, other arguable instances include reference to flood (also in 1:2-3), circumcision (linguistically connected through the *הַכְרַתְּוּ* of 1:4) Sodom and Gomorrah (explicitly referenced in 2:9) and a mock "Table of Nations" in chapter 2's lengthy and condemnatory list of Judah's enemies, beside the extended Babel

14 Ronald S. Hendel, *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 171.

15 Elizabeth Rice Achtemeier, *Nahum--Malachi*. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986) 82-83.

16 Northrup Frye, *The Great Code*. (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 158.

17 Frye later brings both texts into juxtaposition with the Pentecost account as part of a larger discourse on the nature of faith. "We are back here to the contrast of the Tower of Babel, the building of which was accompanied by a confusion of tongues, and the 'pure speech' (Zephaniah 3:9) or gift of tongues (Acts 2:4) promised for the new age" (230).

reference that is the climax of the book and the subject of this paper. At the very least, even the most conservative scholars must agree that Genesis is recognizably present in Zephaniah, and obviously contributed tremendously to the author's narrative framework.

In sum, we have seen precedent for the use of seminal Genesis texts in Zephaniah, and seen that Luke as well could be expected to access the developing Tanak meta-narrative to advance his own story of the early church's first days. We now move to direct textual interaction, to examine the literary “echoes” that may be heard in the passages at hand.

Chapter 3

TEXTUAL DEMONSTRATION

Literary “Echo” and Narrative Movement

Now the question must be addressed – is the “pure speech” narrative *textually demonstrable*? The difference between responsible scripture reading and “parallelomania” may occasionally seem small in outcomes, but be large in terms of truly demonstrable exegetical practice. This chapter, then is concerned sheerly with textual evidence, gathered and arranged under the interpretive lens of the unfolding biblical narrative of “pure speech” and its implications as seen in Genesis 11, Zephaniah 3, and Acts 1-2.

To demonstrate this, we will primarily venture into the realm of theme and “echo” to examine the large-level narrative movements that make these texts three disparate parts of a single narrative. We will trace common themes through each of our three passages, paying special attention to the specific contributions of each to the progressing narrative as a whole. As we proceed, it will be seen that these large level echoes are supported by linguistic parallels and thematic and literary image connections that are certainly more than coincidental.

Themes/Motifs of Genesis 11:1-9

Though the story of the Tower of Babel is a familiar one, it is frequently under-read in terms of its constituent literary elements. Much more than a story of human pride, more even than an “origin of languages” narrative, it is a dense text, packed with nascent themes and motifs that can be traced through not only the Tanak, but the entire canon. As we examine this, one can do no better than to start with the story. Following is the text in

my own translation:

“It was that all the earth had one lip, and one speech.
 And it was in their journeying from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shin'ar and dwelt there.
 And each man said to his friend, 'Come – let us make bricks and burning, burn them.'
 And bricks were stone for them, and tar was mortar.
 Then they said, 'Come – let us build for us a city and a tower whose head is in the heavens, and let us make for ourselves a name lest we be scattered over the face of all the earth.'
 And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which was built by the sons of Adam.
 And YHWH said 'Look – one people and one lip- and all of this is just the beginning of their doings.
 Nothing will be impossible for them, all that they plan, they will do. Come, let us go down and mix their lip, so that no man may hear his friend.' Thus, YHWH scattered them from there over the face of all the earth and they ceased building the city. Because of this was its name called Babel, because there YHWH mixed the lip of all the earth. And from there YHWH scattered them over the face of all the earth.”

It may be quickly seen that as noted above by Ross (see chap 2), the story is fundamentally one of *dispersion*. Humanity -the “sons of Adam” in “all the earth (כָּל-הָאָרֶץ)” - are apparently resistant to YHWH's Genesis 1:28 blessing to “fill the earth (מִלְאֵם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ)”, preferring instead to make for themselves a name (נַעֲשֶׂה-לָּנוּ שֵׁם)¹⁸.

This endeavor is the impetus behind both a city and a heaven- piercing tower. Its motive is a resistance to dispersion, a profound hesitation to be scattered over the face of all the earth (נִפְּוֵץ עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ). Its' consequence is a “double descension” of YHWH – two coming-downs that anticipate and frustrate the planned ascension of humanity. YHWH locates the root of the problem linguistically, confusing their speech with the result being exactly the fate that they had feared – being dispersed כָּל-הָאָרֶץ- “over the whole earth”.

18 Though Gen. 1:28's emphasis appears to be primarily upon the multiplication of fertile humanity, it can at least be said that the builders of Babel do *not* want to scatter, and that YHWH most certainly *does* want them to scatter. The command to “fill the earth” is not merely a command for dispersion. With this said, I do see opposition to the fill the earth mandate in Gen 11, and think it is defensible (though not a point to pound the proverbial pulpit on) that their resistance to dispersion is an act of disobedience. Part of this may relate to a previous pattern in Genesis of what I term as “going forth as result of disobedience”. Both Adam and Eve's exit from Eden (Gen 3:22-24), and Cain's doom to wander (Gen 4:14) after murdering his brother may be given as previous examples of this. Babel is not the first time in the biblical narrative that humanity is locationally displaced as a result of relational transgression or sin. The established pattern would seem to be that those who transgress their bounds, are “cast out” as a result.

The end goal of the builders is not wholly lost however, for their city has indeed earned itself a name! In bitter irony though, the name is בְּבִלְלַי - “confusion” - and quite far from any glorious appellation that their unity would have produced.

A list of significant themes/motifs/images emerges from this narrative. The most notable for this study are these:

Table 3.1 - Themes/Motifs in the Babel Narrative

Theme/Motif	Babel Narrative (Gen. 11:1-9)
Dispersion	11:4, 8, 9
“כָּל-הָאָרֶץ” (The whole earth)	11:1, 4, 8, 9
Changing of Speech	11:1,7,9
“שֵׁם” (Name/naming)	11:4,9
Unity	(Implied in “whole earth” acting as one, also in negative in 11:6, etc.)
The Descent of God	11:5,7
Pride	(implicit throughout, esp. 11:4)
City	11:4,5,8

As was noted in Chapter 2, the Genesis 11:1-9 account is remarkable when viewed against its contextual passages, for *lacking a clear redemptive resolution*. Though the nations end dispersed according to YHWH's desire, something powerful – unity of human language and purpose- has been lost, and the scene changes without any apparent hope of restoration. Humanity is broken and dispersed, leaving behind a city named “Confusion”, lying far below heaven, built out of burned mud and tar. The careful reader should be left a bit deflated.

The reader should feel this disappointment keenly after reading the closely contextual narratives of the Fall in Genesis 3 (containing a promise of redeeming offspring in 3:15), Cain and Abel (a tragedy that nevertheless ends with a merciful “mark” upon murderous Cain to stay the hands of avengers in 4:15, as well as a restoration of Adam's line in Seth in 4:25), and most clearly the Flood Narrative – providing both unparalleled judgment and powerful restoration in a remnant (9:1-7), and a covenant (9:8-17). Even the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 is a restoration of sorts, as the blessing of YHWH in chapter 9 is seen bearing fruit.

In the context of this pattern of judgment/restoration then, the sharpness of the unresolved plot of the Babel narrative should manifest itself with particular poignancy. The careful reader ought to be asking, *demanding* even: “where is the resolution?” Does the story end here? The genealogical records immediately following the account drive the painful point even deeper. Generation after generation passes in a few short stanzas, until we are brought to Abram – a patriarch whose importance is great enough to distract us from the fact that we have just read a plot without a resolution¹⁹.

The themes noted above, combined with a narrative arc left unresolved in Genesis

¹⁹ It may be rightfully asked by some (especially conservative) readers why we would even seek the resolution of a “plotline” in a story that to many Judeo-Christians is not merely an origins of language narrative, but “history”. Whether the events described by Genesis 11 :1-9 are in fact “historical” in the fully scientific use of the term is likely unprovable (i.e. it is highly unlikely that we will find incontrovertible evidence archaeologically or otherwise establishing that the events described in the biblical account are in fact demonstrable within the historical discipline). The literary narrative at hand here must thus be read with eyes of faith if it is to be connected to human history at all.

Though I personally believe that Genesis is a text that does carry significant and extremely meaningful historical referent, it must be established that in reading the canonical scriptures, we are encountering a *literary* work – essentially *interpreted* history. Though the author may not be originating theme and plot, they are at least recording and interpreting a story by means of theme and plot. Thus, Genesis (and I argue, the Tanak at large) is a literary creation that must be examined in light of basic literary technique; including plotline (which demands resolution) theme, motif, etc.

Obviously, the key literary question here remains one of genre – what kind of literature is Genesis? How one answers this question is foundational to the questions one demands of the text. For our purposes here, it may at least be said that Genesis is fundamentally a interpreted *narrative* text – regardless of its extra-textual connection to human history – and thus must be interpreted according to the rules of “story”.

and even the entire Former Prophets leads us to the next major installment of the story, found in a place that seems initially only loosely related – Zephaniah 3:8ff.

Development of the “Pure Speech” Narrative in Zephaniah 3:8ff.

As we begin, it is essential to remember that by the time a reader reaches Zephaniah 3:8, they have already encountered chapters 1- 3:7 - a text that is grounded in powerful connections to the Genesis narrative. This is effective in setting a precedent that primes the careful reader for a continuation of this intertextual narrative strategy. Though 3:8ff can stand on its own two feet in terms of intertextual evidence linking it with Genesis, when it is seen as the conclusion of a trajectory that began with a horrific parody of the Creation story (1:2-3), and has proceeded through strongly defensible references to the Flood (linguistically also in 1:2-3), the circumcision rite (linguistically connected through the *הַכְרֵתֶינָהּ* of 1:4), Sodom and Gomorrah (2:9), and the Table of Nations (2), this upending of Babel takes on a convincing added relevance. In a work that is thoroughly rooted in the Genesis tradition, concluding the text²⁰ in this manner is powerful, if unsurprising. The text in my own translation follows:

“Therefore, wait for me” is the utterance of YHWH, “for the day²¹ when I arise for the prey²².
Because my judgement is to gather nations,
to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out on them my indignation, all my burning anger²³;

20 The text of Zephaniah of course is itself a portion of a larger work. Whether its fullness can be appreciated when read in isolation from the rest of the Book of the Twelve is extremely doubtful, and thus the “conclusion” of Zephaniah in the larger sense does not come until the end of Malachi.

21 Key throughout the Book of the Twelve, the Day of YHWH is discussed thoroughly in Zephaniah. It is portrayed in chapters 1-3:8 as a terrible day of wrath and the brutal and burning anger of YHWH. 3:9 however, adds a beautiful counterpoint to the Day, establishing that the multifaceted Day will also be one of purification and restoration, when God will establish His righteous and humble remnant- a people from all peoples who seek Him and call upon His name.

22 (LXX – rise up “for a witness” *ἀναστᾶσέως μου εἰς μαρτύριον*). This variant, along with other contributions of the Septuagint, could be interesting to examine in light of Luke's use of koine in Luke-Acts. Here, *μαρτύρος* may bear closer examination in connection with Lukan usage.

23 Zephaniah uses YHWH's “burning anger” vocabulary as seen in multiple examples elsewhere in the Twelve (notably in Jonah 4), and firmly ties that burning anger to God's *jealousy*. This is done perhaps

for in the fire of my jealousy²⁴, all the earth will be devoured.
 For then, I will turn the lip of the peoples pure, to call – all of them – upon the name of YHWH,
 and work for him with a single shoulder.
 From beyond the rivers of Cush my suppliants, the daughter of my scattered ones shall carry my offering.
 In the day of it, you will not be put to shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against
 me,
 because then I will turn aside from among you your exultant pride and you shall not be haughty²⁵ in my
 holy mountain.
 But I will leave among you a people afflicted and poor, and they shall shelter in the name of YHWH.
 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, and shall not speak falsehood, and there will not be found in
 their mouth a tongue of deceit.
 For they shall pasture and lie down, and nothing shall cause them to tremble²⁶
 Cry out for joy, daughter of Zion, raise a shout O, Israel!
 Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! YHWH has turned aside the judgments
 against you, he has cleared out your enemies.
 In that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not fear, Zion – do not let your hands sink down.
 YHWH Elohim is in your midst - a mighty one who will save.
 He will rejoice over you with joy, he will silence you with his love.
 He will exult over you with a shout of joy;
 As on a day of festival, I will sweep the suffering ones²⁷ from you, so that you will not bear the reproach.²⁸
 Behold, I will attend to all your afflictors at that time.
 And I will deliver the lame and gather those driven away and I will set their shame to praise and a name in
 all the earth.
 In that time I will bring you in, in the time when I gather you together;
 for I will put you to a name and to praise in all the peoples of the earth

more explicitly (e.g. 1:18, 3:8) than anywhere else in Hosea-Malachi, and seamlessly flows with the text's
 concern for judgment as an act first and foremost of purifying love. It is clear in Zephaniah that God's
 “burning anger” is with the object of a humble and righteous remnant who have been purified through it.
 24 (LXX – “fire of zeal?” $\pi\upsilon\rho\iota\ \zeta\eta\lambda\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$). Again, the LXX contributes a reading that seems to soften the
 harshness of the MT, and may be interestingly compared to the language of Luke-Acts.

25 (גָּבוֹהַ) – literally, “high”.

26 Compare with Leviticus 26:6 and context. This text's seminal influence on the topic of covenant
 obedience and its consequences can be felt throughout the Latter Prophets. The imagery of 26:6 is blatantly
 accessed here.

27 The function of אֲנָשִׁים as a Niphal participial in the construct state is to indicate a set of grieved or suffering
 ones. This use of the Niphal Participle MP construct to indicate a “type” or “class” of people is by no
 means unheard of in Hebrew prophetic literature. The majority of extant examples from the Latter prophets
 are found in Isaiah and Jeremiah (see clear examples in Is. 11:12, 61:1, and Jer. 23:26, among others)
 though also seen on one other occasion in the Twelve beside the verse at hand; in Nahum 3:10. Thus it is
 not a stretch to say that this usage, consistent with the literary “class list” in the following verse, is certainly
 well within the capabilities of the Hebrew Niphal in prophetic literature.

The Niphal here should probably be read resultatively, as a reflexive reading does not make sense
 in the context. Whether this should be read (with the following וַיִּשְׂמַח) as the conclusion of the statement
 of 3:17 is a source of much debate as well as a frequent parting of ways in modern translations. There are a
 multiplicity of ways that this can be read, depending on various syntactical choices – some readings even
 directly contradictory to the others.

I am advocating a reading that includes this phrase as a bridge between the verses, including it
 most strongly with 18, but directly linked to and even flowing out of YHWH's delight in the previous verse.
 Thus, the “joy/delight” of the Lord could be read as a motivation for Him to “sweep” suffering away from
 his people- as if on a day of shared divine festival. Though this is opposition to the LXX, it follows the MT
 marking of the verse ending.

28 Adele Berlin's comment in the Anchor Bible Commentary that in the MT “this verse is unintelligible”
 (145) is rather apt. For an excellent summary of the various exegetical options here, please see her
 discussion in that work. Here I have worked to preserve the apparent leaning of the verse in isolation while
 integrating it with the preceding context.

when I return your captivity before your eyes', says YHWH.”

Coming as it does as the conclusion of a text characterized by YHWH's judgment, this passage represents a major dramatic and restorative shift in Zephaniah. In a book that opened with YHWH essentially un-creating the world, we are left, among other highlights, with dramatic promises of national and international unity, purified praise of YHWH, and even a shared “shouting” exultation between God and Zion/Jerusalem.

It may be quickly seen that our entire list of significant themes and motifs from Genesis 11:1-9 is present in this text, along with several notable additions not explicitly seen in the Babel story which will contribute directly to the Lukan narrative (these new themes are italicized below):

- Dispersion (3:10)
- “כָּל-הָאָרֶץ” (The whole earth) (3:8, 20)
- Changing of Speech (**3:9**, implied effects in 13, 19)
- “שֵׁם” (Name/naming) (3:9,12)
- Unity (3:9)
- The Descent of God (YHWH in their midst here, see below. 3:15b, 17)
- Pride (reversed, 3:11-12)
- City (3:14ff)
- “*Wait*” (3:8)
- *Fire* (3:8)
- *Worship* (3:10)
- *Festival* (3:18)

Following is a development of each of these themes or motifs in light of their relationship with the Genesis Babel narrative²⁹.

- **Dispersion (3:10)**

²⁹ It is important to note that nearly every one of these is “upended” in some way from their earlier instances, consistent with the overall movement towards reversal of Genesis narratives in Zephaniah.

Though not highlighted with the same central intensity as in the Babel account, the theme of dispersion in Zephaniah 3:8ff is still both present and important. The “story” of the passage begins in a place analogous to the ending of the Babel narrative in Genesis 11:8-9; the nations are dispersed, dis-unified, and scattered.

Though starting in this place of dispersion, YHWH's utterance at the beginning (3:8) of this passage indicates his decision to reverse his scattering of the nations at Babel - “my judgement is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them my indignation, all my burning anger; because in the fire of my jealousy, all the earth will be devoured.”

It would seem that this gathering of the nations is a fundamentally destructive act of YHWH. Why is he gathering them? In order to **לְשַׁפֵּד עֲלֵיהֶם וְעָמִי כֹל חָרֹן אַפִּי**.

But the tone of the proclamation changes quickly, redefining our concept of what this fiery, earth consuming judgment will actually result in. In fact, YHWH intends something profoundly restorative here; “For then, I will turn the lip of the peoples pure, to call – all of them – upon the name of YHWH, and work for him with a single shoulder.³⁰”

The outcome of this gathering of nations, will be a nearly direct reversal of the events that were seen in the Babel account. Narratively, this may be presented as an interesting chiasmic structure:

30 This juxtaposition of judgement and restoration (perhaps even judgement *through* restoration) should not surprise the careful inter-biblical reader. In expounding this passage, Richard D. Patterson notes that “Judgement and hope, then, rather than being irreconcilable themes, are two aspects of one divine perspective. Both are designed and intertwined to accomplish God's purposes. Zephaniah's concluding verses, far from being out of place, are neither unexpected nor contextually inappropriate” (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. Chicago: Moody, 1991), 370.

Figure 3.1 – Chiastic Structure of Genesis 11 and Zephaniah 3

A) Unity of purpose/project - building the city and tower (Gen 11:4-5)

B) Speech-changing, confused language (Gen 11:7)

C) Scattered nations (Gen 11:8-9)

C) Gathered nations (Zeph 3:8)

B) Speech-changing, purified language (Zeph 3:9)

A) Unity of purpose/project - Serving YHWH with “שָׁמְרֵם אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים”¹, and worship (Zeph 3:9-10)

Dispersion as a theme thus appears in Zephaniah as a precursor to YHWH's gathering of the nations with the intent of restoring them to pure speech and the service and worship of his name. The prophecy of Zephaniah 3:8ff projects a endpoint to the narrative trajectory set up by the Genesis Babel account.

– “כָּל־הָאָרֶץ”² (The whole earth) (3:8, 20)

The phrase is indicative in both accounts of an apparent totality of the world's people. Though the term (perhaps even as used in Genesis) may be used in a more limited sense to indicate “land”, the contextual features of “the nations”, “Kingdoms” and the geographical marker “beyond the rivers of Cush” indicate that the term here is used indicatively of the entire world of humankind. As may be seen above, this totality mirrors the Genesis account, providing an appropriate counterpoint for the multitude of nations that spill forth from YHWH's scattering in Genesis 11:1-9.

In the midst of this totality, however, YHWH's covenantal relationship with Zion is especially highlighted against the backdrop of “כָּל־הָאָרֶץ”³, as we see that “all the peoples of the earth” will consider Jerusalem to be “renowned and praised” (ESV), or more significantly, having a “name” (“שֵׁם”) among them, an idea that we shall expand below.

– **Changing of Speech (3:9, implied effects in 13, 19)**

We now turn to one of the most significant themes of these passages. The changing of speech in each of these texts represents a profound turning point and major plot shift. As we have observed in the Babel account, it is the changing and “confusion” of speech that precipitates the disunity of humanity and the abandonment of their shared purpose and project. YHWH's disruption of their lingual ties causes a worldwide scattering that, biblically speaking, is still unresolved in the Latter Prophets, by the time the canonically sensitive reader encounters Zephaniah.

Zephaniah's ending prophecy, however, anticipates the reunification of the earth once again, a unity made possible by YHWH's turning of the “שְׂפָתַי וְעַמִּים” (“the lip of the peoples”) “pure” or “polished”, an act that enables *all* of them (at least representatively; preserving the earlier totality of their confusion) to call upon his name and serve him with a singleness of purpose that mirrored humanity's drive to build the city and tower of Genesis 11.

At this stage of our discussion, the specific characteristics of this purification of speech are unimportant. What *is* significant are the profound thematic connections linking it intertextually with the Genesis 11 narrative and the outcome of those themes in this passage – a reunification of all the peoples of the earth for the shared purpose of calling upon the שְׂפָתַי of YHWH, by the means of a divine restoration of their confused speech³¹.

31 Of course, the context of judgement that this speech changing comes in must not be forgotten. Zephaniah's contribution ought to convince us that the judgement and restoration of YHWH's decisive action are in fact two facets of a single attribute, rather than separate or opposing forces within the divine nature.

– “שֵׁם” (Name/naming) (3:9,12)

As will be remembered from the above summary of the Genesis 11 Babel narrative, a key motivation for humanity's doomed resistance to YHWH's desired dispersion was the urge to “נַעֲשֶׂה-לָּנוּ שֵׁם”, to “make for ourselves a name” - a term indicative (as in English) of earning renown or fame. We observed that a name was indeed made for them in that place, but that “Confusion” was a tragic/ironic title that was surely not the type of name that the heaven-bound builders of the city had in mind.

The “name” motif appears significantly here in Zephaniah, but with important developments. It is used in two ways. Its main usage is in referring to the “שֵׁם יְהוָה” - the “name of YHWH”. This name is the referent of “לְקַרְאֵ בְּלִים”, and calling upon it in this context is clearly the result of the purification³² of the first half of the verse.³³

– Unity (3:9)

Another major shared theme of both Genesis 11:1-9 and Zephaniah 3:8ff. is that of unity. This is seen in unity of language, unity of place (the gathering of all peoples in 3:8) and unity of destiny (YHWH's devouring judgement). Forecast here in Zephaniah then is an undoing of YHWH's scattering work and a restoration of what was lost at Babel – both common language *and* (perhaps more fundamentally) common purpose.

Unity in Zephaniah 3:8ff takes the form of a restored common bond and purpose to the nations, as seen clearly in the text; the service and worship of God unites the

32 As obliquely mentioned above, the adjective בְּרִירָה here probably indicates the sense of “polished” or “cleansed”.

33 The phrase “calling upon the name of YHWH” is significant in the Book of the Twelve, especially having been framed by Joel 3:5: “וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה יְמִלֵּט”, “and it shall be that all who call upon the name of YHWH shall be delivered”.

nations to a degree that has not been seen this explicitly in the Tanak since the Babel account.

– **The Descent of God (YHWH in their midst here, see below. 3:15b, 17)**

The major turning point in the plot of the Genesis 11:1-9 story is what may be termed the “dual descension” of YHWH. YHWH's first coming down takes place in 11:5, the second in 11:7. Both events are referred to by the verb “יָרַד”.

The first of these descensions (11:5) is a type of divine reconnaissance mission, portraying YHWH coming down to see the city and tower that humanity is raising in the plain of Shinar. Having decided that this project is “only the beginning” (ESV) of humanity's unified doings, YHWH proposes (to an unnamed agent, read alternatively as a plural of majesty or a trinitarian reference) going down to confuse the people's speech. This plan, of course, is executed, with earth scattering results.

Though this theme (as shall be seen below) of God descending to change the speech of the nations will find its most striking counterpoint in the Acts 1-2 text, it is not without parallel in the Zephaniah prophecy. There are, however, developments that bear mention.

The foremost of these is seen in Zephaniah 3:8, where YHWH tells Jerusalem to “wait” for him, for the day when he will “arise to the prey”. קוּמִי in this context is a classic use of the verb, best translated into English as “arise” or “stand up”. How then does this ascension accord with the theme of YHWH “coming down” set up by the Babel narrative, where YHWH's only apparent motion is a downward one?

At the risk of taking the motif too far (it may very well be the case that there is no

conscious authorial intentionality behind the image in this setting) , I offer two brief thoughts on this matter. The first is that a 1:1 correlation is by no means demanded by an intertext to still be read in close relationship. Indeed, as noted in chapter 2, the very nature of intertextuality is “innovation grounded in tradition”. This theme of God's movement is important to trace through Zephaniah because of it's ultimate accession by Luke in the third text that we shall examine. God's rising up in this context, his divine “devouring” of the nations comes in 3:9 by a changing of their speech³⁴.

As well, in 3:17 YHWH is already in the “midst” of the people, a setting that assumes a previous descent. Which descent this presence results from among the numerous descents of God that may be seen in the passages spanning Genesis 11 and the Book of the Twelve may merit further exploration. However, for our purposes, it is enough to say that: 1) YHWH's presence in the “midst” (קרבו) of the people implies some previous descent and 2) that this theme will be seen most significantly as a textual connection between Genesis 11 and the Lukan Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 (see below).

– **Pride (reversed, 3:11-12)**

In addition to the aforementioned themes and motifs, the implied pride of the doomed builders of Babel finds a potent counter point in the Zephaniah 3:8ff passage. Though implicit in the Genesis narrative, the behavior of the builders (raising a tower with its top in the heavens, and making a name for themselves) is hardly indicative of humility.

It is interesting with this in mind to compare YHWH's promise of 3:11-12:

“In the day of it, you will not be put to shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against me, because then I will turn aside from among you your exultant pride and you

³⁴ As shall be seen below, it may even be read that this “rising up” in light of Acts 1-2 took the first action of a *descension* through the Spirit at Pentecost.

shall not be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave among you a people afflicted and poor, and they shall shelter in the name of YHWH,”

Thus, YHWH promises to lift the shame of the people's rebellious deeds: deeds that involve haughtiness (literally “highness”) in the holy mountain. And the shelter of this humble people? “The name of YHWH” – not a self made name. God brings humility to a prideful people, in categories directly upending the shame of Babel.

– **City (3:14ff)**

It is significant in light of the Bible-wide opposition of Zion and Babylon that the Babel narrative is *the* definitive biblical origin story for the “city of wickedness”. Contrasted with Jerusalem/Zion in Zephaniah 3:8ff, it will only be noted here that the Zephaniah prophecy ought to be included in any discussion regarding this “tale of two cities” in the Latter Prophets³⁵.

Most significant as a takeaway for this theme is that while Babel is the definitive episode of humanity united apart from God, the Zephaniah prophecy colors *Jerusalem* as the epicenter of humanity's reunification for the worship and service of YHWH. In both instances the “city” is the symbolic center of a world wide movement of humanity.

– **“Wait” (3:8)**

35 As noted, it is no Biblical accident that the epicenter of this seminal dispersion is Babel/Babylon. Literarily speaking, it has been widely recognized as Zion/Jerusalem's counterfoil as the paradigm “evil city” of Scriptural settings. It embodies all that God's city opposes, a theme traceable throughout scripture until the city “literally” takes on flesh and blood as the whore of John's Apocalypse. On this theme Ross notes:

Babylon was the prototype of all nations, cities, and empires that despise God's instructions and raise themselves in pride. Babylon represented man's megalomaniacal attempt to achieve world peace and unity by domestic exploitation and power. They would be brought down in confusion; herein was the warning to the new nation of Israel: any disobedient nation would be abased and brought low in spite of her pride, ingenuity, and strength. The "Babylon" motif became the common representation for the antitheocratical program. Later writers drew on this theme and used the name as a symbol for the godless society with its great pretensions (126).

There has been much tremendously valuable work on this theme by many prominent theologians throughout the church's history. Augustine and Buber are prime articulators of a biblical theology of “city”.

Turning now to themes/motifs of Zephaniah 3:8ff without major parallel in the Genesis narrative, we begin with the utterance of YHWH (“נִצְאֵם־יְהוָה”) found in 3:8 - “לִּלְכֹּן־הַכּוֹרֵן”, “Therefore, wait for me”³⁶. The protagonist of Zephaniah's plotline is without question YHWH, and this command to wait for his day, and its earth changing implications highlights his role as the prime mover of the narrative. We will return to this theme in our discussion of Acts below.

– **Fire (3:8)**

Though an extremely tenuous textual echo could perhaps be heard in the “burning” (from the fiery verb שָׂרַף) of bricks in the Babel account, it is far too textually feeble to mount any convincing evidence beyond the cursory pointing out of its presence.

Thus, we treat the theme of fire as the characteristic element of God's indignant wrath in Zephaniah 3:8 as significant *not* for its accession of the Genesis Babel narrative, but for the reappearance of the image in Acts, as the memorable form the Spirit takes when descending upon the church. As it shall be discussed below, this appearance of “fire” is most significant simply as a predecessor to the changing of speech and representative reunification of the nations as will be seen in the Pentecost story.

Significant in its own right however, is the concept established here that the fiery judgement of YHWH is profoundly restorative. Without downplaying its nature as

36 This exhortation by YHWH has significant connections with earlier works in the Twelve, Most obviously with Hosea, Joel, Jonah and (very notably) Habakkuk – Zephaniah's immediate predecessor in the Twelve. Habakkuk in particular stresses the necessity of patient waiting for YHWH's action (arguably Messiah in that context), and the text's exhortation (2:3) and the example of Habakkuk's character (3:16) adds much to our reading of Zephaniah. We are set up for Zephaniah by Habakkuk with an expectation for what (or indeed who) the people of YHWH are waiting for, and the attitude that such a waiting should take. Indeed, the strong message in Zephaniah 1:12 against those who are expecting God to do nothing should perhaps be read as response to those who fail to heed Habakkuk 1:3-4.

imprecatory “judgement”, we can emphasize the fact that textually, its outcome seems to be a purification of speech that leads to an international movement of praise and service of YHWH³⁷.

– ***Worship /Service of God (3:10)***

As was seen above, the worship and service of YHWH is the result of his profound reversal of the Babel confusion. His worshippers are drawn to Jerusalem from the nations (גוֹיִם), from kingdoms (מַמְלָכוֹת), even from “beyond the rivers of Cush” (מֵעֵבֶר לְנַהַר־יַבְדֵּן). They come bearing YHWH's offering (3:10), part of a process of restoration and renewal that ends with the shouting and exultation of both YHWH and the epicenter of this process – Zion (3:14,17). The process of YHWH's purification of the speech of the peoples precedes (perhaps precipitates) this progression of praise. This is worship resulting from a people whose speech has been purified.

– ***Festival (3:18)***

Little will be said about this here, as the verse in which it is seen presents such difficulties of syntactical analysis and exegesis beyond its relative value to this study. Let it stand, however, that there is at least an appearance of the “festival” concept in this context, a quiet echo that will serve only as an interesting textual connection in light of the Pentecost narrative. I am advocating a reading that includes this phrase as a bridge between the verses, including it most strongly with 18, but directly linked to and even flowing out of YHWH's delight in the previous verse. Thus, the “joy/delight” of the Lord could be read as a motivation for Him to “sweep” suffering away from his people- as if

³⁷ Brown writes “This fire comes...not only to destroy but to refine and transform. After the cosmic conflagration, whoever is left will invoke God's name with pure speech...” (114).

on a day of shared divine festival^{38,39}.

Chart and Transitional Comments

To aid in visualizing this tracing of theme/motif, the following table may be found helpful:

Table 3.2 – Themes/Motifs of Gen.11 and Zeph 3

Theme/Motif	Babel Narrative (Gen. 11:1-9)	Zeph 3:8ff.
Dispersion	11:4, 8, 9	3:10
כָּל־הָאָרֶץ (The whole earth)	11:1, 4, 8, 9	3:8, 20
Changing of Speech	11:1,7,9	(3:9, implied effects in 13, 19)
שָׂם (Name/naming)	11:4,9	(3:9,12)
Unity	(Implied in “whole earth” acting as one, also in negative in 11:6, etc.)	3:9
The Descent of God	11:5,7	(YHWH in their midst here, see above. 3:15b, 17)
Pride	(implicit throughout, esp. 11:4)	(reversed to humility, 3:11-12)
City	11:4,5,8	(3:14ff)
“Wait”	N/A	3:8

38 In concept, if not in direct linguistic connection, I see a powerful and ironic juxtaposition between this “appointed time” (widely regarded festively as noted above) with YHWH's darkly festive “sacrifice” in 1:7. Perhaps the general movement of the book toward an ironically redemptive development of YHWH's “day” should shed light upon this relationship, developing the “guests” of 1:7 to be the community seen in 3:18. Sweeney notes that “those who had suffered punishment or exile were to be considered as a sort of sacrifice or offering...” (Sweeney, “Zephaniah”, 203). Perhaps interpreted less through the lens of exile, and more through the lens of “remnant” - both Ba'al's and YHWH's seen elsewhere in the book this statement can take on its fullest meaning for this verse.

39 Tangentially, Sweeney notes the distinct “harvest terminology” (“The Twelve Prophets”, 522) of gathering in 3:8, as seen also in 1:2. Though we cannot expand upon any relationship here, it is at least intriguing to note that Pentecost is a feast of the harvest.

<i>Fire</i>	N/A (perhaps “שִׁרְיָ” in 11:3)	3;8
<i>Worship</i>	N/A	3;10
<i>Festival</i>	N/A	3;18

In spite of these impressive reversals, however, it must be remembered that this is *prophetic literature*, even in its own time written as a fundamentally forward-looking text. The story so far is still fundamentally incomplete, though there now shines through this text a very specific glimmer of hope. Its next significant installment (and arguable resolution) will be seen in Luke's narrative work of Acts 1-2⁴⁰.

Lukan Accession and Development

We now turn our attention to the arguable conclusion of this narrative arc – Acts 1-2. Though at first glance there is a greater literary and textual chasm separating the Lukan account from our previous two texts than that spanning the distance between Genesis 11:1-9 and Zephaniah 3:8ff, it is by no means unreasonable for us to expect profound intertextual connection between the Tanak and Luke's writings. Luke is notable (as are the other synoptics) for his quotations and allusions to the Tanak in both volumes of the Luke-Acts text.

In a text that is clearly grounded in the Tanak, and with strong verbal representation from the Latter Prophets, we should not be surprised to find the conclusion of a mytho-poetic⁴¹, age old origins history such as the Babel narrative, and developed so

40 Of course, our concern in this paper is with a single facet (pure speech) of the massive meta-narrative that extends throughout the entirety of the Christian canonical scriptures. There is a sense in which the full, eschatological fulfillment of Zeph. 3:8ff. is not fully seen until the glorious apocalyptic restoration of Rev. 14ff. However, if Pentecost is seen as an eschatological in-breaking of the Spirit, and the beginning of a process that culminates with cosmic cleansing and redemption, it becomes clear that the single meaning of Zeph. 3:8ff. can easily contain multiple, expanding referents – particularly Acts 1-2..

41 Sharing form with the literary categories of poetic myth – not referring to historicity.

masterfully through Zephaniah's prophecy, in the articulate Koine of the “beloved physician”. Even a cursory reading of Luke-Acts reveals important stylistic similarities to the Tanak (frequently in the language of the LXX), and recognizable Semiticisms.

In addition to this, the sheer volume of Lukan quotation and allusion as easily traceable in the UBS indices of OT quotation and allusion/verbal parallel gives credence to the notion that his portrayal of the Pentecost event in Acts 1-2 as a reversal of Babel framed in the categories set up by the Zephaniah prophecy is credible both in terms of literary strategy and authorial intentionality. It is easily obvious that Luke's text is highly indebted to the Hebrew Bible, and shows clear indications of being “innovation” grounded in the “tradition” of the holy literature of the Tanak.

We will now turn to tracing the same list of themes and motifs collected above through Acts 1-2. Though our dealing with this text will be limited, it shall be sufficient to show the richness and volume of the textual “echoes” of the developing “pure speech” narrative in the Pentecost story. We shall finally see in Jerusalem the resolution of the story begun in the plain of Shinar.

We begin with our list of themes and motifs, noting their appearances in Acts 1-2:

Table 3.3 – Themes/Motifs of Acts 1-2

Theme/Motif	Pentecost Narrative (Acts 1-2)
Dispersion	2:5 (Jews of the Dispersion ⁴²)
The whole earth (various wordings of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$, in the sense of geographic/societal “all-ness”)	<p>1:8 “ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρίᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.”</p> <p>2:5, “παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν”⁴³.</p> <p>2:16, (Quoted) “...πᾶσαν σάρκα...”</p> <p>2:21 (Quoted) “πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ</p>

42 Most likely including both ethnic Diaspora Jews as well as international proselytes.

43 This is reinforced by the extensive list of their languages in 2:9-11.

	ὄνομα Κυρίου...” 2:38-39 “ὕμῖν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ ἐπαγγελία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακρὰν...”. 2:43 “πάση ψυχῇ”.
Changing of Speech	1:14, 1:19, 2:1-4, 6-11
ὄνομα (Name/naming)	2:21 (Quoting Joel), 2:38
Unity	2:12, 2:44ff
The Descent of God	1:2,9, 21 2:34 (in negative), 1:8, 11, 2:2-4
Pride	2:37 (in negative)
City	1:4, 12, 19, 2:5, 2:14
“Wait”	1;4
Fire	2;3
Worship	2;47
Festival	2;1

We will now turn to a brief examination of each of these themes/motifs in more depth, paying especial attention to their relationship with Genesis 11:1-9 and Zephaniah 3:8ff.

– **Dispersion (2:5)**

The theme of dispersion is impossible to miss in this passage. The setting of the story is Pentecost, a festival for which Jews and proselytes from around the entire Roman world were assembling. This provides a milieu of languages that is the direct result (in light of the preceding interbiblical narrative that we have been following in this paper) of Babel, a multitude of nations and tongues gathering together.

This gathering is of course precipitated for this population by a common bond – the Jewish faith and the celebration of one of its principal feasts (Pentecost). Some would

perhaps see in this multiethnic gathering a fulfillment of Zephaniah 3:10's prophecy that "From beyond the rivers of Cush, my suppliants, the daughter of my scattered ones shall carry my offering."

However, it quickly becomes clear that the simple gathering to celebrate the Pentecost harvest festival is by no means as significant in light of YHWH's utterance in Zephaniah as the event that is about to take place. The dispersion begun by YHWH at Babel and that becomes a major theme in the Latter Prophets (as captured briefly in Zeph. 3:8ff) is viewed in its full magnitude here, before being radically reinterpreted.

As will be seen below, the dispersion is representatively unified in a hitherto unprecedented way (calling upon the name of *Jesus*), but is not reversed in the sense one might expect. Rather than gathering the dispersion back into one geographical location, the Pentecost event and Peter's evangelistic sermon unites the "scattered ones" in preparation for a second dispersion – back to their representative geographic locations with the mandate to disperse for the Gospel's sake to "the ends of the earth" (consistent with Acts 1:8).

As a result of this, the careful reader's notion of dispersion is reformatted according to YHWH's original vision as captured in the early Genesis narrative. "Scattering" in and through multiplication in order to fill the earth is a fundamentally *good* thing. Dispersion in its original purpose is neither negative nor disunitive. Once Babel has been reversed at Pentecost, this positive and even triumphant dispersion may commence as both a redemption of the painful and tragic dispersions of Israel's covenant history and perhaps even as a reoriented fulfillment of YHWH's original mandate to fill the earth.

– **“The whole earth” (1:8, 2:5, 16, 21, 38-39, 43)**

The term כָּל־הָאָרֶץ as used in both Genesis and Zephaniah is indicative of the entirety of the earth ; an all inclusive term to show that all of humanity is in view. Though this Hebrew term does not of course directly appear in the greek text of the Lukan Acts narrative, the term $\text{\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha \acute{\eta} \gamma\eta}$ found in the LXX passages (see especially Gen. 11:1,8 and Zeph. 3:8, 20) connects with several very similar “alls” in the Koine of the Acts 1-2 passage, as noted briefly in the above chart. These may be seen (especially in contextual conjunction with one another) to be indicative of a similar or same range as כָּל־הָאָרֶץ .

The primary importance of this theme in Acts is that it seems to denote the same totality of world presence that is in view in both Gen. 11:1-9 and Zeph. 3:8ff. “All the earth” is here (at least representatively) in the same sense as the preceding passages that we have examined.

– **Changing of Speech (1:14, 1:19, 2:1-4, 6-11)**

We must now address the linchpin of this entire narrative, the “changing of speech” that asserts itself with such emphasis in all three of these passages. Consistent with the concept's previous appearances, it is this action on the part of God that is the turning point of the narrative in Acts. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit (see below) precipitates a reversal of Babel that is in every way restorative, though interestingly, not an exact “undoing” of God's previous “mixing” of tongues.

One would expect the narrative counterpoint of the Babel story (one language changed to many) to directly upend the previous speech changing (many languages changed to one). But the Acts narrative, rather than simply undoing YHWH's previous action of confusion by removing linguistic barriers, provides a vision of lingual

restoration that is more redemptive than simple replacement of a common human tongue. The old barriers remain; what has changed is the speaker themselves. They have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

The account in Acts 2 portrays a situation in which, instead of simply re-endowing the representative humanity gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration with the original אֶתְּחַתְּךָ לְשׁוֹן אֶתְּחַתְּךָ לְשׁוֹן seen in Genesis 11:1, God purifies their speech by miraculously giving the newly Spirit-filled church the ability to speak in ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς (“other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance”, ESV).

Thus, when the multitude comes together to hear the nascent Church speaking, they find they are bewildered, not because they all suddenly share a single unitive language, but because each of the travelers hears the disciples speaking ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ - each in his own language (2:5-6).

It may thus be seen that the reversal of Babel here takes on a uniquely miraculous characteristic, with God's purification of human speech being a restoration not merely of the original unity, but that unity with the powerful addition of human lingual diversity. Though the divine motives for this unique undoing of Babel go unmentioned in this text, it is a powerful thought to consider that where before the united worship of YHWH would have taken place with one speech, now that same worship is exponentially multiplied to include a redemption of the linguistic distinctives and traditions of “all the earth”. God is not merely “hitting the reset button” on human language, he is transforming the brokenness of the nations' linguistic confusion for a new unity in

diversity that resounds to his worship.

– **ὄνομα (Name/naming) (2:21 [Quoting Joel], 2:38)**

This worship is admirably summed up in the concept of “calling upon the name of the Lord” referenced in Peter's quotation of Joel (Acts 2:17) – as well as Peter's subsequent connection of this in 2:38; initiating the fulfillment of Christ's original mandate in Luke's preceding volume of this text⁴⁴. Here the move is made to connect τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου with τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; a recalibration of the concept fitting with the evangelistic charge of Luke 24:47.

It may be seen here that in keeping with the reorientation and “tweaking” of themes from the Genesis and Zephaniah passages, the concept of name and naming is similarly changed. No longer is the world united in seeking to make a name for itself as at Babel, no longer does the reader have to wonder what form or specific nature the Zephaniah prophecy's “naming” will take. The people whose speech has been newly “purified” now “call upon the name of the Lord”, arguably with the result of⁴⁵ *being baptized in the name of Jesus*⁴⁶.

– **Unity (2:12, 2:44ff)**

The vital theme of unity seen in our earlier texts is certainly present in Acts 1-2 as well. Though the concept may be seen in the various iterations of “all the earth” (most

44 Namely, “...that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [Jesus'] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47).

45 Or perhaps even *by* being baptized in the name of Jesus. “Calling on the name of the Lord” in the Tanak is read by many (I think accurately) as synonymous with salvation/ right relationship with God; perhaps this could be related in some fashion to the explicitly “name” centered baptismal rite. Tangentially, it is also interesting to note that baptism for many Christian traditions is a time to either name or rename a newly accepted believer into the faith community.

46 Luke's portrayal of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 highlights the importance of “calling on the name of the Lord” (ESV) as quoted from the LXX of Joel 2:28-32. It is obvious that in both Peter's and Luke's interpretations of the Pentecost event, that the Book of the Twelve (of course the direct canonical context of Zephaniah) was at the front of their minds.

imply a certain geographical unity, etc) and in the “changed speech” motif (unity of communication) as noted above, it is worth noting that the concept appears independently of these instances in Acts 1-2. The most notable of these is the short passage beginning in 2:44, and continuing to the rest of the chapter.

Luke writes “...πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύσαντες ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά...” (2:44). As seen here, the new body of the church, following the great speech-changing work of the Holy Spirit at the feast of Pentecost, comes together as a direct community, gathering “together” and having “all things in common” (ESV)⁴⁷.

This unity is obviously a counterpoint both to humanity united in the prideful work of building the city and tower of Genesis 11, as well (obviously) the resulting disunity seen in the scattering of peoples through the multiplication of their languages. God's purification of speech has resulted in a new unity, one previously seen nowhere but in the dreams and oracles of prophets – an ethnically diverse humanity united for the praise of God and the common work of his service⁴⁸.

– **The Descent of God (1:2,9, 21 2:34 [in negative], 1:8, 11, 2:2-4)**

Centering upon both the Ascension of the risen Christ and the subsequent Decension of the Holy Spirit, the movement of God in this passage is interesting in light of the Genesis and Zephaniah texts that we are examining. At the very least, it is readily apparent that just as the “coming down” of YHWH in Genesis 11 precipitated the confusion of human speech and the resulting scattering of the nations, so the descent of

⁴⁷ The totality of this unity is indicated by an effusive use of words such as “all” and “every” throughout the end of chapter 2. “Every soul” (2:43), “All who believed” were together, sharing “all things” (2:44), “all” benefit from the sale of goods (2:45), they enjoy favor with “all” the people (2:47).

⁴⁸ Pusey observes that “The outward confusion of Babel was to hinder oneness in evil and a worse confusion. At Pentecost, the unity restored was oneness of soul and heart, wrought by One Spirit...” (283). These comments are notes upon the text of Zephaniah 3; Pusey seeing to simply assume that the three texts as a continuation of a single narrative.

the Spirit in Acts 2 is the catalyst both for a purification of human tongues, and the representative reunification of their speakers⁴⁹.

– **Pride (2:37 [in negative])**

The theme of pride is primarily “visible” in this passage through its notable absence. The one exception to this is the mocking response of part of the multitude as seen in 2:13 – saying of the miraculous transformation of language - “They are filled with new wine” (ESV). The humility evidenced by Peter's audience in 2:37 seems a far cry from the pride seen (and noted above) both in the Babel narrative and in YHWH's promise in Zephaniah to (in the day of the nations bringing their offering to YHWH after their speech has been changed) “...I will turn aside from among you your exultant pride and you shall not be haughty in my holy mountain; but I will leave among you a people afflicted and poor, and they shall shelter in the name of YHWH”.

– **City (1:4, 12, 19, 2:5, 2:14)**

Noted briefly here – the setting of each of these stories is a *city*. It is also readily apparent that the two cities in question are “paradigm cities” in scripture; Babel (Babylon) for the quintessential summation of pride, sin and rebellion, and Zion/Jerusalem as God's epicenter of redemption, covenant fulfillment, and Messianic rule.

– **“Wait” (1:4)**

Christ's command in Acts 1:4 mirrors YHWH's mandate to “wait” for his action - which (it will be remembered) resulted in the promise of changed speech. Aside from the

⁴⁹ The specific contribution of Zephaniah 3:8ff to this theme as seen in Acts seems inconsequential enough to only merit footnoted mention. Though the “rising up” of YHWH “to the prey” in 3:8 is interesting to compare with the rising up of Christ (an action that seems to fulfill the Zephaniah context when read fully) at his Ascension, I am not prepared to defend the idea that this possible connection was intended by Luke.

similar command, they firmly establish that both the prophecy of 3:8ff and the reality of Acts 2 are clearly emphasized as the work of God.

– ***Fire (2:3)***

Though little may be made of this, it may at least be counted as intriguing that the speech-changing in both Zephaniah and Acts takes place in the context of (arguably *through*) symbolic fire. Though the Zephaniah passage refers explicitly to YHWH's fiery anger and judgment, it is even in that passage turned to a redemptive focus.

– ***Worship (2:47)***

It is observed that both passages have a wide ranging, even worldwide vision of God's worship. As seen above in the examination of “all the earth”, YHWH's worshippers include all the peoples – a concept that is explicitly stated in Acts 2:5; “...devout men from every nation under heaven” (ESV).

– ***Festival (2:1)***

Though the great syntactical and exegetical difficulties of Zeph 3:18 deny confident argument on this connection, the translation of מוֹעֵד as “festival” from the MT is strongly affirmed. Not much may be said on this account – simply that our passages seem to share a common context of “festival” (the harvest feast of Pentecost of course being the setting of the changing of speech through the pouring out of the Spirit in the Acts narrative).

Summary of Findings

In light of the textual demonstration just completed, a brief summary and interpretation of the whole of our findings in this chapter may be helpful. We will begin with a summary table to visualize the respective contributions of the passages under

consideration to their overarching narrative, in terms of theme and motif.

Table 3.4 – Summary of Theme/Motif Contributions

Theme/Motif	Babel Narrative (Gen. 11:1-9)	Zeph 3:8ff.	Pentecost Narrative (Acts 1- 2)
Dispersion	11:4, 8, 9	3;10	2;5
“The whole earth”	11:1, 4, 8, 9	3:8, 20	1:8, 2:5, 16, 21, 38- 39,43
Changing of Speech	11:1,7, 9	(3:9, implied effects in 13, 19)	1:14, 1:19, 2:1-4, 6- 11
Name/Naming	11:4, 9	(3:9,12)	2:21 (Quoting Joel), 2:38
Unity	(Implied in “whole earth” acting as one, also in negative in 11:6, etc.)	3;9	2:12, 2:44ff
The Descent of God	11:5,7	(YHWH in their midst here, see above. 3:15b, 17)	1:2,9, 21 2:34 (in negative), 1:8, 11, 2:2-4
Pride	(implicit throughout, esp. 11:4)	(reversed to humility, 3:11-12)	2:37 (in negative)
City	11:4,5,8	(3:14ff)	1:4, 12, 19, 2:5, 2:14
“Wait”	⁵⁰	3;8	1;4
Fire	-	3;8	2;3
Worship	-	3;10	2;47
Festival	-	3;18	2;1

Beginning in Genesis 11:1-9 we interacted with the themes and motifs of the

Babel narrative, noting a significant list of these key literary elements in the account. We

⁵⁰ As noted above, tenuous parallels could be drawn in the Genesis 11 account for these italicized terms as well, but they demand more research to determine their level of validity.

saw “all the earth” (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ) gathering together in unity with the intent to build a city and a tower that would ascend to heaven itself. Their motivation for this was the “making of a name”

(נַעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ שֵׁם) for themselves, and an explicit resistance to being “scattered across the face of all the earth” (נִפְּוֶיךָ עַל־פְּנֵי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ). These goals are made possible both by their pride and by the common bond of a shared language.

YHWH descends to view their work first hand, and (seeing that their quite godless unity will make any blasphemous project possible), decides to scatter them by the confusion of their language, an outcome that has the desired effect of halting the work on the city and dispersing the gathered people across כָּל־הָאָרֶץ -the whole earth. The narrator ends the tale by noting the name of the city - בָּבֶל (Confusion) – a moniker that is bitingly ironic, and certainly a far cry from the name that its builder intended to make for themselves.

We also noted that (from the perspective of plot) the story broke pattern with the Genesis “episodes” immediately surrounding it; and was notable for its lack of a redemptive resolution. The careful reader ought to be left both noticing this break in narrative strategy, and inwardly looking for some denouement to the plotline.

The often overlooked text of Zephaniah, found in the Book of the Twelve offers a prophetic utterance directly contributing to this narrative resolution. After a series of clear references to other Genesis passages, the author presents a powerful speech from YHWH promising a shockingly redemptive judgment upon the scattered nations of the earth.

YHWH calls upon Jerusalem (the narrative counter point to בָּבֶל [Babel/Babylon] throughout the whole of Biblical literature) to “wait” (3:8) for a future day when his fiery

judgment shall consume כָּל־הָאֲרֶץ - the whole earth. It is quickly seen however⁵¹, that this devouring judgment will be in the context (arguably precipitating) profound restoration.

“At that time” YHWH states that he will turn עַמֵּי שָׂפָה (“the lip of the peoples”) pure, with the outcome of all of them (unified once more with a common purpose) calling upon the name of YHWH (יְהוָה יִשָּׁם). YHWH in their midst promises to remove the peoples' pride (possibly “prideful ones”) leaving only a humble and lowly remnant who exist in marked literary opposition to the “high” builders of Babel. The context of this, as mentioned above, is the city of Jerusalem/Zion, a place that is fitting both for the added plot motifs of worship (especially the shared worship of YHWH from all the nations) through the purified speech, and the rather vague setting of “festival” (3:18).

We have seen that the prophetic utterance of Zeph 3:8ff lays out with striking clarity a direct counterpoint and reversal of the Gen. 11 Babel narrative. However, the story does not end here.

The next significant installment of the “pure speech” story occurs in Acts 1-2. As we have seen, *all* of the previous “textual echoes” we have been following are present in this narrative, both historically reversing Babel and literarily fulfilling Zephaniah with striking results.

The Lukan narrative of Pentecost and its surrounding events found in Acts 1-2 includes “every nation under heaven” (“παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν” 2:5) gathering in the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the great harvest festival of Pentecost. The Spirit of God descends with the appearance of fire, and the resulting speech changing

51 This literary “bait and switch” technique has occurred previously in Zephaniah. Most notable is the preceding portion of Zephaniah 3, where the City of Jerusalem is introduced by an extended misdirecting transition that leads the reader to believe that Nineveh is in view.

profoundly unifies a globally representative group of new believers in the name of Jesus⁵².

We see the dispersion thus coalescing into a new unity, and one that is powerfully redemptive. Rather than a simple reversal of the Babel confusion, God's speech changing of restoration here preserves the diversity of human language. Understanding is miraculously given *across* lingual barriers by the power of the Spirit, rather than removing those barriers completely. The narrative concludes with a vision of a profoundly unified people, sharing a “name” (Jesus) and a common project and purpose (worship and proclamation)⁵³.

To conclude, this trans-biblical example of intertextuality is dramatically demonstrable from the texts of its constituent passages. The textual “echoes” that we have been following establish a fascinating paradigm of “pure speech” and the role that language plays in the unity of humanity and the church.

52 This connection between Zeph. 3:8-13 and Acts 2 is unmistakable. In the context of the nations bringing their offering to God in Jerusalem, their speech is changed and YHWH's people are cleansed of their pride, leaving a humble remnant, who “call upon the name of YHWH”.

53 Ironically, this event precedes a second “scattering” quite reminiscent of the Babel event. The narrative of Acts is structured geographically, tracing the outward movement of the gospel and the new Church from the epicenter of Jerusalem/Zion.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

General Comments

To conclude, this study is of little value if it carries no impact for the field of biblical scholarship and the response and praxis of our faith communities. It is my convinced belief that the continuing exegesis and tracing of large level scriptural meta-narrative of this kind through Zephaniah (and the Twelve at large) adds a profound and necessary depth to biblical studies. It is also useful as a more general case study in pan-biblical intertextuality.

Flowing from this are the tremendously relevant implications for worship, doctrine and practice that the pure speech narrative brings to modern followers of God. This short chapter seeks to contribute its author's earnest vision for next steps; both in recommendations for further study, and in implications and suggested responses for our faith communities.

Recommendations for further Study

It will be obvious to any serious student of biblical literature that this work is by no means an exhaustive study of the subject at hand. We have examined three passages through a very specific narrative lens, noting a wealth of linguistic connections and shared themes and motifs, but the threads we follow here extend far beyond the bounds of these texts. Even as I write, I can think of a dozen directions to follow those narrative cues that could easily constitute a thesis or a dissertation in themselves.

In the interest of fostering further scholarship in this area, I offer a few questions that I am currently contemplating that may spark the imagination of one inclined to

explore our holy writings ever deeper:

- What passages outside of Genesis 11:1-9, Zephaniah 3:8ff, and Acts 1-2 offer a development of the “pure speech” narrative? As a starting point, how should Isaiah 6 be read from this perspective (as an instance of speech- changing by means of “fire”)?
- How does a sustained study of textual variants impact the findings of this paper? Specifically, what light does an in depth reading of the LXX shed upon Luke's use of koine and accession of Tanak themes in his work?
- It is my convinced opinion that Zephaniah is structured around the key Genesis narratives mentioned in this study. I strongly suspect that these include reinterpretations of and allusions to the Creation story, the Flood, the circumcision rite, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Table of Nations, and finally, (as developed here) the Babel narrative. What weight of evidence for this structure can be proved valid, and how does that influence our thoughts about Zephaniah and the Book of the Twelve as a whole?
- The Lukan accession of the Babel narrative as reinterpreted by Zephaniah highlights the dispersion of the early church in a manner that ironically parallels Genesis 11:1-9. It could be pertinent to examine Acts through the lens of early Genesis theme and imagery to determine if this narrative strategy is sustained structurally by Luke. (A starting place could be reading Acts 3 in relationship to Zeph. - 3:19; the saving of the lame).
- The implications of this work for intertextual studies in the Twelve as a whole could be wide ranging. What connections are running through Zephaniah into the

works that canonically surround it? What place does this sustained “riffing” on Genesis play in the overarching movement of Hosea-Malachi?

Implications and Suggested Responses for Faith Communities

It is my sincere hope that this study may also impact the thinking and practice of our local churches and communities of faith. I believe that when scripture is seen with the literary intricacy and vitality that a study of this type highlights, it is compelling and powerful for those who cling to the scriptures as the word of God. The narrative excellence in view here, the thorough intentionality, and the development of a single coherent narrative across the span of centuries and as the product of three very different communities of faith should capture the attention and imagination of modern believers. Here are a few brief ideas for what the practical and responsive outworkings of this study could look like:

Our thoughts about national and international unity should be profoundly influenced by the paradigm offered in these texts. True unity is only possible across ethnic, social, lingual bounds by the power of the Spirit and for the purpose of a shared service and worship of God.

This study is a reminder that truly, “All scripture is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16, ESV). The Hebrew Bible is frequently under read by Christian readers, and the Latter Prophets even more so. This section of our Bibles is rich with powerful imagery, concept, and nuance, coloring our theology and worldview. It ought to be increasingly read.

In addition to this, it ought to be increasingly *taught and preached*. Our pastors and teachers ought to carefully interact with this literature both for its compelling content, as well as the dramatic role that it plays in the over arching scriptural meta-narrative.

As we continue to struggle with the outworking of this powerful narrative together, let us do so with the desire to be vibrant members of a community which the Spirit is bringing together in unity for the worship and service of God, both through the redeeming of our hearts, and the “changing of our speech”:

...לקרא כלם בשם יהוה לעברו שכם אהר:

Bibliography

- Achtemeier, Elizabeth Rice. *Nahum--Malachi*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1986. Print.
- Allen, Ronald Barclay. *A Shelter in the Fury: a Prophet's Stunning Picture of God*. Portland, Or.: Multnomah, 1986. Print.
- Ball, Ivan Jay. *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah*. Berkeley, Calif.: BIBAL, 1988. Print.
- Ben, Zvi Ehud. *A Historical-critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991. Print.
- Berlin, Adele. *Zephaniah: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1994. Print.
- Brown, William P. *Obadiah through Malachi*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996. Print.
- DeRoche, Michael. "Contra Creation, Covenant and Conquest (Jer. VIII 13)." *Vetus Testamentum* XXX.3 (1980): 280-90. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Mar. 2010.
- DeRoche, Michael. "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea." *Vetus Testamentum* XXXI.4 (1981): 4-8. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 10 Mar. 2010.
- DeRoche, Michael. "Zephaniah 1:2-3; The "Sweeping" of Creation." *Vetus Testamentum* XXX.1 (1980): 104-09. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Mar. 2010.
- Feinberg, Charles L. *The Minor Prophets*. Chicago: Moody, 1978. Print.
- Fishbane, Michael. "Types of Biblical Intertextuality," Congress Volume: Oslo 1998, VTS 80 (2000), 39-44.
- Frye, Northrup *The Great Code*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. Print.
- Good, Edwin M. *Irony in the Old Testament*. Sheffield: Almond, 1981. Print.
- Hendel, Ronald S. *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Print.
- Hilber, John W. *A Biblical Theology of Zephaniah*. Thesis. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984. Microform Publisher, 1984. Print.
- Ho, Ahuva. *The Targum of Zephaniah: Manuscripts and Commentary*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. Print.
- House, Paul R., and Paul R. House. *Zephaniah, a Prophetic Drama*. Sheffield, England:

Almond, 1988. Print.

House, Paul R. *The Unity of the Twelve*. Sheffield, England: Almond, 1990. Print.

Jonker, Louis C., and Douglas G. Lawrie. *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Stellenbosch, [South Africa: Sun, 2005. Print.

McComiskey, Thomas Edward. *The Minor Prophets: an Exegetical and Expository Commentary. Vol.1, , Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998. Print.

Nogalski, James, and Marvin A. Sweeney. *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000. Print.

Patterson, Richard Duane. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. Chicago: Moody, 1991. Print.

Pusey, E. B. *The Minor Prophets: with a Commentary, Explanatory and Practical, and Introductions to the Several Books*. Vol. 2. London: A.D. Innes, 1895. Print.

Rad, Gerhard Von. *Old Testament Theology*. Vol. II. Louisville [Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001. Print.

Ross, Allen P. "The Dispersion of the Nations in Gen 11:1-9,." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (1981): 119-38. Print.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Zephaniah - A Re-examination*. Thesis. Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1980. Microform Publisher, 1980. Print.

Schnittjer, Gary E. "The Narrative Multiverse within the Universe of the Bible: The Question of 'Borderlines' and 'Intertextuality'" *Westminster Theological Journal* WTJ 64:2 (2002). [Www.wts.edu](http://www.wts.edu). Westminster Theological Seminary. Web. 18 Feb. 2011.

Smith, Ralph L. *Micah-Malachi*. Dallas: Word Pub., 1990. Print.

Sweeney, Marvin A. *The Twelve Prophets*. Ed. David W. Cotter, Jerome T. Walsh, and Chris Franke. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2000. Print.

Sweeney, Marvin A. *Zephaniah: a Commentary*. Ed. Paul D. Hanson. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003. Print.