

The Poor (עָנִי) and the Remnant (שְׁאֵרִית): A Canonical Consideration of the Theology of the Poor in Amos and Zephaniah

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1. Introduction

The theology of the poor has attracted scholars' attention because of its prominence in the Psalms and prophetic literature. The scholarship generally agrees that 'the poor' have a distinct historical/theological identity in these texts. On the one hand, the poor have been understood as an editorial-redacting group of these texts from the historical research. On the other hand, some have paid attention to the literary multiplicity or 'polyphony' that the Hebrew terminology around 'poor people' conveys.¹⁾ According to Lohfink, the most important modern interlocutor on this issue, the approaches to this concept can be categorized into three major streams in its research history:²⁾

(1) 'The poor' in the Hebrew Bible is a historical 'party' that consisted of poor people. עָנִיָּם, one of the most common

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- 1) For instance, see D. W. Tucker, "A Polysemiotic Approach to the Poor in the Psalms," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31:4 (2004), 425-439; also, see his doctoral thesis related this issue, "*The Reign of Yahweh and the Theology of the Poor in the Final Shape of the Psalter*," Ph.D Diss. (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997).
- 2) N. Lohfink, "Von der 'Anawim-Partei' zur 'Kirche der Armen'. Die bibelwissenschaftliche Ahnentafel eines Hauptbegriffs der 'Theologie der Befreiung,'" *Biblica* 67:2 (1986), 153-176.

terms for ‘poor’, are regarded as servants of Yahweh as a party within the people. Some categorized Levites into עֲנָוִים, some classified them according to social classes. Nonetheless, עֲנָוִים were considered rather as pious, determined followers of Yahweh in exile in general. Whether this group used the name עֲנָוִים as a self-designation, is not clear.

(2) However, because of the lack of extra- and intra-biblical evidence to prove the historicity of this faction, early- and mid-twentieth century scholarship instead suggested a more comprehensive interpretation of this concept as a theological ‘flow’, a tendency exemplified by the piety of the poor leading to the emergence of the Hasidim in later years.

(3) In the mid-to-late twentieth century, the theological message regarding the poor received even more attention. Commentators insisted that socioeconomic poverty and spiritual humbleness cannot be clearly separated in the Old Testament. Many observed that the Hebrew concept of poverty is properly understood as living before Yahweh; thus, the theology of the poor should be interpreted as a ‘spiritual’ perspective.

In a study on the theology of the poor, Johannes Ro took a *Traditionsgeschichte* approach to the Qumran texts, Isaiah 29 and 66, Zephaniah 3, and relevant Psalms, such as 12, 25, 34, 35, 37, 40, 62, 69, 73, 76, 102, 109, 140, and 149.³⁾ His conclusion is that there were several groups using the concept of poverty as a technical term for piety; thus it is impossible to establish a unified view on this problem.⁴⁾ More recently, Bremer conducted extensive research comprising current archaeological findings and the textual observations on the theology of the poor in the Psalms. His conclusion is that it is impossible to describe a single, dominant understanding of ‘the poor’ in the Psalms because they are the product of complex

3) J. U. Ro, *Die sogenannte „Armenfrömmigkeit“ im nachexilischen Israel*, BZAW 322 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2002).

4) Ibid., 189–206.

processes of formation and reflect the various theological interests of diverse classes or groups.⁵⁾

Based on recent observations about the multiple perspectives on the theology of the poor, we will examine this theology in the Twelve Prophets, focusing on Amos and Zephaniah. Approaching these two prophets diachronically, we will examine how Amos and Zephaniah are related thematically, literarily, and theologically.⁶⁾ The Pentateuch focuses on the legalization of benevolent ethics toward the poor (e.g., Exo 22:25–27, 23:11; Lev 19:9–10, 23:22; Deut 15:7–11, 24:12–15),⁷⁾ so a fully developed ‘theology’ of the poor is absent. In the historical literature, because of the historiographical focus in these texts, the poor appear only briefly when the Babylonians capture Judah (2 Kings 25:12): they were remained to be vinedressers and plowmen.

However, the prophetic literature reveals more in-depth and multi-layered understandings of the poor and poverty, materially and theologically. In this paper, by comparing Amos and Zephaniah, where the theology of the poor appears most prominently among the Twelve Prophets, we will see that the earlier prophet’s view on the poor influenced and was developed in the later one. To this end, I will first consider recent views on the canonical position of these two prophets within the Twelve Prophets, analyze the theologies of the poor and the remnant in each, and then conclude with my findings.

5) J. Bremer, *Wo Gott sich auf die Armen einlässt: Der sozio-ökonomische Hintergrund der achämenidischen Provinz Yehud und seine Implikationen für die Armentheologie des Psalters*, BBB 174 (Göttingen: V&R, 2016), 454–471; 479–484.

6) For further details, see Jiseung Choi, “*The Theologies of the Poor in the Psalter*,” PhD Diss. (Aberdeen University, 2022), 14–35, 106–196.

7) However, the Pentateuch does insist that judgment may not be undermined by perverting judgment of the poor or reducing the amount of ransom for life (Ex. 23:3, 6; 30:15; Lev. 19:15). However, this idea does not appear in Deuteronomy.

2. Canonical View of the Minor Prophets, and Relations between Amos and Zephaniah

Considering the canonical nature of the Bible as a methodological factor has presented new possibilities for biblical theology ever since B. S. Childs, who noted that the concept of canon contains elements that cannot be solely covered by historical research.⁸⁾ The canon includes a variety of books with different theologies, and its unity can only be found within the larger framework of the theology of the community. This statement does not imply a disregard for the historical formation of these books; rather, recognizing their place within the canon is a separate hermeneutical task. By examining individual texts in their canonical context, these texts acquire new meaning.⁹⁾ Through lexical and thematic connections with other texts within the canon, the text acquires a meaning that it cannot achieve when considered in isolation.

In this regard, recent studies on the Twelve Prophets have focused on exploring theological considerations for the canonical arrangement of Masoretic Twelve Prophets.¹⁰⁾ Nogalski, for

8) B. S. Childs asks, “is it possible to understand the Old Testament as canonical scripture and yet to make full and consistent use of the historical critical tools?” His suggestion is to ‘work within that interpretative structure which the biblical text has received from those who formed and used it as sacred scripture’ because ‘the decisive force at work in the formation of the canon emerged in the transmission of a divine word in such a form as to lay authoritative claim upon the successive generation.’ *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Fortress, 1979), 45, 60, 73.

9) There have been several significant objections to this trend recently, but they all converge on the fact that various communities related to the formation of the canon existed. See D. Willgren, *The Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms*, FAT II 88 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

10) For recent discussions about reading the Twelve as a whole considering its editorial arrangements, see J. D. Nogalski, M. Sweeney, eds., *Reading and Hearing the*

example, pursues a diachronic approach with an interest in the history of the formation of these texts.¹¹⁾ His crucial argument is that a scribe knit the writings of the Twelve together through a series of catchwords at the seams of each writing.¹²⁾ In contrast, Rendtorff on ‘The Day of Yahweh’,¹³⁾ Bowman on ‘return’,¹⁴⁾ and Nogalski on ‘fertility of the land’¹⁵⁾ have pursued a synchronic approach that places greater emphasis on theological themes shared among the Prophets.

From the perspective of reading the Twelve Prophets as a

Book of the Twelve, SBLSymS 15 (Atlanta: SBL, 2000); P. L. Redditt, A. Schar, eds., *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 325 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003); P. R. House, *Unity of the Twelve*, JSOTSup 97 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009); R. A. Fuhr, Jr., G. E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academics, 2016); M. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2018); especially, B. A. Jones, “The Book of the Twelve as a Witness to Ancient Biblical Interpretation,” *Reading and Hearing the book of the Twelve*, 65–74. For the most recent research on this issue, see A. Sieges, “One Book or Twelve Books?” *The Oxford Handbook of the Minor Prophets*, ed. J. M. O’Brien (online edition; Oxford Academic, 2021), 29–38.

- 11) In terms of formative history, there is an objection based on the Qumran manuscript that the Masoretic order of the Twelve Prophets ending in Malachi is not decisive but a ‘postcanonical concept’. It should be noted, however, that our interest is an observation of canonical theology limited to the order of the Masoretic texts. The most recent example of this objection is M. S. Pajunen, H. von Weissenberg, “The Book of Malachi, Manuscript 4Q76 (4QXIIa), and the Formation of the ‘Book of the Twelve’,” *JBL* 134:4 (2015), 731–751.
- 12) J. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 217 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 42.
- 13) R. Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” *Reading and Hearing the book of the Twelve*, SBL SymS 15, eds. J. D. Nogalski, M. A. Sweeney (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 75–87.
- 14) C. D. Bowman, “Reading the Twelve as One: Hosea 1–3 as an Introduction to Book of the Twelve (the Minor Prophets),” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 9 (2006), 41–59.
- 15) J. D. Nogalski, “Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve: Creating Points of Contact for a Theological Reading,” *Int* 61 (2007), 128–130.

canonical flow, arrangement is the less studied issue.¹⁶⁾ For example, the books of Amos and Zephaniah are arranged in parallel positions in a concentric structure before and after Micah. Following the Masoretic tradition of the Hebrew Bible, Micah occupies the center among the Twelve Prophets; Micah 3:12 is at the very center of the collection as indicated in the Masoretic margin. The book of Amos, placed third in the canonical arrangement of the Twelve Prophets, bears such themes as ‘the day of Yahweh’ (5:18-20;¹⁷⁾ 8:9-10; 9:13-15), ‘proclamation of judgement’ (1:3-5:3; 5:16-17, 25-27; 6:1-9:10), ‘promise of restoration’ (9:11-15), ‘returning from the captive’ (9:14), ‘justice and righteousness of Yahweh’ (5:7, 24), ‘remnant motif’ (1:8; 4:2; 5:14-15; 6:9; 9:1, 11-12), and ‘the theology of the poor’ (2:6-8, 4:1 5:11-12, 8:4-10). The same themes appear repeatedly in Zephaniah, which is placed fourth from the end of the collection in the canonical arrangement and is two books after Micah, just as Amos is two books before:¹⁸⁾ ‘the day of Yahweh’ (1:7-18; 3:8), ‘proclamation of judgement’ (1:2-2:5; 2:8-3:8), ‘promise of restoration’ (3:9-20), ‘returning from the captive’

16) Kyung Chul Park divides the twelve prophets into Hosea, Joel to Jonah, Micah to Zephaniah, and Haggai to Malachi, and investigates the theological and thematic implications of their arrangement in “A Study on the Composition of the Book of the Twelve Prophets as Its Final Form,” *KJCS* 103 (2017), 11-36. The most recent study that best fits the purpose of ‘reading with arrangement’ is introduced in a Korean book written by Chang-Dae Kim: *Minor Prophets in One Book: 12 Prophets Meet with a New Paradigm* (Seoul: IVP, 2013).

17) D. E. Fleming interprets the prophecy of the day of Yahweh in Amos 5:18 as one of the earliest oracles and interprets it in connection with the Moon Rite of the Ancient Near East. However, it is questionable whether this understanding is consistent with the overall theology of the ‘day of Yahweh’ in the prophetic literature, even in Amos. For further details, see “The Day of Yahweh in the Book of Amos: A Rhetorical Response to Ritual Expectation,” *Revue Biblique* 117:1 (2010), 20-38.

18) Kim, *Minor Prophets in One Book*, 39-40.

(3:20), ‘justice and righteousness of Yahweh’ (2:3, 3:5), ‘remnant motif’ (2:7, 9; 3:12-13), and ‘the theology of the poor’ (2:3, 3:12).

These thematic similarities reveal the close literary connection between the two prophets. Amos preached in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in eighth century B.C.E. and Zephaniah proclaimed in Southern Kingdom (Judah) in seventh century B.C.E. It would not be surprising if the prophetic heritage of the forerunner (Amos) influenced the later prophet (Zephaniah).

3. The Theology of the Poor in Amos: Focusing on עָנִי and שְׁאֵרִית

Amos clearly announces the sins of the riches in Israel; the rebuke is located within the context of accusations of idolatry in 5:26 and 8:14. This structure reminds us of Ezekiel 18–22, and some passages sound similar notes (e.g., 5:24–26, 6:12–13), striking a balance between doing justice and righteousness and seeking Yahweh not idols. Two of the major sins of Israel, idolatry and injustice, come together throughout the book of Amos, and oppression of the poor is linked to injustice.

There are a number of passages revealing the ‘theology of the poor’ in Amos: 2:6–8, 4:1, 5:11–12, and 8:4–10. In these passages the origins of Amos the prophet combine with the pre-exilic, ancient Near Eastern idea of care for the poor.¹⁹⁾ Notably, the tone of Amos is harsher than that of any other prophets when he proposes that the exploitation of the poor is the reason for Israel’s punishment by Yahweh, as expressed in the imprecation on the heads of Israel (נִקְבִּי רֹאשֵׁי הַגּוֹיִם, 6:1).

19) D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 283–284.

3.1. Amos 2:6-8; 4:1

Amos 2:6-8 is Amos' accusation against the sins of Israel: many of them are related to the abuse of the poor. Amos here uses various terms for 'poor', which are widely used in the Hebrew Bible: דָּל, אַבְיֹן, and עֲנִיִּים (2:6b-7a). Gillingham has analyzed these usages, pointing out that the first two terms have the meaning of 'various states of material deprivation', while the latter connotes 'spiritual need'.²⁰⁾ Therefore, Amos does not convey the message of judgment in purely economic terms, but also reveals Yahweh's great anger at the emotional abuse against the poor. Particularly in Amos 2:6b, נָדִיק and אַבְיֹן, which are in parallel positions, are equalized, and selling them for money is condemned. This is a unique view of the poor as being more righteous.

In 4:1, the sin of Samaria is condemned again, which is described as the oppression of דָּל, אַבְיֹן.

3.2. Amos 5:11-12

Once again, these verses condemn the sins of the Northern Kingdom for the same reasons as found in the passages above. The text describes oppression against דָּל (v. 11a) in terms of expropriation of them, and אַבְיֹן (v. 12b) appears as the righteous in parallelism again, who are thrust aside at the gates. The gates, as is well known, were not only a gathering place for the community, but also for judgment by elders.²¹⁾ Such disregard for the poor in this public place is condemned as unjust (Lev. 19:15).

20) S. E. Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," *ET* 100:1 (1988/7), 15-19.

21) H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 248-249.

3.3. Amos 8:4-6

These verses are sufficient testimony of the vehemence with which Amos puts forward his theology of the poor. Amos 8:6 is a literal repetition of 2:6 and 8:4 thematically reflects 2:7. Amos 8:5 criticizes specific practices that oppress the poor. The meaning of עֲנִי-אָרֶץ in verse 4 is curious. To understand this expression, it is necessary to interpret בַּעֲבוּר נַעֲלִים, which appears in 2:6b and 8:6. This expression is a bit hard to understand considering the context, because it is understood that creditors were selling the poor as slaves for small amount of money like a pair of shoes. Kyu Seung Han points out that S. M. Paul and Wolff et al. carelessly interpret the meaning of בַּעֲבוּר as a general ‘because’ and instead reads it as ‘a preposition that symbolizes a reason or purpose’ and thus ‘the act of witnessing the mutual transaction in the plaza in front of the city gate’.²²⁾ He refers to the interpretive possibility presented by Taek Ju Woo, which suggests that עֲבוּר is derived from the Akkadian ēburu: ‘The Akkadian ēbūru is a term that appears frequently in contractual documents and refers to the harvest when the term of a debt loan expires’.²³⁾ In this way, 2:6b and 8:6 should be read ‘they sold the righteous for money and the poor for their deeds with a pair of shoes’.²⁴⁾ This transaction is connected with the act of buying and selling inherited land described in Deuteronomy 25:9–10 and Ruth 4:7. Han observes, ‘In the 8th century, in Israel, transactions were carried out in a seemingly legitimate form, but free peasants of Israel were given hereditary land by YHWH. They lost their patrimonial domain and became

22) Kyu Seung Han, “Public Discourses of Amos reviewed in the Perspective of ‘Torah-based Publicness’: Reinterpretation of Amos 2:6-7,” *KJOS* 22:1 (2016), 62–101; especially, 79.

23) Taek Ju Woo, *A New Horizon in Understanding the Prophets of the 8th Century* (Seoul: Korean Christian Book Society, 2005), 146–147.

24) Han, “Public Discourses of Amos,” 83.

a debt-slavery.²⁵⁾ Based on these understandings, we can interpret עֲנִי־אֶרֶץ in 8:4 as an ironic expression for the poor who have lost their land.

3.4. Remnants in Amos

Summarizing the above, the main accusation about Israel in the book of Amos is the oppression of the poor class by the social leadership. They did not treat the poor fairly even in public places such as city gates, but instead oppressed and exploited them. In this regard, Amos uses ‘remnant’ metaphorically to emphasize the harshness of God’s judgment.²⁶⁾ Two terms are used interchangeably for this meaning: ‘remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) of the Philistines’ (1:8); ‘the last (אַחֲרִית) of you [Samaria]’ (4:2); ‘those who are left (אַחֲרִית) [in Israel]’ (9:1); and ‘the remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) of Edom’ (11-12). In 6:9, these terms do not appear but the verse conveys a similar meaning: ‘If ten people remain in one house, they shall die’.

Especially as a term referring to the severity of Yahweh’s judgment on Israel, these terms indicate that he will wipe out even what/who is/are left. Only one exception is found in 5:15: the remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) of Joseph. This verse is a positive portrayal of ‘remnants’ destined for Yahweh’s salvation, offering a glimmer (אוֹלִי) of hope.

Although ‘the poor’ appears just before this verse in Amos 5:12, there is no identification between these two concepts. ‘The poor’ appear only as a conditional factor for the sins of social leaders in Amos, and their relationship to the ‘remnants’ is not

25) Han, “Public Discourses of Amos,” 84.

26) For the general observation on remnant motif in Amos and Zephaniah, see A. Lo, “Remnant Motif in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah,” *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, eds. J. A. Grant, A. Lo, and G. J. Wenham, LHBOTS 538 (Newyork: T.&T. Clar, 2011), 130-148.

clearly stated.

4. Theological Influence from Amos to Zephaniah: A Preferential Option for the Poor

In Zephaniah, God has spread the hand of judgment upon ‘all the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem’ (1:4), but the text divides the object of judgment into two groups. ‘The people of Judah’ are those who live in cities or in the countryside outside Jerusalem. However, the expression ‘all the inhabitants of Jerusalem’ (כָּל-יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם) refers not simply to the residents of Jerusalem. When we consider that the city served as the capital of Judah and as its political, economic, and religious center, ‘the inhabitants of Jerusalem’ most likely implies, metonymically, the political, economic, and religious leaders throughout Judah.²⁷⁾

After describing possible reasons for the prophet avoiding a declaration of judgment on the king in 1:8–9, Ehud Ben Zvi suggests that there was no king on whom to declare a judgment;²⁸⁾ in other words, this passage likely reflects a post-exilic social setting.²⁹⁾ However, there has been an effort

27) שֹׁרֵר (‘prince’) in 1:8 applies not only to the political realm but also to the military, religious, and even private spheres of life. See N. S. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 130; quoted in Dong-Young Yoon, “Zephaniah’s Oracle Against Leaders in Jerusalem,” *Mission and Theology* 39 (2016), 218.

28) E. B. Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*, BZAW 198 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991), 279–281; quoted in Yoon, “Zephaniah’s Oracle Against Leaders in Jerusalem,” 233.

29) Albertz insisted that Zephaniah 1:2–3:13 was a Deuteronomistic composition. See R. Albertz, “Exile as Purification: Reconstructing the ‘Book of the Four,’” *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 325, ed. P. L. Redditt,

to ascribe the Book of Zephaniah to the prophet Zephaniah who was introduced by biblical tradition as a prophet in the time of King Josiah.³⁰⁾ In addition, the absence of indication of king cannot be a clear evidence for the later dating. Nonetheless, our focus is not on the whole corpus of Zephaniah, nor even its main theology, but on what it implies with regard to a theology of the poor. This relatively short prophetic work provides us with two clues concerning this question. These are found in Zephaniah 2:1–3 and 3:12–13.

4.1. Zeph 2:1–3

Zephaniah denied that Jerusalem was a righteous city because social elites abused the weak. Koch argues that Isaiah's social criticism and his emphasis on 'the Day of/for Yahweh' might have affected Zephaniah.³¹⁾ 'Violence and fraud against the weak', Achtemeier adds, 'had become the way of life in law court, commerce, and social intercourse (1:9). Indeed, the luxury items in the leaders' houses were the proceeds gained from such rapacity'.³²⁾ Dong Young Yoon points out the sociological reason for Zephaniah's judgement against Jerusalem:

They had forsaken God (3:2) and had been proud (3:11),

A. Schart (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003), 241–242; for further details, see T. S. Hadjiev, "Zephaniah and the 'Book of the Twelve' Hypothesis," *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, LHBOTS 531, ed. J. Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 326–328.

30) M. Weigl, *Zefanja und das "Israel der Armen": eine Untersuchung zur Theologie des Buches Zefanja*, ÖBS 13 (Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994), 2.

31) K. Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, vol. 1, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1982), 157–163.

32) E. Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 68.

accustomed to seizing the property of the weak and to repressing the socially weak. For this reason, the meek and humble poor people (עֲנָוִים, 2:3) had to suffer, and the believers who kept the ordinances of God and kept the feasts according to the law had to be rather grieved.³³⁾

Almost all modern Bible translations render עֲנָוִים in 2:3 as ‘humble’, but the suffix הָאָרֶץ allows us to understand it differently, because the occurrence in Amos 8:4 (עֲנָוִי-[עֲנִי]-אָרֶץ) refers to materially poor people. While we cannot be absolutely sure whether the עֲנָוִים in Zephaniah 2:3 refers to a specific group or not, it very likely does. Weigl applies the context of the social plight of the poor in Amos 8:4 and Isaiah 11:4 to this passage, concluding that ‘the poor of the land’ in Zephaniah 2:3 does not mean those who ‘feel humble before God’.³⁴⁾ Rather, they are actually poor people in a social emergency that threatens their very existence. If we accept his view, we should think of ‘the poor of the land’ as referring to the poor in the countryside who oppose Jerusalem, the central city, rather than indicating the metaphorical concept of humility. In other words, Zephaniah is speaking on the side of the rural people. If the prophet is indeed a descendant of royalty, as introduced in 1:1, though this is not certain, this emphasis would indicate that there may have been social division among the nobility in this period.³⁵⁾

4.2. Zeph 3:11-13

The higher echelon of society is of no interest at all to Zephaniah, because Yahweh is the only king of Israel (3:15), which will be fully grown in the exilic period as revealed in

33) Yoon, “Zephaniah’s Oracle Against Leaders in Jerusalem,” 234-235.

34) Weigl, *Zefanja und das Israel der Armen*, 113.

35) This paragraph summarizes a part of my doctoral thesis. For further details, see Choi, “*The Theologies of the Poor in the Psalter*,” 186-188.

‘יהוה מלך’ psalms in Book Four of the Psalms (93, 95–99), even anticipating a post-exilic ideology: the elite will be removed from the holy mountain (3:11). In 3:12–13, a new interpretation of ‘the poor’ emerges: they are those ‘righteous’ poor people who have remained in the land in the wake of the invasion of Neo-Babylonia.

4.3. Remnants in Zephaniah

4.3.1. Zeph 2:6–9

The context set from the beginning of Zephaniah 2 is the restoration of Yahweh and a call for salvation to the shameless nation (הַגּוֹי לֹא נִכְסָף) in v. 1 and the poor of the land (כָּל-עַנְיֵי-אֶרֶץ) in v.3. In v. 7, the object of this call shifts to the remnant of the house of Judah (שְׁאֵרִית בֵּית יְהוּדָה). They are described as those who will possess green pastures (vv. 1–2) and plunder Moab and Ammon and claim their possessions (v. 9). The tone of verses 1–5 is not in a firm statement (‘perhaps (אִילָּי) you may be hidden / on the day of the Yahweh’s wrath.’ Zeph 2:3), but God’s promise of salvation to the remnant after verse 6 is more definitive.

4.3.2. Zeph 3:12–13

Weigl links these verses to Zephaniah 2:3 and suggests that the poor appearing in 2:3 and 3:12 are regarded as the ‘remnant of Israel’ (3:13), that is, ‘the nucleus of a new Jerusalem’.³⁶⁾ The prophet continually blames the rulers of Israel, who had once lived in Jerusalem, for displaying their iniquities by doing the things that the righteous poor avoid (3:13): the rulers do wrong, they utter lies, and they have a deceitful tongue.

36) Ibid., 104; 119; 134; 207–214.

We cannot be sure of the exact historical context for this poetic blame; however, when we consider (1) the mention of Jerusalem, (2) the prophecy of removing the leaders in Jerusalem, and (3) the list of righteous acts in 3:13, which are all stated in the negative and refer indirectly to the rulers' evil deeds against the lower classes, it is hard to deny that the original Sitz im Leben of Zephaniah 2:1–3 and 3:11–13 was the deprivation of the poor by the authorities and the conflict between Jerusalem and the rural areas.

Under this contextual understanding, we note that the poor (עָנִי) are identified with the remnant of Israel (שְׁאֵרֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל). The use of the Hebrew word עָנִי to refer to the poor as a remnant in Zephaniah provides a theological insight. עָנִי is a broad term meaning both material poverty and spiritual humility. In the Psalms, עָנִי often functions as an important poetic term, fully exhibiting this multiplicity. This is because this usage not only denounces the evil and absurdity of the social class that persecutes the materially poor by using עָנִי, but also means the humbleness in heart and humility before Yahweh, principles that will be developed theologically in future generations.

5. Observations on the Poor and the Remnants in some Minor Prophets

Before reaching final conclusions on conceptions of the poor and the remnant of Amos and Zephaniah, we briefly examine whether similar theological changes are found in the other minor Prophets, especially Hosea, Habakkuk, Micah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Since thoughts on the poor do not appear prominently in the other these prophets, a brief sketch is sufficient.

5.1. Hosea

Given the grave theme of the Book of Hosea and its vivid metaphor of marriage, with Yahweh as husband and Israel as wife (2:16–23),³⁷⁾ we might expect that this book will display a narrow understanding of the poor and a circumscribed view of social conflict. One passage is worth surveying in this regard: Hosea 14:2–4. These verses say about the orphans, which are one of the poor groups frequently referred to in the Hebrew Bible. The central verse, 14:2 (Take words with you / and return to Yahweh; say to him, / ‘Take away all guilt; / accept that which is good, / and we will offer the fruit of our lips’), points back to the Torah’s conception of piety. Despite the reference to ‘Assyrian’ in verse 3, some would argue that this passage belongs to the post-exilic period;³⁸⁾ however, they could not suggest any further, firm evidence.

5.2. Micah

Micah 3–4 contains a similar rebuke of the rulers of Israel.³⁹⁾

37) J. Day, “Hosea and the Baal Cult,” *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, 209–210.

38) In this view, ‘Assyrian’ is understood as the result of a retrospective redaction. See, H. W. Wolff, *Hosea*, Hermeneia, trans. G. Stansell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); G. A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction-Critical Investigation*, SBLDS 102 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987). M. Sweeney opposes this traditional view proposing a form-critical rereading of Hosea. See, M. A. Sweeney, “A Form-Critical Rereading of Hosea,” *JHS* 2 (1999). <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.1998.v2.a1>

39) Concerning the date of the book of Micah, Waltke points out that ‘the grammar of Micah is pre-exilic, displaying none of the characteristic features of postexilic Hebrew’, an observation also made by Robertson. This fact, however, does not eliminate the possibility that many parts of Micah could be examples of archaism that took place during the exilic period or even during the early post-exilic period. See B. K. Waltke, *A Commentary of Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans,

The word of Yahweh, which Micah ‘saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem’ (חָזָה עַל-שָׁמְרוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַם) in 1:1, was a condemnation of the rulers of the two cities responsible for abusing their people, as shown in 3:1–4 and 7:3. The poor do not explicitly appear here, but the harshness of the rulers against the ‘people’, as a collective term for subjugated and oppressed Israelite individuals, is the main concern of this prophecy. After the Yahweh’s brutal censure in Micah 3, the restorative message follows in chapter 4 with the vivid image of return in verses 6–8:

In that day, says Yahweh,
 I will assemble the lame
 and gather those who have been driven away,
 and those whom I have afflicted.
 The lame I will make the remnant,
 and those who were cast off, a strong nation;
 and Yahweh will reign over them in Mount Zion
 now and forevermore.
 And you, O tower of the flock,
 hill of daughter Zion,
 to you it shall come,
 the former dominion shall come,
 the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem.
 (NRSV [slightly modified by the author], Mic 4:6–8)

2007), 11; D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*, SBLDS 3 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972), 154. Since the foundational research of J. Wellhausen and B. Stade was conducted, it has been largely agreed that, at most, Micah 1–3 is attributable to Micah, while the other parts are from late pre-exilic (6:1–7:6), exilic (7:7–20), and post-exilic (4–5) periods. See Zenger, “VIII. Das Zwölfprophetenbuch,” *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, ed. idem (7. Auflage; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 556. More specifically, Wolff observes that ‘from 587 down to the early postexilic period, there accumulated in chaps. 4–5 a collection of sayings from the prophets of salvation’ H. W. Wolff, *Micah. A Commentary*, trans. G. Stansell (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), 26.

One important contrast between Micah and Amos is the identification of the lame with the remnant (4:6). This concept is closer to the homogenization of the poor and the remnant that appears in Zephaniah, but considering that it is not yet fully articulated, it can be said that Micah's theology of the poor is at an intermediate stage in its development. Canonical order supports this suggestion: Micah is located in the middle of the two Prophets.

5.3. Habakkuk

Habakkuk is famous for his firm confession of faith in Yahweh even in the face of horrible violence. Questions abound regarding the historic setting of that 'violence' (חָרָס), which occurs six times: in 1:2, 3, and 9; 2:8 and 17(2x). Some have tried to find its original setting in earlier intra-societal conflicts in Judah, whereas others have connected it to the Neo-Babylonian invasion.⁴⁰⁾ Consequently, the proposed date for the authorship of Habakkuk ranges from the Hezekiah period to the Maccabean period.⁴¹⁾ Nonetheless, it is obvious that the book of Habakkuk

40) Jeremias supposes that Habakkuk's 'woe oracle', which criticized the harm in the kingdom of Judah, was reinterpreted in an anti-Babylonian fashion in the latter half of the captivity. Seybold similarly suggests that Habakkuk's prophecy begins with the heading of 1:1, followed by the horse rider oracle (1:5-11, 14-17) and the plate illusion (2:1-3, 5-19), all of which indicate the social situation in Judah. He proposes that Habakkuk argued that the evils in the curse were a deadly threat to society. This prophecy is given at the end of the Assyrian period in about 630 BCE. See J. Jeremias, *Kultprophetie und Gerichtsverkündigung in der späten Königszeit Israels*, WMANT 35 (Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 67; K. Seybold, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, ZBK.AT 24/2 (Theol. Verl., 1991), 44-48. Sweeney adds that "the prophet's protests against the influence of the 'wicked' refers to Judeans who reject YHWH's justice or Torah" in Habakkuk 1:2-4. See M. A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets vol. 2: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Liturgical Press, 2000), 455.

does not reflect a social setting later than the return because it retains the explicit appellation of the ‘Chaldeans’ (1:6).⁴²⁾

Marvin Sweeney, focusing on the two distinct superscriptions in 1:1 (‘The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw’) and 3:1 (‘A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth’), divides the structure into two subsections.⁴³⁾ Habakkuk 1–2 repeatedly contrasts the faith of ‘the righteous’ (צַדִּיק) with the iniquity of ‘the wicked’ (רָשָׁע, 1:4, 13; cf. 2:4). In the latter part of the prayer of the prophet (3:1–19), ‘the wicked’ (רָשָׁע) is contrasted with ‘the people’, ‘the anointed’ (v.13), and ‘the poor’ (עָנִי, v.14). Although the thematic and literary connection between these two opposites is not fully clear, Habakkuk 1–2 indirectly identifies the righteous with ‘the people’ of Israel in Habakkuk 3, who consist of ‘the anointed’ and ‘the poor’ in this prophecy of the restoration.

5.4. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

The main characters interested by Haggai and Zechariah are two ‘anointed men’ (Zech 4:14),⁴⁴⁾ the Persian-appointed governor Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest (Hag 1:14; 2:4, 20–23, Zech 3:1–4:14); it is hard to see the poor in these two texts.⁴⁵⁾

41) Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2, 454. For a brief discussion on the formation history of Habakkuk 1–2, see Heesook Bae, “Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Buches Habakuk,” *KJOTS* 18:4 (2012), 96–122.

42) For the detailed discussion on taunt songs against Babylonia in Habakkuk, see Inchol Yang, “A Text Critical Analysis of the First Taunt Song in Habakkuk 2:5–8,” *Canon&Culture* 12:2 (2018), 45–75.

43) *Ibid.*, 453, 457.

44) Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* vol. 2, 532.

45) Rather, Zechariah only shows reverence towards the aristocracy, as displayed explicitly in Zech 12:4–6 (‘On that day, says Yahweh, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But on the house of Judah I will keep a watchful eye, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. Then the chiefs אֲלֵיָּהּ,

One passage is sufficient to illustrate their views on the poor:

The word of Yahweh came to Zechariah, saying: Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear. (Zech 7:8-11)

Zechariah's version of the theology of the poor does not demonstrate anything other than the 'benevolent ruler' tradition common to the ancient Near East. However, Babylon does not appear in the list of places from which Yahweh will gather the people of Israel (see Zech 10). This omission shows Zechariah's affinity with Babylonia.

Malachi, focusing on sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood, has the same view as the two preceding Prophets. The poor are emerging only in relation to observance of the Deuteronomic law in 3:5,⁴⁶⁾ which says, 'and I will draw near to you for judgment; / I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, / against the adulterers, / against those who swear falsely, / against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, / the widow and the orphan, / against those who thrust aside the alien, / and do not fear me, / says Yahweh of hosts' (NRSV).

“*χάλαρχοι*” in LXX] of Judah shall say to themselves, “The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through Yahweh of hosts, their God.” On that day I will make the *chiefs* [אֱלִי] of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem’. This reverence is also somewhat apparent in Zech 9:6b-7 (‘and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia. I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; then it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a *chief* [אֱלִי] in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites’).

46) R. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 329-330.

6. Conclusion

Conceptions of the poor in the Twelve Prophets is based on the Pentateuchal ethic, where Yahweh's care for the poor is entrusted to the king and social leaders (Exo 22:25, 23:11; Lev 19:10, 23:22; Deut 15:4–11, 24:12). Granted, this Hebrew ethic is superior to its contemporaries.⁴⁷⁾ However, the theology of the poor found in the Prophets is not limited to this kind of ethic of benevolence, nor should we assume that terms for 'poor', such as אֶבְיֹן, עָנִי, עֲנָנִים, and רֹשׁ refer to materially poor people.⁴⁸⁾

This paper has explored a comparison between Amos and Zephaniah's different understanding of the theology of the poor and the remnant. As a premise for this comparative study, I followed the current academic view on the arrangement of the Twelve Prophets, and I noted that these two prophets were placed in a symmetrical position, centered around Micah. Also, thematically, these two prophets had a lot in common, especially the prominence of the theology of the poor in their texts. That said, I have also shown that interpretations of 'the remnant' point to theological differences between the two prophets.

First, it should be noted that Amos and Zephaniah reflect the universal ancient Near Eastern understanding of social

47) Lohfink points out that prologues and epilogues in other Near Eastern codes, such as Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi, bear the theme of caring for the poor; however, he also observes that while the ancient Israelites strove to enact royal laws regarding the poor, there was only silence in the legal part of the other codes. See N. Lohfink, "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible," *TS* 52 (1991), 38, 40; E. Otto, "The Study of Law and Ethics in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation III/2*, ed. M. Saebö (Göttingen: V&R, 2015), 602.

48) Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," 15–19; Jung-Woo Kim, "Who are the Poor in the Psalms?," *Bible and Theology* 8, (1990), 62–89.

responsibility for the poor and needy. This emphasis is found throughout the Twelve Prophets, despite their different time periods. The ethical idea is that the weak should be cared for by the strong, especially by the king. According to all of the prophets, the violation of this ethic (i.e., the tyranny of the leaders towards the poor) is evil. However, Amos's emphasis on the poor is more prominent than that of the other prophets. Amos does not go beyond the general understanding of the ancient Near East but does put greater emphasis on the criticism of tyranny and the duty to care for the poor. In the case of 'the remnant' in Amos, except for one example (5:15), the term was used as a metaphor to symbolize the severity of Yahweh's judgment that every single member of the sinful nations would be wiped out.

Second, Zephaniah demonstrates a theology of the poor that is put in the service of overcoming the social restrictions of the time and siding with the poor as a subjugated group within Israel. This text not only suggests that 'being humble in mind' is a good religious model, but it also reveals a theological desire that 'the poor' should trample the rulers and aspire to be saved as the righteous before Yahweh. This developed understanding of the poor culminates in the clear assertion that these are the remnant of Judah who are the only ones who Yahweh will save.

<Keywords>

The poor, the remnant(s), Twelve Prophets, Amos, Zephaniah

<주요어>

가난한 자, 남은 자, 소선지서, 아모스, 스바나

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<Abstract>

**The Poor (עָנִי) and the Remnant (שְׁאֵרִית):
A Canonical Consideration of the Theology of the Poor
in Amos and Zephaniah**

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A theology of the poor is often understood as one of the philanthropic ethical frameworks in the Pentateuch, although interpreters do not always consider the different ways that the text conceptualizes the poor. In the Hebrew Bible, references to the poor encompass material, ethical, and spiritual realms. Transformative ideas about social structural change can also be found that relate to a theology of the poor. This paper is a comparative study of these ideas in the Twelve Prophets, and specifically in the books of Amos and Zephaniah. The traditional ethical principle found throughout the Twelve Prophets is the idea that God's justice demands that we care for the poor. Based on this thought, Amos criticized Israel in the north in the eighth century B.C.E., and Zephaniah criticized Judah in the south in the seventh century B.C.E. However, there is a significant difference: in Amos 'the remnant' is an expression used to emphasize the severity of judgment on Israel, whereas in Zephaniah the poor are prophesied as the remnants of Judah who will be solely saved by Yahweh.

<초록>

가난한 자(עָנִי)와 남은 자(שְׁאֵרִית):

아모스와 스바냐에 나타나는

가난한 자의 신학에 대한 정경적 고찰

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구약에서 '가난한 자의 신학'은 흔히 모세오경의 시혜적인 윤리에만 국한하여 이해되기 쉽다. 그러나 구약에 등장하는 '가난한 자'와 그와 관련한 신학과 윤리는 물질적, 윤리적, 영적인 의미들을 포괄한다. 때로는 가난한 자에 의해 사회구조를 변혁하려는 급진적인 사상까지도 드러낸다. 본 논문은 12 소선지서 중 이러한 신학적 다양성을 쉽게 비교해 볼 수 있는 아모스와 스바냐에 대한 비교 연구이다. 다른 12 소선지서들에서도 공히 발견되는 전통적인 모세오경적인 윤리, 즉 '가난한 자를 돌보는 것이 하나님의 공의'라는 사상은 아모스가 비판하고 있는 BCE 8세기의 북이스라엘에서도, 스바냐가 활동한 BCE 7세기의 남유다에서도, 하나님의 심판의 주요 이유 중 하나로 등장한다. 그러나 차이점도 발견되는데, 아모스에서는 '남은 자'가 심판의 엄정성을 강조하기 위해 사용된 표현인 반면, 스바냐에서는 '가난한 자들'이 곧 여호와로부터 구원을 받게 될 유다의 '남은 자들'로 예언된다.

