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THE REALITY OF PROPHETIC REVELATION

Continued.

II

IN examining the actual data whereon Gunkel tries to found his theory of ecstatic possession as the base of prophetic testimony, we first of all meet with an appeal on his side to the prophetic *visions*. He points to Isaiah, seeing "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple; above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly; and one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory; and the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."¹ Likewise he points to Ezekiel beholding the marvellous throne-chariot of the Lord, consisting of mysterious creatures and living wheels.² Particularly he draws attention to the visions of Zechariah.³ And there are more instances: Amos beholding a basket of summer fruit,⁴ or Jeremiah seeing a rod of an almond tree,⁵ etc. All these visions are viewed by Gunkel as cogent symptoms of the ecstatic state wherein the prophets received their secret experiences.⁶

Now we must take into consideration that visions (and the same can be said of "auditions") do not necessarily result from a state of ecstasy. To be sure ecstasy may be accompanied with visions and auditions, but not every vision and audition is a sequel of ecstasy; no more than vision and audition form an inseparable accompaniment of ecstasy. In point of fact, "voices" and "visions" simply are reproductions of formerly received sensory impressions, distinguished from the usual reproduction of memory only by their high-graded intensity; and such strong reproductions may have their origin in ecstasy, but also in many other different causes: in sensitiveness of the nervous system, in psychical malady, in an evil conscience (a murderer sees and hears his victim), and even in disturbances of the alimentation (night-mare). So it is anything but a matter of fact, that visions produce conclusive evidence for an ecstatic state. Therefore we ask:

¹ Is. vi. 1-4.

² Ezek. i.

³ Zech. i.-vi.

⁴ Amos viii. 1.

⁵ Jer. i. 11.

⁶ Gunkel, *Die Propheten*, pp. 14, 15.

why should not similar impressions existing in the prophet's mind have been by the Lord strengthened to such a high degree and conjoined to definite symbols wherein His revelation was granted them ?

But is it not possible to go any further ? If we examine the passages in the prophetic writings where visions are described, do we find any indications as to the state wherein these visions were received ? We certainly would surpass the scope of this article if we attempted to deal with all these passages minutely, but it is necessary to point out the following data. There are several statements of corporeal affections, accompanying the visionary revelation. So especially the prophet Ezekiel mentions how he fell to the ground,¹ or was affected with speechlessness.² Likewise Daniel tells how he was lying on the soil,³ and even was afflicted with sickness.⁴ Perhaps some utterances from other prophets might also be taken into consideration, *e.g.*, from Jeremiah⁵ and Isaiah.⁶ Now it is certainly true of some of these places that they present instances where either merely figurative speech is used,⁷ or simply the gesture of homage is meant.⁸ But, in the remaining cases, principally this must be marked, that the described corporeal affection always is the sequel of the vision, the effect of it ; not an accompanying symptom. This is particularly manifest with Ezekiel ; we have to turn our attention to the fact that it always is the same vision : the cherub-chariot of the Lord, which causes the corporeal effect ; and each time we are told, after the vision had made its apparition, what, in a bodily effect, happened to the prophet. Even more lucid is the case of Daniel : it was not before the vision of the ram and he-goat had left him that he became faint and sick for some days afterwards. It is easy to understand that this is no proof for ecstasy ; for, if the revelation resulted from ecstasy, the corporeal phenomena would not follow the vision, but precede it. So we rather have to explain these phenomena as the expressions of the appalling experience, that visited the prophets as they saw the vision. This appalling experience in the case of Ezekiel is caused by the awe-inspiring

¹ Ezek. i. 28 ; iii. 23, 24 ; ix. 8 ; xi. 13 ; xiii. 3 ; xliv. 4.

² Ezek. iii. 14f, 26 ; xxiv. 27 ; xxxiii. 22.

³ Dan. viii. 17, 18 ; x. 8-10.

⁴ Dan. viii. 27.

⁵ Jer. iv. 19 ; viii. 18 ; xx. 7-9.

⁶ Is. xxi. 3.

⁷ This is the case without doubt in Is. xxi. 3 ; Jer. iv. 19 ; viii. 18 ; xx. 7-9.

⁸ So in Ezek. ix. 8 ; xi. 13.

vision of the living throne of God ; with Daniel it is due to the succession of miraculous visions.

Separately must be dealt with the question of Ezekiel's speechlessness. In Ezek. iii. 15 the Hebrew has מִשְׁמִים (mashmim) translated in English by "astonished" (A.V.), or "astoned" (R.V.). But there are many commentators who attribute to the word the sense of "stricken with dumbness." Now the verb's first signification is "to be or to become desolate"; in a metaphorical sense it is used for bewilderment and perplexity. There is not a single place in the whole Old Testament where the sense of "speechless" can be proved.¹ So the English translation must be regarded as right. We have not to do with ecstasy but with Ezekiel's awe of the Theophany. A different case is presented by Ezek. iii. 26 ; xxiv. 27 ; and xxxiii. 22. Here without doubt the meaning is that the prophet for some time did not speak and at last his mouth was opened again. But now the question is whether this speechlessness is to be regarded as a corporeal impediment of speech, or as a case of deliberate silence. That the latter is the case is manifest from the fact that it is the Lord who will make him silent by not granting him revelations. In Ezek. xxxiii. 22 it is clearly said that "the hand of the Lord was upon him to open his mouth," that he "was no more dumb." This expression, "the hand of the Lord" continually denotes the reception of the divine revelation. So it is obvious that Ezekiel's speechlessness is meant for a prophetic silence ; this speechlessness is identical with being destitute of revelation. Therefore the Lord announces the prophet's silence in these words : "thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover : for they are a rebellious house" (Ezek. iii. 26).

A second argument of Gunkel is derived from the brevity of the original units of prophetic messages. These units, he argues, originally were only a single sentence, a few words, an expressive sound, uttered in ecstatic trance. We can retrace the evolution of prophecy by analysing the existent prophetic literature into its smallest elements, consisting of scarcely a few lines. And in some aphorisms and symbolic names are handed down to us the original utterances of ecstatic character where prophecy sprung from.²

¹ The only passage where the word would allow the sense of "speechless" is Job xxi. 5 ; but the signification "to be astonished" is still more apt, as commentators generally admit.

² Gunkel, *op. cit.*, pp. 115ff.

Now, to begin with, we must confess that the original units of prophetic preaching certainly do not coincide with the chapters of our Bible. If I am allowed to take an example from the book of Jeremiah, we find prophetic units covering about one of our chapters, for instance ii. 1-iii. 5 ; iii. 6-iv. 2 ; and of somewhat smaller size : vii. 1-15 ; xii. 7-17 ; xiii. 15-27. But we also find larger portions composed, as closer examination demonstrates, of rather short pieces, e.g., iv. 3-vi. 30 ; viii. 4-ix. 25 ; xxi. 11-xxiii. 8 ; xxx. -xxxii. ; xlvi. ; l. -li. These smallest elements are to be regarded as the different themes, on which the prophet preached ; and in the above-named larger portions these themes are brought together, inasmuch as they are concerned with the same subject. So, in iv. 3-vi. 30 and viii. 4-ix. 25, there are brought together the themes regarding the "evil from the north" ; these themes are : iv. 3, 4 ; iv. 5-8 ; iv. 9, 10 ; iv. 11-14 ; iv. 15-18 ; iv. 19-22 ; iv. 23-28 ; iv. 29 ; iv. 30, 31 ; v. 1-9 ; v. 10-14 ; v. 15-19 ; v. 20-25 ; v. 26-29 ; v. 30, 31 ; vi. 1-8 ; vi. 9-15 ; vi. 16-21 ; vi. 22-26 ; vi. 27-30 ; viii. 4-6 ; viii. 7-12 ; viii. 13 ; viii. 14-17 ; viii. 18-23 (English Version, ix. 1) ; ix. 1-8 (E.V., ix. 2-9) ; ix. 9-15 (E.V., ix. 10-16) ; ix. 16-21 (E.V., ix. 17-22) ; ix. 22, 23 (E.V., ix. 23, 24) ; ix. 24, 25 (E.V., ix. 25, 26). The portion xxi. 11-xxiii. 8 contains messages regarding the royal house of Judah ; the themes are : xxi. 11-14 ; xxii. 1-9 ; xxii. 10-12 (on Jehohaz) ; xxii. 13-18 (on Jehoiakim) ; xxii. 20-30 (on Jehoiachin) ; xxiii. 1-8 (on the divine Messiah). In chapters xxx. and xxxi. are gathered the prophecies on the restoration of Israel : xxx. 5-11 ; xxx. 12-17 ; xxx. 18-22 ; xxx. 23-xxxii. 1 ; xxxii. 2-6 ; xxxii. 7-14 ; xxxii. 15-22 ; xxxii. 23-25 ; xxxii. 27-30 ; xxxii. 31-34 ; xxxii. 35-37 ; xxxii. 38-40. Chapter xlvi. is a collection of preachings against Moab (1-8 ; 9-15 ; 16-25 ; 26-28 ; 29-39 ; 40-47), and chapters l. and li. against Babel (l. 2-13 ; l. 14-20 ; l. 21-28 ; l. 29-34 ; l. 35-40 ; l. 41-46 ; li. 1-6 ; li. 7-10 ; li. 11-19 ; li. 20-24 ; li. 25, 26 ; li. 27-33 ; li. 34-37 ; li. 38-44 ; li. 45-49 ; li. 50-58). This conspectus of Jeremiah's prophecies, with application of the well-known *ex ungue leonem*, may teach us that the thesis of Gunkel as to the minimal extent of the original prophetic units is untenable. There are, it is true, a number of prophetic messages of very small size, but the majority are considerably more voluminous than Gunkel is disposed to admit. And, what is more, the relative minuteness of many a prophetic unit is accounted for by the fact that merely the

themes have been written down. What we find in our Biblical prophetic books is not the elaborate rendering of their message as it was delivered to the people, but only the summarising and abridgment of it. Not alone the minute elements of which the larger portions are composed give the general impression of their being outlines, rather than complete elaboration, but also the notices on the construction of these larger portions, clearly prove that they are merely to be regarded as the summing up of a much more comprehensive preaching: it is told us that Jeremiah had to write down "all the words the Lord had spoken unto him against Israel, and against Judah, and against the nations," during a period of not less than twenty-three years,¹ and how can anyone suppose that this writing down would have involved more than a résumé of his preaching? A similar notice is given as to the origin of Jer. xxx. and xxxi.² So we surely must reject the attempt of Gunkel to minimise the original prophetic units.

But what about the aphorisms and symbolic names whereon Gunkel lays extraordinary stress? At first we must draw our attention to the fact that no such aphorisms or symbolic names are found in the prophecies of Amos, one of the older prophets. Were the theory of Gunkel true, that these phenomena have to be regarded as remnants of ecstatic cries, we at any rate ought to find them in the scriptures of the oldest prophets. Yet this is not the case. Moreover, if we attentively examine the rare passages where such aphorisms and symbolic names occur, we never find them making their appearance suddenly and without connection in the context, but on the contrary, they are always inseparably conjoined with their surroundings. So we meet with the symbolic names of Hosea's children³ as the most natural continuation of the symbolism expressed in the usage of the words "wife of whoredoms" and "children of whoredoms."⁴ Just in the same way, the symbolic names of Isaiah's children form an integral part of historical narrative.⁵ Symbolic aphorisms like *Rahab-hem-shabeth* (Rahab—they are sitting still),⁶ *Magor-missabib* (terror from roundabout),⁷ or *Sbaon-he'bir-hamo'ed* (boaster who hath passed the time appointed),⁸ are closely connected with the whole entourage; we have to judge them as a literary figure,⁹

¹ Jer. xxxvi. 2.² Cf. Jer. xxx. 2.³ Hos. i. 4-11.⁴ Hos. i. 2.⁵ *Sbear-Yasub*, Is. vii. 3. and *Maher-Sbalal-Chasb-Baz*, Is. viii. 3.⁶ Is. xxx. 7.⁷ Jer. xx. 3.⁸ Jer. xlvi. 17.⁹ That such symbolic names indeed are purely meant as a literary figure, is placed in a lucid light by Jer. iii. 6 vv. and viii. 5, where the whole tenor of the prophecy depends upon this figure.

to vivify the phrase. Concluding, we may say that it is impossible to use such symbolic expressions as an argument in favour of prophetic ecstasy; on the contrary, there is strong reason to believe that they have merely been taken to support a thesis for want of better arguments.

We pass to a third ground, put forward by Gunkel. The symbolic actions of the prophets should produce evident proof of their ecstatic state.¹ It is true, he hesitates to ascribe every one of them to ecstasy; in more than one case, he thinks of imitation of older, ecstatic prophets; but that is irrelevant as we are willing to test his opinion by the cases where he with surety supposes ecstasy. In order to interpret the symbolic actions as symptoms of ecstasy, Gunkel defines them as "triebmassige Handlungen," impulsive actions, that is to say, actions produced merely by impulse. This notion of impulsive actions is very well-known among psychiatrists, and especially forms an important subject of forensic medicine. Then, if we put the question, what are the discriminating characteristics of an impulsive action (in German "Triebhandlung"), we find that the impulse is the sole motive of the action. In every other case there is a plurality of motives, and human actions as a rule are the result of different motives. Sometimes these motives are contradictory, and the action is produced by a deliberate decision of the mind. The peculiarity of an impulsive action is the entire lack of disparity in motives, and of course, also of a deliberate decision. Turning now to the symbolic actions of the prophets, it is easy to see that there is no absence of differentiation in motives, even in the case where Gunkel and his followers with certainty assume ecstasy, with the prophet Ezekiel. The most prominent example, given by Gunkel, how Ezekiel in order to symbolise the dearth of food in the besieged city, prepares his frugal bread from different ingredients and bakes it with cow's dung,² manifestly shows the varying motives: at first the voice of the Lord is heard by the prophet, "thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight"; but Ezekiel demurs to this demand: "Ah, Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted; for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth." Then the divine command is altered: "Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy

¹ Gunkel, *op. cit.*, pp. 26ff.

² Ezek. iv. 9-15.

bread therewith." It is perfectly incomprehensible how this case can be understood as an impulsive action. I subjected it to the judgment of one of our leading Dutch psychiatrists, who immediately in the most vigorous manner denied the possibility of it. We need not extend our investigation any further; since we do not find ecstasy where it is announced with the utmost assurance, the conclusion will not be too rash, that there is no question of ecstasy in the prophetic symbolic actions at all.

Summing up, we may state that the data, alleged by Gunkel to corroborate his thesis, totally fail to prove that the origin of prophetic revelation lies in ecstatic experiences. But, supposing the result of our investigation had not been negative to this measure, would ecstasy then deliver a sufficient explanation for the prophetic יהוה אמר כה (kho amar Yahweh), "thus saith the Lord"? Ecstasy would only then suffice to explain the prophetic testimony, if it could be ascertained that every prophetic utterance covered by the "thus saith the Lord," had been given in ecstatic trance, or at least went back to some experience acquired in ecstasy. How could ecstasy offer a ground to stamp as divine words psychical experiences which did not originate in it? The purely human explanation of prophecy seeks to surmount this difficulty by reasoning thus: the prophets, having got some ecstatic experiences, henceforth, unacquainted with the real nature of ecstasy as they were, became accustomed to consider every significant and vigorous idea that rose up in their mind as originating from the same source, from "possession" by the Lord Yahweh. This cannot possibly be true. Psychologically, it would be totally unintelligible. Rather the opposite should be expected: that all not-ecstatical experiences were set aside as not revelations; for the difference certainly was perceptible. The ecstatic shamans also definitely know when they are in their state of "possession," and when not. Here we must revert to what we remarked in our first article: the prophets explicitly discerned between their own word and the word that the Lord had spoken unto them, and, now and then, were even struggling with the divine subject; it is here that they discover the gap between themselves and the false prophets: the latter bringing forth merely the ideas of their own heart.

To this can be added, that a usual accompaniment of ecstasy is disturbance of the normal progress of ideas. Therefore

as a rule no proper recollection is left behind. When an ecstatic shaman afterwards is asked for further informations as to what he said in his trance, he shows himself astonished and wholly ignorant of the matter.¹ Regarding this it is impossible to take ecstasy as a base for such rich and deep ideas, as are piled up in the Old Testament prophetic literature.

We think this enough to substantiate our statement at the close of our first article, that the method of Gunkel, no more than of Kuenen, has succeeded in delivering the proof that the prophetic testimony can be sufficiently explained from a purely human base.

Thus we judge it our right to maintain that the only right explanation of the prophetic testimony is the one that gives credence to their declaration, "the Lord hath spoken unto me," and that fully accepts the reality of prophetic revelation.

G. CH. AALDERS.

Hilversum (Holland).

¹ Cf. M. A. Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia, A Study in Social Anthropology*, Oxford, 1914, p. 231.