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# SOME NOTES ON MICAH

(concluded)

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## CHAPTERS VI AND VII

**I**N Micah 6: 1-5 the mountains and hills are called as witnesses in a dispute between the LORD and Israel. Cf. 1: 2, where the earth and all the nations are summoned to bear witness to the rightness of the Lord's judgment, and the similar passage in Isaiah 1: 2.

The LORD points out that, far from giving Israel any excuse for their rebellion, he has shown them his grace by redeeming them from Egypt.

The phrase *w<sup>e</sup>ha'ethanim mosede 'ares* (verse 2) presents several peculiarities. Older commentators such as J. M. P. Smith<sup>1</sup> and G. A. Smith<sup>2</sup> regarded *w<sup>e</sup>ha'ethanim* as a corruption of *w<sup>e</sup>he'ezinu*, but the emendation is hardly necessary. *'ethan* has the meaning "perennial", "ever-flowing" (e.g. of ever-flowing streams, Amos 5: 24; Psalm 74: 15) and hence "permanent", "enduring" in a more general sense (cf. Jeremiah 5: 15; Numbers 24: 21). It is thus an appropriate description of the abiding foundations of the earth.

For the adjective preceding the substantival phrase, cf. Isaiah 23: 12; 53: 11. This construction is really appositional.<sup>3</sup>

What are the *mos<sup>e</sup>de 'ares*? According to B.D.B. the phrase occurs five times, plus *mos<sup>e</sup>doth ha'ares* once, and *mos<sup>e</sup>doth tebel* in two parallel passages. Of particular interest for our present purpose is Psalm 82: 5, where the shaking of the foundations of the earth is associated with human wickedness. The invoking of the foundations here may be taken to imply that Israel by its conduct has offended against the very foundations of the universe—we would say in less concrete form, against fundamental moral laws.

The language of 6: 4-5 is very reminiscent of the Pentateuch (e.g. Exodus 20: 1). The mention of Aaron and Miriam with Moses is unique in the prophets; the Pentateuch confirms that they were associated with him in the leadership of Israel, though in a

<sup>1</sup> *I.C.C.* (1911), *in loco*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (1928), *in loco*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gesenius-Kautzsch, 132b.

subordinate capacity (e.g. Exodus 15: 20f.; 24: 9, 14). The refusal of Balaam, as the LORD'S mouthpiece, to curse Israel (Numbers 22) was a demonstration of the LORD'S grace towards them. The words "and what happened" must be either inserted or understood before the second half of verse 5, as in R.S.V. This part of the verse has no connection with the first part, which concerns Balaam. The reference is to the crossing of the Jordan, Shittim and Gilgal being the camping-places immediately before and after the event (Joshua 3: 1; 4: 20).

In 6: 6-8 someone is pictured as answering the LORD'S charges against Israel by an enquiry as to what he requires from man. Would extremes of ritual sacrifice satisfy Him? When the context is noted, the reference to human sacrifice can be seen to be a hypothetical example of the height of self-abnegating zeal (like the offering of tens of thousands of torrents of oil!) and not necessarily as an indication that this passage dates from a time when human sacrifice was currently being practised.

Sin, rather than sin-offering, is the most natural translation of *hatta'th*, after the parallel *pish'i*. If the latter meant "my offering for transgression", the usage would be unparalleled (cf. B.D.B. s.v. *pesha'*). In each phrase the construction is more likely a double accusative signifying to give something in exchange or compensation for something else.

The verb *sn'*, used in the phrase *w<sup>e</sup>hasnea' leketh*, is not found elsewhere in the O.T., but the translation "and to walk humbly" is supported by Proverbs 11: 2, where *s<sup>e</sup>nu'im* is opposed to *zadon*, "arrogance".

Micah 6: 9-16 describe the punishment for commercial dishonesty. This oracle is directed against the cities—perhaps against Jerusalem in particular. The Hebrew of the second and third lines of verse 9 is full of difficulties. As it stands the second line appears to be a parenthesis ("It is sound wisdom to fear thy name", i.e. true wisdom consists in reverence for God's revealed character). The word *tushiyya* is characteristic of the Wisdom literature but occurs also in Isaiah 28: 29. The third line is the beginning of the Lord's summons to the city: "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it" (A.V.). The LXX reads *akoue phule, kai tis kosmesi polin?* and thus gives at least some support to the emendation followed by the R.S.V. ("Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city"). This assumes the addition of one *yod* and the corruption of *daleth* to *resh* in the consonantal text, and takes in the first word of the following verse. The R.S.V. "Can I forget" translates *ha'eshsheh*. But *'ish* is found for *yesh* in 2 Samuel 14: 19, so the A.V. "Are

there" is quite possible here and the emendation is hardly necessary.

In verse 11 the M.T. has *ha'ezkeh*, "shall I be clean", but the first person does not seem to make sense here. The R.S.V. is probably right in reading (with the same consonants) the Piel with third person suffix, *ha'azakkehu*—though elsewhere the Piel means *make pure*, rather than *count pure*, or *acquit*. The A.V. translates "Shall I count (them) pure", i.e. without the pronominal suffix.

In verse 13 the M.T. reads *heh<sup>e</sup>lethi hakkotheka*, literally "I will make sick your smiting", i.e. "I will make you sick with blows". A similar phrase occurs in Nahum 3: 19, and therefore it is probably unnecessary to follow the Versions and R.S.V. in altering the punctuation to read *hahillothi*, etc., "I have begun to smite you".

The Hiphil of the root *sug* (translated "put away" in verse 14 by R.S.V.) is normally used of moving a boundary. It is most naturally taken here as applying to possessions, but can these be put to the sword? J. M. P. Smith<sup>4</sup> quotes Margolis as translating the phrase "and she shall conceive, but shall not bear". According to S. Goldman<sup>5</sup> this rendering is supported by Ibn Ezra and Kimchi. But *sug* nowhere else means "conceive". It is perhaps more likely that the reference is to an unsuccessful attempt to save offspring from death.

In the closing words of the chapter the R.S.V. translation "the scorn of the peoples" is based on the reading '*ammim* for '*ammi*. If the M.T. is retained, the implication will be that unfaithfulness in God's own people is more serious than in others (cf. Amos 3: 2). But this idea does not seem to fit into the context, and the R.S.V. rendering, which is supported by the Versions, is to be preferred.

Micah 7: 1-7 describe the universal corruption of society—such is the scarcity of righteous men that to look for them is like looking for fruit after the crop has been picked. Israel has sometimes been taken to be the speaker throughout 7: 1-10. But in verse 7 a contrast is drawn between the speaker and the corrupt society in which he lives. This contrast suggests that the speaker in 1-6 is the prophet and not Israel. It also links verse 7 with the preceding rather than the following verses.

In verses 8-10, however, the prophet seems to identify himself with the community of Israel and to speak for them. Both the speaker and her enemy are feminine, and this gender is often used

<sup>4</sup> *I.C.C.* (1911), *in loco*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Twelve Prophets* (Soncino), *in loco*.

in a collective sense.<sup>6</sup> These three verses thus voice the assurance that although God may discipline his people he will not finally reject them.

The Hebrew of verse 3 presents several peculiarities. The order is unusual, especially the position of *w<sup>e</sup>hashshophet*, "and the judge", which J. M. P. Smith<sup>7</sup> would omit. The use of *sha'al b<sup>e</sup>* in the sense "ask for" is unique; the phrase normally means to consult an oracle. The suffix of *naphsho*, "his soul", is strengthened by the pronoun *hu'*. The pronoun when used in this way is usually attached to *gam*, "even", "also", though not always (cf. Zechariah 7: 5; Deuteronomy 5: 3). Possibly the M.T. is corrupt, but in the absence of any convincing evidence to support emendations it is safer to make the best possible sense of the existing text.

In verse 4 the A.V. translates *yashar mimme'sukah* by "the most upright (is sharper) than a thorn hedge". The context and grammar suggest that the consonantal text should be divided differently to give *y<sup>e</sup>sharam m<sup>e</sup>sukah*, "the most upright of them a thorn hedge" (R.S.V.).

In verse 8 the exact sense of *ki naphalti* is "for (if) I have fallen".<sup>8</sup>

Verses 11-13 look forward to a future day of restoration and expansion for God's people, and of judgment for the world. In order to make sense of verse 12 it seems necessary to read *yabo'u*, "they shall come" (R.S.V.) for *yabo'*, "he shall come" (A.V.). It also appears necessary to omit the copula from *w<sup>e</sup>adeika*. Comparison with the third phrase of the verse "and from Egypt to the River" suggests that the R.S.V. is right in reading *wa<sup>a</sup>de* for *w<sup>e</sup>are* ("to Egypt" rather than "cities of Egypt"). *Daleth* was easily mistaken for *resh*. Similarly *har mehar* seems to be required instead of *har hahar*. Did the scribe have the identical consonants of *hor hahar* "Mount Hor" (Numbers 20: 23) in his mind?

In verses 14ff. the prophet looks forward to a time when Israel, under the rule of her Shepherd, will again enjoy the prosperity which had formerly been hers. At present they "dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land"; this means either that they are in possession of the hill tops of Judah, but access to the surrounding fertile plains is denied to them; or it may be a figurative description of Israel surrounded by enemies. The last

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gesenius-Kautzsch, 122s.

<sup>7</sup> I.C.C. (1911), *in loco*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 130, Rem. 4; 132; Rem. 2.

part of verse 14 implies that they are no longer in possession of Bashan and Gilead, and therefore places the oracle after 734 when these areas were overrun by Tiglath-pileser III. The conclusion of the chapter, and thus of the whole book, dwells on the fact that God's grace will ultimately triumph over his people's sin.

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*NOTE* on Micah 5: 5a (*E.Q.*, July-September, 1969, p. 170, lines 34-41): K. J. Cathcart (*Biblica* xlix, 1968, p. 4) argues from Ugaritic parallels that *zeh shalom* means "the One of Peace"; cf. *zeh sinay* (? "the One of Sinai") in Judges 5: 5; Ps. 68: 9.