

SOME NOTES ON MICAH

(continued)

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CHAPTERS III AND IV

IN chapter 3, verses 1-4, the prophet accuses the heads of the people of moral obtuseness and perversity, which lead them to extremes of cruelty. In the day of judgment Yahweh will disregard them as they have disregarded Him and His law. It was *their place* to know justice (verse 1—cf. the rather similar use of the particle *l^e* in I Samuel 23: 20¹). The biblical idea of knowledge is seldom if ever merely theoretical. It includes the elements of knowing by experience (Gen. 3: 22; Ezek. 25: 14) and acknowledging in practice (Exod. 5: 2) the object of knowledge.

In verse 3 we should perhaps follow the RSV in reading *kish^eer bassir* “like meat in a kettle”, and not *ka^asher bassir* “as in a kettle” (LXX has *hōs sarkas*). Even here, though, we should perhaps feel some reluctance to adopt an emendation just because it is “obvious”, where the existing text yields good sense.

The false prophets’ “biting with their teeth” (5, AV) chiefly expresses their greed (see the next line, and cf. the conduct of the priests in I Sam. 2: 13-16). The root *n-sh-k* is however used chiefly of snakes, and there is possibly an underlying reference to the deadly effect of these prophets on the community. Verses 6-7 describe how the false prophets, whose pronouncements will have been shown to be false, will have no message from God on the day of judgment. But the covering of the lip (*sapham*, moustache) is a sign of mourning (Ezekiel 24: 17, 22) rather than merely a metaphor for their silence.

In verse 8 does Micah assert that he is “filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD” (RSV), or that he is “full of power by the spirit of the LORD” (AV)? The former translation appears to take *'eth* as a mark of the accusative after *male'athi* (cf. Exod. 8: 17), and the latter to take it in the sense of “with the help of” (Genesis 4: 1; cf. *'im* in I Sam. 14: 45²). Since *koah* (without *'eth*) is already in the accusative after *male'athi* and another accusative (with *'eth*) would appear unnatural, the AV seems preferable here.

For the singular *boneh* (building) in verse 10 several of the

¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 513a, 5.b.(a).

² *Ibid.*, p. 86a, 1.a.

versions read the plural *bonei*, and they are followed in this by the RSV and (even more explicitly) by the AV ("They build up").

In Jeremiah 26: 18 all but the first two words of verse 12 are quoted by the elders of the land (prefaced by the words "Thus said Yahweh S^eba'oth"). Apart from a small difference in the spelling of the word for Jerusalem the only variation is the substitution of the normal spelling *'iyyim* for the Aramaic *'iyyin* of Micah. The quotation is interesting as showing that the words of the prophets could be well-known (either through oral tradition or written record) a century after their time. The elders assign this prophecy to the days of Hezekiah, and the implication of their words is that Micah's ministry played a part in promoting Hezekiah's reformation.

Micah 4: 1-3 occurs again as Isa. 2: 2-4. If the section originated with either of these prophets, the evidence is rather in favour of Micah, where it is more firmly anchored to its context. The phrase "the mountain of the house" occurs immediately beforehand in 3: 12. After the parenthetical words of verse 5, the following verses continue to speak of salvation. In Isaiah the passage is not so obviously of a piece with its context, although an intelligible connection with the following verses can be made out. Verse 5 is a parenthesis on its own, not unlike Micah 4: 5. Isa. 2: 6ff. (a catalogue of Judah's sins) could then be taken as the motive for the appeal of verse 5 to "walk in the light of the Lord".

Very possibly, however, both Micah and Isaiah obtained the oracle from a third source which may have been the cultus. Some have seen parallels between this oracle and certain psalms (e.g. Psalm 48: 2 [Heb. 3]; 99: 4; 110: 5f.) which would support the likelihood that these words have a cultic origin³.

The oracle tells how the Temple of God will be elevated to become the focus of the spiritual desire of the nations. The peoples of the world will come to seek the revelation of God which emanates from Jerusalem. Yahweh's worldwide sovereignty will issue in a worldwide judgment, which will be followed by universal peace. The individual will then enjoy security and domestic happiness (the language of verse 4 is also used in describing the prosperous conditions of Solomon's reign in I Kings 4: 25 [Heb., 5: 5]). The present writer considers that the principal fulfilment of this oracle is the gathering of representatives of the nations into the Church—"Jerusalem which is above" (Gal. 4: 26). This

³ A. S. Kapelrud, "Eschatology in the Book of Micah", *Vetus Testamentum* XI (1961), pp. 392-405.

does not necessarily exclude the earthly Jerusalem from some special part in the blessings of the New Covenant, and it may be that the principle that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" should lead us to expect a more geographical fulfilment also. In any case the prospect of perfect and universal peace in verses 3f. can hardly be related to any time before the consummation of the age. "In the latter days" (*b'ah^arith hayyamim*, verse 1), according to BDB, denotes "the final period of history so far as the speaker's perspective reaches; the sense thus varies with the context . . .". Kapelrud⁴ considers that it "probably goes back to the Akkadian" *ina ahrat umi*, meaning "in the future" and that not until later times did it acquire the significance of "in the latter days". This phrase in itself, therefore, can probably not be used to support any particular interpretation.

Verses 6-8 tell how God will gather together His scattered flock, and will restore to them their former glory. A "tower of the flock" (8) was apparently a raised structure overlooking a sheepfold (cf. the "towers" of II Chron. 26: 10). A place named Migdal-'eder is mentioned in Gen. 35: 21. Here it seems to be a poetical expression for Jerusalem, the headquarters of Yahweh as the Shepherd (Ruler) of His people. Similarly the "hill (RSV—Heb. *'ophel*) of the daughter of Zion" refers to Jerusalem. Elsewhere *'ophel* is either a general word for a hill (II Kings 5: 24) or the name of the southern end of the hill Moriah between the Temple and Siloam (II Chron. 27: 3). The "*first* dominion" (AV) is probably a reference to the reign of King David—though it could also mean "the chief dominion" (cf. the same adjective in I Chron. 18: 17; Dan. 10: 13).

Zion's anguish was due to the withdrawal of the guidance and rule of Yahweh, her King (9)—or could *m-l-k* mean "counsellor", following the Assyrian *malaku* (cf. Neh. 5: 7)? This meaning would agree well with *yo^asek* in the next line.

In the time of Micah Babylon (10) was part of the Assyrian empire, and not an empire in its own right. But Sargon had imported some Babylonians into Northern Israel (II Kings 17: 24) and Isa. 39 records a Babylonian deputation to King Hezekiah. The reference need not therefore be an indication for a late dating of this passage of Micah.

Verse 10, which closes with a prophecy of deliverance from exile, does not seem to connect with verse 11, where the hostile nations again surround Jerusalem. Verses 9-10 and 11-14 should

⁴ *Op. cit.*

therefore be regarded as separate oracles. Could the repeated "now" (4: 9, 11; 5: 1 [Heb., 4: 14]) introduce successive phases of the prophetic vision?

In v. 1 (Heb., 4: 14) the RSV resorts to emendation of the basis of the LXX (*nun emphrachthesetai thugater emphragmo*, presumably reading *tithgadd^eri* for *tithgod^edi*). This gives the sense "Now you are walled about with a wall". But in this case a further emendation is necessary to get rid of *bath-g^edud*. And the passive sense for the hithpael would be exceptional⁵. The existing text yields two possible meanings, based on two senses of the hithpoel of the root *gdd*. It could mean "gather thyself in troops, O daughter of the troops" (AV)—"gather oneself in troops" is evidently the meaning of the word in Jer. 5: 7. But the better-attested meaning of *hithgoded* is "cut oneself" (Deut. 14: 1; Jer. 16: 6; 47: 5; I Kings 18: 28). This would give the meaning "make incisions on yourself, you daughter of incisions" (Mowinckel, quoted by A. S. Kapelrud). Apostate Jerusalem is sarcastically called upon to perform pagan religious rites to get herself out of her predicament.

The second part of the verse probably refers to the threats and insults which Sennacherib's messengers delivered to Hezekiah (Isa. 36: 4-20)—even if the language is suggested by a rite in contemporary New Year festival rituals⁶.

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⁵ Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar*, 54g.

⁶ Kapelrud, *op. cit.* (see n. 3).