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SOME NOTES ON MICAH, CHAPTER II

by D. K. INNES

WHEN Mr. Innes gave us some notes on Micah I for the October-December, 1967, number of the QUARTERLY, we expressed the hope that he would go on and give us similar notes on the remainder of the book. This he has now done, and we hope to publish them in the consecutive issues of 1969.

THE woe in verses 1-2 is against the calculated covetousness of the rich. Can the second half-line, "and work evil upon their beds", be genuine? (Pusey remarks¹ that "thoughts and imaginations of evil are works of the soul".) Or is *upho'ale 'awen* a "prosaic gloss" (ICC)? No exact parallel to this use of the word *p'l* has been found; though in Psalm 58: 2 (Heb. 3) a similar meaning is achieved with the addition of *b'leb*, "in (their) heart". But the context makes the meaning clear, and there is no sense in suggesting that Micah could not use a figure of speech just because it does not occur elsewhere. The sin begins when the will consents to it (cf. Matt. 5: 20-28), and is expressed in action according to the ability of the individual (for *yesh l'e'l yadam* cf. Gen. 31: 29; Prov. 3: 27, and for the opposite phrase cf. Deut. 28: 32; Neh. 5: 5).

As sinners devise wickedness (1) God devises judgment (3). The symbolism of lines 3, 4a of verse 3 is that of the yoke—a frequent metaphor for subjection and servitude (it is used of the oppressive rule of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 28: 14, etc.). The imagery of "breaking the yoke" may be used of throwing off Yahweh's authority (Jeremiah 5: 5)—a foreshadowing of the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11: 29f.). But here the thought is not of his beneficent rule but of his judgment. Cf. Calvin's comment: "They then who refuse to obey God, when he requires from them a voluntary service, will at length be drawn by force, not to undergo the yoke, but the burden which will altogether overwhelm them".²

In the phrase *w'naha n'hi nihya* (4)—RSV "wail with bitter lamentation"—*nihya* is probably a noun synonymous with *n'hi*, to intensify its meaning, rather than a niphal form of the verb *haya* ("It is done"). The latter interpretation leaves the word

¹ *Minor Prophets* (London, 1907).

² *Commentary on Micah* (Calvin Translation Society, 1847).

unconnected with its context, and 'amar is then in an abnormal position.

In fact the connection of the following phrase with what precedes seems to demand *w^eamar* "and shall say" or *l'emor* "saying" rather than simply 'amar "he said". This change is apparently adopted by AV as well as RSV.

What is the meaning of "he hath changed the portion of my people" (AV)? LXX translates *meris laou mou katemetrēthē en schoiniō*, "the portion of my people is measured off with a line", evidently rendering *yimmad bahebel*. But the "line" could be an intrusion from the next verse, and the text as it stands is not impossible. The root *mur* in the *Hiphil* often means exchange rather than simply change (Leviticus 27: 33; Jeremiah 2: 11; Ezekiel 48: 14). Thus Yahweh will take away the land which is Israel's portion and in its place will give invasion and humiliation.

AV and RSV take the following phrase as referring to the land which has been removed (RSV "How he removes it from me!"). So did Calvin: ³ ". . . How far off are we from restitution? for every hope is far removed, since the Lord himself has divided among strangers our land and possession". But *mush* in the *Hiphil* usually means "depart". Could the meaning perhaps be "How he shall depart!?"

l^eshobeb "for the apostate" is commonly emended to *l^eshobenu* "for our captors". "Apostate" does not seem altogether an appropriate word to describe a heathen conqueror, although in Jeremiah 49: 4 it is used of Ammon.

The phrase "cast a line by lot" (5) is not found elsewhere in the OT, though "cast a lot" occurs in Joshua 18: 8-10. The land had been originally apportioned by lot (Joshua 15: 1; 16: 1; 17: 1, etc.) and the measuring-cord or "line" was used to mark it out. But now no inheritance would be given them. This passage foreshadows the removal of the covenant blessings from the old Israel (cf. Matt. 21: 43) and their transference to the body of Christian believers which becomes "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6: 16).

In verse 6 the audience is overheard trying to silence the preaching (cf. Amos 7: 10-13; Acts 4: 18). The following are three possible translations:

(i) Perhaps the most straightforward rendering of the M.T. would be: " 'Do not preach', they preach. 'They shall not preach of such things.' Reproaches shall not turn away (i.e. cease)—"

³ *Ibid.*

the last statement only being the prophet's comment.

(ii) The second phrase also could be part of the prophet's comment: "They shall not preach to these people", because the judgment which eventually fell will have proved the truth of Micah's warnings and they will be given no hearing.

(iii) The second and fourth phrases could be put in parentheses, cf. J. B. Phillips' paraphrase⁴:

Never prophesy like that
 (But a prophet must prophesy!)
 No man should prophesy such things!
 (Disaster, you see, can never come upon them!)

But this perhaps leaves too much to be supplied, as the AV certainly does: "Prophesy ye not (say they to them that) prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, (that) they shall not take shame".

The main difficulty with (i) and (ii) is the sudden transition to the prophet's comment. This difficulty is removed by altering the vowel points of *yissag* to read *yassig*. The sense will then be "Disgrace will not overtake (us)", giving a natural continuation of the critics' words which then make up the whole verse, with the exception the word *yattiphu*. It is possible that the preceding words "in the assembly of the LORD" should be taken with this verse. If so, the speakers are expressing the common but mistaken belief that because of Israel's special relationship with Yahweh no judgment could fall on them: "Do not preach in the assembly of Yahweh . . ."

"Is the Spirit of the LORD impatient? Are these his doings?" (7). Evidently Israel is speaking. The opening words are either (as RSV): "Should this be said, O house of Jacob?", or perhaps better, altering one vowel point to produce the infinitive absolute instead of the passive participle, "Do the house of Jacob say . . ." The last line is then the answer to their argument. Yahweh's blessing is not unconditional; His Word benefits only those who submit to His authority (Psalm 28: 10).

Yeqomem is unlikely to mean "is risen up" (AV). The *Po'l* is transitive elsewhere, and is used to express "raising up" in the sense of rebuilding. The imperfect is unexpected also. *W'ethmul 'ammi* (literally "yesterday my people") can be read as *w'attem l'ammi* by retaining the existing consonants and altering the vowels. *Yeqomem* might be a corruption of *taqumu*. The consonantal text would then have three *mems* in a row, and it would

⁴ *Four Prophets*, 1963

be easy for a scribe accidentally to add a fourth. If this is accepted the sense will be: "but you rise up against my people as an enemy". However, 'al (Deut. 19: 11) or 'el (Gen. 4: 8) would be expected rather than *l^e*. *Shube milḥama* could mean "returning from war", but perhaps "averse from war" (AV), "with no thought of war" (RSV) suits the context better.

In verses 12 and 13 there is a sharp change from threatening to promise. Calvin attempted to preserve the continuity of sense by reading these verses as a prophecy of gathering together for judgment. But 13b in particular is against this interpretation. "And Yahweh at their head" would have to mean "nigh them, to oppress and wholly to overwhelm them" (Calvin).⁵ But the natural meaning of the phrase is leadership (cf. 2 Chron. 20: 27), not judgment. And it is even more impossible to take the preceding half-line (RSV "Their king will pass on before them") as referring to judgment. More likely this is a separate oracle promising restoration.

Towns named Bozrah are found only in Edom (Gen. 36: 33, etc.) and Moab (Jer. 48: 24). *Boşra* (12) should therefore probably be read as "in a fold" (RSV), not "of Bozrah" (AV). Although rams and lambs are mentioned in connection with Bozrah in Edom in Isaiah 34: 6, so are wild oxen in the following verse, and there is no adequate evidence that Bozrah was specially famed for its sheep.

Haddab^ero (12) appears to be a noun with the article as well as the pronominal suffix. The letter *waw* may belong to the following word.⁶

In 2 Samuel 5: 20 David speaks of Yahweh breaking through his enemies. Here (verse 13) the thought is somewhat different: the Breaker (AV—i.e. Messiah?) breaks through the prison gate, and leads his people out free. But the King in the next line appears to be Yahweh Himself (cf. Zeph. 3: 15; Isa. 33: 22; 43: 15; 52: 12). The close association of Yahweh with the Messiah finds confirmation in chapter 5: 4 (Heb. 3), where the Messiah feeds his flock "in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God"—an idea which finds a striking fulfilment in Christ.

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⁵ Calvin, *op. cit.*

⁶ Gesenius (Kautzsch) 127 i.