ON THE WAYS OF THE PROPHETS

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Title: On the ways of the Prophets

Published by: The Director, Alpha Institute, Archdiocese of Tellicherry, Sandesa Bhavan, Tellicherry, 670 101, Kannur, Kerala
Ph: 0490 - 2344727, 2343707

Published on: 2018 December 25 (Christmas)

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Printing: Vimala Offset Press, Thalassery

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Published for the use of the students of Alpha Institute of Theology and Science

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Prophet, Prophecy and Prophetism

Definition and Description

Prophecy, in a wider context, is a mode of communication between the divine and the human, usually takes the form of dialogue. The messages in both directions are channeled through individuals (prophets) who are recognized by others in the society as qualified to perform the function. It is a divine and social phenomenon operative within a given context with the most suitable mode of communication for human understanding. The three principal actors in the drama are the deity (giver), the prophet (the human mediator) and the human audience (receiver). Since the prophet is not called to minister to him/herself, the central interest of the prophets would be the human audience, who should understand, interpret and act according to the oracle of the deity. Biblically, prophecy represents the inspired word (message) of YHWH, coming from YHWH through a channel chosen by YHWH (a prophet) for His people. It is a mediated message from YHWH communicated to His people through human agents.

"Propheticism may legitimately be defined as that the understanding of history which accepts meaning

only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, divine participation (IDB vol. 3). The common denominator in the three terms is the deity, who calls the prophet. The usage of the word ¯prophet is today associated with a variety of meanings, which also go beyond the religious boundary from where the term originated. For example, weather forecasters are called ¯prophets of weather. Exponents of a new ideology and teaching are called prophets. In the light of this, it is necessary for us to explore the meaning of the term.

In its broad sense, the term, prophet, refers to a person who speaks by divine inspiration. He/She is an interpreter through whom the will of a god or deity is expressed. The prophet is charged with a divine message, which is often received and/or expressed in different forms. It also refers to a specially gifted person, who has profound moral insight and exceptional powers of expression; the chief spokesperson of a movement or cause. All these views will present the prophet to be tied with social and a personal religious experience.

In a technical sense, the prophet is associated with the second of the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, comprising the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. Any of the personalities identified in the bible is also regarded as a prophet, so also the author/redactor of the above mentioned books of the bible is also associated with the name prophet.

Etymology of the Term "Prophet"

Prophet is derived from a Greek compound noun pro and *phçmí* - (Tipó, "before") + *öçìß* phçmí, "I tell"). This may suggest the meaning: one who predicts; one who tells beforehand. It appears to be confirmed by the use of pro, *phçmí*, to predict, proclaim in advance. It is in the prefix pro- that the difficulty of determining the meaning of the noun lies. Indeed, when one examines the combination of pro- with other correlative verbs of speech in Greek in earlier writings, it is evident that in no case does the object of the verbs point to the future. Their obvious meaning is ¯to declare openly, "to make known publicly, ¯to proclaim" to state publicly to proclaim aloud ¯making public declaration.

The religious flavour of the stem *phçmí* gives the word a special weight, and expresses the authority which can be claimed for the prophet's word. The Hebrew equivalent for prophet are *ro'eh, hozeh, 'ish ha-'elohim* and *nabi*.

The Concept of Prophet in the Greek World

The nature of the Greek prophet is more easily ascertained from his/her place in public life than from etymological considerations. The words derived from this root are firmly tied up with the Greek oracle.

i. The prophet expresses something for the content of which she or he is not responsible, since the prophet has him/herself received it indirectly from the god.

ii. The prophet does not give advice unless the prophet is asked for it. The initiative is the questioner's alone, not the god's or the prophet's.

iii. The words of the Greek prophet are always addressed to a unique, historical, concrete, present situation in the life of the client. The advice then given embraces the whole range of counselling help which is called for, even up to the present day, by the troubles and needs of men and women.

iv. The prophet is called to his/her office by the oracular institution, and so not by a god.

v. The prophet is usually inspired to understand and/or achieve things which may be impossible for the mortals.

To sum up, a prophet is a person, employed by the oracle, who by direct inspiration or by the interpretation of sounds and omens declares the will of the gods to a person who asks for advice. Accordingly, prophecy means to proclaim the counsel and will of the gods concerning a historical, concrete, present situation, in response to a definite question put by the client.

Some Biblical Terms for Prophet

One will discover four biblical terms that designate a prophet in the Bible. They are ro'eh, hozeh, 'ish ha-'elohim and nabi. The earliest

is ro'eh or "seer," which goes back to the general term "to see." The ro'eh, therefore, is the one, who understands God's ways and plans and is consulted to ascertain God's will in a matter. Samuel is called a ro'eh (1 Sam 9:9), and an editorial note explains that the ro'eh was later called a "prophet," or nabi. This reference itself shows the transition to the term nabi. Samuel's role in this particular account is that of a clairvoyant, but Samuel performed also as a priest and participated in Hebrew politics. The term ro'eh is used of Zadok, a priest in David's time (2 Sam 15:27), and it is possible that some priests were clairvoyant. The word ro'eh contains no hint of ecstatic behaviour but suggests that divine disclosure came through some form of trance. If as some have suggested, signs and omens were employed, then the ro'eh is best understood as a counterpart of the Babylonian baru.

Hozeh is another term associated with prophet in Hebrew. It also means "seer." It is derived from the root hazah, "to see." In 2 Sam 24:11 we are told that the prophet Gad, who is called David's hozeh, obtained messages from Yahweh but no hint is given about how the message came. In 2 Kings 17:13 the term hozeh is used with "prophet" to designate those by whom Yahweh had warned his people. The prophet Amos is called a hozeh, perhaps in derision (Amos 7:12). Isa 29:10 refers to covering seers' heads so they could not obtain messages. Studies of the words hozeh and ro'eh have failed to demonstrate any marked difference in meaning, and most English translations render both by "seer."

The third term, which stands as the distinctive word for prophet in Hebrew, is nabi (plural, nebhiim or nebiim). It is derived from the Akkadian root nabu which is not found in Hebrew. It is also a cognate of the Arabic Naba'a. It is used as a noun about 309 times in the OT, of which 92 instances in Jeremiah alone, to designate a prophet.

Though the exact etymology is uncertain, it could mean "to call ¯to speak," "to proclaim," "to name," "to announce." But "to call" at present seems the best option. However, the storm continues in scholarship if the verb should be understood in the active or passive sense. A camp of scholarship argues that the etymology is parallel to the Greek, and therefore should be understood in the active sense:

one who calls, forth-teller, preacher (cf. Kraus, 1966). The other sees the meaning from the parallel development in the Akkadian, which indicates a passive sense, that is, one called, one appointed (Albright, 1957). Thus, behind the passive form stands the deity or YHWH as the agent, the one who calls. In other words, the prophet is the one called by the deity ¯to call-out the oracles of the deity, the divine words. So, it is YWHW, who called the prophet, empowers the prophet to speak for YHWH to His people (Amos 3:8; Jer 1:7,17; Ezek 3:4). In other words, the prophet is "a speaker" or "a spokesperson" or a ¯mouthpiece (Ex 4:16) the one who "calls out" or "proclaims."

Consequently, the position here is that the two aspects of the verb is very important and fundamental in the understanding of the concept and mission of a prophet. It is YHWH who calls the prophet (passive) to call-forth YHWH's message (active) to the people (Deut 5:5).

Besides, the three terms used to designate the office of the prophet (cf. I Chr 29:29 - Samuel – Ro'eh; Nathan – Nabi' and Gad – Hozeh), a fourth one is "a man of God" ('ish 'elohim) or "the man of God" ('ish ha-'elohim). Further than designating only a speaker for God, it embraces in a wider context ¯a holy or ¯inspired person. It is in this sense that the Chronicler would pay distinct respect to the inspired leaders of the past who play an important role in his interpretation of history and titled them 'ish 'elohim - Moses (1 Chron 23:14; 2 Chron 30:16, cf. Ezra 3:2) and David (2 Chron 8:14, cf. Neh 12:24, 36), - along with the prophets - inspired unnamed prophets (cf. 2 Chron 11:2; 25:7 f.), Samuel (1 Sam. 9:6-10) and Shemaiah who warned Rehoboam against attacking Israel (1 Kings 12:22-24). Both Elijah (1 Kings 17:18-24; 2 Kings 1:10-13) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:7, 9) are given equally the title.

It is important to note that the Hebrew writers did not employ the terms in such a manner to make a clear distinction between ¯men of God, ¯seers and ¯prophets as contemporary scholarship does. The terms describe, perhaps, one reality, that is ¯men of Godas they were believed to be inspired of God.

The Old Testament Understanding of Prophet

From the Old Testament perspective, a prophet is the mouthpiece of God. The prophet is the YHWH's oracle bearer; as proclaimer of the word. The prophet is one called by YHWH, sanctified and divinely inspired YHWH, to reveal the oracle of YHWH to the people. The Prophet is called to warn, exhort, comfort, teach and counsel the people of YHWH. The prophet is bound to YHWH alone and thus enjoying a freedom that is unique. The prophet is a covenant mediator who delivers the word of YHWH to His people in order to shape their future by reforming their present. The prophet remains an intermediary between YHWH and His people. The prophet is a visionary, ahead of his/her contemporaries, and courageously warns against impending dangers and doom.

The ancient Israelite prophets are fundamentally as proclaimer and preacher, ethical teacher, who instructs and calls the people of YHWH to repentance through words and actions. They addressed local, national and international issues. They warned against the future consequence of the present and gave exhortations that provoke spiritual dedication that would ensure divine blessing to the people instead of destruction.

They are best recognized as charismatic personalities, men under the compulsion of an experience that causes them to utter, despite opposition, challenge, mockery and imprisonment, the words they believed to be Yahweh's words given to them, words representing Yahweh's will, Yahweh's intentions, Yahweh's purposes, and Yahweh's action. Their concern was with their own immediate present. If the understanding and interpretation of that immediate present demanded recollections from the past or indications of what the future might hold, then past and future were utilized. If the best and most meaningful presentation called for dramatic enactment, utilizing legal or mourning or folksong modes of utterance, then these forms were used. To resist the demands of God or to flee from their assigned role was impossible. The prophet would prefer to remain faithful to the call of YHWH and suffer the consequences, though with the conviction that YHWH will vindicate the prophet at the long run.

02

History and Nature of Israelite Prophecy

Introduction

The Israelite prophecy went through different phases of development, which are of interest to modern scholarship. Several efforts have been made to read the history back to the origin of the institution of prophecy in Israel. Interestingly enough, the general consensus is that, though there remains something unique about Israelite prophecy, prophecy as a phenomenon cannot be a special reserve of Israel or the Yahweistic religion. This becomes the centre of the discussion in this unit. We shall be introduced to some of the challenging issues that are associated with prophecy inAncient Near East, the origin and rise of prophetic movement in Israel, and the development of Israelite prophecy. We shall also be exposed to another area of scholarship concern, that is, the duration in Israel. In other words, what does it mean to speak of cessation of prophetism in Israel? Could there had been a time in the history of Israel when there was a prophetic vacuum? In addition, we shall

discuss briefly the concept of true and false prophet, and will finally conclude by arguing that is nothing like false prophet per se, but false prophecy.

Development of Israelite Prophetism

The origins of Israelite prophecy have been much discussed without textual evidence because there is none. Traditionally, the Israelite seer is considered to have originated in Israel's nomadic roots, and the nabi' is considered to have originated in Canaan, though such judgments are virtually impossible to substantiate. But the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan collaterally connects them to Canaanite forms of prophecy. Hence the structure of the prophetic and priestly function in Israel and Canaan become very much the same. However, the early stage of the prophetic ministry is dominated by the seer (hozeh or ro'eh) (1 Sam 9:1-9) whose principal function is to describe events, present or future, past, which are hidden from the ordinary man. The seer is in essence the man people consulted in order to find lost articles. A fee is usually required for the service of a seer. A perfect example of a seer was Samuel, who was consulted by Saul while searching for his father's asses (I Sam 9:1-10).

With the rise of the monarch and the setting up of the great sanctuaries, the seers were no longer mentioned. At this period, the nabi are mentioned for the first time in Israel about the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the tenth century BC, a period that coincided with the rise of the monarchy. So, the nabi and the monarch emerged after the religion of YHWH has long become established in the agricultural areas of Palestine. The early nabis are ecstatic in character, operating from the cultic high places making music, dancing and singing (I Sam. 10). Samuel too is associated directly with these ecstatic bands. Yet, Samuel as the man of YHWH stands always above the group. He is a man held in honour because ¯all that he says comes true (I Sam 9:6). So, in Samuel the two functions, the seer and the nabi, converge.

Of course, the nabis tended to be gregarious and usually appeared and acted in bands. This may be partly because ecstasy is held to be infectious. In contrast to the seer, their social and moral standing

was low, as is shown not merely by the amazement of Saul's friend at his association with such disreputable people (1 Sam 10:11f). With the passage of time however, the group gradually came into prominence, because kings and nobles patronized them. Their status in the society therefore improved considerably. This led many to join the guilds of the ecstatic, and moreover, because many of them became consultants and found their ways into the palace. Thus, this marked the beginning of the professionalisation of the prophetic ministry. Sycophancy and formality would find its way in professionalism, thus bring the prophetic ministry into disrepute among the people.

However, individuals who saw the excesses of the ecstatic prophets separated themselves from these guilds of nabi. The first person of whom this independence is recorded is Micaiah son of Imlah (I Kgs 22:5-28). Micaiah and his contemporary Elijah appeared in marked contrast to these official prophets. They stood alone and spoke upon the impulse of their own experience with YHWH. Micaiah, in opposition to both the deceivers of the king and the views of the majority of the prophets, presented the word of YHWH as he understood it. His message did not support the throne; it spelled out doom and disaster. Micaiah then stood outside the ranks of official prophetism. For the first time, a prophet of woe stood opposed to other prophets, expressing both an idea and an attitude that would characterize prophecy for the next centuries. Prophetic independence of the throne was established and oracles of denunciation were often directed towards the king.

After Micaiah, individual prophets had become a familiar figure. It was no longer on the crowds of ecstatic prophets that the people relied for divine message. It was rather the single independent speaker whose words they held to be due to the direct inspiration of YHWH. The classical or literary prophets fall into this category. This fact is seen in Amos indignant repudiation of any connection with the ecstatic nabis, when he declared, ¯I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. The Lord took me from behind the flock and the Lord said to me, go prophesy to my people Israel (Amos 7:14-15). Isaiah is

named as ¯the prophet only three times in his book, all in chapters 36-39, a section that is actually copied from 2 Kings 18-20. Jeremiah is called a prophet twenty-one times, but in his own speech the term is used only of those sent in the past and of contemporaries who are also alleged to be liars. Twice, Ezekiel is indirectly referred to as a prophet (Ezekiel 2:5, 33:33); otherwise ¯prophet is also used of the past, or of contemporary liars. Nowhere is Hosea or Micah or Malachi called a prophet. Zechariah is only the ¯Son of prophet . Only Habakkuk and Haggai are called prophets and in the remaining books of the prophets the word is not even used.

Cessation of Prophetism in Israel

The office of prophet would seem to have come to pass away in Israel after Malachi. It does seem not to have reappeared until 400 years later with John the Baptist. It may equally appear uncertain how the New Testament gift of "prophecy" relates to the Old Testament. Yet New Testament prophets (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32; I Cor. 12:10,28-29; 14:29,32,37; Eph. 4:11) claim not to be revealers of new revelation or Scripture, but the forth- and foretellers of God's will in the context of the covenant.

Again, the cessation of prophecy would seem to have been suggested in Ps 74:9 (cf. Lam 2:9, 20) and endorsed by 1 Macc 9:27 (cf. 4:46; 9:27;14:41). Yet the same prophecy will be understood in the context of an expectation of an eschatological prophet connected with the person of Moses on the basis of Deut. 18:15-18 (cf. Acts 3:22 f.; 7:37; and Jn. 6:14; 7:40) and with the person of Elijah on the basis of Mal. 3:1 (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 1:17, 76; 7:27) and Mal. 4:1-6 (MT 3:19- 24; cf. Matt. 17:11; Mk. 9:12; Lk. 1:17. It will be honoured and fulfilled in the realities of the NT (Heb 1:1, cf. Matt 1:22; 2:15, 23; 13:35; 21:4, etc.). In other words, there is never in Israel a prophetic age in the sense of a fixed historical period. Prophecy is always accompanied and opposed by living and fruitful rational or anti-charismatic trends.

Furthermore, prophecy is always challenged from within by the question of its legitimacy. What distinguishes prophecy in Israel is its tremendous ability to live on in ever new forms. When the vivid

prophetic manifestations of the post-exilic period finally had to give place to a nomistic rationalism, there were easily discernible historical reasons for this. After the death of Herod, prophecy was entangled in political developments as never before in Israel's history. After the overthrow of the hierocracy in Jerusalem, which was also a serious defeat for all charismatics, Pharisaic Rabbinism set to work creating a Palestinian patriarchate on a nomistic rational foundation. Thus the Canon was fixed and all movements which did not correspond or bow to the Pharisaic Rabbinism norm were eliminated. At the same time all literature, which went beyond the pew dogmatic limits, was suppressed, and the schema triumphed whereby the wise men were the legitimate successors of the prophets.

The rabbis naturally saw in apocalyptic the legitimate successor of prophecy. ¯Up to this point (i.e. up toAlexander the Great) the prophets preached through the Holy Spirit. From then on, bow thine ear and hear the words of the wise (i.e. the apocalyptic writers) (Seder Olam Rabbah 30). So, in the rabbinic writings the ¯voice from heaven begins to gain importance alongside apocalyptic. God still spoke but only through the echo of his voice (SB II 125 ff.).

Incidentally, Josephus (Ant. 13, 311 ff.) reports that the Essenes had a great number of prophets, who were held in high repute. In other words, for all its consistency the nomistic trend was not strong enough to destroy at once the charismatic element, which was especially dangerous in Zelotism. Hence the second revolt broke out, as it would appear, under the spiritual leadership of Akiba as prophet. The radical defeat and the Roman policy of extermination up to the edict of toleration under Antoninus Pius in 138 A.D. ended all spirit-effected manifestations. With great effort the Synagogue could be reconstructed, but now its official outlook was so strongly dominated by nomistic rationalism.

True and False Prophecy

Another area of interest about prophecy as a form of intermediation in ancient Israel is the legitimacy of claims. As Vawter (1990) correctly observed, true and false prophets abound not only in antiquity, in the OT and NT, within and without the people of

God, but also in later times. Nevertheless it is important to note that term, false prophet, is not Hebrew biblical tradition but first came to be associated with the LXX tradition of pseudo-prophetes. Otherwise there is confusion of identification since the same word, nabi, is used to depict the different concepts in MT. That notwithstanding, the following points should be noted in the understanding of the concept of the identity and functions of ¯true and false prophet.

1. Distinction between true and false prophets is difficult

In the eyes of Israel prophets would appear the same, hence the distinction between false and true prophecy in the days of the classical prophets was not always clear. Although there could have been some prophets deluded by their own prophetic devices, erring in judgment, confusing their own hopes and aspirations with the authentic word of YHWH (cf. Isa 28:7; Jer 23:5ff.). Possession of the ecstatic prophetic "spirit" was no sure criterion: prophets might be touched by the spirit and still prophesy falsehood, and most of the classical prophets give no signs of having been ecstatics. The situation becomes even more problematic in Israel when two prophets appear saying things that were contradictory using almost, if not, the same standard language (cf. 1 Kgs 22 and Jer 28). In Jer. 28, the prophet Jeremiah confronted Hananiah, who presented a divine oracle (Jer 28:2-4) from Yahweh.

Yet some countless passages in the OT accuse "the prophets" frequently enough, sometimes prophets and priests together, of every kind of moral and social crime against Yahweh and his people and of cooperating with the worst elements in Israelite rule and practice to frustrate Yahweh's will.

2. YHWH could deploy the service of both Yahweistic and non-Yahweistic prophets

As Overholt (1989), prophecy can work well if there is one prophet speaking to somebody who will take that prophet seriously. So, if prophecy should have a fatal flaw, it is not necessary because of the person of the prophet as such, since YHWH could use any person for His work but the content of the message.

3. The prophecy of a non-Yahweistic prophet could be as true

There appears in the history of Israel a situation where the prophecy of a non-Yahweistic prophet was treasured as true within the Israelite tradition that condemned the tradition of that prophet (Balaam) as false. Thus, the oracles of Balaam in Num 22-24 were regarded as true prophecies from Yahweh, although biblical tradition classified Balaam with the enemies of God and his people (Num 31:8,16; Josh 13:22; 2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11 ; Rev 2:14) So

4. False Prophets as sycophants

The majority of the false prophets were often those found at the king's court in whose interest it was to tell the king and his officials what they would want to hear. Some were those who derived monetary benefits from favourable prophecies that assured their clients of divine blessings and troubled no consciences. Some of these prophets were the children of their age, who were probably caught up in the common tragedy of their people. They were those, Vawter (1990) believes, who had become so convinced that "the Israelite way of life" represented all that was godly that it had become second nature to measure Yahweh's will according to Israel's performance rather than the reverse. This oft-repeated tragedy has by no means been confined to ancient Israel. In an age when national pride spoke a religious language, it was inevitable that it should also speak in prophecy.

5.The fulfilment of prophecy not the criterion for true prophecy

The fulfillment of prophecy, even if it had been always evident to the prophet's contemporaries, was not an infallible sign, as Deut 13:2ff. shows; moreover, true prophecy apparently often went unfulfilled, discouraging even the prophet himself (cf. Jer 20:7ff.). When the prophet Hananiah prophesied his own wishful thinking in predicting the end of the Babylonian exile in two years and the restoration of Jeconiah (Jer 28: 1 ff.), Jeremiah could offer little in rebuttal except his conviction of the truth of his own contrary prophecy.

6. The Word of God as the true test of a prophet

Anyone who really knows God will recognize his true prophet and discern him from the false, for the prophecy must conform to God's designs as he has revealed them. Jesus similarly argued his case before his generation according to John 5:37ff., etc.

If the classical prophets could offer their contemporaries only the testimony of the prophetic word itself, they did nothing more or less than any true prophet could be expected to do: it is the word itself that must find a response in the heart attuned to the reception of God's word. Their own conviction of the truth of their prophecy rests on the same foundations; therefore, the narrative of the prophetic call, the experience of the divine presence, plays a prominent role in the records of the literary prophets. This testimony constitutes their credentials, both for themselves and for those to whom they have been sent.

Vawter (1990) observes in line with Aquinas that the same person might prophesy both truth and falsehood, depending on whether or not he had been touched by the Spirit of God, because prophecy is a transient motion rather than a habit (Quodl. 12, q.17, a.26). In other words, prophecy does not preclude the fact that the same prophet might alternately prophesy truth and falsehood. However, a true prophetic word was in every case a distinct gift received from God (cf. Deut 13:2-6, restricting the somewhat unsophisticated criterion of true and false prophecy in Deut 18:21-22).

7. YHWH as the cause of false prophecy

Biblical tradition betrays also the notion that possession of the spirit of Yahweh" is not a guarantee of true prophecy (cf. 1 Kgs 22:5-28). In OT eyes, the activity of the false prophets was also willed by Yahweh as a means of testing his faithful followers (Jer 4: 1 0; 1 Kgs 22:19-23; etc.).

Conclusion

In this part, we tried to see the evolution and development of Israelite prophetism. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine

where and how Israelite prophecy originated. However, that the prophetic ministry came to prominence during the monarchical period in Israel cannot be contested. If we critically sieve the prophetic tradition, it will be evident that the prophetic ministry went through series of development. Different factors responsible for this were given adequate attention in the main content of the unit.

Summary

i. The discussion has shown clearly why many scholars believe that the phenomenon of prophecy is not the exclusivity of the Israelite or the Yahweh religion. Rather the Israelite prophets followed to greater extent some established tradition of ancient Near East both as nomads and sedentary population.

ii. That notwithstanding, one can still speak about the origin and development of prophecy in Israel.

iii. It has equally become clearer how socio-political and religious factors had led to the emergence of prophetic movement in Israel. These factors are summerised as a reflection of opposition to whatever that threatened the life and survival of the nation of Israel. Hence the movement is conceived to be redemptive to the extent that it sustains hope and assured security in time of emergency. Even the prophetic oracles against foreign nations, which could be seen as representing the Holy War ideology (cf. von Rad, 1965), is a demonstration of the faith in the liberative act of YHWH. In other words, the religion of YHWH is the religion of freedom. The curses poured on Israel's enemies symbolically achieved that, which could not be executed practically is demonstrated (cf. 1 Kgs 22; 2 Kgs 13:15; Jer. 27: 2ff; Isa. 20.2).

iv. It was equally highlighted in the course that the history of the development of prophecy is a very complex and complicating issue for scholarship.

v. Furthermore, it was observed that, contrary to popular belief, there was never a period in the history of Israel that Israel was without prophecy. Even when the vivid prophetic manifestations of the post-exilic period finally had to give place

to a nomistic rationalism with their discernible historical reasons, there was still trances of prophecy as attested by Josephus, and also witnessed in the lives of some of the great Rabbis and the Zealots.

vi. Many issues were raised which would seem to have made it more complex and complicating to identify true and false prophets. However, it was finally concluded that the Word of YHWH is the true text for true and false prophecy.

The Nature of Israelite Prophecy

The issues raised in the last part borders principally on the origin and rise of prophetic movement with the conclusion that prophecy is not the uniqueness of the Israelites.

Our attention in this part will be directed on the call of a prophet, the mission and role of the prophet and the missionary quality of the prophet. We shall also discuss the characteristics of a true prophet.

The Call of a Prophet

In this section, three main elements concerning the call of the prophet will be examined, that is, the call experience, the power of the word, and some symbolic actions. All these are in one way or another connected with the call, response and missions of the prophet.

The Call Experience

A prophet‘s ministry begin with the prophet‘s call experience (see Isa 6; Jer. 1:4-10; Ezek. 1:1-3:15). It might be pursued continuously despite opposition or rejection on the part of his listeners (e.g., Hos. 9:7b); Ezek. 12:21ff.); it might be broken off by external coercion (Amos 7:10ff.) or by the prophet himself on account of failure (Isa. 8:16-18); or on account of his inward conversion to a new message (Ezek. 3:22-27; 24:25-27; 33:21-22) it might be temporarily interrupted. The prophet‘s words are usually spoken to those for whom the message is intended.

In other words, the prophets of Israel are called by YHWH to announce YHWH‘s word to YHWH‘ people. They speak for YHWH and the message carries the authority of YHWH as the

ONE who has called them and given them the message. So, it is YHWH, who decides and determines who will be his spokesman. He calls, prepares and sanctifies the prophet for the mission to which the prophet is called. This perhaps is responsible for the occurrence of the call narratives in the extent works of the prophets (see for example Isaiah 6:1-10, Jeremiah 1:4-19, Ezekiel 1:1-15; Amos 7:14). Therefore the ¯call is an important element in the making of a prophet, for it is not the prophet who decides to become one, but YHWH, who wills and calls the prophet to mission.

The Role of the Prophet

The different labels assumed by the prophets as seer, diviner, nabi (prophet) and man of God can be interpreted as a linguistic reflection of different times and places. They can equally be an emphasis on the different roles assumed by the prophets, which may also have some considerable overlap. These prophets are both writers and/or speakers. They receive information from and communicate with the deity in various ways (i.e., auditions and visions).

The Prophet as a Boundary Figure and Mediator

Despite the multiple roles assumed by the prophets of the Old Testament, it is still possible to identify one element common to all the prophets. The Israelite prophets functioned as intermediaries between the human and the divine worlds, and represented humans to God (e.g., Amos 7:2), and God to humans (Amos 5:4). They acted with the power of God within the mundane world (so Elisha). They envisioned the cosmic world (Amos 7:4; Zech 1:7-17) and sometimes participated in the divine council (1 Kgs 22; Isa. 6). The prophets often analysed the machinations of humans (Micah 3). They are truly boundary figures.

The prophets spoke for God to the people, calling the people to respond faithfully to the God who had revealed Himself in their history. They also spoke for the weak, the oppressed, the disenfranchised, those who had little voice in shaping their own lives or their own future. As they were speaking for the people, they were equally speaking for God, because their tradition remembered

that once they were slaves in Egypt with no voice in their own future until God entered history and delivered them. Such oppression of the helpless by the powerful was understood by the prophets to be a violation of the most fundamental part of God's revelation of Himself, that He is the kind of God who hears the cries of oppressed slaves and responds with grace and deliverance. These dual roles we shall further explore in this section.

The prophet as religious guardian

In looking at Old Testament prophets more closely, it is clear that their message is most often calling the people back to proper worship of God. But much of that task is done in the context of the community, the nation, of Israel. That meant that much of the criticism of the prophets is levelled at religious leaders for their failure to be spiritual leaders. It is also aimed at the powerful, most often also the religious leaders, who used their power and influence for selfish or sinful purposes, and sometimes not only forsake YHWH, but also teach their subjects to do the same.

In the time of the monarchs, Yahwism (that is the worship of YHWH), the religion of Israel went through series of challenges. This is seen in the constant struggle between Yahwism and the nature religions of the Canaanites. It went to the extent that the nature of primitive Yahwism had long been forgotten in Israel. The consequence of this is that in many minds, the essential distinction between YHWH and the pagan gods had been obscured. Thus, Yahwism was in danger of slipping unawares into outright polytheism. This situation calls for reforms and the prophets carried out the early attempts at reform of Yahwism. As loyal Yahwists the prophets fought rigorously for the enthronement of YHWH in the national life of Israel. The activities of Elijah can be understood against the backdrop of this prevailing situation. As deep religious thinkers, the prophets saw the shift of allegiance from YHWH to the emerging world powers in ancient Near East as an abomination. The prophet sees YHWH as the Lord over all creation and all powers were subject to him. To enter into any alliance therefore, portend undermining the person of YHWH (Isaiah 30:1-7).

The prophet as social reformer

Israel and Judah had undergone drastic socio-cultural, economic and political development. The prophets would appear on the national scene to remind the people the essence of their being as a people and as a nation. They served as a balance to the unrestrained power of the monarchy and the aristocracy (cf. 1 Sam 8:11-17). Politically the crown no longer took cognisance of the poor and the ancestral law (1 Kg. 21), hence a prophet like Elijah would not spare the crown in his utter condemnation of the tyranny of the king. So the prophets stand as a counter voice to those who would allow the allure of power, ambition, and self-serving self-righteousness to blind them to the things of God: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

The state with its taxation and its civil service had brought about a further disintegration of the old social order in Israel. In this wise, urbanisation with its attendant socio-cultural and economic evils become inevitably a necessary evil. The great landowners who were living in the towns gained control over the village people, and the result was a severe social injustice. Because of the burden of taxation, the peasant who were economically weak, were no longer able to maintain their land. The village people became increasingly poor (Isaiah 5:8, Micah 2:1f).

Consequently, the prophets condemned in clear terms those who exploited and despised the poor (cf. Is. 3:14-15; Amos 2:6; 4:1; 8:4-8). They spoke out particularly to challenge, in God‘s name, those who made laws that allowed the poor to be exploited (Is. 10:1-2, Jer. 22:3). This condemnation of unjust legislators was matched equally by strong words against unjust judges (Amos 5:12).

The prophets were, in the best sense of the term, "counter-culture" Israelites. As Brueggemann (1989) observes, the prophets called the people to live in an alternate reality not governed by the rules of power and success. They called them rather to live out Torah as a faithful response to God. They called the people to abandon the status quo shaped by those who benefited from it most, to embrace a new future shaped, empowered, and energized by God. They

always sang one octave too high, and empowered by a vision of how things could be, a future in which the people and their leaders would live out their calling to be the people of God as a channel of blessing to the world. They had the courage to call into question any preoccupation with the status quo on any level that interfered with that future. As a result, they were often in trouble with those who stand to lose most if the status quo were to be changed and that "could be" future became a reality.

The prophet as motivator and adviser

A re-reading of the historical and prophetic books in the light of the course also depicts the role of a prophet as a military strategist. Most often, when an Israelite king was strategizing for war, especially in case of doubts, the prophets would be consulted to inquire the mind of YHWH (cf. 1 Sam. 28:6, 14ff; I Kg 20). Prophet Isaiah was actively involved in the prosecution of the Syro-Ephraimite war and the Assyrian campaign (Isaiah 7); and in another occasion gave assurance to the Israelite king and his people, that the Assyrians would surely be defeated by YHWH (Isaiah 39). Jeremiah, during Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem, was active in offering advice on what to do to prevent the impending doom. But his advice would fall on deaf ears but at their peril (Jer. 42).

The prophet as political activists

An activist has been described as a person who in an event but also supports a policy with vigorous action. In the light of this, the ancient Israelite prophets could be regarded as political activists. This is because they were actively involved in the political life of Israel as a nation. Their contribution in the shaping of the monarchy becomes obvious. They take active part in the appointment and deposition of kings. In YHWH's name they designate candidates for the throne and fight to it that they are deposed again if necessary. Because of an infringement of the rituals of the holy war, the same Samuel who nominates the peasant farmers son, Saul, to be king with the words, furthers also his rejection (I Samuel 10:1, 15:28).

David's episode and, the condemnation and encouragement of Nathan portrays also the dual role of the prophet (2 Sam 7:10-12).

Besides, the prophets did merely help to put their respective rulers on the throne, and threaten them later with the end of their government but saw to it (at least Samuel and Ahijah did) that an active opposition, bent on revolution, soon appeared on the scene. Samuel anointed David immediately after the dispute with Saul. Elijah encouraged Jeroboam to rebel. Even Nathan's speech attacking David indirectly promoted Absalom insurrection. Moreover, the end of Omri's dynasty was the responsibility of Prophet Elisha. He was the one who accomplished the task of cleansing the political terrain that had long been defiled by this dynasty (2 Kgs 9:10).

The prophet as priest

An absolute distinction between prophets and priests did not exist in ancient Israel. Some prophets were also priests. At least three prophets—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah—belonged to priestly families. The priest-prophet connection is even stronger than matters of lineage. The book of Joel offers a remarkable scenario in which the prophet appears to function as a priest (Joel 1:13-14.19; 2:18-20). 20). The prophet Joel undertook such work as one might expect from an intercessory priest. Another prophetic book, Zephaniah, depicts the prophet's (Zeph 3:14-15) calling Israelites to the service of song. They were to praise the deity for having moved from a time of judgment to a time of restoration.

In sum, one remembers that prophets not only could exercise various roles but also could even be or act as priests. Such behaviour should prevent us from thinking about prophets in a simple and/or monolithic fashion.

The Missionary Quality of the Prophet

It has been stressed that the call of a prophet is fundamental to the prophet's mission. The call is manifested in the various roles the prophet plays as YHWH energises the prophet to achieve the mission. The intention in this section is to itemise the characteristics of the prophet, who is called to carry out the mission as directed by YHWH. This has been viewed from three perspectives, that is, in relation to YHWH, to the people, and to the prophet as a self.

The prophet and YHWH

The prophet's relationship with YHWH depicts the characteristics of a messenger and a person of faith, under authority with total and absolute obedience and commitment to the mission to which the prophet is called. .

In other words, prophet is a messengers rather than orator. The prophet is under the authority and direction of the Spirit of YHWH and act accordingly. He or she does not speak, except when directed by YHWH; hence the prophet cannot be manipulated through human inducement. It is when the prophet is called and sent, that the prophet can say: ¯Thus says the Lord. The prophet is also under the obligation to proclaim not the prophet's own word or message, but YHWH's. The prophet cannot contradict the Word of YHWH. Even in the face of opposition, the prophet remains faithful and courage to carry out the mission as set out by YHWH. The prophet remains a person of single faith; faith in YHWH and YHWH alone (1 Kg. 18:21)

The prophet and the people

The prophet is gifted with the spirit of compassion, patriotism, fearlessness, and the creative insight to read history critically and influence the people through teaching, edification, exhortation, and comfort. The prophet remains an advocate of holiness and righteousness (Is. 58:1, cf. 2 Pt. 2:5), who is equally called to walk along the path with YHWH (Gen. 6:9).

The Old Testament prophet generally understands YHWH as God of justice and compassion; hence within the context of the oracle of judgement, there is always salvation. The prophet is a patriot, whose loyalty to God, to whom the land and the entire people belonged, is unquestionable. The prophet is called to serve the people, to proclaim salvation and call them back to YHWH.

The prophet and the self

The prophet is equally human with some emotional and psychological challenges that can enhance and/or inhibit the prophetic ministry. For this reason, the prophet as a servant of YHWH is

called to carry out YHWH's (not the prophet's) ministry through constant training and retraining, retreats and recollections. In this wise, some of the qualities that flows from such relationship will include humility, self-control, prudence, passion for inspirational creative abilities, sense of timing and rightness

The prophet is extremely prayerful (Is. 62:6), selfless (Dan. 5:13-17; 2 Kg 5:14-19; cf. 1Tim 3:3) and humble (Num. 12:3). The prophet trembles before the LORD, knowing full well that the secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will reveal His covenant to them (Ps. 25:14). The fear of the LORD means to hate evil: pride and arrogance (Prov. 8:13).

Conclusion

From the discussion, it is now clear that the ancient Israelite prophets possessed some special qualities that singled them out among their contemporaries. They were messengers of YHWH, whose probity and integrity were no doubt. These, however, did not shelf them from conflict with the powers of their days. Their lifestyle and measure not only challenged and disquieted the conscience of their contemporaries but also became a symbolic and effective means of communication.

03

Formation of Prophetic Literature

Introduction

This chapter introduces the student into the Old Testament prophetic Books. It is divided into three main sections. From this stage the course assumed more practical approach, for the student is directly confronted with the OT texts, and at the same time challenged the student to evaluate the message of the text and use the finds to judge the contemporary historical happens.

The first section will discuss how the prophetic books came to be, hence the production and growth of the prophetic literature, and the theoretical stages in the articulation of the prophetic discourses. The second deals on some of the recurrent themes in the prophetic books such as covenant and imperium, ethical norms, justice and obedience, the law, messianism, persecution and suffering.The third section presents the prophetic genres and speeches, which incidentally are classed into two broad headings: prose and poetic accounts.

The Concept of Literary and Preliterary Prophets

The notion of "literary and non-literary prophets" may convey an idea that is not intended. It is not about the reading or writing ability of the prophets that is in question. It is not about the "authorial" privilege that might finally attribute some of the prophetic works to some specific prophets. The distinction is less about the prophets whose names appear on the superscript. It is more or less about the subsequent fate of their prophecies. Therefore, the concept is thanks to the disciples of the great (literary) prophets, who could guarantee the preservation of the prophecies of their master, and from which one could learn a little about the personality of the prophets themselves.

Identity of authorship

The prophetic literature is not strictly the biography or about the personality of the prophets. It does not consist of books written by the literary authors as the prophets. Rather "the names appearing at the heads of the prophetic books do, with some nuances, identify the substance of the words therein contained with distinct prophets. However, these prophetic words are, in the main, the collected and edited memorabilia of the prophets, not literary compositions of the prophets themselves. They are the result of the editorial joining of the smaller collections of prophecies that have been connected by catchwords, similarity of topic, literary forms, or some similar consideration" (Vawter, 1990).

It is not impossible, but unlikely that the prophets themselves could have made the collection themselves for the following reasons:

i. The compilers of the prophecies lacked some basic information that would have been available to the authors.

ii. The biographical material in the third person that forms a substantial part of many of the prophetic books

iii. One is equally informed of the existence of such disciples and of the role they played in preserving and transmitting their masters' words (cf. Isa 8: 16-20; Jer 36)

iv. Even the first person accounts in some of the books presupposes the presence of friendly auditors whose duty it was to remember and record (cf. 7:1,4,7; 8:1-2) and may not be read in isolation of the third person (cf. Amos 7:10-17).

So the thesis at this juncture is that the prophecies of the great literary prophets would have been preserved in the circles of disciples probably as originally private material (e.g. the "confessions" of Jeremiah - Jer. 12:1-6; 15:15-21) made known by the master to his followers, not initially intended for the general public. It was only of late that the disciples, or schools of the disciples, could commit them in writing appearing both as the ipsissima verba of the prophets and commentaries. Sometimes the principle of ancient historiography could be at play, thus reading the mind of the prophets as the actual words of the prophets.

The *Ipsissima Verba* of the prophets

The possibility that the literary prophets could not have been the sole author of the writings attributed to them raises in some measure the question of the ipsissima verba of the prophet. To what extent do the prophecies of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and the rest appear precisely as they were originally uttered? The answer to the question is not simple, nor does a single answer suffice in every case. The answer could be approached from the two major literary genres associated with the prophetic literature - the poetic and prose materials.

The poetic material

i. In the majority of the poetic texts primary to a given prophetic book is found a substantial transcription of the prophet's original words.

ii. It is not unthinkable that in some instances those words had been actually written by the prophet himself using any of the familiar recording media at his disposal.

iii. Poetic material distinct in literary styles and constants frequently emerge in the prophetic literature.

iv. The distinctive poetic materials can easily be separated as materials peculiar to a particular prophet hence one can speak of an Amosian or an Isaian materials.

v. Poetic material belonging to one prophet can be separated from the editorial hand of the compiler or editor e.g. the material of Jeremiah from that of Baruch.

The prose material

i. A prophet could, of course, produce prose as well as poetry, and there is a great deal of prose in various of the prophetic books that surely has an authentic life situation in the ministry of the individual prophets

ii. But to determine the ipsissima verba of the prophet in the prose structure poses additional challenge. But in the simplest form, the prose might have been the utterance of relatively short poetic assertions of the prophet.

iii. The prose sections of the prophetic literature frequently have the appearance of literary productions rather than of addresses to audiences, even when they record words of prophecy that were so spoken.

iv. They often seem to be paraphrases and summaries of prophecies rather than the actual prophecies themselves.

vi. The prose paraphrases could also have been the work of the prophet but it is usually more likely that they are recollections of the sense of the prophecies, sometimes preserving snatches of the original words as tradition had transmitted them.

The hypothesis appears to be especially confirmed in the case of Jeremiah, many of whose prophecies have evidently been handed down in circles that were strongly influenced by deuteronomic style and vocabulary (cf. Jeremiah, 18:7).

The Making of the Prophetic Books

The early section in this unit underscored a point that the Old Testament prophetic literature may not be seen primarily as a direct

product of the prophets, whose name they bear. Most of the materials were thanks to the disciples and most probably the schools, of the great prophets. Again, the contribution of any particular individual to the books ascribed to him varied considerably. Consequently, the focus in this subsection will be on the production and growth of the prophetic literature and some of the stages involved in the processing of the prophetic discourse. This brings to the fore the claim that the prophetic work could not have been the product of an individual or a tradition of one generation.

The production and growth of the prophetic literature

Oral tradition played some significant part in the preservation and transmission of the materials of which the prophetic books. Although opinion differs about the stage at which, and the extent to which these materials were committed to writing, our interest is on the dominant model with which various discrete units of account or speech were preserved, collected, and edited.

Collection

i. The assemblage of the legends about Elisha (e.g., 2 Kgs 4–6) and the vision reports of Zachariah (Zech. 1–6) offer the student a good example of a prose collection in the prophetic tradition. The book of Jeremiah (cf. 21:11–23:40) presents several compelling examples of collections that include both prose and poetry, concerning the Judahite kingship, then the prophet himself. They provide some graphic evidence for the ways in which prophetic literature came to be formed: either the prophet or an editor placed sayings addressing a similar topic together.

ii. Another different method of collection lies behind Hosea 12–14. Although the sayings are all composed in poetry, they are not similar in their content. Rather, their very dissimilarity (some very negative, others hopeful) permit the creation of a collection that moves the reader from sentiments of judgment to that of restoration. It reveals an editorial arrangement that progressed from punishment to promise.

iii. A further compelling example is the rearrangement of material such that oracles of admonition such as those in Hos 14:1-3, originally spoken prior to oracles of judgment, were transposed to be read after Yahweh has spoken: ¯Compassion is hidden from my eyes (Hos 13:14).

Interpretation

Other dynamics resulting in the growth of prophetic literature is the role of the readers of the earlier oracles, who often found the oracles difficult to understand or otherwise problematic. Accordingly, the readers (scribes) proceeded to interpret them and to include their interpretation as part of the oracles. A comparison of the MT and LXX texts of Jeremiah presents a number of such examples. The reader of the LXX form of Jer 28:16 might wondered why Jeremiah offered such a harsh and abrupt sentence. The MT provided some answers to the question by adding a clause at the end of the verse: ¯because you have spoken rebellion against the Lord. Such commentary or explication contributed to the growth of prophetic literature.

Recreation

The original prophetic sayings and accounts possessed a generative power that resulted in the creation of new literature, which is particularly evident in the books of Isaiah and Zechariah. This new literature, sometimes called ¯deutero-prophetic. It is another important attempt by Israelites to understand their own times by reformulating earlier prophetic words and accounts. In some cases, the new literature arose in the form of rather short comments, which another prophet might have the privilege to update. Isaiah 11:11 and 16:13-14 may appear as brief notes from the hands of those who preserved and venerated the words of the earlier prophets as they contemporized those earlier texts. However, these later figures composed not only compact sayings but also major compositions in their own right.

So, the ability of prophetic literature to elicit newer prophetic literature is one of its hallmarks. The book of Isaiah contains two major exemplars of this process. The Deutero- (chaps. 40–55) and

Trito- (chaps. 56–66) Isaiah were composed based on the sayings and accounts attributed to Isaiah ben Amoz (chaps. 1-39). In other words, the two later Isaiah compositions are based on those earlier sayings and accounts of chaps 1-39 as a response to Israelites living in the Persian period, long after Isaiah ben Amoz had died. In this process, major topics like the role of Jerusalem/Zion and Babylon are explored over a long period of time.

The orientation of much prophetic rhetoric toward the future helps to explain this kind of literary creativity that is at work. It has the advantage of reading and interpreting prophetically later happens in the light of earlier prophecy (cf. Jer. 25:11 in the light of Zech 1:12 and 2 Chr 36:21).

Intertexuality

There is a final type of literary development in prophetic literature, one exemplified by Hos 14:9 and Mal 4:4. The former text emphasizes the connection between Hosea‘s words and those who are wise, whereas the latter concludes the Minor Prophets, perhaps even the entire prophetic canon, by calling for obedience to Torah. In both cases, these components of prophetic books link that literature to another portion of the canon: wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs) and the pentateuchal torah respectively.

All of these elements—collection, comment, updating, and linkage—belong to the process by means of which the prophetic canon grew. Of these, the profuse updating or contemporizing of prophetic words and traditions for a new generation seems to be a distinguishing feature of prophetic literature.

The processing of prophetic discourse

The prophetic literature must have been conceived as literary entities and not collections with superscription linking the prophecy either to the reign of a king (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah) or simply characterizing the book as ¯word (Joel), ¯oracle (Nahum, Habakkuk, Malachi), or ¯vision (Obadiah). While opinion varies on the possible implication of the superscription, our emphasis is that the prophetic discourse therein

could have taken shape through a process of some length involving at least four steps.

Stage I: Personal contact

The first stage is the ultimate source of prophetical activity. It is a moment of deep personal contact with God, in which the spirit‘ or word‘ of Yahweh comes up the prophet. The prophets appeal to the spirit or the word of YHWH, which encounters them as an alien force, and imposes itself against their personal wishes and inclinations. It shows itself to be the Word of YHWH through its persuasive content and consistent demands, which shatter the ordinary human response to life. It gives rise to a new approach that differs from what went before not only in degree but in essence as well. In such a moment of contact with God the prophet had a special and unique religious experience.

Apart from dreams, which, like the gift of the spirit (Jer. 23:25ff), one can recognise four types of prophetic experiences, which take place in a partial abnormal psychic states: visions (internal sight, e.g., Isaiah 6); auditions (internal hearing, e.g., Jer. 4:5-8, 13-16, 19-22); sudden inspiration (e.g., Isa. 7:10-17); and miraculous knowledge (e.g., the foe from the north‘ in the early period of Jeremiah‘s ministry). Visions and auditions often occurred together.

Sometimes the unique religious experiences are obviously accompanied by ecstatic experiences (cf. Ezekiel). But ecstasy has no independent significance in its own right. It is not an isolated phenomenon; it merely accompanies the secret experience. Where it occurs, it exposes the prophet to more or less powerful agitation and emotion; the mind reeled, fear and trembling overwhelmed the prophet, his hair stood on end, and his feet refused to obey (Isa 21:1-10).

Stage II: Interpretation

The second stage is the prophet‘s interpretation of the prophetic experience. The interpretation is completely dominated by the faith through which the prophet lives, which is now intensified and reshaped by the force of the new experience. The new experience

is interpreted in such a way that the particular experience is incorporated into the existing picture of YHWH's nature and will, thus making it come alive afresh.

Stage III: Processing

In the third stage, there is added rational processing of the experience. The content of the unique religious experience is to be articulated as the divine obligation, which is effectual in the outward world. It implies that the experience is to be translated into rational and comprehensible words in order not to remain the babbling of glossolalia. The translation is so much a matter of the faith of the prophet himself which often contributes to the appropriate motivation, or the logical consequences of the experience, which are incorporated into the words spoken by YHWH.

Stage IV: Reduction

The fourth stage is paralleled to the third. It is the reduction of the message to artistic form. According to the belief of the period, all oracles — including prophetical oracle — have to be communicated in poetically structured form. There is therefore no genuine prophetic saying not in the form of poetry.

From the description of the processing of the prophetic discourses one could better imagine how the phenomenon known as false prophecy, or still prophets, came into being. Either there is no secret experience giving rise to it, so that everything said is without foundation, or the secret experience is erroneously interpreted by the prophet or wrongly applied.

Common Theological Themes

If we understand the prophets as intermediaries, those who act and speak on behalf of YHWH, then they should, in principle, reflect the religious affirmations and theological norms of ancient Israel, which are found in diversified forms. Consequently, we can speak of norms but not norm. As a result, it is difficult, indeed, to talk about a single prophetic theology or a sole prophetic ethical perspective. However, our cursory look at the prophetic books will show us that the following themes can be identified with the books:

The covenant and the sovereignty of YHWH

The covenant treaty and relationship is one of the prominent common core elements ever present in the prophetic literature (cf. McCarthy, 1972 and Clements, 1965). Thus the prophets would always remind Israel to obey that to which they have agreed at Sinai. This becomes more evident in the later prophets who wrestled with a new way to understanding Israel's relationship to its God and in so doing use the image of a new covenant (Jer 31:31; cf. Ezek36:26). The image of Moses as prophet (cf. Deut. 18) would add further weight to the idea.

In addition, the majestic image of God as enthroned in the divine council (cf. the call narratives of both Isaiah and Ezekiel) is another aspect of the theology of the prophets. Isaiah envisions the deity in the Temple, a symbol for the heavenly divine council. In that context, YHWH is surrounded by minor deities, to whom He speaks (cf. Isa 6:8-9; also Jer. 23:18).

Another interesting aspect of the sovereignty of YHWH is read in the commissioning narrative of Jeremiah. YHWH designates Jeremiah as ¯a prophet to the nations and Kingdoms (Jer 1:5, 10). The prophet as one with an international role fits better with the notion of God as an imperial and cosmic sovereign than it does with the God who is covenant partner with Israel (cf. Isa 13:1–23:18; Jer 46:1–51:58; Ezek 25:1–32:32 also Joel 3:9; Mic 4:1-2; Hab 1:5-6; Zeph 2:4-15; Hag 2:21-22; Zech 1:11; Mal 1:11). So, the prophets lived in the world of politics, both international and domestic.

Such imperial representation extends to the understanding and interpretation of history. Thus YHWH is equally presented as the Lord of History. He is actively involved in human history. The rise and fall of Empires and Kingdoms is subjected under the divine control of YHWH (cf. Isa. 10:5-15). In addition, the prophets understand history as moving towards a purposeful end. This fact is expressed in idea of ¯the day of the Lord . It is the period the kingdom of God will be established. A period when justice and good will triumph over the forces of evil and wickedness (cf. Isa. 13:9, Ez. 30:2, Obad. 1:15, Zech. 2:11, 14:1-7).

Ethical Norms

It would appear that the prophets presented two different levels of norms, one for Israel and the other for the rest of humanity. Within the ethical framework one identifies the sayings and oracles devoted to foreign nations (cf. Amos 1–2), thus indicting them for heinous and immoral such as genocidal acts (1:6, 9), violence against noncombatants (1:13), acts of ritual degradation (2:1). The oracles against the nations also include indictments for prideful behaviour that offended Israel‘s God (cf. Is 14). Finally, there is a strain of language according to which God had designated certain imperial powers (the Neo-Assyrians and the Neo-Babylonians) to act on God‘s behalf to punish Israel. However, in both cases, Israel experienced such devastation that some prophets would declare that these two countries had overstepped the roles assigned to them by YHWH (Assyria: Isa 10:12-15; Babylon: Jer 51:11-49). Hence, they are to be destroyed. But the norm is one common to all people: excessive violence in time of warfare.

Despite opinion by some scholars that those ethical categories referring specifically to Israel might not necessarily be peculiar to Israel, they are still specifically for the Israelite within the prophetic tradition. The two basic moral categories at this point are righteousness and justice. Quite simply, righteousness involves the principle of beneficence, doing the good thing, and justice the principle of acting out beneficence.

As the reference to Hammurabi‘s law code suggests, the king is theoretically responsible for administering justice in the ancient Near East. The prophets recognise the same, but go further todemocratise the responsibility for justice and righteousness by challenging the entire population. So the practice is seen as the ultimate responsibility of all, not simply the job of those elders, judges, who are most prominent in the legal system.

The prophets also indict the societal structure as well as the individuals. Along with these categories emerges another norm. Micah 6:8 speaks of walking humbly with one‘s God, depicting the sense of arrogance and the people‘s lack of faith in YHWH. It is on this

strength that some of the prophets attacked Israelites for their loyalty to other deities outside YHWH (cf. Ez 8; also Ex. 20:3).

Later prophets would wrestle with the realities of human behaviour. Jeremiah would appeal to a new covenant (31:31) or Ezekiel to a new heart (36:26), thus understood as utopian solutions to the intractable tendency of humans to do the errant thing. The ethical norms had not changed, but one recognizes a realization in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah that to enact them is terribly difficult, requiring a moral and religious capacity not hitherto realized.

On the political scene, the prophets insist that to have a sound society, people and their leaders must cease to be unfaithful. Israel must be upright and faithful to YHWH as opposed to the supposed best and strongest human allies (Isa. 30:1-2, Hos.5:13).

The Law and the Prophet

One of the major challenges before the Yahwists is the question of the relationship between prophetic literature and the Torah on the one hand, and the prophetic literature and the writings on the other hand. Incidentally, the biblical writers who depicted Moses as a prophet offer an important way out by linking Moses to the prophetic literature and Torah. Moses is presented as a paradigmatic prophet (Deut 18:15) and also as responsible for Torah. This makes prophecy a part of Torah, though still subordinant to it. In this sense, prophetic literature may be understood as an exposition or admonition based on Torah, rather than an independent word of YHWH. Therefore, it is from this perspective that the Prophet Ezekiel may appear to be such a dangerous text, since it purports to be a new Torah, ¯the law of the temple (43:12), which might stand in competition with the pentateuchal Torah.

However, Moses is only one of the several possible paradigmatic prophets. Elijah is another; he has special credentials, since, according to biblical tradition, he did not die. As a result, writers both in the Persian and the Greco-Roman periods could look forward to the return of Elijah ¯before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes (Mal 4:5; cf. Matt 17:10-13). Closed though the prophetic writings

might finally become, there is still an expectation that a prophet or prophecy would appear in the future (cf. Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2).

Apart from traditions about prophets themselves, there are also canonical formulations that attempted to integrate prophetic literature with other portions of the canon. These texts are of several different types. On the one hand, considerable amounts of psalmic language are embedded within prophetic literature (e.g., the so-called Amos doxologies [4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6] and the catena of thanksgiving and hymn in Isaiah 12). On the other hand, there are texts at the end of prophetic books that call for the reader to reflect on that text from the perspective of another portion of the canon (Hos 14:9 points to wisdom texts, Mal 4:4 to Torah). From this perspective, the law and the prophets are perceived by early readers as a far more coherent body than has been supposed.

Messianic prophecy

The Messianic prophecy has its root in the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7). The prophecy is further supported and assured by the inviolability of the office of the king and priest. But with the fall ofJerusalem and deportation, the Israelites become disillusioned. The days of prosperity that have so often been expected in Judah have proved continually elusive. Disappointment follows disappointment; disaster follows disaster, as punishment for the people's sinfulness. There is then an attempt to reinterpret the history of Israel, to find a new meaning in the context of the meaninglessness. Consequently, the messianic prophecy becomes dominant. Expectation grows concerning the time in the future when YHWH will raise a king who will deliver Israel from all their enemies. He will establish a kingdom in righteousness, and a prince of the House of David will reign over the kingdom. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and in that day the Gentile nations will come to Jerusalem to learn of God and to walk in His way. The prince is called the Messiah (anointed one) will establish Israel as the kingdom of God. This idea is widely taught in the prophetic books (see Jeremiah 31:32, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 53:55).

Persecution and suffering

Another important theme in prophecy is the notion suffering and persecution. The prophets are sometimes exposed to violent fate. According to Petersen, suffering and persecution of prophets may have occasionally been the case in ancient Israel (cf. Jer 26:20-23), it is more prominent within the Persian (2 Chr 24:20-22; Neh 9:26) and Greco-Roman periods (cf. Luke 13:34; Acts 7:52) rather than the periods earlier than the post-exilic. In other words, the Jeremiah's own rhetoric (e.g., Jer 11:19) on suffering of the prophet could be interpreted as exaggeration. That is to say that the prophets of the 8-5th cent. B.C. might not have been so brutally treated as the picture is presented today.

Conclusion

The discussion demonstrated clearly that the prophets were not strangers to their own culture. Their ability to deploy their intellectual and historical insight for the service of their people singled them out. Their theological concern and cravings inform the student how intoxicated they were in the things of YHWH. It was the spirit of YHWH chase them all though as they adapted and deployed the cultural elements of the given environ for a better understanding and appreciation of the message given to the people through them (prophets). They were simply the animators of the society.

04

The Pre – Literary Prophets of the Old Testament

Introduction

The Pre-literary (sometimes non-literary) prophets, recognised as former prophets in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), are found in the historical books of the Septuagint (LXX). They are sometimes identified as early or acting prophets, distinct from the writing (literary) prophets associated with the 15 prophetic books of the bible – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the 12 Minor Prophets. In some studies the book of Daniel is also included. Still it has been observed by some scholars that there are many more other prophets in Israel far greater than those identified in book-form. The group are sometimes referred to as the sons of the prophets, and a whole village could have been inhabited by a band of prophets. Elijah speaks of many prophets of Yahweh that were executed during the reign of Ahab, thus referring to many prophetic figures in the society.

Furthermore, the non-literary prophets could be classified along different lines depending on the interest of scholarship. Such division may include nomadic, wondering and transitional, royal (court) and temple

(cult) prophets, individual and group prophets, major and minor prophets. The prophetic guild or group prophet can further be classified into ecstatic, monastic and cultic prophets. But the major division in this unit will follow the broad line of individual and group prophets.Within the individual prophets, the minor and major acting prophets will be discussed, while in the class of the group prophets, the focus will be on the ecstatic, monastic and cultic prophetic groups.

Individual Prophets

Occasional Prophets

A roll of individual non acting prophets is mentioned in the bible and in other rabbinic sources. Some of these prophets act only on some occasions as prophets without being prophets themselves - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (cf. 1 Chron 25:1). Eldad, Medad, and the seventy elders (Num 11:24-29), and Saul (1 Sam 10:6-10; 19:18-24) are prompted by the Spirit to behave as prophets on single occasions (Num 11:25; cf. 1 Sam 10:6; 19:23). Six prophets are mentioned but anonymous (Judg 6:7-10; 1 Kgs 13 and 20; 2 Kgs 9:1-10). The Rabbinic tradition identifies 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses. The prophetesses are as follows: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther.

There are also a number of individual prophets whose writings are mentioned by the Chronicler as part of his literary sources. He mentions in this regard the books of Samuel the seer, Nathan the prophet, Gad the seer (1 Chron 29:29-30); the prophecy of Ahijah of Shiloh; the visions of Iddo (2 Chron 9:29); the histories of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer (12:15), who is also called the prophet (13:22); the history of Jehu, son of Hanani, which is included in the annals of the kings of Israel (20:34); the vision of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 32:32); and generally the discourses of the seers (33:18-20).

Minor Acting Prophets

A number of (minor) prophets worth mentioning are the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh (1 Kgs 11:29-39; 14; cf. 2 Chr 9:29), Iddo the seer (2 Chr 9:29) and prophet (13:22; cf. 12:15); the seer Hanani

(16:7-10), and his son, the prophet Jehu (1 Kgs 16:1-7); the prophet Azariah son of Oded, upon whom the Spirit of God came (2 Chron 15:1-8)—his words to King Asa were indicated as ¯prophecy (v. 8); Shemaiah the man of God (1 Kgs 12:22; 2 Chron 11:2); Jahaziel son of Zechariah, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came (2 Chron 20:14-17), he being a Levite, a member of the singers guild of Asaph; Eliezer son of Dodavahu, who denounced Jehoshaphat with a ¯prophecy (20:37); Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest, who proclaimed God's judgment onKing Joash and paid with his life (24:17-22; cf. Luke 11:51); Oded, ¯a prophet of the LORD, who told the victorious northern Israelite army to release the Judaean captives in the Syro-Ephraimite war, which they did (2 Chron 28:9-15); and Uriah son of Shemaiah, the last known martyr-prophet (Jer 26:20-23; also the Lachish letters).

Five prophetesses are mentioned: Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:3-5), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20; cf. 2 Chron 34:22-28), Noadiah (Neh 6:14), and the anonymous wife of Isaiah (Isa 8:3). Noadiah was one of Nehemiah's adversaries who tried to intimidate him, and thus belongs to the category of false prophets. The same applies to the women of Israel ¯who prophesied out of their own imagination (Ezek 13:17-21). Prophetic activities among women were part of the religious and cultural heritage of the ANE, including the Hellenistic world.

Major Acting Prophets

Six individual prophets played different major roles in Israel's history and religion. They were Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Micaiah son of Imlah, Elijah, and Elisha.

1. Samuel, Gad and Nathan

Samuel incorporated in his function the offices of judge, in both the military (1 Sam 11:12) and judicial (1 Sam 7:15-17) sense, of priest (7:9-10, cf 13:8-15), and of prophet (3:19- 4:1; 9:6-10, etc.). Samuel played a very in indispensible role in the establishment and down fall of the monarchy. His outstanding courage and total obedience to the voice of YHWH singled him out as one of the biblical personalities.

Nathan and Gad are the two active prophets in the court during the reign of David. They occupied prominent positions and enjoyed some elevanted status. Gad, the prophet, was ¯David's seer (2 Sam 24:11). He was David's entourage from the days of David's flight before Saul (1 Sam 22:5), until the end of his reign, when he had to confront his king with God's judgment because of his census (2 Sam 24:1-25; cf. 1 Chron 21:1- 22:1). He, along with Nathan, was instrumental in reorganizing the temple music (cf. 2 Chron 29:25). The events of King David's reign from first to last were recorded in the books of Gad the seer (1 Chron 29:29).

Nathan, the prophet and adviser of David, played a significant role on at least three occasions: when he had to reprimand the king because of his crimes with Uriah and his wife (2 Sam 11:1- 12:23); when David asked his advice on his intention to build a temple for the Lord (2 Sam 7; cf. 1 Chron 17:1-27), and when he was instrumental in instituting Solomon as David's successor (1 Kgs 1:8, 22-27). Besides his assistance in the reorganisation of the temple music (2 Chron 29:25), and his writings on the events of King David's Solomon's reigns (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29), were part of the Chronicler's literary sources. According to the rabbis, Nathan was David's cousin. Incidentally, contrary to the account of 2 Samuel (16:23), Ahitophel, who counsels Absalom, was not counted among the prophets in the tradition of the Chronicler (cf. McKane, 1965).

2. Ahijah, Shemaiah and Jehu

At the time of the division of the kingdom, the dramatic action of Ahijah the prophet would have been partially responsible for Jeroboam's revolt (I Kings 11:29-39). Much later, the prophet, now blind and disenchanted with Jeroboam's lack of enthusiasm for Yahwism, opposed the king, pronouncing imminent death for Jeroboam's ailing son and predicting the forthcoming doom of Jeroboam's house.

During this same period Rehoboam refrained from attacking Israel on the advice of the prophet Shemaiah (I Kings 12:21-24). An embellishment of Shemaiah's role is given in II Chron. 12:5 ff. and reference is made to a book which the prophet was supposed to

have written (12:15). Later, Baasha of Israel was condemned and the end of his line predicted by the prophet Jehu in terms very much like those used by Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife (I Kings 16:1 ff.).

It becomes clear that the courts of the Hebrew kings employed prophets to secure guidance and advice from Yahweh. It is also plain that prophets such as Ahijah (and perhaps Jehu), not intimately connected with the court, were consulted at moments of critical importance. There can be little doubt that, from Samuel's time through the beginning years of the divided kingdom, Yahweh's prophets were instrumental in keeping ethical and religious responsibilities before the king, proclaiming both the will of Yahweh and the judgment of Yahweh when violations occurred.

3. Micaiah, the Son of Imlah

Micaiah son of Imlah (1 Kgs 22 = 2 Chron 18), played an important role in God's confrontation with Ahab and the Baal cult. He prophesised the doom that would befall Israel and the house of Omri. Consequently, he was physical abuse by Zedekiah and imprisoned with little piece of bread and water as food. What happened to him when his prophecy was fulfilled was not told.

4. Elijah the Tishbite

There were about six originally independent Elijah narratives reporting his activities, which have been assembled in I Kings 17-19; 21; II Kings 1:1-17, together with several legendary anecdotes. These tell of a drought broken by rain, of divine judgement on Mount Carmel, of an encounter with YHWH at Horeb, of the call of Elisha, of the judicial murder of Naboth, and of Ahaziah's request for an oracle.

According to these stores, Elijah appeared in the Northern Kingdom during the period of kings Ahab and Ahaziah, i.e., between 874 and 852 B.C. He represented the class of wandering prophets, not being associated with any sanctuary or living as a member of a prophetical guild. He was obviously more like seer than a nabi.

Elijah exercised his ministry primarily against the background of the policies pursued by Ahab, who was seeking to overcome the

problem of integrating both Canaanites and Israelites into his kingdom by means of a neutral approach that accorded both groups parity and equal rights. Since Canaanite civilization had previously been checked or repressed, this policy meant in practice that it would not be promoted because it favoured the advance of Canaanite religious ideas and practices.

Furthermore Ahab, who considered himself a dynastic ruler of the ancient Near Eastern sort, wanted to replace the Israelite conception of kingship with the absolute monarchy typical of the ancient Near East and introduce into Israel the king of royal law associated with absolute monarchy.

Elijah opposed Ahab on both points. He succeeded in having the Carmel region with its mixed population treated as Israelite rather than Canaanite territory, so that YHWH alone would be worshipped there. In the case of Naboth, he supported the continued recognition of the ancient Israelite law of Land ownership, rejecting the notion that the king has power over the life and property of his subjects. Finally, in such questions as who bestowed rain on the land and to whom a sick man should turn to be healed he insisted on YHWH's unique authority, refusing Baal any recognition.

Elijah's message was characterised first by the assertion of traditional elements of Yahwism that were to continue to be recognised in Palestine. He supported Yahweh's claim to sole sovereignty in Israel, and showed himself a vigorous guardian of the religio-ethical way of life that refused to let even the king infringe upon basic human rights and violate the divine command of justice. He demonstrated that anyone anxious for health or should turn to YHWH rather than taking refuge in Canaanite vitalism.

In the second place, Elijah introduced new elements into the faith of Yahwism to preserve its viability within the context of an advanced civilisation and political order and keep it from declining into syncretism. Thus he declared that it was Yahweh, not Baal who bestowed or withheld rain and thereby the fertility of the land, and turned from the notion of YHWH as a god of war and battle to a conception of God in which YHWH's activity is not represented by

awesome eruptions and raging storms, but is characterised by quiet governance, comparable to the calm after storm, just as YHWH also reveals himself through his word (I Kings 19:11ff.). It is easy to see how these influences led tradition to compare him to Moses in many points and to depict him as a new second Moses.

Elijah differs from the later great individual prophets in that he still considered Israel to be fundamentally in a state of favour with God, which it was incumbent on the nation to maintain or to restore after an interruption. But he paved the way for those prophets by reasserting Yahweh‘s claim to sovereignty in such terms that they could measure Israel‘s failure and guilt against it.

5. Elisha

Besides some of the trivial incidents associated with Elisha, there are four major incidents that portrayed him as a great prophet: The widow‘s plight (II King 4:1-7); the woman of Shenun (II Kg 4:8-37); Nemaan the Leper (II Kg 5:1-17); Elisha at Dothan II Kg 6:8-23.

The Elisha tradition is found in reasonably coherent form in II Kings 2; 3:4-37; 4:1-8:15; 9:1-10; 13:14-21. Its first strand comprises a narrative cycle of popular miracle stories, whose common element is their association with Gilgal, where Elisha usually lived (II Kings 4:38). This cycle brings together what were originally independent anecdotes reflecting real acts of power performed by Elisha or associating him with widespread motifs. A second group comprises a series of individual narratives of diverse character; all they have in common is their reference to the contemporary political and historical background against which Elisha played his role.

The anecdotes and narratives reveal two aspects of Elisha‘s activity. On the one hand, they show the effect he had on daily life and events within the circle of his prophetical guild and the ordinary people with whom he came in contact. On the other hand, they extend their horizon to include the authoritative figures of the political world; in the conflict between Israel and the Arameans and in Elisha‘s attitude toward the reigning Israelite dynasty they agree with contemporary history. Those narratives that exhibit the prophet‘s

hostility to the reigning dynasty (II Kings 3:4-27; 8:7-15) point to the time of Joram, the last king of the Omride dynasty. The turning point was marked by the revolution of Jehu, the intellectual authors of which included Elisha (II Kings 9:1-10), although he retreated completely into the background after it began. According to the rest of the narratives he was friendly to the reigning dynasty and hostile to the Arameans (II Kings 5; 6:8-23; 6:24-7:20; 13:14-19); these events took place in the period of Jehu‘s dynasty.

6. Prophetic Groups

There is evidence to indicate that there existed, in addition to the individual prophets, a school or guild of prophets. Samuel is said to have been head of a group of prophets (I Sam. 19:20), Elijahhad a disciple, Elisha, and a school of prophets (II Kings 2); Isaiah had disciples or pupils (Isa. 8:16), and Jeremiah had a personal scribe, Baruch. It is not unlikely that strong, dynamic, charismatic personalities tended to draw about them those who hoped to share the charisma or who hoped to learn methods and techniques of prophecy. The interest at this stage is to identify the forms of prophetic groups and their respective characteristics.

7. The Ecstatic Prophetic Group

There is some intimate relationship between the group of prophets mentioned in 1 Sam 10:5ff and 19:18ff. They are described as band or company of prophets (10:5) of venerable community (19:20). The general behaviour of the group is their exuberance and enthusiasm. According to 1 Sam 10 their prophetic activities are accompanied by musical instruments, which are especially fit for enhancing rhythmical movements (cf. 18:10; Exod 15:20; 2 Kgs 3:15). The group is noted with the ¯prophetic rapture/frenzy that could sometimes lead to ¯shouting and dancing . These prophets are strong, effective, powerful inspired by the Spirit of the Lord (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 19:20, 23)

The ecstasy, with which the group is identified, is often infectious (1 Sam. 10:5 ff.; cf. 19:18 ff.; including the prophet of Baal - 1 Ki. 18:19-40). The ecstatic who could temporarily become ¯another human (1 Sam. 10:6) constituted a certain attraction for the Israelites (1 Sam. 10:5).

The ecstatics move freely about the country, putting themselves by the use of musical instruments into a state of trance, and in such a condition babbling out their messages (cf. the phenomena in the NT period in 1 Cor. 14). The content of their ¯prophecies (10:5) must be conceived of in relationship with Saul's anointment as king (ch. 9-10): It consists of short prophetic utterances, with accompanying gestures and music, which received special emphasis because it was in the neighbourhood of a Philistine camp (10:4). Saul's participation in the prophetic activities caused bewilderment among the onlookers (10:11-12), but was in itself an indication that the kingship in Israel was intimately related to the prophetic legitimation.

According to 1 Sam. 19:20, Samuel was the head of these ecstatic group of prophets. The prophets acted in consort with Samuel, consequently could not be associated with heathen cult or prototypes. Sometimes their prophetic activities are not welcoming, especially among the orthodox Jews. In one occasions they would be described as ¯mad fools (Hos. 9:7). Joshua would appear critical of them (Num. 11:10-30), perhaps interpreting it as a strange, repellent, un-Israelite prophetic phenomenon being introduced into the worship of YHWH. But Moses reply to Joshua (Num. 11:29) may then be understood as the legitimation of this new religious phenomenon which could have caused the orthodox a good deal of perplexity. So, the story as earlier observed by von Rad (1965) could be taken as evidence of an acceptance of the ecstatic movement into the institutions of Jahwism, or at least as an etiology of the prophetic movement which gave it legitimation.

8. The Monastic Prophetic Group

Another early group of prophets is located within the monastic communities. The group is consistently depicted as sons of the prophets, in the sense of a ¯Prophetengenossenschaft, a community of prophets (1 Kgs 20:35; 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1; Amos 7:14). Several groups of them were found in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. They were married, had children, and lived in their own quarters. With exception of 1 Kgs 20:35-43, the groups formed themselves around a prominent figure (e.g. Elisha, 2

Ki. 2:3 ff.; 4:38; 6:1), whom they addressed as ¯master or ¯father , at whose feet they sat and learned, and with whom they lived in communal dwellings.According to 2 Kgs 4 and 6 they were very poor people. The group was predominantly of rural composition. Elijah was a Gileadite, probably of a shepherd family (I Kings 17: 11). Elisha was a farmer (I Kings 19: 19), the husband of the poor widow who appealed to Elisha to save her children from bondage was a member of the prophetic guild (II Kings 4:1.). Evidently Quite a poor man! The prophetic groups, in the Elisha tales, were certainly rural and poor. Equally, the Rechabites, desert dwellers, bitter opponents of city civilization, fanatical adherents of the desert tradition, joined the prophets after Jehu's triumph. All these individual facts tend to prove that the prophets of this period were rural folk.

9. The Cultic Prophetic Group

Some of the figures associated with the cult prophets are Moses (Ex. 2:1) and Elijah (I Kings 18:32ff); Jeremiah (1:1) and Ezekiel (1:3). There is also a mention of Levite, a cultic official, who was inspired by the spirit of God to bring a prophetic message at a time of national crises (2 Chr 20:14). Also, possibly the group of Leviticus singers after the exile were survivors of groups of cultic prophets attached to the sanctuaries. Not only that prophets were associated with temple singers (2 Chr 29:25), they together with Priests were associated together in a way that suggests professional association (e.g. 2 Kgs 23:2).

Other cultic prophets mentioned were Shimei (1 Kgs. 1:8), Zedekiah (1 Kgs. 22:24), and perhaps also Nathan (2 Sam. 12:1 ff.; 1 Kgs. 1:11 ff.) who worked in close association with the court and yet enjoyed an astonishing degree of independence. No books had come down to us from these prophets, unless one includes Nahum and Habakkuk who at least had some affinity with them. There were, however, unmistakable traits of the cultic prophet in Zechariah and still more in Haggai.

The cultic prophets were among the protagonists of an ethical religion, which is an expression of the Israel‘s faith. The cult is also from the beginning the tangible expression of the same Israel‘s faith, which the prophets themselves furthered and remained in close

rapport with. No wonder then that some of the early prophets were familiar with the rituals and meaning of the cults and that they sometimes spoke in languages borrow from the cult. Some of them were employees of the national sanctuary. Consequently, their activities could not be purely an anticultic or anti-institutional as many have wrongly thought. Their relationship is indeed one of mutual indebtedness. Even prophets and priests were not so consistently and inimically opposed as has sometimes been assumed. The two figures occupy important position in Israel's religion.

The cultic prophet had his place along with the priest in the cult. His task was to give oracles in answer to communal laments, and especially to the king. For this reason he had great influence in the royal court (1 Kgs. 1:8), where he spoke as a man of God (1 Kgs. 22:24 ff.) with remarkable severity (2 Sam. 12:1 ff.). The cultic prophets were feared, because their powerful word could bring success or disaster (1 Sam. 16:4; 1 Kgs. 17:18). Their words of salvation would be formulated after the manner of proverbs. One discovers in Isa. 33:1-24 some traces of prophetic liturgy that gives some insight into the language of these prophets.

It is important at this junction to note that the condemnation of the cult by prophets like Isaiah and Amos, is not to be interpreted to mean that they were against the cult but the lack of moral concern and holy living on the part of those who bring sacrifices and join in the rituals (Amos 5:21ff). Isaiah too brings strong condemnation of sacrifices, the Sabbath and even prayer (Isa. 1), with the intention of showing that it is all-useless in the context of a blatantly sinful life (Isa. 1:15).

Conclusion

The chronicler did not hesitate to make the contributions of the non-literary prophets bold. The enormous contributions of the prophets to the history and religion of Israel formed one of the strongest selling points of the books of chronicle. However, one had come to appreciate the complex nature of the prophetic tradition through the various movements, guilds and groups, which incidentally remained the pulsating force that propelled and sustained the religion even in the face persecution and seemingly annihilation. Another score

on the board sheet is the prophetic activities among women, which were part of the religious and cultural heritage of the ancient Near East, including also the Hellenistic world. This brings out

Summary

i. The last chapter emphasized that the distinction between literary and non- or pre-literary prophets was more of a misconception of the history of literary prophecy, and, in any case, incidental. And the introductory part of this unit went further to raise some consciousness on the varied models of classification of the pre-literary prophets. It also informed the student that there were many more prophets in Israel than what the Old Testament could literarily account for.

ii. It was also observed that majority of the acting prophets presented in the bible were more of occasional prophets, thus acting sometimes only once as prophets.

iii. Reading through the Books of the Chronicle, it became clearer that there were many missing prophetic accounts which could have enriched the prophetic literature more. Nevertheless, the Book of Chronicle contributed a lot in this regard.

iv. The major acting prophets - Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Micaiah son of Imlah, Elijah, and Elisha - played many different major roles in the shaping of the history and religion of Israel.

v. Elijah and Elisha were obviously the champions of God's people Israel; they were the defence against foreign cult and foreign ways of thought and action. Their purpose was to keep Israel's belief on and worship of YHWH pure, and to preserve to His people their ancient privileges. Yet, the role of Elijah was so prominent and significant that he became the converging and diverging point in the history Israelite prophetism in particular, and the religion of Israel in general.

vi. Three main prophetic groups were identified in the course of the discussion. These were (a) the ecstatic, (b) the monastic and (c) the cultic prophetic groups. Each of the group had its

own peculiarity, which had enriched the prophetic tradition of Israel. And some of the great (literary and non-literary) prophets were naturally identified with these classes of prophets.

vii. It was equally emphasised that the prophets were not strictly speaking against any of the social and religious institution of Israel. They only condemned the abuses and lack of the right intention for the things of YHWH

05

The Book of Isaiah

Introduction

Our interest the last chapter was on the pre-literary prophets. Some of the pre-literary prophets were mentioned. We discovered that there were more prophets than the Old Testaments contained. We looked at the various groupings of the prophets and then focused our attention on two major prophets of the time - Elijah and Elisha. We also stressed that the criticism of the cult and other institutions in Israel by the prophets was because of the abuse associated with those institutions.

In this unit, we shall concentrate on the one of the major literary prophets in the person of Isaiah. Our attention will be drawn to the fact of the person and authorship of the oracles, the historical context of the oracles, and the prophetic and theological motifs contained in the oracles.

The Book and Its Authorship

We may not be surprise to hear that the 66 chapters of the canonical book of Isaiah are composed of two or even three major works (chapters 1-39 [Isaiah];

40-55 [Deutero-Isaiah]; and 56-66 [Trito-Isaiah]) probably written by different authors at different historical periods. This observation was first made by Ibn Ezra (ca. 1167), and latter supported by C. Doderlein (1775) and. G. Eichhorn (1780-83) in the late eighteenth century AD. That is to say that Isaiah the son of Amoz was not the sole author of the book that bears his name.

We shall in this section see some of the reasons advanced by some scholars to come to the conclusion that these works were written at different times in history and by different persons or bodies.

The Book of Isaiah as Three-in-One

Historical Argument

i. The first impression we can get if we are seriously engaged with the canonical text of Isaiah may be that there is a very clear division in the book between chapters 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66. The first 39 chapters are placed in a different historical setting, that is, an eighth century BC setting in Jerusalem during the period when Assyria was dominant power in the region. In the second half of the book (40-66), the audience addressed is looking forward to a time the Israelites would return from exile to Jerusalem (Is. 40:9-11, 42:1-9, 43:1-7, 51:11, 52:1-12, 58:12, 60:10, 61:4). So, the two different sections addressed two different people in different historical periods.

ii. We can equally observe that the first 39 chapters refer to a time when Judah was being constantly harassed by Assyria (from about 742 to 688 BC; cf. Isa. 7.18; 10.5; 14.25). Here also the name of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, is mentioned in Isaiah 36.1, and three times in Isaiah 37 thus indicating the overarching presence of Assyria. While in the last 27 chapters (40-66) of the book of Isaiah, on the other hand, Assyria is alluded to only once, and even then only as part of the past history of Judah (Isa. 52.4).

iii. Furthermore, at the time Isaiah son of Amoz lived, Babylon was not a power to reckon with that will take the people away into exile. So, any reference to Babylon as a political power could been seen as evident after the death of Isaiah. Therefore Isaiah the son of Amoz could not have been the author of that section/

iv. The reference to Cyrus, the Persian king (45:1, 13) who lived more than two hundred years after Isaiah the son of Amos further proves that this section (40-66) must have been written long after the death of Isaiah the son of Amoz.

v. The addressees in the second section of the book (43:14; 48:20) are no longer inhabitants of Jerusalem but exiles in Babylon Jerusalem. Their Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and now awaits reconstruction (44:26-28; 49:14-23). And Babylon is no longer an ally of Israel (2 Kgs 20:12-13), for she has destroyed Jerusalem and deported the Israelites. This is a sign that the former prophecies about Jerusalem's destruction have been fulfilled (Isa 1:21-31; Jer 7:1-15; Ez. 22,24), and Israel now awaits a new, more glorious future (41:21-23; 42:9-10; 54)

vi. Contrary to the author of Isa 1-39, Dt-Isa mentions the Davidic dynasty, only once, and then transfers its privileges to the entire nation (55:3-5). In Tr-Isa Israel is back again in her own land, and the problems are different from those pictured in Isa 1-39.

vii. Again, chapters 40–66 are self-consciously of later speech than that of Isaiah of Jerusalem (1-39). The terminus ad quo (earliest date) of this section (44-66) could be from the period following Babylonian collapse, and the terminus ad quem (latest possible date) may appear indeterminable.

Theological Difference

i. The theology of Dt- and Tr-Isaiah shows a shift in emphasis from Isaiah. Before the exile, Israel and especially the inhabitants of Jerusalem were relatively prosperous, overly self-confident, and material-minded. For this reason, Jerusalem stands condemned by God (e.g. Isa. 3.8; 10.11). The city can only hope to be saved from destruction if the people accept God's judgement (e.g. Isa. 1.24-26; 4.3-6). In Deutero-Isaiah, on the other hand, the people were discouraged, dazed, and destitute, severely tempted to apostasy. They were the people in exile, and therefore, must be consoled, not punished; their faith must be sustained, not further tried. Jerusalem is then presented as the centre of hope and joy, even though it stands

in ruins (Isa. 52.9-12). In Trito-Isaiah, that is the postexilic era, the faith of Israel must be open to the possibilities of Judaism becoming a world religion.

ii. Isaiah emphasizes God's modesty, whereas Dt- and Tr-Isaiah stresses the universal dominion and infinitude of YHWH.

iii. Isa looks upon foreign nations as scourges of divine anger (10:5), Dt-Isa sees them as instruments for saving Israel (41:1-5; 45: 1-7). Tr-Isa opens Temple services and priesthood to them (56:1-8; 66:21).

iv. Again, Isaiah betrays the idea of the special place of Israel in the salvific history. Thus the nation is led by a king descended from David (11:1). But in Tr-Isaiah, leadership belongs to priests, Levites and princes (66:6, 66:21) and there is no mention of the Davidic dynasty.

v. The ¯messianic king of Isaiah (cf. 9:6-7, 11:1-11) is replaced in Dt.- and Tr.-Isaiah by ¯the servant of the Lord , a figure not mentioned in Isaiah.

vi. Tr-Isa introduces us to the beginning of apocalyptic writing, so that not even death will mar the new heavens and new earth created by the Lord (66:17-20). This theology is lacking in the early sections of Isaiah.

Literary Argument

1. Literarily, there change of mood from threat and condemnation in Isa to consolation and sorrow in Dt-Isa., then sorrow and visions in Tr-Isa.

2. The division between the two parts of the book is made especially clearer by the four chapters of historical writing (Isa. 36-39) which have been placed at the end of the first part of the book as an appendix. These four chapters contain almost exactly the same words that are found in 2 Kings 18.13-20.19. They tell the story of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem, and Isaiah's part in guiding the decisions of King Hezekiah. This historical section was probably added to the earlier part of the book in order to complete the account of all that the prophet Isaiah had done in Jerusalem.

But Isaiah is not mentioned at all in the later chapters of the book. There is no record that he was deported to Babylon, and none to show that he continued his work there. In fact he would have needed to live for more than two hundred years in order to be both in Jerusalem at the time when the Assyrians were a powerful enemy, and also in Babylon at the time when Cyrus set the Israelites free to return home.

3. Some of the key words and themes in the discourse of Isaiah, especially in the deutero- and trito-Isaiah give the impression that the writing of the books extends several generations from the pre-exilic to Babylonian collapse down to the time of return and finally restoration. But that notwithstanding, the prophetic mantle of Isa imparts authority to Dt- and Tr-Isa's preaching; they for their part enable Isa's original prophecy to keep in touch with later crises and new theological developments.

4. The frontier of the differences in language and style is very clear in Is. 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66.

Isaiah is brief, cryptic, and imperious, brilliant in the use of contrast and paradox; his preaching is filled with autobiographical material. Dt- and Tr-Isa never show any autobiographical interest. On the other hand, the style of Dt-Isa is expansive, flowing, impassioned, redundant, solemn, hymnic and lyric more than 1-39.

But Tr-Isa lacks originality in style and fails to sustain images. Unlike Dt.-Isa which is plagued with melancholy and frustration, Tr-Isa sees new visions for the future. This therefore leads to the conclusion that the three sections must have been composed by different authors.

A Matter for Authorship

The matter would seem not have been settled even if we have succeeded to convince ourselves that the three sections of Isaiah (chaps. 1-39, 40-55, 56-66) must have been written at different times by different authors. The three works are now canonically one in the Judeo-Christian scripture. How do we then account for the three-in-one work? Who is then responsible to make them one? And why must the three works be classified as one?

In order to clarify some of the issues raised above, many scholars have come up with various different explanations. Some of them will be considered in this section.

One Prophet Responsible for the Canonical Text

In order to solve the riddle surrounding the similarity and difference between the three sections of the book, some scholars are of the opinion that Isaiah of Jerusalem foresaw what would happen to the people of Judah in the future, and then prepared a written prophecy to be published later when the time is due. The argument is further supported by Isaiah's instruction to his disciples to prepare a written record of his sayings (Isa. 8.16; 30.8)

We can equally see from the description of the two parts of the book that in some ways the second part of Isaiah follows and completes the ideas of the first part. In both parts the prophet recognizes the need for judgement, punishment, and cleansing. In the first part judgement is regarded as a future event, in the second part it is something already completed. Both parts show that God uses foreign nations to fulfill His plans, and that what happens to Judah is always according to God's purposes. Again, all through the book a special title is used for God which is seldom found in other parts of the Bible: 'The Holy One of Israel' (e.g. Isa. 1.4; 5.19, and Isa. 41.14; 48.17).

But the above reasoning would seem to oversimplify the matter. It is true that most of the prophecy in Isa. 1-39 points towards the future; it is usually a message of warning or of hope, based on the behaviour of the Israelites at the time when the prophet was at work. Future events were mentioned only in the context of the people's present attitudes and behaviour, which either deserved punishment or could lead to blessing. To argue that God did know and could inspire Isaiah to write about the future condition of the Israelites is the denial of freewill. It would mean that even repentance is prearranged, fixed and settled for people, without their own will and intention.

Two or More Prophets Responsible the Canonical Text

The second explanation is that there was another prophet at work in Babylon in the time of Cyrus. We do not know his name, but he

was fully aware of the needs of the people of his time, and was responsive to God and His purposes for that time. This prophet probably wrote his message in secret, and passed it round anonymously as an encouragement to those who were willing to do the will of God.

The links that we have seen between his messages and the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem can be easily explained. This later prophet must have been a man who had studied the records of the work of Isaiah, and as a result had come to understand God's purposes. He did not simply repeat the ideas of Isaiah of Jerusalem. His exilic experiences of God deepened and enriched his understanding. At the same time, he was not afraid to appeal to Isa. 1-39 in his writing. His writings were probably added to those of Isaiah of Jerusalem because men saw that they carried on, developed, and enriched those earlier writings.

However, it is important to note that the content and material of Isa. 40-66 pose other overarching worries to scholarship. Some scholars believe that these chapters all belong together.

Others are of the view that they contain the work of at least two different prophets: one in Babylon, the other in Jerusalem.

A third opinion is that the prophecies may have come from many different sources, and that they were put together because they come from roughly the same period of history. This probably may lead to a brief discussion of some editorial contributions to the work. But before then, we ask ourselves, how did the three works come to be regarded as one?

The Combination of the Three Works into One

The focus here is different from the foregoing ones. The interest is no longer on the ¯who but on the ¯why Some scholars are of the opinion that there was a practical reason for joining the two sets of writing together. Following traditional literary economy, it would appear that Isaiah 1-39 was not long enough to fill a whole scroll, and there was need to add these latter writings (40-66). This would prevent the wasting of valuable writing materials. In other words,

the existence of the works are acknowledged, and probably also from different authors.

The second view is that the Dt- and Tri-Isaiah were already existing as a work but without title. And for the fact that the prophet in Babylon, who was responsible for the work, was not known by name, it became more expedient for the author to ride on the back of an already existing work, hence it was joined to already known work. The whole scroll became one and was known as the Book of Isaiah.

We know actually in spite of all the historical, theological and literary differences we have observed in the canonical text, the division between the two or three separate writings was only marked by titling them simply as (Primo) Isaiah, 'Deutero-Isaiah', and Trito-Isaiah. They still remain as one book, and no modern scholar has attempted successfully to make them separate books.

The Editorial Contribution

Surprisingly, scholars disagree among themselves about the content of the three sections of Isaiah. They suggest that some parts of Isaiah 1-39 were probably not the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem (the son of Amoz), but were added later, because their content seemed similar. Others disagree that the so-called ¯addition has always been part of the original work in 1-39. Such scholarship challenge naturally introduces us to the editorial contributions to the Book.

We accept that the Book of Isaiah, despite the originality of most of oracles, has enormous editorial influence. The editor(s) not only draws principally upon the oral and written traditions of the prophets' of the Book. The editor(s) also includes some of the reflections and teaching of their disciples (cf. 8:16; 30:8; 50: 10; 54: 17a; 52:6; 65: 13). The editor(s) centres the entire book on Jerusalem. Somehow the first Temple has to be destroyed in the process of purifying the people of false hopes in externals. We also observe that even the new Temple of the postexilic age is itself tarnished by unworthy leaders. This sad, sinful situation leads to its final opening to the Gentiles. The editor has allowed all major sections

to open with a sympathetic attitude toward the Gentiles: 11:10-16; 23:17-18; 27:12-13; 33:17-24; 35:5-6; 49:6; 56:1-8; 66:18-21.

It may be sufficient for us to accept at this stage that the trend of contemporary scholarship is to treat the Book of Isaiah as one-in-three part, and that each part contains oracles predominantly from the period of history which it describes.

Isaiah 1-39

The Time of Isaiah the Son of Amoz

One of the advantages of the knowledge of the historical context of a prophet is that it would help for a better appreciation of the message of the prophet. It is in this wise that we are turning to the historical context of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who was a resident of Jerusalem. Isaiah was, according to Jewish, a relative of King Uzziah.

Isaiah was married to a prophetess and was the father of at least two sons (7:3, 8:3). Jewish traditions from the second century AD say that Isaiah was martyred in the reign of Manasseh. One ancient writer says that Isaiah was 'sawn asunder', which perhaps explains the reference to this sort of martyrdom in Hebrews 11.37. Isaiah is said to have written an account of the reign of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26.22), and another of Hezekiah, which is now included in the book of Kings (2 Chron. 32.32).

Isaiah began his prophetic ministry in the year that king Uzziah died (740BC; cf. Isa. 6:1), the period Assyria became a threat to Judah. His ministry extended through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Is. 1:1). Probably because of his relationship with King Uzziah, he was associated with influential people of the city, who were his friends (Isa. 8.2), and had the opportunity to talk freely to the kings who ruled over Judah (see especially Isa. 7).

He lived at the time that the Assyrian empire was a powerful force in the geo-political life of the ancient Near East. It was also the period when Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727BC) extended the frontier of the Assyrian empire and captured Syria; this led to the formation of an alliance between Syria and Israel. Consequently, many of his prophecies would refer directly to the changing events

of that time. He warned King Ahaz of Judah against participating in an anti-Assyrian coalition led by Aram and Israel (Isaiah 7). After the death of Tigalath–Pileser, Shalmanesser and Sargon moved against the northern kingdom (Israel). The capital Samaria was destroyed and the people dispersed to different nations in 722 B.C.

Isaiah's final words relate to the siege of Jerusalem, and probably to the second siege in 688 BC (e.g. Isa. 14.24-27; 17.12-14). If this is the date of his last prophecy, then his work as prophet continued for 54 years, and ended when he was about eighty years old.

The Message and Teaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem

1. The Holiness of YHWH

The controlling principle of much of what Isaiah taught was his conviction concerning the holiness and kingly power of the God of Israel, both of which he experienced in his inaugural vision (6:1-13). The expression, "the Holy One of Israel," was his favourite title for Yahweh, whose "glory" did not abide merely in Jerusalem but filled the whole earth (6:3).

2. The Kingly and Universal Power of YHWH

Yahweh's power is such that all lies under his control, including the destinies of the mightiest nations, who function only as instruments of YHWH's policy (cf. 5:26-29; 7:18-19:20; 10:5-6). YHWH is the God, who has a policy and plan which he carries out in history with supreme wisdom (28:23-29) and ineluctable power (14:26-27). All human plans to the contrary are doomed to futility (7:4-7; 8:9-10). Thus, Isaiah thought it folly for Judah to attempt to carve out its own destiny, especially when this involved turning to Assyria (for help against Syria and Israel) or Egypt (for help in revolting against Assyria).

3. Absolute Trust and Confidence in YHWH

One may argue and probably correct that one of the principal duties of Isaiah was to guide the kings of Judah in all their dealings with Assyria, that is, both in the early days when Ahaz wanted

assistance from Assyria and in the later days when the kings planned to throw off Assyria's control over Judah. In both situations the kings looked for help from other countries. Isaiah would always oppose the idea, urging them to put their trust in YHWH. For Isaiah, to trust in YHWH's help and protection is faith, whereas the failure to do so is lack of faith (7:9b; 8: 17; 28: 16-17; 30: 1-5, 15; 31: 1-3). He strongly criticised the human wisdom of the king's advisers that led Ahaz and Hezekiah into paths contrary to trusting in YHWH (cf. 5:18-19; 6:9-10; 29:13-14,15-16)..

4. Social Justice

The idea of YHWH's holiness will also be reflected in Isaiah's understanding of social justice. He spoke vehemently against the oppression of the poor and weak of the society. According to him, the oppression of weaker members of society offends YHWH's holiness (cf. 1:10-17, 21-26; 3:13-15; 5:1-10,20-23; 10:1-4). And the rejection of the laws and instructions of YHWH's would invariably attract punishment (5:24).

5. Pride as Cardinal Sin

Isaiah saw pride as the cardinal sin; it is the antithesis of faith. Hence such behaviour would attract judgment (2:11-12,17; 3:16; 5:15-16; 9:8-9; 10:7-16,33; 28:1-4,22; 29:5).

6. Punishment, Hope and Salvation

Isaiah reveals and justifies YHWH's intention to bring punishment on Israel and Judah (3: 1-4: 1; 5:25,26-29; 6:11-13; 9:7-20). But he also understands such punishment as redemptive and salvific. It prepares the way for restoration (1:21-26). So, Isaiah equally opens a door for hope. His own followers exhibit the faith to be the, or among, the remnants that would constitute the New Jerusalem. Incidentally, Isaiah makes no reference to Moses, Sinai, or covenant. Nevertheless, the Zion tradition and the promises to David's dynasty, inspired him to leave some of the brightest promises for the future in the Old Testament tradition (2:2-4; 8:23-9:6; 11:1-9).

7. The Picture of Jerusalem

Isaiah believed that Jerusalem will play an important and fundamental part in God's plans in the days that are about to come.

Consequently, he teaches that the city will not be destroyed (Isa. 29.5-8), even though Judah will be severely chastised for her sins (cf. Isa. 5.1-7, 13-17). Only a few survivors would remain to share in God's plans for the future, a mere remnant (Isa. 1.9; 11.11). Enemy nations would be destroyed and have no remnant left at all (Isa. 14.22,30; 15.9)

Isaiah 40-66

The Prophet(s) of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah

We have earlier stated that no direct information was given about the prophet whose words are recorded in the Dt.- and Tri.-Isaiah. We do not know the name of the prophet, or anything about the experiences of the prophet as a prophet. However, the oracles in this section falls into two parts – Isa. 40-55 and 56-66. The oracles in Isaiah 40-55 are predominantly concerned with the life of the Jews in Babylon, and Isaiah 56-66 with their experiences after the return from exile.

It is possible that there were two prophets, or even that these chapters contain the collected prophecies of a large number of people who worked during the time of Cyrus's rise to power, and the Jews' return from exile. There are similarities in the messages included in both halves of this part of Isaiah. But the chapters Isaiah 40-55 express greater confidence in God, and more hope for the future, than can be found in Isaiah 56-66. If the same prophet produced both parts, then his experience of the return to Jerusalem did not reach up to his high hopes, and the messages he declared in Jerusalem express something of his dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

The Teaching of Isaiah 40-55

1. The Creator of History

The verb "to create" in connection with YHWH is used over 16 times by the author of Dt-Isa. The author, however, does not introduce the theme of YHWH Creator as a proof or reason but rather as an indication of the exceptionally new and expansive form of what is to happen to and for exiles. This is, of course, different from what the exiles expect.

There are many stronger nations than the Israelites, but the Israelites should remember that it is God who sent His people into exile, and that He did so to punish them for their sins (lsa. 50.1-3). He now plans to redeem them, even though they are still unworthy (lsa. 48.9-11). The foreign gods have had no influence over the history of Israel, despite the boasting of their worshippers (Isa. 41.21-24). Even Cyrus is sent by God, although he does not know it (Isa. 44.24-45.7). God is the Creator of all things. God is in control of all things (Isa. 40. 12-26, 28). God is the first and the last. There is no other but YHWH (Isa. 44.6; 46.9). His will for Israel will be fulfilled.

2. The New Exodus: A Message of Comfort to Zion

The experience of exile has caused despair (Isa. 49.14), but YHWH is preparing a 'new thing' for His people (Isa. 42.9). There is to be a new Exodus, and God will lead His people through the wilderness (Isa. 48.20-21; 49.9-11). Foreign nations will share in this pilgrimage with Israel as their leader (Isa. 45.14; 55.3-5). God will rebuild Jerusalem, and the whole world will find salvation through Him (Isa. 54.11-12; 45.22). In other words, the Deutero-Isaiah working in Babylon, presents a message of comfort to Zion, to console Jerusalem and give solace to the people (Isa. 52.1-2, 7-8).

3. The Power of the Divine Word

We observe that from the opening statements of Dt.-Isa (40:5,8) to his final summation (55:10-11), the author concentrates more than any other prophet on the power of the divine word. This word does not consist so much in written or spoken messages as in wondrous deeds of YHWH to Hispeople. It is a creative Word, the liberating Word and the Word that fulfils all that has been promised.

4. First and Last

We can also discover that Tri.-Isa. contain series of poems dedicated to first and last, mostly in the literary form of argument, indictment or trial speech (42:12-31; 41:1-5; 41:21-29 + 42:8-9; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:18-22; 46:9-13; 48: 1-11,12-19). These series of poems become prophetic fulfilment of earlier prophecies, the first things, and therefore the necessary fulfilment of the final or last prophecy which ushers in an extraordinary age for Israel.

The Message of Isaiah 56-66

1. History and God's Justice

There are some oracles in this passage of Isaiah which are similar to those found in Dt.- Isaiah. Their interpretation of history is almost, if not, the same. They believe that every divine promise is on the point of fulfilment. They extol the justice of God (41:2,16; 42:6; 61:3; 62:11-12).

2. The New Exodus, Jerusalem and Zion

Jerusalem occupies a centre role in both Dt- and Tr-Isaiah. At times the prophet sees Jerusalem as announcing Israel's return across the desert to its own land (40:9-10), at other times as a lonely widow who will become the happy mother of many children (54:1-10; 65:17-25). The people of Zion are again to take comfort because God is about to renew His care for them (Isa. 61.3). The ruined condition of the city of Jerusalem has caused them despair, but now there is reason for joy (Isa. 64.8-12; 65.18-19). New people will come to Jerusalem as a result of the continuing new Exodus (i.e. the return from captivity in Babylon), and will make the city even more glorious (lsa. 60.4-7). Foreign nations have already provided some servants for God, but many more will follow (Isa. 56.3; 60.10-14).

3. The Temple

It is true that only once, in a very disputed line (44:28b), does Dt-Isa mention the Temple. But it transfers Temple imagery to the outside world (40:3-5; 53:4-6). But in Tr-Isa., we see how the prophet on bitterly condemns the greedy Temple leaders of the postexilic age (56:9-57:13). The prophet warns that the only hindrance to the fulfilment of God's plans for Israel is the continuing disobedience of His people (Isa. 59.1-4), their selfish act of worship and corruption (lsa. 66.3-4). Their fasts are a mockery, for they do not express penitence (Isa. 58.3-5). God's judgement will come upon all who behave wickedly (Isa. 59.15-19). God's purposes cannot be hindered for ever, He will reign victoriously (Isa. 60.1-3; 66.22).

It must be made clear that the differences between the prophecies of Isaiah 56-66 and Isaiah 40-55, reflect the differences between the experience of captivity in Babylon, and the experience of all that was involved in the return to Jerusalem.

Conclusion

A closer look at the materials we have presented in this unit show that the mission and activities of the prophets of the Book of Isaiah are simply the concretisation of the claims made in our earlier discussion on the mission and role of the prophets (cf. Module 1, Unit 3). The prophets of the Book of Isaiah were indeed consciously and actively involved in the social history and religious experience of the people. Before the exile, they warn the Israelites about the moral consequence of their actions. They called for structural and individual change, and constantly reminded Israel of her relationship with YHWH. In the dark age of Israelite history, they remained the boundary figure, the motivators, giving the people hope and guiding them out from despair. So, they remain an indispensible part of the religious history of the people. The discussion further demonstrates in clear terms the complexities in the understanding and appreciation of the prophetic books, especially the Book of Isaiah. It must have exposed our far little knowledge about the prophets of the Book and asks for a more critical study of the Book in order to discover the richness of the mystery of the Word.

Summary

Many issues have been raised in the course of our discussion on the Book of Isaiah.

i. Through the discussion we have learnt that the authorship of the work is a complex issue that touches history, theology and literature. Consequently, we observed that the work in its canonical state proved to have been written by more than an author. We equally notice some editorial contributions in the material.

ii. We identified three major works within the Book, and thus designated them as Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah.

We further observed that the material in Isaiah is predominantly pre-exilic, in Dt.-Isa exilic and in Tr.-Isa post-exilic.

iii. While we insisted on the internal division of the work and the global classification of the materials, we equally discovered that the materials are not radically separate. They sometimes overlapped, thanks to some editorial exercise identified in the Book.

iv. Each section in the Book has its message and theology, which, though different, yet has some affinity with one another.

v. We finally discovered that the historical experience of the Israelites and the oracles of warning, threat and encouragement replicate themselves in our contemporary situation.

06

The Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Introduction

The discussion in the last unit was centred on the Book of Isaiah. We observed some of the complexities connected with the book as a prophetic genre and the various opinions by scholars. We raised some critical questions to enable us appreciate the prophets more fruitfully.

We shall equally follow the same pattern of reasoning in this unit, with the aim of motivating ourselves to think more critically in our reading of the Books of Jeremiah and the Lamentations. However, we shall divide the unit into two major sections, dedicating each section to one of the books. In the first section (the Book of Jeremiah), we shall explore the biography of the person of Jeremiah to the extent we can extract from the Book. The historical background of the book and the literary genre and sources of information will form a part of our discussion. We will conclude it by examining some of the message the Book has for the contemporary reader.

The second section, which concentrates on the Lamentations of Jeremiah, takes up the traditional

connection of the Book to Jeremiah. Here, we shall examine the questions surrounding the authorship of the Book, its historical background and the literary genre. We shall make some observations about the literary structure and sources of information in the book. We shall further look at the message and value of the Book in our present age.

The Person of the Prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a young man when in 626 BC he received his call to be a prophet (Jer. 1.2, 6). He came from Anathoth, and his father was a priest (Jer. 1.1) from the clan of Hilkiah, and probably a descendant of Eli, and distant relation to Abiathar (1 Kings 2.26). Jeremiah could have believed that he had forbidden him by God to marry and to father children, probably because impending divine judgment of Judah would sweep away the next generation (Jer. 16.1-9). His closest friend and companion, Baruch, was his secretary. It has been suggested by scholars that Baruch must have been responsible for the final compilation of the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah‘s career runs from the time of his call to prophetic ministry during the thirteenth year of Josiah‘s reign through the destruction of Jerusalem (627-587 B.C). It covered one of the most turbulent and decisive periods in the history of the ancient Near East. His ministry began at the time when the Assyrian empire was breaking up, and continued at zenith of Babylonian empire (Jer. 1.2-3). He prophesized for 40 years: a period which spans the reign of five kings in Judah. During his ministry, Babylon and Egypt were struggling for supremacy, with Judah caught in the middle.

The Babylonians allowed Jeremiah to stay in Jerusalem in 587 BC, when they took many of the leaders of Judah into exile (Jer. 40.4-6). After the assassination of the Babylonian governor, Gedeliah, some Jews forced Jeremiah to escape with them into Egypt (Jer. 42.19; 43.2, 5-6), and he probably died there. It is not possible, however, to establish the date of his death.

Historical Background

We shall give a summary historical account of the events of the period of Jeremiah the prophet in order to understand the part played by Jeremiah:

- 621 B.C: King Josiah carried out a reform of religion in Judah.
- 612 B.C: Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, was captured by the armies of Media and Babylonia.
- 609 B.C: King Josiah was put to death by command of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. The Pharaoh appointed Jehoiakim in his place.
- 605 B.C: The Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish.
- 597 B.C: The Babylonians captured Jerusalem, and took Jehoiachin and his court into exile. They appointed Zedekiah as king.
- 587 B.C: Zedekiah led a revolt against the Babylonians, who again attacked and this time destroyed Jerusalem and punished Zedekiah. They took more of the leaders of Judah into exile, and appointed Gedeliah as governor.
- 582 B.C: Further Jews were taken into exile, probably as the result of the assassination of Gedeliah.

The Message

We can best understand Jeremiah’s message if we consider what he said at different periods in his ministry.

A. The Fall of Assyria.

1. Discouragement of Judea from Gaining Independence

We mentioned earlier that Jeremiah became a prophet at a time when Assyria was losing its control over world affairs. At that time he discouraged the people of Judah from trying to gain their independence by making treaties with other nations (Jer. 2.18). He believed that Judah would suffer further attacks ‘out of the north’ (Jer. 1.13-15).

The Potential Attack of the Scythians: Jeremiah would have considered Scythians as the new potential enemy of Judah, thus advising Judah never to contract any alliance with other nations. These Scythians were nomadic people who usually lived north of Assyria. They took advantage of the decrease of Assyrian power by raiding many parts of the Assyrian empire.

The Anticipation of the Rise of the Babylonia Empire: Some scholars believe that Jeremiah was already thinking of Babylon as the new enemy of Judah. Consequently, Judah ought to be circumspect on the way it transacts its business in the world politics so as not to incur the anger of the new growing world power.

2. God as Creator and Sovereign

In the book, the prophet stresses the fact that God is the creator and sovereign (Jer. 25:51). He is omniscient and the source of life for those who trust him (Jer. 17:5ff, 13). He demands his people's allegiance and hates idolatry (Jer. 7). Incidentally, in the time of Jeremiah the people ran after other gods and idols (2:13). The situation became so pathetic that idols were even found in the temple at Jerusalem. The consequence of this is the moral corruption and perversion. There was oppression in the land and empty religiosity.

3. Indictment of Judean Idolatry and God's Judgment

Jeremiah used many of the same words and ideas as Hosea, e.g. he described Judah as an unfaithful wife (Jer. 3.1, 6-10). His chief accusation was that the people of Judah had turned aside from serving God, and were worshipping the Baalim, the fertility gods of Canaan (Jer. 2.23). God had given them good crops, and they had praised the Baalim for it (Jer. 5.23-24). Jeremiah calls Judah a harlot, and says that the people committed adultery by turning away from the true God (Jer. 2.20 and 5.7). God would punish them for their unfaithfulness, but he would welcome them if they returned to Him (Jer. 6.6-8 and 3.12-14, 22). Jeremiah was doubtful whether they had the wisdom to return (Jer. 4.19-26).

B. Josiah's reform.

1. Support of Josiah Based on the Book of Deuteronomy

King Josiah was for Jeremiah a just and righteous man (Jer. 22.15-16). Although there is no record of any specific oracle addressed to King Josiah, we are not in doubt of Jeremiah's support of King Josiah's reforms of the religious life of Judah. We are also told that the reform was based on the law book of Deuteronomy, which was later discovered. Among other things, the reform declared the

worship of Baal illegal and idolatrous. It equally discouraged and condemned any false forms of ritual associated with the Yahweistic cult. The reform also necessitated the destruction of high places (several shrines) and fosters the centralization of worship in the Jerusalem Temple, which was an agenda already initiated by David more on political expediency.

2. A Call for Change of Heart

But later Jeremiah recognized that a book of law could not reform the people. They needed a change of heart. Without that, the people of Judah would probably distort the interpretation of the Law, and make it 'into a lie' (Jer. 8.8). Two false interpretations are especially mentioned in the book of Jeremiah:

(a) Because the book of Deuteronomy refers to one central place of worship chosen by God, the people came to believe that Jerusalem was especially sacred and would never be captured by an enemy. Jeremiah told them that this depended upon their obedience to God (Jer. 7.2-7).

(b) Secondly, because the book of Deuteronomy describes the forms of sacrifice which should be made to God in Jerusalem, the people came to believe that sacrifice is especially important in the service of God. Jeremiah told them that God always wants obedience, and sacrifice could not be used instead of service (Jer. 7.21-26).

C. The Reign of Jehoiakim.

The greater part of Jeremiah's prophecies come from the reign of Jehoiakim, before the Babylonians had conquered Judah.

1. Judgment and Suffering of Judah

Judgment against Judah was one of the prominent themes in the oracles of Jeremiah. He announced YHWH's judgement on Judah without offering much hope to the people of Judah except to surrender themselves to the might power of Babylon (Jer. 15.1- 3). Jeremiah made it clear that the armies of Judah would be shamed defeated crushed. Many of the young people would die (Jer. 15:8). The people of Judah will be punished through drought and famine (14:1ff) and

invasion by a foreign power (Babylonians) (6:1-15). They would go into exile by God's will (Jer. 17.4). Even in exile they would suffer severely (Jer. 8.3). It is possible that the Confessions of Jeremiah would have been a consequence of the reaction of the people against such distasteful pronouncement.

Some scholars have interpreted Jeremiah's symbolic language and action of the potter as the irreversibility of God's judgment (Jer. 18.1-12). Thus God's rejection of Judah was as complete and final as when a potter has completed a pot, baked it, and then broken it because its shape was not perfect (Jer. 19.10-11).

2. Prophecy Against Foreign Nations

Surprisingly in the LXX, Jer. 46-51 comes immediately after Jer. 25. Literarily, we may argue that LXX is telling us that the oracles of Jer. 46-51 have some connection with those of Jer. 25. But what is of more interest to us at this juncture is that the prophesies of Jeremiah did not spare any segment of humanity. In other words, YHWH is the judge of all nations. This is also an indirect way of acknowledging the universal kingship and sovereignty of YHWH.

3. Attack on the Professional Priests and False Prophets

Jeremiah bitterly complained against and criticised the professional priests and prophets because of the their unhealthy practices of using their office' for material gain, and their contention that the Jerusalem Temple will never fall into the hands of the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 14:14ff; 23:14, 21-22).

D. After the first deportation.

1. Restoration of Jerusalem

We have earlier pointed out that the symbolic language and actions of Jeremiah betrayed the inevitability of YHWH's punishment on the people. However, there is also the theological theme of restoration running through Jeremiah's oracle. In other words, Jeremiah still believed that YHWH would include the people of Judah in His plans for the future. But this great hope rests with the people in exile; those ones, who would be able to serve God in the future. Consequently, he wrote to the exiles in Babylon telling them to settle peacefully there, and to work for the prosperity of that country (Jer.

29.4-7), thus consoling them that the exile in Babylon would not last for ever (Jer. 29:10ff) and that Babylon itself would be overthrown eventually (Jer. 50). The people should wait patiently for God to fulfill His plans by bringing them back to Judah (Jer. 24.5-7). Then they would be able to rebuild Jerusalem, and in those days the people would be faithful (Jer. 33.2-9 and 24.7). This hope gave birth to his great act of faith – buying land – in the darkest days (cf. Jer. 32). But he looked even beyond the return from exile to an ideal future in which Samaria would have a part. Abundance would prevail and Jerusalem would be holy to the Lord because its people had repented and he had forgiven them (31). The Lord will also establish over them the rule of the Messianic prince (23:5-16).

2. The Anticipation of a New Covenant

We may say that one of the major theological contributions of Jeremiah is the concept of a ¯NEWCOVENANT . According to Jeremiah, the knowledge of the law without obedience to it would amount to the highest form of idolatry (2:8). So, in order that the law may be effectively obeyed, it must be written in the heart of the people. This, of course, can only take place if God will establish a new covenant with the people (31:31ff). Otherwise, judgment is inevitable. However, there would be a new covenant to replace the one which the people had already broken through their unfaithfulness (Jer. 50.4). The old covenant that was based on laws written in books, and which the people did not fulfill has been broken. In future God would write His laws no longer in the book but in the hearts of the people, so that they would gladly serve Him (Jer. 31.31-34). There would be a new king in Judah, chosen by God from the family of David, who would rule wisely and well (Jer. 23.5-6).

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Historical Background

We have no doubt in any form that the Book of Lamentations contains funeral songs composed shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. We also believed that the destruction of Jerusalem, and above all the desecration of the Temple, calls for a lament. It was unprecedented that YHWH should be so humiliated

before his own people. It places the whole oracles and theology of the Davidic dynasty in question. In short, the Babylonian conquest of Judah, and the destruction of Jerusalem put an end to these hopes on the rule of David's family in Jerusalem, Jerusalem as the city of YHWH, and Zion as His dwelling place.

Unfortunately the Book of Lamentation makes no mention of any new concrete circumstances that could bring hope to the Jews. So, one of the implications we may draw from such observation is that the book could have been written before Cyrus rose topower and set the exiles free to return to Jerusalem, i.e. it must have been written before 538 BC.

Lamentation as a Literary Genre

It should be noted here that the book of Lamentations is not the only book that contains individual and community laments. There are individual and community laments in the book of Psalms. Moreover, the Old Testament laments found a paradigm in the overall context of the ancient Near East (cf. 2 Sam. 1:17-27); Amos 5:1-2). For example among the Sumerian we have ¯Lamentation over the Destruction of wr, ¯Lamentation over the destruction of summer and wr etc

The Literary Structure of the Book

The book is composed of five separate poems, each contained in a separate chapter. In the Hebrew the first four poems have the form of acrostics each verse or group of verses beginning with a different letter in alphabetical order. The poems in Lamentations 2,3, and 4 make one alteration in the order of the letter, which may suggest that the final order of the Hebrew alphabet had not beenfixed when the poems were written. Lamentations 5 is not in the form of an acrostic, but it does have the same number of verses as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, i.e. twenty-two. .

- Lamentations 1: Jerusalem mourns her destruction.
- Lamentations 2: National lament over the fall of Jerusalem.
- Lamentations 3: A personal lament.
- Lamentations 4: National lament over the fall of Jerusalem.
- Lamentations 5: A prayer for deliverance.

We may observe here that some of the motivations for the acrostic form of the book may include the facilitation of memory and the expression of completeness of grief and despair, and the plenitude of faith and hope.

The Message of Lamentations

1. The Embarrassment of Judah

The poems are an attempt to answer the urgent questions of the people of Judah: How could God allow His city to be destroyed, His royal line of kings to be defeated, and His Temple to be desecrated? The Book of Lamentations did not hesitate to provide the answer: it was because of the sins of His people (Lam. 1.8-9, 18). The answers places YHWH as a just and righteous God, who has always been faithful to his covenant.

2. YHWH as the Lord of History

The sovereignty of YHWH and His kingship all over the nations has been one of the reoccurring themes in the prophetic books. This we equally read in the Book of Lamentations. Here YHWH is in control of history, using the foreign nation to punish Judah for her sins. So, the suffering of Judah is not for the sake of suffering, for YHWH does not glory in her suffering, nor is YHWH so weak not to defend His people, His city, His Temple and the royal dynasty. But it is for the profound lessons to be learned from it. Behind the judgment of Judah, which is due to the sin of the people, is YHWH himself. It is not the Babylonians, but God himself who will destroy them, because of their sins (cf. Lam. 2:4-5).

3. Repentance and Hope

YHWH's anger had led Him to hand His people over to their enemies (Lam. 2.2-8). And it would seem that the people's sin have led Him to reject them finally and completely (Lam. 5:19-22). However, YHWH is merciful. There is hope for the future (Lam. 3:31-33). The author still keeps the hope alive. He expresses the assurance that YHWH does not abandon those who turn to him for help (3:22-33). In spite of Israel's sins (1:8, 14, 18, 2:14: 4:13), YHWH will still forgive and restore. His compassion and mercy are everlasting and greater than his anger (3:31-33).What He required

of His people is repentance (Lam. 3.40-42, 55-58). He would then overthrow their enemies (Lam. 3.64-66).

Liturgical and Moral Values of the Book

1. Embodiment of the Corporate Sins of Israel

The book of Lamentations grapples with corporate suffering in the same way as the book of Job struggles with the issue of individual suffering. The writer acknowledges YHWH's wrath against Jerusalem, and this motivates him to pray for her restoration. Israel's sufferings were catalogued in a variety of ways: wholesale killings, king (2:6,9,4:20), princes (1:6:2:2, 4:7, 5:12), elders (1:19, 2:10, 4:16, 5:12), priests (1:4, 19:2:6, 20, 4:16), prophets (2:9,20) and ordinary citizen (2:10-12; 3:48, 4:6) as well as cessation of worship (1:4, 10).

2. A Challenge for Righteousness among the People

The book of Lamentations is read at a Jewish festival which commemorates the fall of Jerusalem, and serves as a perpetual reminder that YHWH requires righteousness from His Chosen People, and will punish their wrong-doing.

Conclusion

We have explored briefly the two books classified among the major prophetic books in order to discover some of their literary qualities, the messages and theological values. It is equally true that we strongly argued that the two books could not have shared a common authorship. However, the affinity between them justifies the consideration of the two under one unit.

Jeremiah was the prophet of the time. Jeremiah was human and supra-human. His experience as a prophet was bordered with ups and downs. Most often he found himself in a corner he would not have wished himself. He complained, shouted and wept for the love of Judah. In midst of trial and condemnation, he never gave up. His courage and doggedness in the face of all oppositions makes him a prototype prophet for our age. He was so resilient, so courageous and undeterred in his ministry. The Word of YHWH was his bed rock, his faith and hope.

The Lamentations, following the tradition of Jeremiah, remained purely human. The sorrows of human are so articulated in the Book. Human finds the answer for the age-long question, the call of despair – "O! Lord, where are you?" While the Book upholds the justice of YHWH, it gives humanity hope that the Lord will not abandon the righteous one. This becomes our consolation even in the midst of suffering, in the midst of persecution.

Summary

Our focus in this chapter has been on the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations. We treated the two books as different but interrelated works. Some of the salient points made during the foregoing discussion are as follows:

i. Jeremiah the prophet was from priestly family, and did not raise any family because of his vocation.

ii. The ministry of Jeremiah occurred during the most turbulent period in the history of Israel.

iii. We also stressed some of the sad human experience Jeremiah underwent for the sake of the Word of YHWH.

iv. The Book of Jeremiah itself is composed of the literary genre of autobiography, biography, poetic oracle, the confessions of Jeremiah and historical appendix. But thanks to the editorial works that have literarily and artistically interwoven the material to give us the present canonical text of Jeremiah.

v. The message of Jeremiah embraced many aspects of human relationship with YHWH. Jeremiah did not in any form hesitate to proclaim the sovereignty of YHWH over all powers and kingdoms, and therefore, should be trusted. Jeremiah's understanding of the covenant of human with YHWH becomes one of the conspicuous points on the scoreboard for Jeremiah. Jeremiah's critique of the priests and prophets of his kind presented Jeremiah as a man of objectivity. Jeremiah simply thought us that in every judgment, suffering and destruction, this is always inherent restoration and reconstruction for the better.

Also in the Lamentation,

i. we noted that there is no good reason to suppose that that Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations, except for the prejudice of tradition.

ii. Lamentation as funeral song or dirge is not peculiar with the Book of Lamentations. It could also be found in other texts of the Old Testament, and in the ancient Near East texts.

iii. We also observed that some of the reasons behind the acrostic structure of the book are to facilitate memory and also to express some sense of completeness of grief and despair, as well as the plenitude of faith and hope.

iv. We also discovered a very close relationship between the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations. It would appear that the Lamentations serves Jeremiah a fulfilment of his oracles and a deserved conclusion.

v. The message of the Lamentations is very simple and straightforward: YHWH is just and shall never allow any sin unpunished; yet His mercy is sufficient enough to redeem us once we come back to Him.

vi. In fact, the author of the Lamentations has left for us a veritable monument, which shall remain ever alive in the liturgical and theological circles.

07

The Book of Ezekiel

We considered the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations in the last unit. In continuation of our study of the prophetic books, we shall concentrate in this unit on the book of the Prophet Ezekiel. Our primary focus will be on the person of the prophet and the historical background of his oracles. We shall analyse the historical accuracy of the book and the literary quality of the book. It is also of interest to us to probe into some of the traditions that could have influenced the writing, then the literary structure of the book and the theological import of the writings. It is also for our interest to read though the book before proceeding with this lecture. In addition we are advised to read the lecture along with the bible, for at various instances reference would be made to some of the passages in the book.

The Person and Authorship of the Book of Ezekiel

The Book of Ezekiel (1:1-3) gives handful biographical information about the Prophet himself. He was a priest and one of those deported to Babylon, along with King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C (cf. 2 Kings

24:14ff), that is, before the final deportation in 587 B.C. While in exile, he lived in Babylon beside the river Chebar, which was a canal off the Euphrates at Telabib (cf. Ezek. 3.15). There he received a call to be a prophet. This could probably be five years after 'the exile of Jehoiachin', thus in 593 BC. It is most likely that Ezekiel was thirty years old (cf. Ezek. 1:1) when he received the call. Incidentally the latest of his oracle gives a date in the twenty-seventh year of the exile, i.e. 571 B.C (Ezek. 29:17). We may from this infer that Jeremiah was still working in Jerusalem when Ezekiel began his ministry in Babylon, and that Ezekiel continued with the ministry more than fifteen years after Jeremiah ceased to prophesy.

Ezekiel's membership of the priestly family is evident throughout the book. His concern with the Temple and its ritual betrays his background. However, the prophet was unable to fulfil his calling as a priest while living in exile far from Jerusalem away from the temple. It equally justifies the popular saying: "it was not easy for Ezekiel." That is to say, it was not easy for Ezekiel as a priest to live without the Temple. Above all, it was probably in the year that Ezekiel would have begun his priestly ministry that he was summoned by YHWH to serve as His prophet. The married experience of the prophet adds further to the complexity of his hard encounter in life. Ezekiel was married. But his wife died on the very day Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in 587 BC (Ezek. 24: 1-2, 15-24), thereby leaving him as a torn widower. And there is no mention of children in his marriage.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel was an educated person. He used his knowledge effectively to present his message. His prophecies portray a high knowledge of history (Ezek. 16.3), of mythology (Ezek. 28:11-19; 31:1-9), and of ship-building (Ezek.27:1-9). We also learn from the book that Ezekiel was influential among the exiles. He owned a house, and the elders normally came to consult him in his home (Ezek. 8:1). Throughout his ministry Ezekiel kept a close watch on events in Judah, and adapted his message to the needs of the changing situations.

It is also important to mention that the authorship of the book of Ezekiel is still one of the unsettled issues in biblical scholarship. But

whatever position one takes, we must agree on one issue. That is, that the book must have contained some personal contributions of the historical prophet Ezekiel. However, there have equally been some level additions and moderations in the Book over the years probably by the disciples of the prophet.

Historical Background

The prophetic ministry of Ezekiel must be understood against the turbulent background of the last days of Judah as an independent state. When King Josiah came of age to rule in 628, the Assyrian empire was weakened and tottering after the death of its last strong ruler, Ashurbanipal. Josiah ceased the opportunity and began a major reform of Israel's religion along the lines of Deuteronomy's covenant (2 Kgs 22-24). But his untimely death in the battle field against Egypt in 609 ended any further reform. His son Jehoiakim was not so enthusiastic to further the reform (cf. Jer 7, 26, 36).

In 605 political events brought the Babylonians to power over Judah, and Jehoiakim eventually became embroiled in a scheme to fight for independence after Babylon seemed weakened by its near defeat by Egypt in 601. However, he had misjudged, and in 598, the Babylonian army sacked Jerusalem and exiled thousands of its leading citizens. Jehoiakim conveniently died, but they took the new king, Jehoiachin, off to Babylon as a prisoner. Nebuchadrezzar, the Babylonian king, appointed Zedekiah, a brother of Jehoiakim and uncle of the young King Jehoiachin, as king-regent. He, too, remained quiet for a number of years, and then planned rebellion. This time, the Babylonian siege lasted from 589 to 586 and wiped out all of Judah's cities before taking Jerusalem itself (see 2 Kgs 25; Jer 37-45, 52).

Literary Structure of the Book

The book of Ezekiel is divided into three stages of the prophet's ministry: oracles of judgment (chaps. 1-24), oracles against foreign nations (chaps. 25-32), and oracles of salvation (chaps. 33-48). This corresponds to a three-part program: divine punishment of Israel, a prelude to restoration by punishment of the foreign powers

who oppress Israel, and a promise to Israel of restoration to a new order. The last section in turn has two parts: promise of a new exodus and conquest of the land, i.e., a return from exile (chaps. 33-39) and a new division of the land and rebuilding of the holy city (chaps. 40-48).

The Theology of the Book

Ezek shares with earlier prophetic writings the conviction that God punishes disobedience and infidelity to the covenant by political disaster (Isa 10; Jer 4-6; Ezek 17). Ezekiel, like his predecessors and contemporaries, treats violations of the covenant in the language of adultery and prostitution (Hos 2; Jer 2; Ezek 16; 23). He certainly agreed with Jeremiah that God willed aninternal faithfulness to the covenant under Babylonian rule rather than a war for independence built on human pride and political motives alone; for Babylon was an instrument of divine correction (Jer 29; Ezek 4; 21).

However, what sets Ezekiel off from other prophetic books is the unique way the prophet develops certain traditional themes of (a) YHWH's lordship over all nations and events, (b) His holiness (transcendence), (c) insistence on both moral and cultic integrity, (d) the responsibility of each generation for its own acts, and finally (e) a conviction that God intends to restore Israel out of a totally free gift of grace.

The Divine Lordship of YHWH

Ezekiel's doctrine of God is most clearly seen in the formula that ends nearly every oracle: "so that they (or, 'you') will know that I am YHWH." God acts in events to manifest that he alone has the power to punish and restore. Divine activity reveals that YHWH does indeed take seriously the punishment of sin while at the same time never forgetting his lasting promise of care and covenantal love toward Israel. Ezekiel rarely stresses the tender side of God (although it is present in 16:1-14; 34:1-31) when an oracle can emphasize the power of God to achieve his ends. Above all, the divine concern is seen in YHWH's ability to give life when there appears to be only death (37:1-14; 47:1-12).

YHWH's Holiness

Ezekiel stresses the distance between our human hopes and actions and the divine will. Example, the prophet is regularly addressed as "son of man," to emphasize his mere mortality even as YHWH's spokesperson. Similarly, in the great vision of the heavenly chariot, he sees only the "likeness" of the "appearance" of God (1:26). Finally, he does not use Isaiah's "Holy One" but speaks instead of the holiness of God's "Name" (20:39; 36:20; 43:7; etc.). Because Israel bears God's name, it must not profane that name by its disobedience, making God a victim of human whim (20:30).

Moral and Cultic Demands

Ezekiel continues the traditions of vehement protest against the corruption of Israel in both injustice and in false worship (Ezek. 5-6; 17-18; 20 and 22). But the preponderance of specific offenses named are cultic, including profaning the Sabbath (20:12, 24), worshiping on high places (6:13; 20:28), and defiling the sanctuary (23:37-38). Ezekiel clearly understood that the root of Israel's turning from YHWH was a loss of "knowing" God and his covenant statutes. Chap. 20, with its remarkable history of Israel's recalcitrance even from the time of the exodus, makes a sharp point-at no time did Israel follow YHWH entirely from its heart – it was always rebellious! God gave his statutes and regulations to enable them to serve him faithfully, but it was not enough (20:40).

Individual Responsibility

The emphatic perceptive transition from corporate sin to individual is another point that makes the oracles of Ezekiel unique. It is about the individual consequences of both obedience and transgression (18:1-32, 33:10-20). Before Ezekiel, the people had been using a proverb that in effect claimed that God was unjust. Thus "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel; 'The Father eats sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge (18:2; also Jer. 31:29)'. For the people felt that the exile had come about partly as a result of the cumulative guilt of the past generations of Israelites who had lived in rebellion against God and

his law. So, the exiled accused God of being unjust for punishing them for the sins of the fathers.

But Ezekiel in defence of the divine action of YHWH develops the lesson in chapter 18, thus tracing the cases of a father, a son, and a grandson, and then concludes with the teaching that God is never unjust. He maintains the specific point that each generation will have to take responsibility for its own decisions. Every generation, will confront the consequence of its own sins. Moreover, it is the individual who sinned that will be punished, and not the whole nation (Ezek. 18:1-10). So, the sins of the exiled generation is, or at least partly, responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the discretion of the Temple.

Above all, now is the time for the exiled to act in order to overcome the evil of both the past and the present and to stand before God in judgment and hope for a new future. The thematic passages on the prophet as watchman in Ezek. 3 and 33 build upon this insight.

Why should Ezekiel preach if no one will listen? The answer is in the twofold responsibility involved in warning. The prophet must be faithful to his charge to show God's justice and mercy in action whether anyone hears or not. The people can accept or reject the warning and the explanation of the prophet, but they must bear the burden. God will bring about punishment and salvation no matter what the response of the people is, but the prophet's words serve as a present sign to all of what is really happening and a lesson for all future generations.

Sin and Grace

Ezekiel demonstrates his uncompromising stance with sin. Not only does he find the rebellious spirit deeply ingrained in the human heart, but he has high expectations of human conduct before the holiness of God. He also proclaims the possibility of repentance (see 16:54-63; 33:10-16). Yet God does not act as a result of people's repentance, but out of his own prior holiness and covenant love (16:53, 60-61; 20:40-44; 34:11; 37:1-14).

Chapter 36 would go further to underscore the divine promise of salvation as the work of grace. Thus, YHWH will restore Israel because of his jealous wrath against the derision of other nations who mock his people's lowly fate (36:6). YHWH will act for the sake of His holy name, that is, in order to vindicate his holiness (36:22-23). Then he will give Israel a new heart and a new spirit so that they can obey and be faithful (36:26-28; cf. 11:17-20). Repentance follows God's initiative to save because Israel will recognize that God is still acting for them, and, as a result, they will be ashamed of their conduct (16:54; 36:32).

Conclusion

We must have observed the uniqueness of the prophet which is so much influenced by his biography. His education gives him some edge over most of earlier prophets as well as his contemporaries. Ezekiel proves himself to be a good historian and chronicler. His literary style is exceptional and will continue keep Old Testament biblical scholars baffling. Ezekiel is also a wonder theologian of the age. What counts more is not what he said as such, but the perspectival approach. Above all, the entire prophetic tradition is indebted to Ezekiel for the shift from collective to individual responsibility, and subsequent emphasis given to the theology. Ezekiel sings the tenor with octave that every generation will face the consequence of its sins both as an individual and as a nation. Ezekiel is simply the prophet.

Summary

The discussion in this part has centred solely on the Book of Ezekiel. Some of the points and issues discussed will be recounted below to enable you refresh your memory.

i. Ezekiel was a priest, but could not exercise the priestly ministry due to some exigencies associated with his later vocation.

ii. The authorship of the Book of Ezekiel remained one of the controversial issues in Old Testament biblical scholarship.

iii. The prophetic ministry of Ezekiel was during one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the Israelites - the exilic period.

iv. The historical accuracy found in the book has raised a lot of suspicions and awake more interest on the issue of authorship of the book.

v. Ezekiel adopted many literary patterns of his predecessors, and through his ingenuity excel in literary styles such as the project of YHWH in the first person singular, the use of set forms of expression, the management of repetition, allegories and imagery, and other host of literary forms.

vi. We also observed that Ezekiel was a man of tradition. He combined a lot of traditions in his writing: Jeremiac tradition, the priestly and apocalyptic traditions. More interesting, however, what later tradition had made out of the writings of Ezekiel, which had produced a host of heretics and renegades.

vii. The literary structure of the book that divided it into oracles of Judgement against Judah and against the nation, as well as oracles of salvation has influenced the study of Ezekiel along the line of divine punishment of Israel, restoration by punishment and the promise of a new exodus that leads to the return.

viii. We ended the discussion by looking at the theology of Ezekiel. Besides following the tradition of the classical prophetic in condemning the social and moral evils and religious abuses of his days, Ezekiel laid special emphasis on YHWH's lordship, sovereignty and holiness. He further insisted on both moral and cultic integrity and on the responsibility of each individual and each generation for its own acts. Finally, but not all, Ezekiel was convinced that YHWH's intention to restore Israel. This act of restoration was interpreted by Ezekiel as purely the free gift of grace.

08

The Book of Daniel

Introduction

Our attention in the preceding unit was on the Book of Ezekiel. We observed the unique position of the book in the prophetic tradition, thanks to the literary quality and theological import of the Book. In this unit, we shall further explore another major prophet named Daniel. The prophet, like Ezekiel, gave new impetus to the prophetic tradition through his prophetic apocalyptic and haggadic discernment.

Our approach in this unit will be simple and systematic. First, we shall review some of the challenges connected with the title of the Book, the different text versions and the historical background of the book. The date, authorship and language of the prophet will be another area of interest. We shall also discuss the literary structure of the book and genre of the writings. We will conclude the discussion by presenting the purpose and message of the author, and finally the theological significance of the book.

The Title of the Book

The book is named after the chief character of the stories in chapters 1-6, who is said to have received the visions recorded in chapters 7-12. Daniel is described as a Jew living in Babylon, who became influential in the court there, and continued to have authority when Darius the Mede conquered Babylonia. The stories tell how Daniel remained faithful to God in the time of the Exile, and how God protected him from his enemies. The visions describe the events of world history which followed the breakdown of Babylonian power, and the writer used these visions to show how God was directing events towards the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

Although Daniel is shown as playing an important part in the Exile, and afterwards, there is very little information about him in other parts of the Old Testament. Ezekiel spoke of a Daniel who was one of the righteous men of much earlier times, and who could be counted alongside Noah and Job (Ezek. 14.14, 20; 28.3). One of the leaders who returned from the Exile with Ezra was called Daniel (Ezra 8.2). And the name appears again among those who made a new Covenant with God in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 10.6).But it is unlikely that any of these were the same as the Daniel of Daniel 1-6. They belonged to different times.

The Masoretic and Greek Versions of the Text

The inspired character of the Book of Daniel is never in doubt. But the MT and LXX differ in location of the book within the Judeo-Christian scripture, and also in the text versions. Thus, the MT places Daniel in the Hagiographa (writings), that is, the third part of its canon (after Esther and before Ezra). The LXX and Vulgate on the other hand, include Daniel as one of the prophets, and locate the Book immediately after Ezekiel.

The challenge, however, is not necessary the difference in the location. It is the text versions in their canonical status. The canonical Daniel as given in the LXX and the Vulgate is considerably longer than the canonical Daniel of the MT. Many explanations have offered for such feature. Some biblical scholars have argued that there is some reason to think that the Book of Daniel circulated atfirst in

more than two forms. We now know from the manuscripts found at Qumran that there were at that time more stories about Daniel in circulation than are contained in any modern Bible.

In any case, the Greek version of the text is much longer than the Aramaic text of the MT in chapter 3. In addition to the information contained in the MT, the Greek version include the Prayer of Azariah (3:24-45) and the Hymn of the Three Jewish Men (3:46-90). It is important for us to note here that these sections were neither an addition to the Greek version nor deletion from the MT. They were there ab initio in the Greek version and formed part and parcel of the text; and at the same time they never formed part of the edition represented by the MT.

Secondly, some scholars are of the opinion that the extra information in the Greek text, under separate headings and in varying position as Susanna, Bel, and the Dragon, placed in the Vulgate at the end of Daniel as 13:1-64; 14:1-22; 14:23-42 respectively, suggest that these information were originally as distinct little books. Another suggestion is that the sources of these stories could be retraced to the Hebrew or Aramaic originals, including most likely the story of Susanna, despite the play on words in the Greek text of 13:55-59.

Also, important for us is to note that the Greek text of Daniel has come down to us in two forms. The first is that found in almost all the manuscripts, designated (for want of a better name) “Theodotion-Daniel”. The second is that of the LXX, which until recently was known from only one Greek manuscript. Incidentally, it is the Greek version, containing the extra information or the so-called deuterocanonical, that the early church accepted as forming part of the canon of the Bible the Scriptures according to the Greek text. The so-called deuterocanonical, the Church insists, is divinely inspired and on a par with the rest of the book.

Historical Background.

To understand the literary nature of the book and its theological claims, it is pertinent for us to discuss briefly the historical circumstances surrounding the book. We are already conversant

with the relationship between Israel and Assyria. Thus, in the 8th cent. B.C, the Assyrians had turned the kingdom of Israel into a province of their vast empire and reduced the southern kingdom to a vassal state. Toward the end of the 7th cent., Cyaxares, king of the Medes, with the assistance of the Babylonians, captured Nineveh and utterly destroyed the Assyrian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon soon took over most of the former realm of the Assyrians and even extended it by his conquest of Judah in 587. We also remember that most of the people who survived Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah were deported to Babylonia between 598 and 582. However the successors Nebuchadnezzar could not hold the empire together. The Babylonian power continue to deteriorate until the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, who had already conquered Media and made himself master of both the Medes and the Persians, captured Babylon in 539 from its last king, Nabonidus, and his son, Belshazzar. It was after the defeat of Babylon in 539 that Cyrus permitted the exiles to return to their homeland. There was then a slow but steady growth in the number of Jews living in Palestine.

Thereafter the ancient Near East was ruled by the Persian successors of Cyrus the Great, among whom the only outstanding king was Darius I the Great, until Alexander the Great placed it under Greek dominion in 331.

In the 3rd century, Palestine was governed by the Greek dynasty of the Ptolemies, whose capital was at Alexandria in Egypt. Under their Persian and Ptolemaic rulers they enjoyed limited political autonomy and complete religious liberty.

But in the 2nd cent., the batten rulership was changed from the Ptolemies to the Seleucids. It was under the dominion of the Greek dynasty of the Seleucids that the Persian capital was relocated to Antioch in Syria, and Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in his endeavor, both for political and for cultural reasons, to hellenize the Jews of Palestine, tried to force them to abandon their ancient religion and to practice the common pagan worship of his realm. The ultimate outcome of this bloody persecution was armed revolt among the Jews, as told in 1-2 Macc. This conflict between the religion of the Jews and the paganism of their foreign rulers is also the basic theme of Daniel.

However, in Daniel, the conflict is regarded from God's viewpoint as long foreseen and tolerated by him, both to show the vast superiority of Israel's wisdom over all pagan philosophy and to demonstrate the truth that the God of Israel is the master of history, who "deposes kings and sets up kings" (2:21), until he ultimately establishes his universal kingdom on earth.

The Authors of the Book

For many centuries, the Jews and the Christians believed that Daniel, a prophet and statesman who lived in the 6th century BC was the author of the book. This fact is supported because Daniel speaks in the first person especially in the second half of the book (cf. Dan. 7:2, 4, 6, 28:1, 15, 9:2, 10:2). We can equally think in the same way today if only we are ignorant of the literary genre of Daniel - apocalyptic and haggadic.

For many scholars today, however, Daniel was not the author of the book. Most scholars now believe that the book of Daniel is a work that was composed in the second century B.C. Some of the reasons for this recent position will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

The Date of Composition of the Book

There are several arguments in favour of the date of the composition of the book to be shortly before the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 164 B.C..

a. Linguistic Argument

i. The language in which the book was written supports the idea that it was composed in the time of Antiochus IV. Daniel 2:4b-7.28 was in Aramaic, the language widely used by the Jews after the Exile. The rest of the book was in a style of Hebrew known to belong to a much later time, and may have been a translation from an Aramaic original.

ii. Many of the Persian vocabulary that appear in the work are of later period of contact with the Persian. In other words, it is after a longer period of contact with the Persians than at the very beginning of the Empire, and still long after Daniel's time.

The same we can equally say about some Greek words used in the texts.

iii. It is not also accidental that the name of the real writer of this book was not disclosed. No new prophets would have been accepted around the second century B.C after the Israelites' bitter experience of false prophets before the fall of Jerusalem. Thus a custom gradually grew up bywhich new writers used the names of people remembered from the past, in order to give their books authority.

iv. It is also possible that the stories of Daniel were told among the Jews before the book was written, and they provided an acceptable introduction to the visions which were newly composed.

v. Unlike Ezekiel, the Book of Daniel is infested with historical inaccuracy. Consequently, some scholars have tried to explain the inaccuracy from the point of view of the writer, who made used of oral traditions which were incomplete. This led the writer to make mistakes about the history of the earlier times, when he tried to give a complete background to the stories in their written form.

Theological Argument

The theological outlook of the author, with his interest in angelology, his apocalyptic rather prophetic vision, and especially his belief in the resurrection of the dead, points inescapably to a period long after the Babylonian Exile.

Historical Argument

i. The historical perspective of the author is often hazy for events in the time of the Babylonian and Persian kings but much dearer for the events during the Seleucid dynasty. This could suggest that the author is more of the Hellenistic age. For example: Daniel thought that Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of Jehoiakim (605 BC), and that the first deportation took place then (Dan. 1:1-4). But in fact Jerusalem fell in 598 BC, after the death of Jehoiakim. He thought that Belshazzar

was the son of Nebuchadnezzar and that he became king of Babylon (Dan. 5:1-2, 13; 7.1). But in fact Belshazzar was son of Nabonidus, and the greatest authority he possessed was as his father's regent.

The author thought that Darius the Mede conquered Babylon, and became the first king of the new empire (Dan. 5.30; 6.28). But in fact the first king of the new empire was Cyrus. His son Cambyses was next, followed by Darius who was a Persian.

ii. The author gave a detailed description of the profanation of the Temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 and the following persecution (9:27; 11:30-35). But he made only a general reference to the evil end that would surely come to such a wicked man (11:45), who had championed the desecration of the holy place. Contrasting both accounts would suggest that the book was composed shortly before the death of this king in 164, and most probably could have been around 165 B.C.

iii. There is also doubt, taking into consideration the period in question, if a Hebrew like Daniel could have been admitted into the Babylonian priesthood, how much more making him the head.

iv. Scholars are still in search of any extra-biblical allusions to the account of Nebuchadnezzar's madness (cf. Dan. 4:28-33), and the possibility of finding one would seem remote.

v. There is also some discrepancy in the account of the prophecy concerning the coming of four Persian rulers (Dan. 11:2-3). In fact there were eleven Persian rulers before the Greek victories over Persia, led by Alexander the Great. It is, therefore, difficult to see how Daniel could have foreseen accurately the more distant events and yet make mistakes about things that were to happen nearer tohis own time. But this difficulty disappears if we accept that the writer of the book of Daniel was at work in the time of the Greek Empire. His purpose in describing the visions was to convey an important message to the people of his own time. Probably

he could only remember the four most famous of the Persian rulers, who were part of history by the time that he wrote.

Consequent upon the facts presented above, we may not hesitate to conclude that the visions of Daniel provide more accurate information about the Greek Empire, which might be the result of clear revelation. But when the visions refer to the time of the Persian Empire they are less accurate. That notwithstanding, we must equally admit that the few historical inconsistences, which we have pointed out, are of little importance. They could not have negatively affected the message the author of the book is presenting.

Unity of Authorship.

Until now we have spoken of the "author" of Daniel as if Daniel were entirely the work of one person.

i. It is possible that the work was written by a person, for there is surely a singleness of religious outlook, spirit, and purpose throughout.

ii. It is also possible that the work is a creation of several authors (a more probable view). If that is the case, we can equally say that those authors responsible for the work could have shared the same school of thought.

iii. Another side of the argument could be that the work could have been a product of one author but with the possibility of using different older sources both oral and written.

iv. Some exegetes consider the visions in chapters 7-12 to have been written by two, three, or even four different persons.

v. It would seem that the book, even as it is preserved in the MT, received certain secondary additions after its original composition; such a supposition helps to explain some apparent inconsistencies in the text. For example, the prayer in 9:4-20, which is not entirely appropriate for the context, is written in much better Hebrew than is found in the rest of the book. This may be an older composition that was later inserted into the original work.

The Structure and Language of the Book

The Book of Daniel as preserved in the MT, Dan lends itself to a natural division of two roughly equal parts. The first part (chaps. 1-6) contains six edifying stories about Daniel and his three companions at the royal court in Babylonia; the second part (chapters 7-12) is made up of four visions in which Daniel beholds, under symbolic images, the succession of the four "kingdoms" that God's people, the Jews, occupied from the time of the Babylonian conquest of Judea until God's establishment of his own kingdom for them.

As the book has come down to us in its Greek version, it also contains two extra materials found in chapter 3 and three stories of Daniel's exploits with Susanna, the priests of Bel, and the Dragon (chaps. 13-14), which seem to share a common purpose with chapters 1-6. In line with the reasoning of Hartman and Di Lelia, we may structure the book as follows:

I. Exploits of Daniel and His Companions at the Babylonian Court (1:1-6:29)

i. The Food Test (1:1-21)
i. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Composite Statue (2:1-49)
iii. Daniel's Companions in the Fiery Furnace (3:1-97)
iv. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Great Tree (3:98[31)-4:34)
v. The Writing on the Wall at Belshazzar's Feast (5:1-6:1)
vi. Daniel in the Lion's Den (6:2-29)

II. Daniel's Apocalyptic Visions (7:1-12: 13)

i. The Four Beasts (7:1-28)
ii. The Ram and the He-Goat (8:1-27)
ii. The Interpretation of the 70 Weeks (9:1-27)
iv. The Revelation of the Hellenistic Wars (10:1-12:13)

III. Other Exploits of Daniel (13:1-14:42)

i. Daniel's Rescue of the Chaste Susanna (13: 1-64)
ii. Daniel and the Priests of Bel (14: 1-22)

iii. Daniel's Destruction of the Dragon (14:23-42)

Outside the challenge posed by our making a decision between the two versions as we earlier presented, there is another one. It is the difficulty of the strange mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic within the book, which suggests that the author could have made use of the two different languages in the composition. The difference in the language use corresponds only partially to the division of the book into its haggadic and apocalyptic sections.

We describe the first and last sections of the book (Chapters 1-6 and 13-14) as haggadic, and the second section (Chapters 7-12) as apocalyptic. The haggadic section is in Aramaic, except 1:1-2:4a, which is in Hebrew. The apocalyptic section is written in Hebrew, except the first vision (chap. 7). The account of the find is a challenge to biblical scholarship.

However, two major explanations abound:

i. Probably the whole book, except the Hebrew prayer of 9:4-20, was originally composed in Aramaic, and later on its beginning and end were translated into Hebrew. Some would further explain that the project of the translation was done probably to ensure that the book has a place in the Jewish canon of Scripture, or for nationalistic reasons. The hypothesis explains certain difficult Hebrew passages as representing faulty translations.

ii. Another explanation is that the author of the Hebrew visions of chaps. 8-12 could have prefixed to his work an older Aramaic collection of four stories (chaps. 2-6) and one vision (chap. 7), then rounded out the whole by composing or translating in Hebrew the introductory story of chapter 1 and, for a smoother nexus, the opening verses of the second story (2:1-4a).

Whatever explanations offered, scholars are not yet unanimous on the matter. It is open for further inquiry.

Literary Genre.

You can still remember the discussion in 3.2, where we mentioned the different locations of the canonical Book of Daniel in the Masoretic text on the one hand, and the LXX and Vulgate on the other hand.

Our observation was that the MT placed Daniel in the Hagiograph (writings), the LXX

and Vulgate traditions made the book a part of the prophetic writing. We will be surprise to discover that the author could not have intended to present a work in the prophetic tradition. It rather appealed to different literary genre which may be strange and surprise to modern readers: the haggadic genre and the apocalyptic genre.

The Apocalyptic Genre

Daniel employed apocalyptic genre in chapters 7-12, which is quite distinct from from prophecy (cf. Module 1, Unit 4, 3.7). It consist in a certain mysterious "revelation," received in fantastic visions or transmitted by angels, both about past and present history and about the eschatological establishment of God's messianic kingdom. Inasmuch as this literary device makes use of some famous character of the distant past as the recipient of this revelation, events that are past history to the writer are presented as prophecies of future happenings. In a broad sense, however, this form of writing can rightly be regarded as a kind of prophecy, because it gives an interpretation of history in God's name, as seen by the author of the book.

The Haggadic Genre

The haggadic genre, used in chaps. 1-6 and 13-14, gets its name from the mishnaic Hebrew word haggida with the literal meaning: a "setting forth," a '"narrative."' The term is often used in the sense of a "story" having little or no basis in actual history, but told for the sake of inculcating a moral lesson.

i. If such a story is a free elaboration of some true event of actual history, it is more exactly called an "haggadic midrash."

ii. But the story may also be a pure "haggada," i.e., a free composition throughout with no historical basis at all.

Often it is impossible to say how far, if at all, a haggadic story is based on actual history.

Implication for the Haggadic Genre of Daniel

i. We observe here that the stories about Daniel are clearly haggadic. So, they cannot be taken as strict history. In other words, the author does not intend the stories as historical, and therefore, cannot be accused of error if he makes inaccurate statements about history.

ii. We have no way of knowing whether the Daniel of these stories was really a historical character, about whom popular legends gradually clustered, or whether he was simply a creation of Jewish folklore. We find a similar situation in Ahiqar of the Aramaic Ahiqar legend, who was a wise counsellor of the Assyrian kings (cf. ANET 427-30). In fact the story share some common characteristics with that of Daniel.

iii. For the inspired author of our book the historicity of the person of Daniel or the stories was out of question and unimportant. He stressed the spiritual message that he wished to convey by these haggadic stories.

The Purpose and Message of the Author.

i. The work was written primarily for the purpose of encouraging the Jews to remain faithful to their ancestral religion at a time when they not strongly felt the allurement of the higher worldly culture of Hellenism, which was intimately connected with Hellenistic paganism.

ii. The primary recipient of the message were the Jews, who were suffering a bloody persecution. It heartens them not to abandon the Law of Moses and accept the religion of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

iii. The author of Daniel, therefore, is particularly concerned with demonstrating the superiority of the wisdom of Israel's God over the merely human wisdom of the pagans, and with showing his immense power, which can and will rescue his faithful ones from their persecutors.

iv. The message is not only for believers of Daniel's own age and place, but for believers of all times. The book has a message of enduring worth: God is the master of history, who uses the rise and fall of nations as preparatory steps in the establishment of his universal reign over all people.

The Theological Significance.

a. The Sovereignty of God

The theme of the book is God's sovereignty, ¯The Most High God is sovereign over the Kingdoms of men (5:21). The book of Daniel set out to pursue this thesis. So, in the book we see the emergence of different world powers – Babylon and its fall and the emergence of the Persian Empire. The destiny of the subsequent world powers was also revealed. It was done through an apocalyptic vision. Apocalyptic characteristics such as dreams and visions, often centred on the heavenly throne-room, portraying a future salvation, which transcends ordinary experiences, are seen in the book.

The book sets all the events into the background of God's purposes for the world. God's rule is more certain and more significant than all the empires of men. These will come and go, but God's purposes go from strength to strength, and His rule will crown all things. The rule of the righteous will come, and 'one like a son of man' shall lead them (Dan. 7:l3-14, 27). In other words, the kingdom will be for those who lived a holy and righteous life (Dan. 12:2-3)

In several respects, the ideas expressed in Daniel are of prime importance in the history of religious thought. Even in its literary form, the work presents in chapters 7-12 the first clear example of canonical apocalyptic biblical tradition in the apocalyptic style of writing in its fullest development, a literary genre destined to have tremendous influence during the next few centuries.

b. Angelology

We also observe that Daniel gives to the angels a very significant role as the ministers of God, through whom God reveals his will to humans. So, the book goes considerably further than previous books and points the way to the highly developed angelology of the rabbinic and early Christian literature.

c. Resurrection

Likewise, a theological contribution of immense significance is the clear teaching on the resurrection of the dead (12:2), which is something unique in the Hebrew OT. Thus the concept of resurrection

is much more meaningful to the Semitic mentality than the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The story provides comfort concerning those who have died for their faith, for there will be a day of resurrection leading to eternal life. Some who have sinned greatly will rise to bepunished (Dan. 12:2-3). Thus we see that the writer of Daniel grasped the truth which escaped the writer of Ecclesiastes.

d. Messianism

Again, the messianism of Daniel brings Israel's hope of salvation to the final stage before its full realization in the New Testament. It is also important for us to understand that the concept of the "son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" (7:13) does not refer directly to an individual Messiah. The reference to individual Messiah is only of later development, which definitely becomes the favourite expression by which Jesus of Nazareth would refer to himself.

Conclusion

The exposé of the Book of Daniel shows clearly that those who go after the historicity of either the person of Daniel or the stories contained in the book are far from understanding the purpose of the writing. Daniel is both apocalyptic and haggadic, therefore should be weighed and judged on a different scale. Once we are convinced of that, we cannot then but appreciate the contributions of the author of Daniel to enriching the prophetic tradition in particular, and the canonical Judeo-Christian scripture in general. Daniel taught us to think apocalyptical and haggadical within the given world of the scripture.

Daniel confronts the challenging issue of inculturation, which has dominated the contemporary theological system. The author is positively bold enough to combine Hebrew and Aramaic for the sake of proclaiming the sovereignty of the ¯Most High God over the Kingdoms of men. For him, language is a means and not an end in itself. Hence the argument on language becomes secondary to the author's commitment. Theologically, Daniel has kept us wondering if he was not consciously anticipating Christian theology in his highly developed angelology, messianism, and the doctrine of resurrection.

Read Daniel once more with a Christian goggle then judge if he could not stand out as the first Christian theologian.

Summary

Our discussion regarding the Book of Daniel has been bordered with many historical and literary issues. But probing beyond history and literary brings us closer to the original intention of the author. However, some of the issues raised will be outlined below.

i. The title of the Book of Daniel may not necessary represent a historical person as such. That, however, does not diminishes the worth of the book.

ii. Daniel is one of the Old Testament books with complex textual history. There are two main versions of Daniel - Masoretic and Greek versions. The later is further composed of the popular Theodotion-Daniel as found in the Vulgate and the LXX forms. We also stressed the difference between the Masoretic and the Greek versions.

iii. Historically, we placed the book within the happens of the second century B.C.in the time of the Seleucids dynasty.

iv. We argued that there were more reasons to believe that Daniel of the 5th century B.C. could not have been the author of the Book. Our argument was built on linguistics, theology and history. We finally reflected different views regarding the single and multiple authorship of Daniel without making a conclusive statement on the issue because of its nature.

v. We equally observed that the book could conveniently be divided into three sections of haggadic-apocalyptic-haggadic. Some of the challenging issues surrounding the structure and language of Book were discussed. Our conclusion was that the issue would be subjected to further inquiry.

vi. We went further to evaluate the literary genre of the book and discover that our author unprecedentedly introduced the apocalyptic and haggadic style into the world of the canonicalscripture. We concluded that the understanding of

the apocalyptic and haggadic nature of the book answered most of the historical questions raised against the author.

vii. We also appreciate the purpose and message of the book, and discovered the book, though not primarily written for our age, would remain an indispensible treasure not only in the religious circle but also in the literary forum.

viii. Finally, we stumbled on the rich theology of Daniel. According to our observation, the theology of Daniel would ever remain relevant for the Christian theology.

09

The Twelve Minor Prophets
Prophet Amos

Introduction

In this chapter, we shall concentrate on the 12 Minor Prophets. Of the 12 prophets that will attract our attention, 10 will be associated with the Judah, while only two come from the Northern Kingdom. The two from the North are Amos and Hosea.

We shall divide the discussion into two sections covering the Book of Amos and the Book of Hosea respectively. The personal and social history of the prophets, the socio-political situation of the time and their respective messages to us will be among the issues that will occupy us in this unit.

The Uniqueness of the Book of Amos

The book of Amos has a unique significance in the Old Testament prophetic tradition, not only because it gives us an account of the oracles of one of the early classical prophets, who may be regarded as an inaugurator of a totally new prophetic tradition. It is also the first literary collection of prophetic oracles

preserved in Israel as a separate book. That is to say that there were many prophets in Israel for centuries before the time of Amos, but the record of their activity is embodied in oral traditions and in the general history of the nation. It was Amos and his disciples that taught the classical prophets the value of collection. The collection and preservation did not occur overnight. It took some long process as we earlier observed (cf. Module 1: Unit 5), which took the normal prophetic course. Thus, for Amos, his prophetic activity was considered normal, nothing novel; he was merely doing what God had always intended a faithful prophet to do (2:11; 3:8). But it was the simplicity and thoroughness with which Amos "discharged the office of prophet, combined with the swiftness with which his words were validated by disastrous historical events that induced men to preserve his oracles and some slight record of his activity. Then, as men discovered the power of the written word to perpetuate the spirit and mission of the prophet and to inspire and train others to take up a similar mission, it became the practice for those under the influence of a prophet to record his utterances.

The Prophet Himself

Amos was, until the sudden beginning of his prophetic ministry, a layman with no professional training for a religious office. He was a shepherd (Am. 1:1) and pincher of sycamore fruit (7:14) in the region of Tekoa, some five miles South of Bethlehem and ten miles South of Jerusalem. He could have come from the lower social classes of ancient Israel, for the sycamore fruit is associated with the poor. Nevertheless Amos had some edge that made him outstanding. He had had a deep appreciation of the religious heritage of his people and an ability to express his convictions in poetic language of the first order. Again, his prophetic call would take him to the markets in the larger centres, and might well have journeyed as far Northern as Damascus.

He lived in the first half of the eighth century during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C) in Israel and Uzziah (791-740) in Judah (Amos 1:1), a period in the history of Israel and Judah marked with unprecedented prosperity. Through from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos was called to prophesy in the northern kingdom. His

prophetic task of moving from South to North, passing from the Judean city of Jerusalem to deliver his oracles at Bethel and Samaria in the Northern kingdom, has led to attempts to make him a northerner by origin by some biblical scholars. Some theories have equally been projected to support the idea:

i. One theory is that Amos began as a shepherd and pincher of sycamore fruit in the North, took up his mission there, and removed to Tekoa only when the authorities expelled him from the Northern kingdom because of his harsh pronouncements of doom.

ii. Another is that there was a second Tekoa in the Northern kingdom where Amos lived, though no historic reference to such a place has been found.

The absence of sycamores in the region of Tekoa, since they grow only at lower altitudes, and their presence at some points in the North, has reinforced these attempts. The sycamore may also have grown, however, in lower parts of Judea not too far from Tekoa, so that Amos could have discharged both occupations in that region. It must also be recognized that, for Amos, Israel and Judah were one people of God, and his concern as a prophet was for the whole nation. The most forceful leadership of the nation in his time was in Samaria rather than in Jerusalem, and it was urgent that he reach with his message those who would be most able to influence national policy.

The Period of Amos

The first half of the eighth century B.C. was singularly promising for both Israel and Judah. This is partly due to the military exploits of the Assyrian Adadnirari III, who in 805 B.C. crushed Damascus, Israel's northern neighbour, thus to the advantage of the Palestinian states, who had then little to fear from the Syrian for many years to come. King Jehoash of Israel was clever to seize the opportunity to quickly reclaim the border cities of Israel under the Syrian control in its days of power (II Kings 13:25). But the death of Adadnirari III in 782 B.C. weakened the Assyrian empire. It was not until the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C. that the West was once more troubled by the Assyrian.

In this period of temporary peace Israel was free not only to extend her borders but also to control the trade routes of the ancient world that now passed through her territory. As a consequence of the military successes and territorial expansion (2 King 14:25, 15:2; Chronicles 26:6-8), great wealth accrued to the two kingdoms. A rich merchant class developed, sharing the nation's prosperity with the nobility and building for themselves elaborate homes. But the common people had no share in this new wealth. Earlier wars had weighed heavily on them, and now they found themselves helpless before the rapacity of power and land-greedy upper classes. Small farmers were dispossessed to make possible the development of large estates. Israel, whose strength had been in the mass of its solid, independent citizens, was quickly becoming divided into two classes -the dissolute rich and the embittered poor.

The shrines at Bethel and Gilgal were crowded continually by the prosperous citizens who interpreted the nation's prosperity as a certain sign of God's favour and who looked for yet greater days to come. Priests and prophets at the sanctuaries benefited sufficiently from the lavish offerings that they were not inclined to do or to say anything that might dampen the mood of confidence and exultation.

Amos, eyes sharpened by the frugal, austere life of his desert regions, by the insights of faith that came to him from earlier prophets, and by his own intense consciousness of God's justice, wouldsense the peril in which Israel was placed by the dishonesty of its courts, the maltreatment of its poor, and the profligacy of its upper classes and concluded that it is ripe for judgment (8:2), thus the doom that awaits Israel.

The Beginning and End of the Ministry

An agreement on the date that Amos began his prophetic ministry is one of the unsettled issues among biblical scholars. For some scholars, the popular mood of confidence in the nation and the freedom from any fear of invasion points to the period ca. 760 B.C. or shortly afterward. For others, that Israel is soon to be invaded indicates that he had knowledge of Tiglathpileser Ill's westward movement, which began in 745 B.C.

However, Amos pronouncement of doom is based upon his conviction that such corruption and unfaithfulness as he saw in Israel could not long remain unpunished by Israel's God. The duration of his ministry and its geographical expansion also suffer the same uncertainty among scholars. He must have gone beyond Bethel (2:9; 4:1; 6:1), although the termination of his ministry took place in Bethel (7:10-17).

Amos' sharp critique of the existing order in Israel and his announcement of an invader who would overrun the country and carry the populace into captivity had included a specific prophecy of the fall of the house of Jeroboam (7:9). This was interpreted as treason. Amos was accused to the king of conspiring against him and was ordered to return at once to Judah. The spokesman for the king was the priest of the royal sanctuary, Amaziah. His words to Amos were sharp with scorn. He assumed that all the prophet wanted to achieve was that people would be sufficiently disturbed to pay him well for a more cheerful oracle - a form of religious blackmail which apparently was not uncommon.

Literary Style and Genre

1. Poetic Form

The oracles of Amos are cast in a poetic form, which is eminently suited to their content. He shows himself skilled in the use of a variety of meters. Perhaps most effective of all is his employment of the dirge-like Kinah meter, which builds up the feeling of ominous expectation, the very music of the poetry that proclaims the message of relentless doom. The poetry itself is powerful in its simplicity and rarely surpassed by any other prophet in the beauty of its form or the vividness of its images.

2. Repetition and Refrain

Amos shows genius in the organization of his oracles, thus making effective use of the repetition of certain words as a refrain. In his opening sermon (chs. 1-2) each division begins: "For three transgressions ... , and for four," and within this framework, which remains the same while the content changes, the audience sees

episodes of judgment upon neighbouring nations, each one coming closer to Israel than the last. So also the fivefold repetition of the phrase " 'Yet you did not return to me,' says the LORD," in 4:6,8-11, and the beginning of successive oracles with "woe" in chs. 5-6, have this same cumulative effect. We meet the same device again in the three visions of 7: 1-9, where twice the prophet prevails upon God to withhold judgment, and then, the third and last time, is able to restrain the judgment no longer.

Amos can simply be described as a finished craftsman. He is no novice in his employment of poetic forms.

The Theology of Amos

1. Judgment

Obviously in Amos, the announcement of impending judgment is very consistent. We equally discover his insistent that the unrepented sin of the nation is certainly to bring doom. He is so absorbed in his message of doom that he has no word like Hosea's concerning the future beyond. It would appear that it was the covenant of love between God and Israel that made God more severe in his dealings with Israel than with any other nation (3:2).

2. Repentance and Restoration

Unlike Isaiah, the doctrine of the remnant in Amos is only in its nascent stage (5:4, 15). But more important for us is that Amos never closed the door for repentance and restoration. He had no hope for the nation as a whole, but surely that which sent him North to brave the insults of priests and people was the hope that some might hear and live. He expected the nation to be decimated (5:3) but not to be totally destroyed (9:8ff).

3. Reinterpretation of the Covenant

Nowhere does Amos make mention of the covenant, but it is implicit in his conception of the relation between God and Israel. Amos rejected the popular conception that presents the covenant as a legal agreement. For Amos, the covenant is more than an agreement. There is nothing so special about Israel that should attract God to choose Israel. It is not Israel's righteousness or might. But

God simply choose them without Israel graciously. So, Israel should not glory on its privileged position among the nations, but rather should see it more as responsibility. It is within this context that we can appreciate Amos' sharp critique of Israel in 9:7, which, of course, could have embarrassed his Jewish contemporaries.

4. YHWH as God of all the Nations

It is significant that Amos never speaks of God as "the God of Israel." This title implied too often a narrow nationalism which Amos is out to defeat to defeat. Yahweh is the God of all nations; the "Lord of hosts." Amos' God is the creator God of the J document, from whom all nations have their life. It is the Lord of history by whose hand the destinies of all peoples are determined. Before his dread power none can stand. He is a God who creates, destroys and recreates. Let Israel persist in sin, and God will use such nations as Egypt or Assyria to punish the sinful nation. And because he is the God of the whole earth and of heaven and Sheol, there can be no place of escape from his wrath (9:2-6)

YHWH has a hand in all their histories, and he holds all equally responsible for their sins against their fellow men (chs. 1-2). In Israel he has made himself known in a special way, and this knowledge is the secret of Israel's unique destiny, but far from conferring special privileges, it creates rather special responsibility (3: 1-2).

5. Justice and Righteousness as Moral Demands from YHWH

The covenant relation of Israel with YHWH places huge responsibility on Israel to reflect in her life the justice and truth and mercy of God. The absence of these in the common life of the nation is evidence that the bond with God has been broken. Amos' primary call to Israel is: "Repent and return to God." Sometimes his emphasis upon concrete changes in conduct: Seek good, and not evil, and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, has seemed open to the interpretation that he was offering a way of salvation by moral reformation. But for Amos all reformation of conduct was dependent upon a radical repentance.

The heart of Amos' faith is the conviction that only a nation in which the dealings of humans with one another are just can be in any true sense a people in covenant with God. For him, it is axiomatic that the whole future for Israel depends upon its relationship with God. Divorced from God, the nation must quickly perish. Therefore, the dishonesty of judges, the cruelty of rapacious businessmen and landowners, and the irresponsibility of prophets were not merely blemishes upon the national life, to be exposed and reformed; they were evidences of a deeper and more serious sickness, the repudiation of its God by the nation, and thus a betrayal of the nation that must bringits ruin. It is the justice, holiness, and purity of God that calls for justice, holiness, and purity in the common life of Israel.

vi. A New Understanding of "Day of YHWH"

Popular expectation in Amos' time was fixed on a glorious "day of Yahweh" when Israel would triumph over all her foes. The promises of God to Israel that are recorded in the traditions of the past are expected soon to be fulfilled. The existing prosperity is interpreted as a sign of God's favour. But, where king, priests, prophets, and people see only a culmination of national success in the near future, Amos would see only darkness and disaster. He proclaims a day of Yahweh, but it is to be darkness and not light, fiery judgment and not deliverance (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2; 5:6, 18-20). Fire is to consume the filth of men not only in Israel but also among the nations.

vii. Worship and Cultic Exercises

Amos condemned in strong terms the abuses around the altars and other places of worship (cf. 2:7-8, 12; 3:14; 4:4-5; 5:21-27; 7:9; 8:3; 9:1). The evil lay, not in the idols alone, but also in the delusion that God could be kept favourable toward the nation by the offering of sacrifices and by the ritual of the cult. He called for the cessation of such sacrifices, songs, and ritual (5:21-23) because they are direct insult on God, hence God's disapproval of the perversions. That notwithstanding, Amos still have some sympathetic interest in religious worship and festivals (cf. 8:5)

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The Book of Hosea

The prophet Hosea, whose name comes from the same root as names like, Joshua and Jesus, is said to come from the northern kingdom of Israel. The main evidence cited to support the fact that he is from the northern Israel, is that references are made to places and sites in the northern kingdom. Tabor, Samaria, Bethel, Jezreel, Ramah are some prominent northern towns mentioned in the book. Also, he demonstrated an unequalled love for his native country (northern) Israel in his writings.

The prophetic ministry of Hosea covers the last thirty years of the northern kingdom. His oracles reflect the political uncertainty that the northern kingdom was experiencing at that time. It was a tragic period in which six kings (following Jeroboam II) reigned within twenty-five years (2 Kings 15:8-17:41), four (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahia and Pekah) were murdered by their successors while in office, and one (Hosea) was captured in battle; only one (Menehem) was succeeded on the throne by his son. For years, during the reign of Jeroboam II the nation of Israel prospered (Hosea 4-

5). After the death of Jeroboam II, decline set in and the judgment of God, represented by the Assyrian destruction was approaching. For prophet Hosea, the collapse of Israel in 722 BC, was largely due to its adoption of an alien lifestyle borrowed from Canaanite neighbours. Every part of their life was bound up with Baal-worship, and the nation leaders had promoted it (Hos. 5:1ff). Lawlessness and injustices reigned as a result of burglary, robbery, murder, drunkenness and political intrigues were common (6, 7-7:7). This caused this Lord much grief.

Hosea's Family

Hosea 1-3 seems to contain details of Hosea's personal life and of his relationship with the woman Gomer. But scholars interpret these chapters in widely different ways.

Hosea 2 is a parable in which God speaks as the husband (Hos. 2.16) and Israel is the unfaithful wife (Hos. 2.11, 15, 16). Some scholars regard Hosea 1 and 3 in the same way, and say that these chapters have nothing to do with the life of Hosea. But this interpretation is unconvincing, because in these chapters we read of Hosea's own experiences, and of what he did at God's command (Hos. 1.2; 3.1).

Some scholars regard Hosea 1 and 3 as two different accounts of the same events. It is clear that these chapters do come from different sources, because Hosea 1 is a piece of biography, while Hosea 3 is a piece of autobiography, i.e. in the first chapter somebody else tells Hosea's story, and in the third chapter Hosea tells his own story. But the two chapters give different accounts of Hosea's relations with his wife. According to Hosea 1.3, Gomer bore the prophet a son in due time after their marriage, but Hosea 3 makes no mention of children, and mentions a time of stern discipline, which may have included sexual abstinence. Even stronger evidence is the fact that Hosea 3.1 refers to Hosea's wife as an 'adulteress'. This word can only be used of a woman who is already married, so Gomer must already have been Hosea's wife at the beginning of the events described in this chapter. Even though she had been unfaithful, Hosea was to love her again (Hos. 3.1).

So we see that the most convincing explanation is that Hosea 1 and 3 give details of two different events in the relationship between Hosea and Gomer. Hose 1 tells how the prophet took her as his wife; Hosea 3 tells how he reclaimed her after she had deserted him for a lover and then been taken into slavery to pay off a debt.

Gomer's Unfaithfulness

It is not clear whether Gomer was a prostitute before she married Hosea or whether she fell into sin afterwards. According to Hosea 1.2, God told Hosea to marry a prostitute.

i. Some scholars accept this as accurate; they explain that Gomer was a cult prostitute involved in sexual relationships as part of pagan worship and honoured by those in Israel who worshipped the Baalim.

ii. Other scholars, however, point out that though the verse describes God's first call to Hosea, it must have been written at a later time in his life. They suggest that in fact Hosea married a woman who only turned to sin after their marriage, and that later Hosea reinterpreted God's call in the light of what had happened, saying God gave him Gomer as a wife. She has become a prostitute.

There is also doubt whether the children of Gomer belonged to Hosea, or were born as a result of her adultery. The first child was clearly Hosea's own child (Hos. 1.3). Nothing is said about the father or fathers of the second and third child, but their names suggest that Hosea disowned them: Not-pitied and Not-my-people (Hos. 1:6, 9). Another interpretation of these verses is that Hosea gave these names to his own children simply as a sign to the Israelites of God's attitude towards them, in much the same was as Isaiah named his children in a way that would be a sign to Judah (see Isa. 7.3; 8.3).

Hosea's Understanding of the Covenant

The noun "covenant" appears only three times in the Book of Hosea (2:18; 6:7; 8:1). Nevertheless, the prophet was most absorbed clarifying the meaning and quality of the covenant relationship between God and people of Israel. The prophet was conscious that Yahweh had formally initiated the covenant at Sinai

and that he had issued directives on Israelite existence. Hosea also claimed that the relationship between Yahweh and his people had its informal beginnings in the era of the Exodus (9:10; 11:1; 13:4). In the covenant offered at Sinai (Exod. 19-24) and renewed at Shechem (Josh. 24), the crucial element was the relationship between Israel and her God.

In Hos. 9:10-13:16 and elsewhere the prophet demonstrates his profound knowledge of Israel's history, which reflects continual violations of the covenant. The cherished association between the transcendent deity and his people had been repeatedly defiled.

Hosea never conceived the Yahwistic covenant as a bargain between equals. But unfortunately the cultic exercises at Bethel, Gilgal, and Samaria have turned the covenant into affairs of equal partners. Hosea knew as fully as Amos had that the callous people were inclined to consider Yahweh a subservient partner who might readily be pressed into supporting their thoughtless aspirations.

In an effort to counter the prevailing religious trends, Hosea called on his people to see the covenant for what it truly was. In his proclamations, he emphasized the word hesed, "covenant love," and imputed to that Hebrew noun a new and vital significance (2:19; 4:1; 6:4, 6; 10:12; 12:6). It assumes a profound meaning of "steadfast love" (2:19; 6:6; 10:12), "love" (6:4; 12:6), and "kindness" (4:1). This understanding is important for Israel's appreciation of her covenant relationship with deity. It represents among other realities confidence in the covenant partner as well as devotion to him. It denotes responsibility and loyalty to each other.

In Hos. 4:1 and 6:6, hesed has to do with good behaviour in the light of what Yahweh expects of Israel. In both passages, the noun "knowledge" also appears. Together these verses affirm that although Yahweh desires "covenant love" and "knowledge" on Israel's part, these two cardinal virtues are sorely lacking. "Knowledge" relates directly to the confession that Israel was expected to give to the God of Sinai, who had already revealed to her his name, nature, and will. Presently the people, who had perverted their dealings with one another and defiled their relationship with deity, were

betrayed by an ignorance that was everywhere apparent. Hebrew man's relationship with God and neighbour had been severely ruptured. And with her breach of faith, Israel had offended the deity. Israel's talent for corrupting the covenant relationship is summed up in Hosea's disclosure (cf. Hos. 4:1-2).

Hosea 4:1-3 reveals that "what Yahweh required was not the mindless practice of ceremonial religion, but a genuine understanding of who, and what kind of God, Yahweh was, and an intelligent grasp of the ethical implications of worshiping him." Israel's bankruptcy thus occasioned Yahweh's negative assessment of his people: "Your love [hesed] is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away" (6:4). Israel's hesed was remarkably undependable.

Hosea was convinced that the northern kingdom had been woefully delinquent in fulfilling the terms of the previously established covenant between God and people. Accordingly, Hosea let loose harsh threats and judgments that were on a par with those of Amos. Nevertheless, Hosea also spoke of Yahweh's pathos in having to bring a historical catastrophe on Israel and his determination to maintain a highly personal relationship with the people of his choice. Though Hosea was noexponent of easy salvation, the reality of Israel's heedlessness to divine expectation was set against the reality of Yahweh's extraordinary faithfulness.

Here the prophet made use of a uniquely human experience. He spoke of the covenant as a marriage bond. He symbolized Israel's period in the wilderness as an entirely harmonious matrimony involving Yahweh, the husband, and Israel, the bride. During the period of settlement that followed, however, wife Israel had become enticed by Canaanite Baalism. Nevertheless, her conduct did not result in automatic extinction. Hosea portrays the deity as the compassionate husband who takes back his wayward wife (especially in 2:16-23). In such a manner, the original relationship between God and people was thought to be restored.

Hosea also held that Yahweh had guided Israel as a concerned father guides his young son. Yahweh had instructed Israel in how to walk (11:3). It was he who had brought his son out of Egypt and

into the land of Canaan with "cords of compassion" and "bands of love" (11:4). In the intervening years, however, defection had been gross. Here the deity speaks in a highly personal manner, "My people are bent on turning away from me; so they are appointed to the yoke" (11:7). However, Yahweh cannot dispense with this nation, which he still loves. The covenant relationship between God and people has been broken by only one side. Yahweh has yet to say no on the matter. He is thus understood to be the tortured father and husband (11:8) who still grasps Israel with his hesed.

The Message of Hosea

1. YWHW as the Lord, Provider and Master of Israel

First of all, when Hosea reflected on Yahweh's way with history, he achieved more depth than breadth. Hosea did not entertain thoughts about Yahweh's providential care of the nations at large. The universalism of Amos 9:7 has no parallel in Hosea's disclosures. The God of Hosea is essentially Lord of Israel and the land that Israel momentarily occupies. As her Lord, Yahweh first knew Israel in the desert, but the subsequent farming population had too often followed the gods of Canaan. Hosea stoutly maintained that Yahweh was Israel's Lord and that the nation's pastoral, agricultural, and commercial pursuits were under his sway. Because Yahweh was provider and master, Hosea denied the validity of the prevailing nature-oriented Canaanite syncretism.

2. The Exodus as the Foundation of Israel's Faith

For Hosea, it was history that gave meaning and direction to human existence. No preexilic Old Testament prophet was more concerned with the historical traditions of Exodus, wilderness wandering, and settlement than Hosea was. History, more than nature, was in Hosea's view the crucial arena of Yahweh's activity. Hosea also referred to the patriarchal traditions of Genesis (Hos. 12 :2-6, 12), but there he suggested that Iacob's religion was not in harmony with the chief interests of Mosaic Yahwism. Thus, the former had no right to compete with the latter in its quest for the people's fidelity."

3. Election and Covenant Relationship

On the issue of Israel's election and covenant relationship with the deity, Hosea claimed· that Israel's election was actualized as she was called forth from enslavement to the Egyptian pharaoh. In his pronouncements, Hosea reviewed Israel's wilderness experience. Speaking for the deity in the first person he declared, "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel" (9:10). Yet as the prophet surveyed Israel's past, he saw that chosen Israel, who was once Yahweh's bride, had become amiserable harlot (Hos. 2). Moreover, he portrayed elect Israel as Yahweh's problem child who remains the object of his loving concern. Nowhere is the prophet's expression of election and covenant more tender than in the masterful poetry of Hos. 11 :1-9.

4. Knowledge and True Worship of YHWH

The present sickness of the nation also concerned Hosea. Essentially that sickness related to a lack of knowledge. The land did not know Yahweh (4:1). The people had rejected knowledge and the law that was an integral part of that knowledge (4 :6). Instead, Israel persisted in a smug course that was especially reflected in a rigorous fertility cult and an over-confident monarchy. Hosea criticized both the cult and the state. He insisted that Israel's participation in Canaanite fertility religion was counter to the interests of a fundamentally austere Mosaic Yahwism, The cult also erred in offering sacrifices to gain opportunities and material goods (4:13; 5:6). Genuine expressions of thanksgiving had all but vanished.

5. YWHW as the True King of Israel

Hosea linked part of the nation's sin directly with the monarchy. Having turned their backs on Yahweh, Israel's kings trusted only in themselves, and the people were too quick to rely on the judgments of these consistently weak monarchs. Hosea even asserted that Israel became a monarchy without Yahweh's consent. Through its ineffective alliances, the monarchy had become a wedge between Yahweh and his people. The evidence is not clear-cut (contrast 8:4 with 3:5), but the prophet may have hoped for the permanent overthrow of this questionable institution, which had no place in the

internal structure and life style of Yahweh's covenant people. In any case, Hosea believed that Yahweh was Israel's true king.

6. Judgment and Justice

Although he claimed that Yahweh would punish Israel in the days ahead, Hosea was not specific about what political form the punishment would take or when it would occur. Such passages as 8:3 and 10 :10 affirm that judgment would be carried out through the invasion of an enemy nation. Yet he sometimes contended that Israel was already ensnared by her own deplorable activity. "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God" (5 :4). The wrathful judgment was really selfinflicted; it was Yahweh's response to Israel's misbehavior. Nevertheless, Hosea did not regard Israel's chastisement as absolutely final. The purifying discomforts would continue until Israel was acutely aware of her guilt and once more responded positively to the deity. This prophet heard Yahweh saying: "0 Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit" (14:8).

7. The Mercy and Love of God

Paradoxically, the God who is consumed by wrath remains the God who is propelled by love for his people. As the concerned husband and father, Yahweh must somehow resolve the dual realities of wrath and love. As for Hebrew man, Hosea hoped that his affections would finally turn toward Yahweh, his Lord.

11

Habakkuk

Introduction

We discuss in the last unit the prophets Amos and Hosea. Their personal and social history, the socio-political realities that occasioned their respective oracles are among the issues raise. We also examine their individual prophetic messages and their theological significance.

We shall follow the same approach in this unit, making Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah the centre of our attention. In doing this, we shall point out the uniqueness of each of the prophetic books and their respective teachings. You are equally encouraged to apply the lessons to the present situation in the Nigeria in order to appreciate the value of the study.

Name and Person of the Prophet

The book which bears the name Habakkuk is one of the prophetic books among the Minor Prophets in the OT canon. It tells us only the prophet's name and fact that he was a "prophet". So, little is known about the prophet himself. Some scholars would identify the prophet as one of those from the southern kingdom of Judah, closely associated with the cult. The idea of associating the author with the cultic prophets is founded on the liturgical character of the woes in 2:6-20 and the canticle in chapter 3.

The prophet lived during the last days of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and under the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), and could therefore have worked in the period between 625 BC when the Babylonians gained independence, and 612 BC when they helped to destroy Nineveh. Perhaps his ministry was at the beginning of that period, as he refers to the Assyrians as still oppressing Judah.

The origin of the name Habakkuk is uncertain. His name occurs only at the beginning of the book. Some scholars associate the name with Arabic or Akkadian origin, and others from the rom a Hebrew language meaning ¯embrace . This is perhaps because he was acquainted with the local and political situation in Judah (Hab. 1:3,4).

Attention has also been called to the legend in the LXX of Bel and the Dragon, in the title of which the prophet is called "Habakkuk, son of Jesus of the tribe of Levi" (vs. 1). If that tradition is correct, Habakkuk was linked definitely to the priesthood. Some scholars also believed that Habakkuk was probably one of the disciples of Isaiah. He was in all probability a priest (cf. Hab. 3).

Date of Composition of the Book

The book of Habakkuk was probably written at the time the Babylonians emerged on the scene (Hab. 1:6); that is around the seventh or early in the sixth century BC, that is, between 625 and 504 BC. The observation is supported by the mention of the rise of the Chaldeans (1:6). The Chaldeans were the people from South Mesopotamia who, with their centre at Babylon, replaced the Assyrians as the masters of the ancient Near East in the late 7th-early 6th cent. BC. However, because of themention of the numerous conquests of the Babylonian armies, some scholars believe that the book was written long after the Babylonian exile of 586 BC.

The question of more precise dates within this time period for the individual prophecies as well as their specific targets is a more contentious one and is linked to the question of the book's form. Whichever be the case, the prophet Habakkuk was probably a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum.

Some of the Worries of Habakkuk

The abusive might of the Chaldeans, plus the obvious turmoil both on the national and international scene are the major concerns

of the book. On the national front, the prophet questions the seemingly prosperity of the ungodly, which humanity is yet to unravel over the years, was also a major concern for the prophet. In his days, corruption and injustice were the order in Judah, especially Jerusalem. The rich were prospering at the expense of the poor. Evil was perpetrated in the name of God. The prophet appealed to God in form of complaints (1:2-4). However, the response of God to Habakkuk was shocking. God promised to use the Babylonians as an instrument of judgment against his people. For the prophet, it is like God is using evil to punish evil. How can a holy God use an unholy nation to punish his people?

In other words, the 'oppressor' described in Habakkuk 2.6-20 was probably Assyria (also vv. 5 and 8 where 'many nations' are troubled by 'him'). Habakkuk believed that the Assyrians themselves would be punished in their turn by the coming of the Babylonians (Hab. 1:6).

Nature and Literary Setting of the Book

Majority of scholars observe the literary unity of the book and argue that the author has purposely ignored the specific historical setting of the materials and has arranged them in such a way as to give priority to the theological message, i.e., the power of God over human history and the consequent call to trust and faithfulness (cf. 2:4). The liturgical character is sometimes associated with a liturgy for a day of penitence. This is clearer with the first two chapters of the book, which are in the form of a lamentation and prayer liturgy composed for and used in the Temple worship.

However, the absence of chapter 3, that is, the theophanic hymn, in the Dead Sea Scroll of Habakkuk armed to doubt the authenticity of the chapter. Nevertheless, a direct divine utterance, spoken through the mouth of an official and authorized mediator or cultic prophet, had its place within the liturgy of any particular day in the cultus of ancient Israel. Many psalms show that such a liturgy had poetic and musical form. The same must have been the case as regards the words of revelation in the liturgy of the temple. Therefore, it fell to the temple prophets in the cultus of Judah to attend to the position of the temple singers. Songs were sung in the name of the congregation

by such singers. If the prophet Habakkuk was such a prophet, he was very familiar with cultic compositions coloured with Israel's wisdom tradition.

Thus the formal affinities to Israel's liturgical and/or wisdom traditions come from the fact that the author has appropriated and shaped them to express a specifically prophetic message.

The Dead Sea Scroll commentary

Scholars have discovered in the Dead Sea Scroll on Hab. 1-2 about fifty readings which vary from the received MT of the OT, a few of which seem reasonably conclusive. The oft-debated reading "Chaldeans" in 1:6 is confirmed. For Hab. 1:11 the scroll reads "And he makes his might his God." The Habakkuk Commentary on 1:17 omits the interrogative particle so as to read: "Therefore he bares his sword continually slaying nations and has no pity," thus suggesting merciless slaughter.

Religious Teachings

Habakkuk makes an important and original contribution to the sum of Israel's reflection on the nature of its God and of God's ways with Israel. The book is filled with truths which stand at the core of Hebrew religion:

i. Apparent Doubt about the Divine Justice as a Process of Religious Experience

i. The book begins with a question which the prophet dares to direct to God, raising doubts about divine justice and God's treatment of the wicked. The question represents a first step in an attempt to deal with a breakdown of order and justice, a situation to which God seems implicitly to assent by silence and apparent inaction.

ii. Faith and Trust a Fundamental to Religion

But despite the doubts the prophet expresses, there is an underlying attitude of faith and trust. This is especially due to the canticle in chap. 3, which, with its ringing affirmation of God's absolute power over creation and history, places the disturbing events recounted in chaps. 1-2 in the wider context of God's saving design.

This could have equally influenced Paul in his teaching on faith in in Rom 1: 17 and Gal 3:11, also the writer of Hebrews 10:38.

iii. Condemnation of Oppression, Exploitation, Pride and Arrogance

The key sentence in 2:4 counsel, confidence and trust in God's faithfulness, and the book repeatedly condemns all forms of oppression and exploitation as well as the pride and arrogance that stand opposed to the humble faith demanded by God.

Generally, we can summarise the teaching under the following key points:

i. History has meaning if one takes the long view and judges events from the perspective of faith.

ii. Uprightness in the soul is necessary for individuals and nations alike. The righteous shall live by his faith.

iii. Wealth is treacherous as a basis of human dependence for security

iv. Ruthless dealings rebound upon the doer.

v. God can overrule an evil nation for his righteous purpose. Evil is bound to fail in the end, even though it may seem victorious.

vi. There is no might but right.

vii. Trust in God is the only sure basis of strength, regardless of external situations. The ultimate of faith is joy in communion with God.

So, when Habakkuk complained against God about his apparent inactivity and lack of interest in the business of humans, he is only expressing the humanness of our humanity. But he also teaches us in a clear term that no matter how difficult conditions might be, we must continue to trust the promises of God and have confidence that the Lord of the earth would do right (3:16-19). To do this, we have to live by faith (Hab. 2:4).

12

The Book of Nahum

The Prophet Nahum

Nahum is also one of the books of the collection of the Twelve Minor Prophets. Only very little is known from the book about the life of the prophet Nahum himself. The name could mean "comfort," "compassion" (cf. Isa. 57: 18). He is generally identified as a cultic prophet from Elkosh, a town in south-western Judah, in the region where the tribe of Simeon had settled, close to the Philistine and Egyptian borders, between Beit Jibrin and Gaza. There is equally no consensus that the sphere of his activity is limited to Jerusalem.

Date of the Prophecy

The date of the prophecy is vague. The fall of Thebes (3:8) to Ashurbanipal in 663 provides some hint on the date of composition of the book. Some scholars place the date closer to the fall of Thebes or around the time of the death of Ashurbanipal (626), because Assyria was still then at the height of its power. Others consider the time between Cyaxares' first attack on Nineveh in 614 and the city's fall to the combined armies of Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians to be a more likely date.

There is also a proposal that Nahum, while in exile in Nineveh, wrote the prophecy as a letter (1:1) to sympathizers in Judah around 660-630. The claim is based on Assyrian loan words in the book, the absence of interest in Jerusalem, and a vivid description of Nineveh. But it is likely that Nahum wrote in Judah close to 612 B.C. during the reform of Josiah before the death of Josiah (609) and before the evidence of Babylonian imperial might quenched the spirit of optimism surrounding the fall of Assyria. This could be supported by the absence of castigation for Judah's sins.

The Political Situation at the Time of Nahum

Before Nahum began his prophetic ministry the Assyrian empire was the world power. And the latter half of the eighth and into the seventh centuries was a period of Assyrian power and expansion. Under such able leaders as Tiglath-Piler III (745-727) Shalmaneser V (726-722), Sargon II (721-705), Sennacheis (704-681), and Esarhaddon (680-669) the Assyrian empire reached unprecedented heights of imperial control. In their effort to extend the frontiers of their empire, the Assyrians destroyed many nations and kingdoms. Moreover, their imperial policy of scattering inhabitants of conquered territory into different lands caused a serious commotion in the ancient Near East. The Northern kingdom was also a victim of such imperial might and policy. Thus, the land of Israel was destroyed in 722 B.C. and the inhabitants were taken to different lands; and strange people were then brought in to replace them.

Then, in 625 the Chaldean Nabopolassar founded the Neo-Babylonian state, which was destined to be the leading power in the Middle East for nearly three quarters of a century. He soon brought all Babylonia solidly under his control, then mobilized his forces against Assyria. Marching up the Euphrates to Qablinu, he inflicted on the Assyrian army a decisive defeat. Meanwhile the Medes began attacking from the east. In 614 they took and sacked the major Assyrian city of Asshur, and Nabopolassar made an alliance with their king. Together the Medes and Chaldeans continued their attacks, until at length mighty Nineveh itself fell. The collapse of this imperial capital marked the end of an epoch, and its reverberations were felt throughout the then-known world.

Nature of the Book and its Uniqueness

It is most likely that Nahum was himself a temple or cult prophet. According to some scholars" he "historified" elements from the myth of Creation. He identified a historical enemy with the cosmic adversaries who had been conquered at the beginning of the world and whose fight was re-enacted in the New Year Festival.

The primary focus of the book, however, is the prophetic pronouncement of judgement and curse on Assyria, the arch enemy of Israel. Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, will face judgment for oppression, cruelty, idolatry and wickedness. So, the book will go a long way to demonstrate that God is not only ¯slow to anger (Nah. 1:3) and ¯a refuge, for those who trust in him (1:7) but also one who ¯will not leave the guilty unpunished (1:3).

The book also expresses gratitude for the anticipated freedom from tyranny. God's righteous and just kingdom will ultimately triumph, for kingdoms built on wickedness and tyranny must eventually fall, as Assyria did. To curse such an enemy, the very incarnation of evil, is a way of professing loyalty to God.

If you read through the book, you will also observe that Nahum is different from the other literary prophets of the OT particular in one area. It is about his unmitigated excitement over the fall of the enemy at the expense of any criticism of his own people (contrast his contemporary, Jeremiah). Unfortunately Nahum was so obsessed with the defeat of a hated oppressor that he forgot the national corruption, the individual and structural social injustice of his days.

Again, Nahum's poetic genius ranks with the highest in the Old Testament tradition. He sketches scenes of warfare with a vivid sense of the picturesque or horrible detail, thus the cavalry and chariotry charge (2:3-5), the panic of the queen's servants (2:7)

Literary Techniques in the Book

The prophecy of Nahum comes from a poet of great skill. The work is a combination of many forms. The whole prophecy is similar to other oracles against foreign nations. It contains a partial acrostic poem (1:2-8), a funeral lament ("woe," 3:1-7), and a taunt-song (3:8-19). Several images are drawn of Nineveh: pool (2:9), den of

lions (2:12-14), prostitute (3:4-6), yielding fig trees (3:12), swarm of locusts (3:15-17).

Most striking are the wordplay and use of sound. In 2:11, the final devastation of the city tolls like a bell. The moaning and breast-beating of the servants is heard in the sounds of 2:8.

The ironic question in 3:7 portrays some play with words, and sound is echoed in 3:10 and 1:10. Several other verses are alliterative, e.g., 1:2; 2:3; 2:6; 2:9; and 3:4.

Religious Value of the Text

i. Universal Sovereignty of YHWH

The book projects the universal sovereignty of YHWH. YHWH is Lord of history and of all nations. He controls the destinies of nations both Israel and others. Consequently, he has authority and power to promise, judge, punish and reward.

ii. Threat, Judgement and Promise

Nahum tells his readers that God will execute vengeance against Nineveh, the oppressor and cruel tyrant as a sign of God's faithfulness to his promise: The fall of Nineveh, although once used as an instrument of God's wrath against the covenant people (cf. Isa 10:5-16), is an act of divine justice. Assyria has plundered the nations and torn them like prey for its voracious appetite; now Assyria in turn will be plundered and become the prey of another.

iii. Faith in YWHW

Nahum's prophecy is only intended to make one statement: God who is faithful has not abandoned Judah. The enemy will not prevail forever; the punishment will come to an end. Just as once God delivered those enslaved by Egypt (and one looks in vain for expressions of sympathy for the Egyptians in Exod 1-15), so now God will deliver those oppressed by Assyria. The good news is already proclaimed; feasts of thanksgiving should be celebrated (2:1). He is animated by an intense faith in YHWH, the universal judge, whose jealousy and avenging wrath will not fail to destroy the guilty. The prophet shows also the importance of a dedicated leadership and the ultimate failure of injustice in a national policy.

13

The Book of Micah

The book of Micah is among the most important books of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name of the book is eloquent testimony of a confession of faith and the best summaries of true religions to be found in the Bible.

Micah the Man

Micah is a Judean prophet of late 8th Cent. BC; a contemporary of Isaiah. His father's name is not given. But according to the superscription, the prophet came from a town named Moresheth, or Mareshah (1:1,14-15; cf. Jer. 26:18), probably Mresheth-Gath, near the old Philistine town of Gath, which has been identified with Tell el-Menshiyeh, near' Araq el-Menshiyeh, ca. 61/2 miles west of Beit Jibrin and 71/2 miles south west of Tell el-Judeideh. The prophet lived, therefore, in a small village of the Shephelah or the low foothills of south-western Palestine halfway between Jerusalem and Gaza, near the Judean stronghold of Lachish and close to the Philistine cities.

The name of Micah may be compared to another prophet's name: Micaiah, son of Imlah, who lived more

than a century earlier (cf. 1 Kgs 22:8). The name means "who [is] like [Yahweh]?" (possible allusion in 7:18: "Who [is] God like you:

Historical Background of the Prophecy

We read from the chronological note in 1:1 how Micah received the "word of YHWH" during the reign of Jotham (ca. 750-735), Ahaz (ca. 735-715), and Hezekiah (ca. 715-687). If the editor of the book is right, Micah's activities began a long time before the fall of Samaria (721) and continued for many years, running simultaneously with that of Isaiah in Jerusalem.

During the the Assyrian armies of Tiglath-pileser III conquered Damascus in 732 (with a part of Israel), and Samaria in 722. Ashdod fell in 711. Sennacherib was occupying part of the coastal land, menacing Moresheth and the area; see 1:10-15. Jerusalem was besieged in 701. Danger was not only external. Prophets, priests, and judges accepted bribes; merchants cheated; Canaanite cults were used alongside the Yahwistic ones.

Structure and Composition of the Book

The book shows a classical organization of prophetic literature: oracles of doom followed by oracles of promise (doom: 1:2 to 3:12; 6:1 to 7:6; promise: 2:12-13; chaps. 4-5). The concluding verses (7:8-20) seem to be a "liturgical text" from the days after the exile.

i. The Nature of the Original Ancient Text

The Hebrew text is difficult. The ancient copies (see, e.g., Qumran fragments lQ14, 1Q 168, and those from Murabba 'at, Mur 88 xi-iv) do not alleviate the situation. The ancient versions were already experiencing this problem.

ii. Additions to the Text

The book itself claims to be the work of Micah of Moresheth. Some scholars have critically questioned the claim based on difference in literary style found between early section of the book and the later. A minimal consensus considers 1:8-16; 2: 1-11; and 3:1-12 as coming from Micah. However, 2:12-13 and at least part of chaps. 4-5 are later additions. Consideration is also giving to 6:1-7:6 as

being mainly from the prophet himself. There is also a school of thought that accepted Micah as the author of the whole book.

The Socio-Economic Situation Micah's Time

It is true that Micah appeared when Israel and Judah was witnessing a terrible socio-political and moral situation. But nothing shows that he plays a major, if any, political role, and little is known of his personal life. His interest was mainly about the internal situation of Judah. His preaching is concerned with sin and punishment, not with political or cultic matters. He is preoccupied with social justice and does not fear princes, prophets, or priests. Not being a member of such groups, he affirms his independence through his message.

In the view of Micah, the nation had lost her moral integrity; she had become sinful and therefore predisposed to judgment. . The times were bad. The greed of the nobles shows itself in the attempts to build up large estates by forcibly ejecting smaller property holders (Micah 2:1-2). The judges seem to have been quite willing to arrest their powerful friends in robbing the weak (3:11). Widows and orphans, without powerful defenders, were cruelly robbed and plundered, and even sold into slavery (2:9). Creditors were without mercy, and common people were oppressed by the rich and powerful (3:10). The religious scene was not even spared. The prophets and priests were corrupt, selfish, immoral and greedy. They merely wanted money, ease, cheap popularity and some assurance that they could continue to live in luxury. Micah in reaction to the situation insists on the holiness of Yahweh. To Micah, as long as Yahweh's people do the right, they will enjoy divine favour (3:7) but when they turn against him, they must suffer punishment (1:2-4, 10-10).

Warning and the Proclamation of Doom

1. The doom of Samaria

It was to Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, that Micah turned early in his prophetic ministry. All eyes were on Samaria. Thus far it had withstood the shock of the Assyrian invasion of Israel, but Assyria was ruthless and strong, and Israel's future was most

uncertain. The prophet was well aware that Samaria could not long hold out against Assyrian attack. Micah sought to awaken the capital to the fact of its imminent destruction (cf. 1:6).

Incidentally, the capital city was besieged and captured by Sargon (721 B.C.). The majority of its population (close to thirty thousand people) was taken captive, and in its place were brought in captives from other regions which the Assyrians had mastered (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:24-34).

2. Warnings to Judah

Micah took the occasion to appeal to his fellow Judeans, that they might take a lesson from Samaria's collapse. He resorted to symbolic prophecy to awaken his people to the degenerating influences of the fertility rites. Naked and barefoot like a slave, he went at an impulse from YHWH and lamented over the sins of the Northern Kingdom and their corrupting influence pouring into Judah (1:8-9). He warned the people social injustice and moral decadence, and presented to them the consequences (2:3-5, 11).

3. Shame to the Judean rulers and Prophets

The prophet turned to the aristocracy of Judah and questioned their moral stand to lead. For Micah they were irresponsible hypocrites and lovers of evil l (3:1-2a). With the official prophets of his time Micah dealt sharply, for they gauged the quality of their revelation by what the people paid them (3:6). 4. 5.

4. The doom of Jerusalem

It was clear to Micah that the capital city of Jerusalem was in reality the chief source of licentious and corrupt living. And it was plain to him that as Jerusalem went, so went the nation (1:5). For Micah, the civil officials were criminal profiteers. The judges' hands were itchy for bribes. The priests so manipulated the priestly oracle as to enrich themselves. The prophets had become infected with a materialistic motivation of their sacred calling as the Lord's spokesmen. It is reasonable to believe that 3:9-11a was Micah's first utterance in Jerusalem and most likely at the temple. Micah's country background made all the more clear to him the sense of

responsibility that should characterize these heads and rulers, these spiritual guides. Boldly, the prophet predicted the destruction of the capital and even the downfall of the temple (3: 12).

The Message of Micah

The message of the prophet was aimed at strengthening the people morally so that they would be saved from the impending doom.

1. Against False Security

Micah is concerned with the people's rejection of God. Sin is the reason for the coming punishment. The Assyrian king is but an unconscious instrument of God's wrath. A false sense of security (3:11: "Is not the Lord in our midst?") has replaced an authentic allegiance to God. Jacob's rebellion is the reason why Samaria has fallen; Judah's sins are a menace for Jerusalem. The Lord must judge, and the prophet is the accuser in God's name.

2. Abuse of Religion and Neglect of Social Justice

Like Hos, Amos, and Isa, Micah is preoccupied with social justice and with the astute wickedness of all leaders, political and spiritual. While princes and merchants cheat and rob the poor and humble, esp. women and children, priests and prophets adapt their words to please their audience. The leaders mistake evil for good and good for evil. Prophecy is rejected and sacrifices are emptied of their relation to God. The covenant is ignored and the Lord must turn his face away from the people and abandon them to their plight. In Micah denunciation and accusation often take on the aspect of complaints.

3. YHWH's Love and Mercy

The final verses of the book give us an example of the liturgy to be performed: having confessed their sin, the people no longer ask: "Where is Yahweh, your God?" A new exodus is taking place. God's wrath has abated and a new era is beginning. God's steadfast love, his hesed, will be shown to Jacob and Abraham, thus realizing the oath given to the fathers in the days of old.

4. Restoration and Hope

However, a message of hope is inserted in the middle of the book. The Temple shall become once again the centre of the land and of the world. People will come there in procession. A remnant will be at the origin of a new Israel, and its leader will be a true shepherd, a bringer of peace in the name of the Lord. Thus, Bethlehem and Jerusalem will be renewed and the sources of sin will be eliminated.

14

Haggai

Introduction

In the preceding unit, we examined the books and personalities of Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah. We stressed the peculiarities of the prophets and their shared interests. We also underlined that their respective messages could be pointer in our effort to make a better Nigeria.

In this unit, we shall our usual methodology. We shall project the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. While studying them individually, we shall equally make some comparative analysis. We equally expect that whatever lessons that could be drawn from the study, that you should apply them to the Nigeria situation and come up with some practical solution that could serve that veritable advice to Nigerians.

The Book of Haggai

The book of Haggai is the first of the collection of prophecies dating from the postexilic period; the others are Zechariah and Malachi. It is the shortest of the three, comprising merely two chapters totalling thirty-

eight verses. These are made up of four utterances delivered within the space of four months in the second year of the reign of Darius I Hystaspis, king of Persia (522-486)-i.e., in 520.

The Prophet Haggai Himself

The name Haggai is derived from the word for "a festival," which would suggest that the prophet was born on some feast day. Little or nothing is known of his background. He is referred to simply as "the prophet" (1:1; Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He would appear, however, from this description, to have been a conspicuous figure. Jewish tradition has it that he was known as a prophet in Babylon during the Exile. On the evidence of 1:1, he was active in Jerusalem in 520 B.C. This may suggest that he had made his way there sometime before this date. He does not appear to have been of the priestly caste, since he asks the priests' guidance on a matter of Levitical practice (2:11-13). If 2:3 implies that he had seen the temple before its destruction in 586, he was a very old man when he became one of the prime movers for its restoration in 520.

In association with Zechariah (Ezra 4:24-5:1; 6:14; Zech. 1:16) Haggai rouses the people of Jerusalem and their leaders (Zerubbabel and Joshua) to undertake the task of rebuilding the temple. It would appear to be largely because of his energy and enthusiasm, as indicated in his oracles, that the work of restoration was begun almost immediately after his first appeal, and completed within four years (Ezra 6:15).

In later Talmudic tradition Haggai was associated with Zechariah and Malachi as joint founder of the "Great Synagogue." It was considered that with the death of these, the last of the prophets, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel. A number of psalms are attributed to Haggai and Zechariah in the LXX, Vulgate and Peshitta (e.g., Pss. 138; 146-149). This may account for the Christian tradition, as opposed to the Jewish, that the prophet was of priestly descent.

The Authorship of the Book

The form of the book would suggest that these oracles were collected by someone other than the prophet himself, and then set

into the editorial framework of :1,3,12,13a,14-15; 2: 1-2, 10,20, with 2:4 and the date in 2: 18 probably also from the editor's hand, and with 2:5 as a secondary gloss CTH which may be still later. The editorial framework is not likely to have been written by Haggai himself, but it was probably composed not long after his oracles. Haggai is referred to throughout in the third person and is described impersonally as "the prophet." Moreover, the book serves as a record of the effect of the prophet's words, as well as a collection of his utterances.

The editor has made no comment on the oracle to Zerubbabel (2:21-23). Rather the other oracles all seem to be addressed to the people of Judah, but in the framework the editor has enhanced the roles of Zerubbabel and of Joshua by having the oracles addressed primarily to them and by emphasizing the part they played in getting work on the Temple started (1:12-14).

It is, of course, possible, some argued, that Haggai himself compiled the book and chose to refer to himself in the third person. But the general view is that the compilation was done by some unknown disciple not long after the time at which the oracles were first delivered.

Opinion has it too that the origin of the framework of the oracle is found in the circle in which 1-2 Chronicle were compiled. Others argued that the oracle finds more significant kinship with deuteronomistic circles, with Ezekiel, and with the Pentateuchal Priestly document.

Historical Background

The Policy of Cyrus and the Return

We read from the text of the Cylinder of Cyrus that when Cyrus, the victorious Persian king had taken possession of the territories of Babylon, he gave general permission to racial minorities exiled there to return to their own countries if they wished to do so. It would appear that the Israelites returned en mass. This is the conclusion we can draw following the Chronicler's rosy picture of a mass return of the exiled Jews to Palestine and the immediate undertaking of the rebuilding of the temple. But the fact remains that only some of the

Jews availed themselves of the opportunity to return, and that their first task was to eke out some kind of existence in a land that had suffered much ever since its capital city had been destroyed fifty years earlier.

The Laying of the Foundation of the Second Temple

It was under the leadership of the prince of Judah' (Ezra I:8) and "governor" (5:14) of the new Persian province that attempt was made to rebuild the temple, shortly the second year of the return (537 B.C. cf. Ezra 3:8-13). The returnees laid the foundations of a new temple amid the ruins of Jerusalem, as indicated in Ezra 5:16. But we are told in the books of Haggai and Zechariah that the construction continued.

Again, the impression conveyed by Haggai and Zechariah's writings would tend to confirm the view that it was not until the emergence of Haggai as an inspired leader that any serious steps were taken to restore the dilapidated temple at all, and that the rebuilding did not, in fact, start until 520 (i.e., the second year of Darius I), under the governorship of Zerubbabel (ch. 1).

Haggai found himself in the midst of people who were more concerned with their own selfish interests than they were with work for the advancement of their society and its religious institutions (Hag 1:2-9). It was in this situation that Haggai set out around 520 BC to proclaim his oracles. He would argue that they had suffered because they had failed to honour God themselves by rebuilding the Temple (Hag. 1.6; 2.16-17). So, by rebuilding the Temple they would find blessing, even as they began the work (Hag. 1.6; 2.16, 17, 19). Furthermore, the reconstruction would be very urgent and necessary because the day would come when God would make Jerusalem the religious centre of the whole world (Hag. 1.9; 2.7-9). People of other nations would then learn to serve God by giving Him honour there.

However, some of the environmental factors for the lack of concern for the reconstruction of the Temple that finally led to the oracles is discussed below.

Socio-Economic Situation

1. Although the racial minorities including the Jews were free to return to their own countries, many Jews had preferred to remain in Babylon (Jos. Antiq. Xl.iii), especially those who had established themselves most successfully. The action indirectly and negatively affected the speedy reconstruction of the temple since the economic means for such a massive work would be limited.

2. Those who returned not only were presumably mostly the poor without enough resources, but also whatever zeal they had for the restoration of the house of the Lord were tempered by finding themselves among people who had become reconciled to the sight of the ruined sanctuary.

3. The devastation of the Babylonian conquest was heightened both by harrying tactics on the part of the petty kingdoms which surrounded Judah, and later by the marauding Persian army under Cambyses on its way to invade Egypt in 525 thus using Judah as a passage. They must have had an unsettling effect on Judeans - more, no doubt, on those in Babylonia but also on those in Judah.

4. When in addition to this we remember the gloomy picture drawn by the book of Haggai of a people crippled by a succession of bad harvests, with subsequent poverty, it is difficult to think that the period between the return and the emergence of Haggai as a leader can have been anything other than a dispiriting struggle for existence, far less one of religious enthusiasm. Concern for the rebuilding of the temple must have been the least of the anxieties of the sorely tried people of Jerusalem.

Religious Factor

1. The destruction of the temple in 586 by the army of Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25:9) would mean the breaching of the walls and the disappearance of the shrine and adjacent buildings, but the whole area with its courts would still be available as a sacred place for those who were minded to worship. An altar for burnt offerings was no difficult matter to erect, if, indeed, the old one had

been destroyed, and there is evidence that this was in use (Jer. 41 :5; cf. Hag. 2: 14) and that priests were in attendance (Lam. 1:4).

2. There are more sombre indications in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel (e.g., Jer. 7:17-19; Ezek. 8:9-18) that pagan cults, including the worship of Ishtar, Tammuz, and the sun, had established themselves side by side with the worship of YHWH. Even if these were conditions which obtained before the fall of Jerusalem, it would be more than likely that they persisted after the visible reminders of the superiority of YHWH-worship had vanished.

Political Incidence

1. When Darius I succeeded Cambyses as ruler of the Persian Empire in 522, revolts broke out throughout the subject provinces. The supremacy of the Gentile masters of the world was threatened. To a prophetic mind such as that of Haggai, accustomed to look for the leadership of YHWH in the signs of the times, this must have suggested the prelude to the end event of history, the final destruction of the power of the Gentiles and the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

2. With Zerubbabel, a scion of the house of David (I Chr. 3:17-19), installed as governor of Judah, and assuming, in the prophet's mind, the messianic status, the time appeared to be ripe for the rehabilitation of the house of the Lord, so that YHWH might return to his people, as Ezekiel and Second Isaiah had foretold, to establish his throne in Zion (Isa. 52:7-10; Ezek. 43:4-5). It was in such a situation that Haggai uttered the oracles which are contained in this book.

Theological and Historical Significance of Haggai

1. The Centrality of the Temple

The interest of Haggai in the rebuilding of the Temple singles him out as great enthusiast in the affairs of YHWH and Jewish religion. It is evident that without the Temple and the Judaism which centred on the Temple, the legacy of the great prophets would have been quickly dissipated, and Christianity would have had no foundations

on which to build. Haggai deserves to be remembered for his contribution to this.

2. Re-Establishment of the Cultus

The interest in the Temple drove Haggai further to stress the need for the re-establishment of the cultus. The prophecies concerning this, argued some scholars, may originally have been connected with the cultic rites of the New Year Festival. Even if that is the case, Haggai could have taken only the form but gave it a new content. However, the danger is the superficial view that material prosperity is assured provided the mechanics of worship are guaranteed.

3. Hope and Encouragement

The hope and encouragement which Haggai's message brought to the dejected community of Judah at that time was, in the providence of God, a significant milestone in the Praeparatio Evangelica

4. The Messianic Age and the Gentiles

The civil governor, Zerubbabel, is given an imminent role as God's elect. In this respect Haggai might be thought to resemble a court prophet, like Nathan in 2 Sam 7. Therefore, for Haggai, the future is the future of Judah, restored with a Davidic ruler and with God once again dwelling in his earthly Temple. However, **Z**erubbabel was not the Messiah, as Haggai imagined, and the messianic age when it came did not bring about the downfall of the Gentiles and the enrichment of the temple, as the prophet expected**.**

5. Good Historical Book

The value of the book is more historical. It is together with the book of Zechariah a form of corrective apparatus to the inaccuracies of the Chronicler and sheds a welcoming light on the obscure period between the fall of Jerusalem and the achievements of Nehemiah .

15

The Book of Zechariah

Zachariah together with Haggai and Malachi, it belongs to a group of prophecies delivered after the Exile. Zechariah gives us some valuable information on the thought and conditions of that period. Just like prophet Haggai, Zechariah was concerned with the reconsstruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 520.

The Prophet

Little is known of Zechariah. The name means "Yahweh remembers." He is described (1: I) as the "son of Berechiah, son of lddo." In Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:16, however, he is referred to as the son, not the grandson, of Iddo. The discrepancy has been accounted for by supposing that a copyist confused the "Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah" of Isa. 8:2 with this prophet, and that the words "the son of Berechiah" are an intrusion. Zechariah would thus be the son of Iddo. Alternatively the discrepancy is held to be only apparent, since in Hebrew ben may mean either "son or' or "grandson of."

Iddo, father or grandfather of Zechariah, is included among the heads of the priestly families who returned

from exile to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:4). Zechariah himself is numbered among the priests (vs. 16); this would suggest that he may have been a cultic prophet. Whatever his relationship with Iddo, Zechariah is generally assumed to have been still a young man when he was associated with Haggai as an advocate of the immediate rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14).

The Text of Chapters 1-8

Historical background

Zechariah has common historical background with Haggai. The Temple has lain in ruins since its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 586. The factors of external enemies and internal apathy contributed to this sorry state. It was a poverty-stricken and dispirited community (8:10; 1:17). But Zachariah interpreted the general upheaval in the Persian Empire on the accession of Darius in 522, and the presence of a Davidic prince, in the person of Zerubbabel, as governor of Judah as antecedents to the coming of the Messiah. Consequently, he urged the people to embark on immediate reconstruction of the Temple, which, of course, is a necessary condition‘ for the emergence of the messianic age. In other words, YHWH was about to establish his kingdom. His ancient dwelling place in Zion must be restored to its former glory; so that he might once again be enthroned among his people and from there achieve his purposes.

Fired by the prophet’s zeal, the people had begun the work of restoration (Hag. 1:14-15), but it seems that before long the enthusiasm of the builders waned. A month after operations had commenced, the prophet had to rally the people once again (2:3), and it would appear that shortly after this (Zech. 1:1), Zechariah added his plea in prophetic exhortation. When Haggai’s voice was no longer heard, Zechariah continued for two years (520-518) to proclaim the coming of the messianic kingdom and to urge the rebuilding of the Temple as the necessary prelude. As a result of the combined vigour of the two prophets, the restoration was completed in 516 (Ezra 6:15). With the emphasis on the reconstruction of the Temple, Zechariah fixes his eyes upon the subsequent glories of the

messianic kingdom and Zerubbabel its ruler (3:8; 6:12). It would appear from the rather obscure reference in 6:9-14 that Zechariah proposed to crown Zerubbabel king. Whether for this reason (cf. Neh. 6:7) or because Zerubbabel contemplated rebuilding the walls of the city as well as the Temple (Zech. 2:1-5), it seems likely that the Persian government relieved him of his governorship. At all events, he mysteriously disappears from the scene. The text of 7: 1-2 may imply that a new governor, Bethelsarezer, had been appointed in his place by 518.

Comparing Zech. 1-8 and Haggai

i. Both in Haggai and in Zechariah we find emphasis on Jerusalem as the place of God’s dwelling, on the importance of reconstructing the Temple, on the role of Joshua and Zerubbabel.

ii. But in Zech 1-8 Joshua has an importance that he does not have in Haggai, and Zerubbabel’s importance appears mainly in relation to the rebuilding of the Temple, probably because Zech 1-8 reflects a stage of political evolution at which Zerubbabel had already played his part out and had turned out to be of little real consequence in the historical destinies of Judah.

iii. In comparison with Haggai, Zech 1-8 shows a greater sense of the importance of God’s action and a correspondingly reduced sense of the importance of initiative taken by the people and their leaders.

iv. Zech 1-8 is less concrete than Haggai, less static, more likely to entail movement, less fixed upon the phenomena of daily existence, more utopian.

v. Whereas Haggai promotes immediate action and holds out a hope quickly to become reality, Zechariah promotes principles and outlooks that will assure right action when it is needed, and he holds out a hope for a coming age which seems less immediately imminent.

vi. As in the case of Haggai, Zechariah is spoken of impersonally as "the prophet" (1:1, 7), but on the other hand, there is also a large element of personal reporting in Zechariah (1:8, etc.).

vii. Unlike the book of Haggai, however, the prophecies of Zechariah spread over a wider range of issues and contribute considerably to our understanding of the later stages of OT theology such as the themes: angelology, messianism, and apocalypticism.

viii. Although the oracular activity of the two prophets thus overlapped by one month, unlike the oracles of Haggai, which covers only a range of 4 months, (August-September to November-December, 520 B.C. (i.e., the second year of Darius I Hystaspis; Hag. 1: 1), Zechariah's cover a longer period of two years from October-November, 520 (1: 1), to November-December, 518 (7:1).

The Text of Chapters 9-14

The second part of the book of Zechariah presents vast challenges in respect of authorship, date, and interpretation. We may not prove beyond doubt if more than one author was responsible for chapters 9-14. But based on linguistic, style, history and theology, the author of these chapters cannot be the prophet Zechariah**.**

Date of Composition

There have been vast differences of opinion among scholars trying to find the historical situations in which the oracles of chaps. 9-14 were uttered. Some associated the oracles in Zech 9-14 to the period before 721, others to the latter years of the kingdom of Judah, or more commonly to the early Hellenistic period.

But some have strongly argued that even the mentioning of old cities and empires in the text must be understood as a reflection on the literary character of these chapters and on the rhetorical procedures. Those old names stand in the text as an exemplification of God dealing with Jerusalem and Judah as he had done to those old cities. And some of these could equally be explained as editorial gloss insertion into an already existing text.

Again that the oracles in chaps. 9-14 manifest an eschatology that is increasingly apocalyptic, thus in chaps. 12-14 more than in 9-11, is not only an indication that the text could have been given in the post-exilic era. It means also that the interest of the oracle is, unlike the earlier prophets, less on direct and concrete contemporary historical reality. It rather shows more concern with a future lacking historical specificity and portrayed in colours which have a tone that becomes more mythological as the apocalyptic tendency is more fully developed.

However, the most we can say from the historical situation is that oracles of chapters 9-14 constitute a collection of anonymous and mainly apocalyptic utterances, having their origin within a range of time between the fourth and second centuries B.C. Even if the apparently cogent argument against a Maccabean date is furthered by some scholars that it may be impossible to add extra material after the canon of the Twelve had been fixed, some authorities are yet to accept such claim.

Composition of 9-14

Zech 9-14 comprises two collections of oracles (chaps. 9-11 and 12-14), each introduced by the phrase "Oracle (lit., "burden") of the word of YHWH." The oracles of each collection are skilfully bound together editorially: in the case of chaps. 9-11 by catchwords and by bi-directional verbal pointers at the points of juncture; in the case of chaps. 12-14 by the repeated phrase "on that day," which introduces most of them. These two collections must have existed independently before they were joined and added to Zech 1-8.

The Significance of Ch. 9-14.

Theology of the Hellenistic Period

Chapters 9-14 provide us with valuable insights into the theological trends of this Hellenistic period about which relatively little is known. They reflect the various levels of thought which characterized a people who saw little outward evidence of the fulfilment of prophetic promises, yet who never relinquished their invincible hope in the vindication of YHWH and his people.

Apocalyptic Understanding of History

The strong apocalyptic note, born of despair, looks more and more toward supernatural intervention as the only salvation of the tiny community of God from the world-wide supremacy of paganism.

Judgement and Salvation for All

In apocalyptic thinking the Gentiles have almost ceased to be regarded as human beings and have become synonymous with the power of evil that violates every law of God. However, there is the emergent realization that the consummation of God's purpose cannot consist merely in the destruction of evil but must include the conversion of evil to good. In the end the Gentiles must be won for God, and Jerusalem must become the spiritual centre of the world, even if this is seen within the limited conception of worship as consisting of Levitical correctness (cf. 9: 7; 14: 16-21).

Anticipation of the New Testament Theology

Significant use is made of the book of Zechariah in the NT, notably in the messianic entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21: 1-11; cf. Zech. 9:9-10) and the betrayal (Matt. 26:14-16; cf. Zech. 11: 12).

16

The Book of Malachi

The Title and Authorship

The book, with the title Malachi, is often regarded as the last of the collection of the Twelve Prophets. The evidence for attributing this book to a prophet who bore the name of Malachi is the superscription of 1:1. This, however, is clearly an editorial preface to the prophecies which begin in 1:2 (cf. Zech. 9:1; 12:1). It is possible, but unlikely, that Malachi is a personal name. Some scholars are of the view that it is an abbreviation for" Malachiah." This, however, would tend to mean "YHWH is a messenger or angel," an impossible concept, rather than "the messenger or angel of YHWH," which is the usual translation of "Malachiah."

A stronger argument against the view that Malachi was the name of the prophet is that it appears to have its origin in the Hebrew word for "my messenger" in 3:1. But since the LXX reads "his messenger" in 1:1 and both the Talmud and the Targum of Jonathan identify "my messenger" in 1:1 as Ezra the Scribe, an explanation which was accepted by Jerome, it is unlikely that the author bore the name of Malachi at all.

The tradition in favour of Ezra as the author is no more valuable than similar traditions in favour of Nehemiah and Zerubbabel. Both the themes and the historical allusions of the book would suggest anyone of these names as possible authors.

However, it would seem most probable that the writer is unknown, an editor of the Book of the Twelve having bestowed the name of Malachi upon the author of this anonymous collection of prophecies on the basis of the phrase in 3:1. For convenience, however, he is generally referred to as Malachi.

The Person of the Author

We may know nothing of the author's life. But the writing suggests to some extent the kind of person of the author of the book. Thus:

i. It appears that the author was a cult prophet

ii. He was probably active in Jerusalem in the period of Persian rule ca. 450, shortly before the appearance of Nehemiah.

iii. His criticisms of the priests of his contemporary days notwithstanding (1:6-2:4), he was favourable to the levitical priesthood (2:4-7), and he insisted on the people's obligation to contribute to the expenses of the Temple and the support of the personnel (3:6-12).

iv. He had a humane concern for the wife who suffers rejection (2:14-16) resulting from mixed marriage, and for the people of Judah who wonder about God's love for them (1:2-5)

v. He was a defender of social justice. He was convinced that those who wronged and oppressed the defenseless would eventually receive their just deserts from God (3:5).

vi. He had a religious sense of God's honour (1:6-14) and of the transcendence which enables God to enforce his will wherever he wishes (1:5).

Date of Composition

Reference to Persian Term for Governorship

Unlike most of the prophetic books in the Bible, no specific date or the time of any reigning king or important personality is associated

with the book, except by inference (cf. (Pechah; 1:8, cf. Neh. 5:14; Hag. 1:1). It appears that the oracle was proclaimed when the land (Judah) was being ruled by a Persian governor (Pechah; 1:8, cf. Neh. 5: 14; Hag. 1:1), thus the time must be after the return from exile.

No Reference to the Dereliction of the Temple

There is, however, no reference to a derelict temple or to the need for its rebuilding, as in Haggai and Zechariah. On the contrary, the cultus is in full operation (1:10; 3:1, 10). Consequently, the oracle could have been after the reconstruction of the Temple, that is, later than Haggai and Zechariah's prophecies. In other words, the period of the oracle could probably be pointing at a date later than 516 when the Temple is already in full operation. This is also true if we observe that the prophet's complaint is that the priests have grown weary of the ritual (1:13).

The Prophet's Position on Mixed Marriage

Again, we observe that the prophet inveighs against mixed marriages (2:10-16), and demonstrates good support for the abandoned wives. At the same time, there is no suggestion that there is any official legislation against mixed marriage at that particular time. This would point to a date before 444, when Nehemiah appeared in Jerusalem and proceeded, among other things, to deal with the problem of mixed marriage (Neh. 13:23-27). It was, in fact, during Nehemiah's second term of office that he took action on this matter, and for this reason some scholars regard these prophecies as dating from the period between Nehemiah's first and second administrations. This is, however, more than evidence warrants.

The Influence of Deuteronomic Code

We can also argue that the prophet's criticisms on the shortfall of the Temple cultus (e.g., 1:8) are based on the Deuteronomic Code of 621 and not on the Priestly Code of ca. 450-400. The fact that the reference to tithe law in 3:10 is based on P (Num. 18:21), rather than on D (Deut. 14:22-29), does not necessarily point to a date

later than the promulgation of the Priestly Code, since any codification may include some legislation which is already established practice.

Lack of Distinction between the Priest and the Levite

Further, the author's conception of the priesthood (2:4-9) makes no distinction between priests and Levites, thus agreeing with the Deuteronomic view (cf. Deut. 17:9), whereas the Priestly Code distinguished between the Aaronic priesthood (Lev. 1:5) and the Levitical assistants (Num. 18:1-4). For these reasons most support is given to a date somewhere ca. 460-450. If it were possible for us to date the Nabatean invasion of Edom (1:2-5), then we might come to a closer approximation of the date of the composition of the writing.

The Composition of the Book

The book, as we already observed, has close affinity with Zech. 9-14. It would appear to be the third section of a collection of prophecies (Zech. 9:1-Mal. 4:6) which at some point have been added to the Book of the Twelve. The first two sections of work (Zech. 9-11; 12-14) were added to the work of the sixth-century prophet Zechariah, and the third section was given a separate identity under the name of Malachi. The hypothesis is supported by the fact that each of the three sections has a similar and distinctive superscription: "An oracle of the word of the LORD" (cf. Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1). The detachment of the third section from the book of Zechariah has been explained as an editorial device to complete the sacred number of twelve prophets, but clearly the basic justification for the separate existence of this book is that both the theological content and the historical background are entirely different from those of Zech. 9-14.

We can equally observe that apart from the sole resemblance to Zech. 9-14 , Malachi is brought together under a heading beginning with the word "burden" or (with qualification) "oracle" (1:1). Each of Malachi's six oracles has the same structure: An initial provocative statement by Yahweh or by the prophet is followed by a remark attributed to the people or to elements among them, which is in turn

followed by a rebuttal in which the prophet provides the heart of his message. The book closes with two editorial appendixes

The Oracles of Malachi

The first oracle (Mal. 1:2-5) is a reaffirmation of Hosea's proclamation of Yahweh's love for Israel (e.g., Hos. 11) and the second (1:6-2:9) a denunciation of the priests for their failure to give the moral and religious leadership that YHWH demands of his ministers. This imputes on them responsibility for the hardships which the people are suffering, and for their lack of spiritual resources to meet them. YHWH asks his priests where are the reverence and honour that even a human father would expect from his children. The third oracle (2:10-16) is concerned with mixed marriages and divorce. It is addressed to the laity. They too have broken covenant with YHWH and with one another. The fourth oracle (2:17-3:5) is a prophecy of the coming of Yahweh in judgment. The fifth oracle (3:6-12) traces the divine disfavour, of which the people complain, to their failure to give YHWH. The sixth oracle (3: 13-4:3) returns to the problem of the moral order of the universe. The devout and faithful section of the community wonder what profit lies in obedience to Yahweh. The conclusion of the book (4:4-6) is probably editorial additions.

The Significance of Malachi

1. Personal Commitment through Religious Discipline and Observance

Malachi shares the genuine prophetic insight which knows that true obedience to God must come from personal commitment, but he also recognizes that for ordinary mortals this must be expressed in sundry small acts of discipline and religious observance. Consequently, it is not enough to merely enunciate high doctrine and moral principles. These must be enshrined in a practical code of behaviour as the people await the final solution of the world's disorder in the Day of Yahweh.

2. A Call for Holy Ministry and Worship

The prophet emphasises the need for holy ministry (2:5-7) and sincerity in worship and truth under the auspices of any religion (1:11;

cf. Acts 10:35). His condemnation of casual attitude towards God (1:12-13) is obvious. His call for correct ritual and worship is simply based on giving YHWH nothing less than the best (1:7-8).

3. Protection of Marriage and Family Life

In his high doctrine of the institution of marriage and his condemnation of easy divorce, he is more akin to the spirit of the NT than the OT (cf. Deut. 24: 1-4 with Mark 10:2-12).

4. Lay the Foundation for Ezra-Nehemiah's Reform

The prophet with his insistence on the correct fulfilment of the worshiper's obligation to the priesthood (3:8-10), offering unblemished sacrifices (1:7-8) and his fear of the infiltration of foreign religious practices through mixed marriages (2:10-11) he anticipates Ezra and Nehemiah to the hardening of the spiritual arteries of the prophetic faith, which reached its apex in Pharisaism.

5. Social Justice and Righteousness

There are many echoes of the older voice of true prophecy in Malachi's oracles. God's holiness and righteous is a reoccurring theme. Human must reciprocate to this through service based on moral obedience, correct ritual obligation and above, honesty, justice and mercy (1:14; 3:5).

6. Repentance, Reverence and Punishment

The prophet surprisingly sings a very high pitch on the reestablishment of human relationship with God, which is only effective through repentance (3:7), reverence and awe (3: 16). For Malachi, iniquity will not forever go unpunished (4:1).

7. Day of the Lord and Future Life

His eschatology is partly conventional and partly original. The Day of the Lord in these oracles is largely of the normal prophetic pattern (cf. Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:7-18), but a new note is introduced with the conception of the book of remembrance in which are recorded the names of the righteous (Mal. 3:16) and which points toward later developments in the belief in a future lif**e**

Popularised the Theological Concept of Precursor

Significant too is the conception of a forerunner to "prepare the way" for the coming of YHWH at the great Day (3:1). It is not clear whether the author had in mind two separate figures, the "messenger" and the "messenger of the covenant," or whether the latter is an editorial emendation. Nor is it clear whether the "messenger" is a prophetic figure who will proclaim a last chance of repentance before the judgment, and who, as we have seen, one of the editors of the oracles believed to be the author himself (1:1), or whether the concept is rather that of a supernatural "angel of YHWH," almost a manifestation of YHWH himself.

On the basis of the editorial note in 4:5, which identifies the messenger with Elijah redivivus (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11), the idea of a herald of the messianic age came to play a large part in later apocalyptic. Jesus himself clearly regarded the prophecy as foreshadowing the mission of John the Baptist (Mk. 9:11-13), and the early church without hesitation saw in the relationship of the work of the Baptist to the messianic kingdom inaugurated by Jesus, the perfect fulfilment of this oracle (Mk. 1:2; Lk. 1:17).

17

The Book of Zephaniah

Introduction

In the previous unit, we examined we presented the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. We discovered the uniqueness of each of the books and also some common interest that run through the books. We exposed ourselves to certain critical issues that would entail further investigations, and ended up with the challenge of translating our finds into action for a better society.

In this unit, we shall follow the same line of thought. We shall settle on three prophetic books: Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel. We shall examine the personalities of the prophets, the nature, structure and literary qualities of their books, the historical background of their respective oracles. We shall also review the content of the books and above all the message we could derive from those books.

The Prophet Himself

Zephaniah was a Judean prophet whose activity is dated by the Scythian invasion (630-625 B.C. He was born probably not earlier than 660 B.C. and possibly a descendant of King Hezekiah (1:1). His great-great-grandfather Hezekiah was the king of Judah (715-697 B.C.). Incidentally, Zephaniah was the only prophet of the Old Testament, whose lineal genealogy was given in detail.

The abuses and low state of religion described in the book (1:4-6, 3-9, 12; 3:1-3, 7) perhaps confirmed that the prophet must have started his ministry at the time of King Josiah (640-609), when there was an attempt, serious but of limited success and duration, to undo the apostasy of Josiah's predecessor Manasseh. Understanding Zephaniah's prophecy as an early part of this reform (2 Chr 34:3-7), we see why he does not include the king with the other leaders of the society that he condemns (1:8; 3:3-4).

Political and Religious Situation

Zephaniah lived in a period when the power of Assyria in the West was rapidly expanding. During this period, official protection was given in Judah to the magical arts of diviners and enchanters. Astral religion became so popular that Manasseh erected on the roof of the upper chamber of King Ahaz altars and chariots for the worship of the sun, the moon, the signs of the Zodiac, and all the hosts of heaven (2 Kgs 23:11ff). New impetus was also given to the worship of the Queen of Heaven, the mother-goddess of Assyrian-Babylonian religion. This worship was extremely popular, for entire Judean families participated in it - fathers, mothers, and children playing distinctive parts in the ritual (Jer. 7:17 ff).

But the invasion of Palestine by the Scythians would awaken Zephaniah to YHWH's call to be His prophet. The Scythians were barbarian hordes who poured down through Asia Minor into Palestine and down to the borders of Egypt in terrorist raids, leaving calamity in their track. At the bribe of Psammetichus I of Egypt (cf. Herodotus 1.103-106) they would not attack Egypt but made Ashkelon and Bethshean to pay more.

Content of the Prophetic Book

Zephaniah came to feel that the Scythians were harbingers of a judgment which Yahweh was bringing not only upon Judah but also upon all humans and animals, birds and fish-indeed, upon the face of the whole earth (1:2-3). With considerable detail and geographical definiteness, he shows how the judgment of God would affect the nations with which Judah is most vitally concerned (2:4-15). The Jerusalemer leaders were equally indicted and under condemnation because they have refused correction, therefore, remained in their sins (3:1-8). Nevertheless, YHWH will save the few righteous remnant of Judah (3:9-20). To this creative nucleus of the future Judah, Yahweh will give spiritual renewal (3.17b). YHWH will also find joy in them (3:14-17). They will not endure disaster any more. Yahweh will save the lame, gather the outcast, and, having brought home the scattered people, he will cause them to be honored among all the nations of the earth (3:18-20).

Date of Composition

If accept the superscription of 1:1 that Zephaniah preached only during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), then we are already into a big worry – literary and historical.

i. A number of scholars consider that chapters 2-3 contain later poems that cannot be fitted and that even the authentic oracles of Zephaniah have been somewhat amplified in the postexilic period.

ii. Some of the oracles (2:8-9) appear to reflect the attitude of later Jewish nationalism, and the international situation reflected in the book (3:1-7) is characteristically different from that of Zephaniah during the Scythian invasion (chapters 1-2).

iii. The conversion of all peoples to the worship of YHWH (3:9) and the gathering of the Diaspora (3:10) constitute typically postexilic themes, bearing the influence of Deutero-Isaianic theology.

iv. The final poem (3:6-20) belongs to the eschatological pattern in which YHWH himself, the "king of Israel," is "in the midst of his people," and the nations become witnesses of the restored fortunes of Judah.

18

The Book of Obadiah

Name and Title

The name 'Obadiah' which is used as the title of the book, means simply 'Servant of the Lord'. It is a name quite common in the biblical tradition (cf. I Kings 18:3, 7, 16; I Chr. 27:19; 2 Chr. 34:12; etc.). The book is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It belongs to a literature of anti-Edomite polemic (cf. Gen. 27:39-40; Ps. 137:7; Isa. 34:5 If; 63:1-6; Ezek. 25:12-17; 35; Amos 1:11-12; Mal. 1:2-4; cf. Jer. 49:7-22) and of Day-of-the-Lord prophecies (cf. Isa. 2:6-22; Ezek. 7; Joel 1:15-2:11; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:7, 14-18), to which it bears numerous affinities in thought, style, and diction.

Historical Setting and Occasion

Israel's hatred of Edom was inveterate in the Book. The etiological narratives of Genesis record the tensions between Jacob-Israel and Esau-Edom (Gen. 25:23; 27:39-40). From the time of the United Monarchy the control of Edom was a fixed policy of the kings of

Israel and Judah. The lucrative trade from Ezion-geber (modern Tell el-Kheleifeh), the port on the Gulf of Aqabah, passed through Edomite territory, and wars, as a consequence, were not infrequent (II Sam. 8:13-14; 1 Kgs. 11:14-17; 2 Kgs 14:22; 16:5-6; 2 Chr. 20; 21:8-10). When Jerusalem fell in 597, Edom exploited Judah's plight, rejoiced in its fate (Lam. 4:21). The Edomites "acted revengefully" against Israel (Ezek. 25: 12). They joined with the Babylonians in her destruction, and occupied the Negeb (Ezek. 35:10). The description of Edom's behaviour in Obad. 11-14 is the most definite of all the anti-Edomite oracles, and is generally held to reflect conditions after 597. The only question is whether it should refer to contiguous verses in the book; on this matter there has been considerable diversity of opinion among scholars.

The Message

Verse 15: '"As you have done, it shall be done to you," summarizes the message of the whole book. Edom had rejoiced in the sufferings of Judah, and had taken advantage of her defenceless condition. But Edom's own turn for trouble would come. Jeremiah 49:7-22 repeats many of the ideas of Obadiah 1-9. Probably these verses were added to the book of Jeremiah at a later time, when people had forgotten where they came from.

The book of Joel is one of the twelve Minor Prophets that together make up the concluding section of the OT. In the LXX and Vulgate versions the book consists of three chapters. But the MT version has four chapters. The LXX and Vulgate combined the two chapters of MT into one. In the case of the English versions, it follows the LXX and the Vulgate, thus combining chapters 2-3 of the Hebrew into one chapter – 2:1-27, 28-32.

The Author

The superscription attributes the book to a man named Joel ben Pethuel. The name Joel means "Yo" (YHWH) is God." Incidentally, the name is popular in the Old Testament tradition. 1 Sam 8:2 tells us about one of the sons of David named Joel. The name appears most often in the later book of Chronicles. A dialectal form of Joel's patronym is read in Gen 22:23; 24:15,24, 47; 1 Chr 4:30. It is true

that the author of the book is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT, but there is no strong evidence to doubt the historical existence a person that bore such name.

Again, we can adduce concerning the person of the author from his writings. Joel had a deep appreciation for the worship conducted in the Temple (1:8-9; 2:27; 4:16-17). The book also contains cultic terms such as vegetable offering and libation, fast and solemn assembly (1: 14; 2:12,15) Temple personnel such as priests (1:9,13; 2:17), ministers of Yahweh (1:9; 2:17), ministers of the altar (1: 13), and "ministers of my God" (1:13) appear in his writing. All these information could suggest that the author could not have been a stranger to the cultic practices of the Jews.

Some scholars have even gone further to infer that Joel could have been a cultic prophet because his appreciation for the cult and the use of cultic terms. We may see such interpretation as deducing more than the text can bear. That is to say that the appreciation for the cult does not necessarily make one a cultic functionary just as appreciation of soccer must not necessarily make one a player or referee.

Historical Situation

It is important for us to note that intra-textual evidence places the Book in a period after the Exile, when the worship of the restored Temple had become the lifeblood of the people. It was a time when formalism in ritual had taken the place of moral issues as the main concern of a prophet (2:12-14). The period was also punctuated with disappointment and disillusionment over the failure of earlier prophetic promises. The situation would lead to a growth of nationalism and exclusiveness (2:28-32; 3:18-20). The Jews would see themselves as the victims of a world too corrupt to be redeemed. The only alternative left was to place their hope in YHWH, who would vindicate them by the total and supernatural annihilation of their enemies. Such attitude was further encouraged by the legislation of Nehemiah and the promulgation of the law. The situation reflects the conditions in Jerusalem at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the fourth century.

19

The Book of Joel

The first part (1:1-2:27) appears to deal with a recent historical event namely, a plague of locusts which so devastated the land that the prophet, regarding this affliction as a clear indication of YHWH's displeasure. He therefore called the people to repentance. The people responded to his call. He then predicted the destruction of the locusts and the restoration of fertility to the land.

The second part (2:28-3:21), on the other hand, appears to be wholly eschatological in character. The prophet speaks of a future time when a supernatural visitation of the spirit of YHWH will bestow upon all his people the gift of prophecy. He further depicts in apocalyptic terms the final conflict between the hosts of YHWH and the armies of the heathen nations, ending in the annihilation of the latter and the ultimate vindication of Israel

Interpretation of the Book

The book manifests some literary and historical challenges that have given rise to various interpretations. The first part of the book would appear predominantly

historical and the second part mostly apocalyptic. However, some themes still run through the two sections. The Day of YHWH as a theological theme occurs in both sections (cf. 1:15; 2:1-2 and 2:31), and elements in the description of the invading army of locusts seem to have already a kinship with the supernatural character of the events described in the second half of the book (compare 2: 2- 11, 20 and chapter 3).

The question has therefore been raised as to whether the locusts are, in fact, real locusts, or whether they are merely symbols of the heathen armies whose destruction is described in chapter 3. If they are symbolic, either they may represent hostile attacks in the course of the past history of Israel, or they may be wholly apocalyptic in character as in Rev. 9:1-11.

The fathers favoured an allegorical interpretation. The locusts of chapters 1-2 are the powers of darkness which threaten the Church. But in the end God's judgment will fall upon the world. Later explanations identify the four types of locust (1:4) with four great world empires which harried Israel-Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Greek; or Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman-or with four separate assaults on the country during the Persian period. None of these allegorical interpretations is satisfactory. As has been pointed out many times, if the locusts are armed warriors, they cannot be said to be like themselves (cf. 2:4-7).

The view generally held now is that the locusts are real and not symbolic. Close observers of the habits of these creatures, and spectators who have witnessed the devastation they have caused, recognize in the prophet's description an accurate picture of such a fearful onslaught as must have given rise to this book. Their behaviour suggests nothing more vividly than the terrible havoc wrought by invading armies, and might well be described in the highly coloured terms of chapter 2. In the normal manner of apocalyptic thought, as in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, this would lead the prophet, in the second part of the book, to regard such a disaster as a warning of the judgment to come (cf. Isa. 13). The association of the two elements would readily account for the apocalyptic colouring and eschatological references of the first part.

Incidentally, the affinities of the book of Joel would be more with the oracles of Zech. 9-14 rather than with Malachi, especially with the emphasis given to the eschatological and apocalyptic section.

Date of the Prophecies

The date of the book must be deduced from criteria within the text itself. There is probably a greater scholarly divergence concerning the date of Joel than there is concerning the date of any other biblical book. A minority position would situate Joel in the reign of Joash (837-800). The majority of scholars places the book in the postexilic period, although there is considerable divergence as to whether an early or a late context best fits the book. The reasons for a postexilic date are compelling.

Absence of the Royal Court in the Book

It would appear that the monarchy has disappeared, and many of the people are scattered in exile (3:2-3) when the oracle was uttered. For nowhere in Joel is mentioned of a king or a royal court, despite the fact that all classes of people from priests to elders, from infants to brides are invited to the lament in 2:16-17. In times of emergency it is always the king who normally represents the people before God (2 Sam 21:1; 2 Kgs 6:30). Joel must have been written during a time when the monarchy no longer existed.

The people and rulers of the Neo-Babylonian Empire are also never mentioned, although it was they who brought the kingdom of David to an end and destroyed the Temple in 587. We assume, therefore, that the Babylonians would have probably been replaced by the Persians (539) at the time of Joel.

Prominence of the Temple

The prominence of the Temple is well attested in the oracles, and oracles seem to suggest that the Temple is standing and in full operation (1:13-14; 2:15-17). Again, we may observe that the walls of Jerusalem are intact (2:9), and the community is so small enough to be gathered within the temple courts (2: 16), which are some of the characteristics of the post-exilic period. So, Joel must have been written after 515 when the Temple was rebuilt. With the year 515

we have a terminus post quem for Joel. Since Tyre and Sidon are still in existence as cities to be punished (4:4), we are able to set a terminus ante quem in the latter half of the 4th cent. Tyre was destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332 and Sidon by Artaxerxes III Ochus in 343.

Lack of Cultic Abuse

Furthermore, the cultic reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah seem to have already taken place at the time Joel was written. Our observation is taken from the prominence given to the he priesthood and the ritual figure (I: 13-14; 2: 12-1 7), in particular the meal offering and drink offering (1:9, 13; 2:14) without indicating any cultic abuses. In addition to Joel's cultic concerns, his antiforeigner tone is reminiscent of the period of Ezra-Nehemiah and later.

Linguistic Designation of Israel and Judah

We may also add that the impression created by the text is that Israel and Judah have ceased to exist as separate nations, thus the names appear to be used synonymously (2:27; 3:2, 16). Again, despite the possible qualification in 2:32, it seems that the prophet drew a sharp distinction between Israel and the rest of the world in his view of the Day of the Lord. Whereas earlier prophets (cf. Amos 5:18-20) had thought in terms of judgment upon Israel for its sins, Joel thinks rather of the punishment of Israel's enemies and the triumph of the Jews (ch. 3). This is clearly a post-exilic mode of thought

Link with Post-Exilic Prophetic Works

There are also points of contact between Joel and postexilic prophetic works. Joel 2:11 is similar to Mal 3:2, although the similarity is not striking. Joel 3:4b is identical to Ma13:23b and Joel3:5b is very likely a citation of Obad 17a. One can also compare Joel 4:2-3 with Obad 11 and Joel 4: 19 with Obad 10.

All of this indicates that Joel would have been written after Obad and Mal (5th cent.). In summation we may say that it is clear that the book was written after the rebuilding of the Temple in 515 and before the destruction of Sidon in 343, and after the time of Obadiah and

Malachi. A date between the last half of the 5th and the first half of the 4th century seems best to fit the context.

The Significance of Joel

Multidimensional Interest

This fascinating little book has many intriguing features, and these not only theological. Naturalists commend the accuracy of the description of the ravages of the locusts, and litterateurs are impressed by the vividness of the imagery and the poetic quality of the style. It would appear from the number of phrases which can be paralleled in other Old Testament books that the author had modelled himself on earlier masters like Amos and Zephaniah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah.

Indeed, he acknowledges a quotation (from Obad. 17) in 2:32, but he in his turn probably influenced the imagery of the second part of Zechariah. His artistic skill in weaving backward and forward between the historical phenomenon of the locusts and the supra-historical events of the Day of YHWH is considerable. Each of these themes takes on something of the colouring of the other. Consequently, we may agree with the opinion that Joel has used a great deal of previously existing material, but thoroughly reworked them to present a stylistic and theological unity.

Sin and Repentance, Judgement and Reward Expressed in Apocalyptic Biblical Theological Terms

But it is in his role as a harbinger of the apocalyptic school that Joel's importance lies for biblical theology. In other respects he shares the older prophetic ideas. The plague of locusts is a certain sign of YHWH's wrath. Repentance is therefore incumbent on the whole community for their unspecified sins. The most tragic aspect of the rift between YHWH and his people is seen as the cessation of the daily offerings, now, in the postexilic theocracy, the guarantee of the covenant relationship.

But given repentance, divine favour will be manifested, not only in terms of material prosperity for the community, but also, and more important, in the restoration of the means of preserving the covenant

relationship. By this both Israel and the world will know that YHWH is Lord and that his own people are his peculiar care.

It is on this conventional basis of rewards and punishments that Joel builds his apocalyptic structure. The events of history are projected onto a cosmic canvas and become prefigurations of what lies beyond the natural sequence of occurrences within the time process. The plague of locusts becomes a type of the powers of evil that oppress YHWH's people. Their rout and the subsequent restoration of prosperity are transposed into the final judgment upon the world and its sequel in a golden age for the people of the promise.

Import of its Theology

Theologically, the message of Joel is one of hope built on experience. The devastation visited upon Israel by the locusts and drought was immense. However, if YHWH responded to Israel's heartfelt lament and removed this particular disaster, it was a sign that YHWH had not abandoned his people; God was still in their midst. Armed with that conviction, there was every reason for them to hope that the reversal of fortune brought about by the end of the locust plague and drought would continue and bring the final vindication of Israel.

20

The Book of Jonah

Introduction

This unit is the concluding section, not only of the module but also the entire course. Consequently, we have chosen the book of Jonah for the project. In the last unit, however, we examined the books of the prophets Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel. We tried to examine the personalities of these prophets, the nature, structure and literary qualities of their books as well as the historical background of their respective oracles. We also reviewed the content of their books and, above all, their message.

In this unit, we shall look at some of the challenging issues surrounding the identity of the person of the prophet Jonah, the uniqueness of his book. We shall also look into the complexities of the date and authorship of the book. We shall give a summary account of the story to enable all of us follow the discussion very close, and make some positive contribution through the self-assessment exercise. The structure of the story and the literary devices as found in the text will also form an interesting piece for us to deliberate upon. In addition, we shall look into the various interpretations

of the text and the text message, which covers the range of history, literature and theology. At every state of the discussion, we shall be relating our finds to the Nigerian environment. We therefore appear for more concentration since the last lecture always carries the summary of the entire course.

Identity and Uniqueness

The challenge of the book starts with the identity of the Prophet Jonah, whose identity was not disclosed in his own book'. However, we can read about a prophet in 2 Kings 14:25, whose prediction certainly came to pass. He correctly predicted that Jeroboam II would successfully reconquer from Syria the large tracts of territories previously held by Israel. Could it be the same prophet we referred to in the Book of Jonah? That is, Jonah, the chief character of the book, who is described as the son of Amittai. Opinions of scholars are divided on the matter. Some would see the same Jonah of 2 Kings in operation here, while others have questioned such claim (Harrison, 1973, 905). The issue remains unsettled.

In spite of the fact that mere mention of the book of Jonah comes along with it the ridiculed and disobedient prophet, the story, indeed, if pictured as a stage act, would have great sense of humour. It is a prophetic book with difference. Unlike other prophetic books, it contains no divine oracles or prophetic utterances but stories about a prophetic figure (Harrison, 1973). It contains history and narrative to the practical exclusion of prophecy or divine utterances (Feinberg, 1987, p. 133). It is a story about a prophet, and even more a tract about God (Watts, 1975, 207), whose life style, actions and reactions to issues depict the prophetic message is located.

Date of Composition and Authorship

The authorship of the book is as controversial as the identity of the prophet himself. In the midst of the controversy, three opinions prevail:

i. The book was written by Jonah the Prophet himself.

ii. The book was authored by an unknown author, someone probably very close to the Prophet, but not the prophet himself. According to the argument, this could account for such details as

would be known only to Jonah, including his dialogue with YHWH. The projection is that the sailors, whose ship presumably returned to port, might perhaps have supplied the account of what happened when the prophet was asleep (1:5) and after he had been thrown overboard (1:16).

There is also a case whether the book is actually the work of person or group of authors either simultaneously or successively. However, the majority opinion is that it is the work of a single author who has exhibited some definite and common literary and theological threat that bound the thoughts together (Stuart, 1979).

Taking into consideration all the divergent of opinions, it will also be good for us to examine briefly the date of the composition of the book before we make any attempt of drawing conclusion.

Argument on the Date of the book could also be seen from three different camps:

i. The camp that jettisons any discussion on the date of composition on account that it cannot precisely be determined.

ii. The group that threats the Book of Jonah as a true historical account of the Prophet Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kgs 14:25. Thus, if the narrative is regarded as historical thus relating it to the Jonah of 2 Kings, we may then assume a date for the composition of the book somewhere between the reign of Jeroboam II and the fall of Nineveh in 612. In other words, the composition of the book is presumably earlier rather than later eighth century B.C.

iii. But once we cannot link the book historically with Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kgs 14:25, the dating of the book as a production of the 8th cent. would seem to have been disconnected. Then scholars have to search for other dates, and the "universalism" implicit in the outlook of the book has led many to believe that the work is of the late 5th cent. That is to say, they read it as a reaction to the separatist and exclusivist tendencies of the period of Ezra and Nehemiah.

But recent scholarship has been reluctant to restrict the book's intent so narrowly, and arguments for a postexilic dating based on linguistic considerations (e.g., the number of "Aramaisms" in the

text) have been critiqued. Nevertheless, the work's concern with the question of God's justice and the need for and possibility of repentance coincides well with Israel's historical experience of the exilic and postexilic periods.

Therefore, proposals for more specific dates would include:

- the 6th cent. (contemporary with Jeremiah [cf. 18:7-8), Joel [cf 2:13], Ezekiel [cf. 33:11]),
- the mid-5th cent. (note, e.g., Mal 2:17; 3:14-15), and
- the early Hellenistic period (late 4th-early 3d cent.).

However, the terminus ad quem is 200 BC, by which time it had been included in the "Book of the Twelve" (cf. Sir 49:10). So, with caution, we may conclude that the work could have been written ca. in the fourth century B.C. by an unknown writer who shared the view of Second Isaiah that God's concern for human was not confined to the Jews but was as wide as the world itself.,' and most probably about the time in Jerusalem, when Nehemiah and Ezra had been pursuing their policy of racial exclusiveness, narrow nationalism, and religious intolerance in a misguided attempt to preserve the unique heritage of the Jewish faith.

The Story Begins

Our Jonah is summoned by YHWH to set out for Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which not only represented the oppressive power of the war lords of the Near East, but, like Babylon and Rome in later years, was also regarded by Jews of the stricter sort as a synonym for the worst infamies, vicious practices, blasphemy, and irreligion of the Gentile world (cf. Nah. 3).

Jonah's mission to Nineveh is to proclaim the judgment of YHWH upon it, but the prophet, for reasons which are not disclosed until later in the story, is unwilling to fulfil his assignment. His reluctance is founded on the ancient animosity between the Jews and the Assyrian. Thus the story simply reflects the unlovely character of the dour, recalcitrant Hebrew prophet, which is finely contrasted with the humane and charitable Gentile sailors, and the readiness of the pagan city to respond to the proclamation of the truth about God and his

will for human. YHWH, having issued his initial command to the prophet to pronounce his judgment upon Nineveh, assumes the role of a deus ex machina until the final denouement, when he emerges as the merciful Creator and Father of all, a conception as lofty as any in the OT.

Message of Jonah

The Message as History

The book of Jonah finds its place in the OT as the work of an unknown writer of the fourth century B.C. who, in a little tale of the lesson which YHWH taught to a harsh and intolerant Jew, protested against this travesty of the message of 2 Isaiah, and sought to persuade his countrymen that God's love is wide enough and deep enough to include the hated Gentile. Israel, like Jonah, must learn by bitter experience that Jewry has no prescriptive right to be called God's people. Several centuries later the rigorists in the Jewish-Christian section of the church had likewise to be taught that "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11: 18).

The Message as Story

i. Allegorically, it is at this point of history that the author stands. In depicting the immediate conversion of the Ninevites, he suggests the readiness of Israel's neighbours to respond to the message, and in the picture of the prophet sulking in his flimsy shelter he depicts the Nehemiahs, Ezras, Joels, and Obadiahs of his day, sheltering under the precarious protection of their recently rebuilt temple, uncompromising in their hatred of the Gentiles, hoping for the apocalyptic judgment of God to fall upon them, and still unwilling to recognize the purpose of God to save the whole world and not only the Jews (cf. Ezek. 38-39, etc.)

ii. Parabolically, if Jonah is intended to be no more specific a character than the "certain man" of Jesus' parable, he still remains unmistakably a portrait of the narrow and intolerant Hebrew of Ezra's day, or the narrow, intolerant Christian of our own day, who refuses to face the universalistic implications of the divine revelation and its call to world mission. Moved neither by the words nor by the works

of God, he peers out upon the world from his tiny sanctuary, a forlorn, self-centred figure, clutching his faith to his bosom, while ordinary humanity, with its many likable qualities, waits ready to respond to the message of God's salvation, which his religious dogmatism makes him unwilling to share.

The Message as Prophetic

We have already seen that the importance of the work lies neither in the "miracle" of the 72-hour sojourn in the belly of a fish nor in Jesus' reference to the "sign of Jonah" in his preaching. Responding to the particular situation of the Israel of his day, the author gives us insight into developments in the role that prophecy came to have after-the monarchical period and dares to deal with the very mystery of God.

i. Prophetically, the oracle of Jonah is a brief and blunt announcement of imminent destruction (3:4). But the book as a whole emphasizes the possibility and desirability of repentance as well as the merciful and forgiving nature of God. Some have seen these emphases as evidence of a shift in the role that prophecy began to play from the 6th cent. on; a shift from simply the announcement of what God was about to do, usually judgment and punishment, to the call to." repentance. The theme of' repentance is also prominent in other literature of this period, e.g., Dtr, Jer, and Ezek.

Others have seen in this caricature of a prophet (Jonah at first flees from his mission and then sees his prophecy proved inaccurate) "a mild parody of prophecy;' written not only to counter a rigid deuteronomistic doctrine of retribution but also to give voice to "doubt, perplexity, and unease over simple solutions and glib orthodoxy.

It is also important for us to note the satire implicit in the inconsistency between Jonah's confessions of faith in 1:9and 4:2 and his accompanying actions. But this critique comes not from outside but from within the prophetic tradition and thus represents that "prophetic proclivity for self-questioning" which is "one of the best aspects of its spirit."

ii In the world of theodicy, Jonah, the central human character in the book, the author draws not a stick figure nor a cardboard character but a real human being who, despite his obvious failings, manages to evoke a certain sympathy in his struggle to understand the God in whose service he finds himself. At the root of Jonah's sometimes inexplicable actions and acerbic disposition, one can begin to recognize a sincere striving to reconcile the concept of a just God with the reality of God's mercy. In inviting us to view the problem through the eyes of this reluctant prophet, the author brings us close to the mystery of God.

Not only is it the mercy of God which the author highlights in his parable story; it is a particular quality of that mercy. That mercy is free and unmerited, and, above all, God is free to bestow it on such as the Ninevites.