Numerical Features of the Book of Zephaniah
A New Approach to its Compositional Structure
Please read the General Introduction

Various views on the structural design of the book of Zephaniah

The sections marked blue are displaced, resulting in a text contrived by the commentator in question.


K. ELLIGER (Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja, Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi, in: ATD 25, 1951, 53-78): 1,1.2-3; 1,4-6; 1,7; 1,8-9; 1,10-11; 1,12-13; 1,14-16; 1,17-18; 2,1-3; 2,4-6; 2,7; 2,8-11; 2,12-15; 3,1-5; 3,6-8; 3,9-13; 3,14-15; 3,16-18αα; 3,18αβ-20.


A.S. VAN DER WOUDE (Habakuk, Zefanja, in: POT, 1978, 79-162): 1,1.2-6; 1,7; 1,8-9; 1,10-11; 1,12-13; 1,14-18; 2,1-3; 2,4-7; 2,8-11; 2,12; 2,13-15; 3,1-5; 3,6-8; 3,9-13; 3,14-15; 3,16-18α; 3,18β-20.

R. SMITH (Micah-Malachi, in: WBC 32, 1984, 119-144): 1. 1,1.2-6; 2. 1,7-2,3; 3. 2,4-7; 2,8-11; 2,12; 2,13-15; 4. 3,1-5; 5. 3,6-8; 6.3,9-13; 7. 3,14-20.


J. VLAARDINGERBROEK (Zephaniah, in: HCOT, 1999): 1,1.2-3; 1,4-6; 1,7-9; 1,10-11; 1,12-13; 1,14-18; 2,1-3; 2,4-7; 2,8-11; 2,12; 2,13-15; 3,1-5; 3,6-8; 3,9-10; 3,11-13; 3,16-18; 3,19-20.

H. IRSIGLER (Zefanja, in: HThKAT, 2002): Teil I: I.A. 1,1.2-3; 1,4-6; I.B. 1,7-8-9; 1,10-11; 1,12-13; I.C. 1,14-18; Teil II: II.A.1. 2,1-3; II.A.2. 2,4-7; 2,8-11; 2,12-13-15; II.B. 3,1-5; 3,6-8; Teil III: III.A. 3,9-10; 3,11-13; III.B.1. 3,14-15; 3,16-18; III.B.2. 3,18αβ-20.

K. SPRONK ("Joël, Obadja, Nahum, Zefanja, Haggai, Zacharia, Maleachi", in: De Bijbel literair, Onder redactie van Jan Fokkelman en Wim Weren, Zoetermeer/Kapellen, 2003, 304): 1,2-3; 1,4-13; 1,14-18; 2,1-3; 2,4-15; 3,1-8; 3,9-20.

M.A. SWEENEY (Zephaniah, in: Hermeneia, 2003): I: 1,1; II: 1,2-6; 1,7-13; 1,14-18; 2,1-4; 2,5-15; 3,1-20.

L. PERLITT (Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja, in: ATD 25/1, 2004, 97-148): 1,1.2-3; 1,4-6; 1,7; 1,8-9; 1,10-11; 1,12-13; 1,14-16; 1,17-18; 2,1-3; 2,4-15; 3,1-5; 3,6-8; 3,9-10; 3,11-13; 3,14-15; 3,16-17; 3,18-20.

J.D. NOGALSKI (The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi, in: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 18a, Macon GA, 2011, 797-757): I: 1,1.2-3; 1,4-6; 1,7-18; 2,1-3; II: 2,4-15; 3,1-8; III: 3,9-10; 3,11-13; 3,14-17; 3,18-20.
Outline based on content, numerical features, and the extant layout markers

A distinctive feature of the book of Zephaniah is the scarce use of layout markers. There are no Petuchoth and only two Setumoth with a demarcating function: after 2, 15 and 3,13 - see below. In three cases the Setumah does not have a demarcating function but serves to highlight what follows: after 1,9,18, and 2,4.

The book divides into two sections, which are in terms of words highlighted by 26 and 17 respectively:

A. 1,1-7YHWH’s announcement of his universal judgement: 104 (4x26) w. Altogether

B. 1,8-3,20 Elaboration on the theme of this judgement 663 (39x17) w. 767 words.

The parts marked blue are individually or collectively highlighted by the numbers 26 and 17.

A. Part 1: 1,1-7 YHWH’s announcement of his universal judgement: [] 7 vs; 104 (4x26) w.

B. Part 2: 1,8-2,3 Be silent before God, for he intends punishment: [] 14 vs; 208 (8x26) w.

B. Part 3: 2,4-15 The coming restoration for the remnant of Judah: S 26 12 vs; 179 words. 663

B. Part 4: 3,1-13 YHWH’s Judgement on Jerusalem and the nations: S 13 vs; 182 (7x26) w. (39x17)

B. Part 5: 3,14-20 Israel is to sing a new song: God will restore them: Col. 7 vs; 94 words.

Quantitative structural analysis of the book of Zephaniah

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vs.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Letters</th>
<th>מילים</th>
<th>Sum words</th>
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<td>Ze 1,7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50/403</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>104/104</td>
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|     | 2     | 1,8-2,3 |       |       |           |   |
| 8   | Ze 1,8| 15     | 58     | 10    | 119       | S |
| 9   | Ze 1,9| 13     | 54     |       | 132       |   |
| 10  | Ze 1,10| 15    | 62     | 11    | 147       |   |
| 11  | Ze 1,11| 12    | 44     |       | 159       |   |
| 12  | Ze 1,12| 20    | 84     | 12    | 179       |   |
| 13  | Ze 1,13| 15    | 62     |       | 194       |   |
| 14  | Ze 1,14| 14    | 208     | 8      | 13-14 208 |   |
| 15  | Ze 1,15| 16    | 61     |       | 224       |   |
| 16  | Ze 1,16| 9     | 40     |       | 233       |   |
| 17  | Ze 1,17| 12    | 54     | 15    | 245       |   |
| 18  | Ze 1,18| 24    | 83     | 16    | 269       | S |
| 19  | Ze 2,1 | 5     | 22     |       | 274       |   |
| 20  | Ze 2,2 | 20    | 67     | 17-18 | 294       |   |
| 21  | Ze 2,3 | 18    | 66/805 | 19-20 | 312/208   |   |

|     | 3     | 2,4-15 |       |       |           |   |
| 22  | Ze 2,4| 11    | 53     |       | 323       | S |
| 23  | Ze 2,5| 15    | 15/26  | 62    | 21        | 338 |
| 24  | Ze 2,6| 8     | 51 (2x17) | 30  | 346       |   |
| 25  | Ze 2,7| 12   | 17     | 76    | 22        | 363 |
| 26  | Ze 2,8| 13   | 52     |       | 376       |   |
| 27  | Ze 2,9| 28   | 52 (2x26) | 109 | 23        | 404 |
| 28  | Ze 2,10| 11  |       |       | 39        | 415 |
| 29  | Ze 2,11| 16   | 58     | 25    | 431       |   |
| 30  | Ze 2,12| 6    | 21     |       | 437       |   |
| 31  | Ze 2,13| 13   | 47     |       | 450       |   |
| 32  | Ze 2,14| 20   | 74     |       | 470       |   |
| 33  | Ze 2,15| 21   | 84/705 |       | 491/179   | S |
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- YHWH’s announcement of his universal judgement
  - The paragraph is in its entirety highlighted by its $104 (4x26)$ words, in line with the way a holy book begins. See my article on this intriguing phenomenon.

- Be silent before God, for he intends punishment
  - The function of this S is to highlight the following part of YHWH’s speech about the impact of the punishment.

- The coming restoration for the remnant of Judah
  - The function of this S is to highlight the words of the prophet urging the people to hold assembly.

Part 2: 1,8-2,3 has altogether $208 (8x26)$ words. 1,1-2,3 All about the day of YHWH: $312 (12x26)$ words.

2,4-7 Judgement on the nations will mean benefit for the remnant of Judah: $51 (3x17)$ words.

2,8-10 God’s judgement on Moab and Ammon will let them become like Sodom and Gomorra: $52 (2x26)$ words.
Observation 1  Excluding the heading, the prophecies have 52 (2x26) verses. This does not imply that the heading stands apart from the prophecies, because it is structurally integral within them, as demonstrated by the 104 (4x26) words in 1,1-7 and by the 34 (2x17) instances of the name YHWH including the heading. As for the highlighting by the divine name numbers, the book is in its entirety for 100% highlighted by the divine name numbers 17 and 26, with 104 (4x26) words in Part 1 and 663 (39x17) in Parts 2-5 = 767 in total.

Crucial passages extra highlighted by the divine name numbers 17 and 26.

1. Judgement on the nations will mean benefit for the remnant of Judah (2,4-7): 51 (3x17) words.
2. Judgement on Moab and Ammon will turn them into Sodom and Gomorra (2,8-10): 52 (2x26) words.
3. The God of justice is in their midst (3,5): 17 words.
4. YHWH confirms his resolve to take action (3,8): 26 words.
5. The prophet urges Israel and Zion not to fear; their King is in their midst (3,14-16): 34 (2x17) words.

Observation 2  In the first divine speech (1,2-6), there is a series of 7 deeds intended by YHWH: wipe out, wipe out, wipe out, bring down,* cut off, stretch out, cut off. *See BHS: read הובשלו. In the depiction of the day of YHWH, 7 characteristics are mentioned (1,14-16): the day of YHWH is near, it is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of destruction and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and dense fog, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry.

Go to my analysis of the book of Amos for a prolific use of groupings of seven. See the Hebrew text below.
Words ascribed to God in the book of Zephaniah

Not a single one of the divine speeches is specified by an introductory formula. The formulae יְהֹוָה, 'utterance of YHWH' (1,2; 1,3; 1,10; 2,9, and 3,8), and יְהֹוָה כֹּהֵן, 'says YHWH' (3,20b), are taken as integral within the words ascribed to God, as in the books of Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Micah, Haggai, and Zechariah. The books of Amos, Nahum, and Malachi are exceptions, because they stand in this respect in the Isaiah and Jeremiah tradition, where such formulae are structurally not part of the words ascribed to God! In any case, they stress the divine character of the words attributed to God.

See especially 2,9 where יְהֹוָה כֹּהֵן is part of the phrase “Therefore, as I live, utterance of YHWH the God of Israel". The fact that YHWH speaks in many cases about himself in the 3rd person makes it very difficult to identify the divine speeches precisely. What follows is an attempt. I owe thanks to Klaas Eikelenboom for his constructive suggestions, also regarding the outline, and for having checked the article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. 1,2-6</td>
<td>70 words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. 1,8-9</td>
<td>28 words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. 1,10-13</td>
<td>62 words.</td>
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<td>4. 1,17-18</td>
<td>36 words.</td>
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<td>5. 2,4-7</td>
<td>51 (3x17) words.</td>
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<td>6. 2,8-9</td>
<td>41 words.</td>
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<td>7. 2,12</td>
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<td>8. 3,6-7</td>
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<td>9. 3,8</td>
<td>26 words.</td>
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<td>10. 3,9-10</td>
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<td>11. 3,11-13</td>
<td>48 words.</td>
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<td>12. 3,18-20</td>
<td>47 words. /469 (67x7) words in total.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The 469 words have 1870 (110x17) letters.

Zephaniah 1

Heading

70 words.

Seven deeds intended by YHWH

See BHS: read

1. 1,2-6 70 words.

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3. 1,10-13 62 words.

Seven characteristics of the day of YHWH

14. 3.10-12 10

15. 3.11-12 11

16. 3.12-13 12

4. 1,17-18 36 words.

Zephaniah 2

5. 2,4-7 51 (3x17) words.

6. 2,8-9 41 words.

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The Book of Zephaniah

Zephaniah 3

1. The Lord has broken the yoke of one who had ruled.
2. He has broken the heavy burden that was under the whole nation.
3. He has broken the yoke of servitude of his people.
4. He has broken the yoke of the Assyrian king.
5. The Lord has broken the yoke of the king.

6. He has broken the yoke of servitude of his people.
7. He has broken the yoke of the Assyrian king.
8. He has broken the yoke of the king.
9. He has broken the yoke of servitude of his people.

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107. He has broken the yoke of the king.

108. He has broken the yoke of servitude of his people.
109. He has broken the yoke of the Assyrian king.
110. He has broken the yoke of the king.
14 Describe Zephaniah's vision for Jerusalem: 'All the cities will be desolate.

15 The Lord has decreed how he will punish the nations of the East.

16 All the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem to attack it, as the Lord decreed against Jerusalem.

17 Their land will be desolate, and every Israelite will be driven from his homeland.

18 A great gathering of nations will come from the north and strike the land.

19 All the nations will come and serve the Lord of all the earth.

20 The Lord will restore those who have captured them.

21 While the sword is against Jerusalem from every direction, the Lord will save them.

22 The Lord will then go out and attack.

23.3.18-20 47 words.