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SOME NOTES ON MICAH

(continued)

by D. K. INNES

CHAPTER V

IN contrast to the king who is insulted by his enemies (v. 1, Heb. 4: 14), Yahweh will one day raise up the perfect and victorious Messiah. His apparent origin will be insignificant, since he will come from Bethlehem—the designation of Bethlehem as “little” is perhaps confirmed by the fact that it is not mentioned among the cities of Judah in Joshua 15: 20–63. The free quotation in Matthew 2: 6 appears to reverse the meaning by rendering, “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least (*oudamōs elachistē*) among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel” (RSV). This is perhaps an interpretation; it is independent of the LXX, whose vocabulary and form are quite different. The meaning is not really contradictory, since Matthew assumes that Bethlehem would have been *thought* insignificant had not the Messiah come from there.¹

The connection between Bethlehem and Ephrathah is confirmed in I Samuel 17: 12 where David’s family are said to be Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah, and Ruth 1: 2 where the same is said of Mahlon and Chilion. In Ruth 4: 11 Ephrathah and Bethlehem appear to be synonymous, as they are also in Genesis 38: 19 and 48: 7.²

The word *’eleph*, literally “a thousand”, which also came to mean “a company of 1000 men”, and thence “a family” (I Samuel 10: 19), here seems to receive a further extension of meaning to denote the area occupied by an *’eleph* (cf. I Samuel 23: 23).³

“Ruler over Israel” may be preferable to “ruler in Israel”. The same phrase (*m-sh-l bē*) has the former meaning in Genesis 3: 16; 4: 7; Psalms 22: 29; 59: 14, and probably also in Genesis 45: 8, 26; Joshua 12: 5. Of course one meaning need not exclude the other. *Bē* is by far the commonest construction after *m-sh-l*, while *’al* is much commoner after *m-l-k*. The Messiah’s authority is implied

¹ [See R. H. Gundry, *The Use of the OT in St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 91ff. Ed.]

² Compare L. Morris on Ruth 1: 2 (Tyndale OT Commentaries).

³ [The translation “rulers” in Matt. 2: 6 may reflect vocalization *’alluphei* instead of MT *’al’phei*. Ed.]

again in verse 4 (Heb. 3) by the shepherd metaphor (cf. 2 Samuel 5: 2; Ezekiel 34).

Moša'oth is not used elsewhere in the sense of "origin", but the similar word *moša'* means the source of a spring in 2 Kings 2: 21; Isaiah 58: 11. *Miqqedem*, "from of old", and *mimei colam*, "from ancient days", are quite general words for past time. *Miqqedem* is used of the time of God's prophetic revelation in Isaiah 45: 21; 46: 10, of God's existence in Habakkuk 1: 12, and of the days of David and Asaph in Nehemiah 12: 46. *Yemei colam* is used in reference to Israel's past history in general (Isaiah 63: 9, 11; Micah 7: 14; Malachi 3: 4), and to the past days of prosperity for David's house (Amos 9: 11). These words are suited to convey both the ancient lineage of Christ as a descendant of the family of David, and also His eternal pre-existence.

It appears from verse 3 (Heb. 2) that the birth of the Messiah will mark the end of the period in which Israel will be given up into the hands of their enemies, and will also herald the reunion of God's people. The reunion of Israel is mentioned as a characteristic of the Messianic Age in several other passages, e.g. Isaiah 11: 12; Jeremiah 3: 18; Ezekiel 37: 16-17. The prominence of His mother is reminiscent of the "Immanuel" prophecy in Isaiah 7: 14.

The Messianic King will be equipped for His work of ruling with the power of Yahweh (4, Heb. 3)—in fact His rule will be an actual manifestation of God's revealed character (Name); the thought is not unlike that of Isaiah 11: 2. There is perhaps a suggestion of the Messiah's invincible power in the words "he shall stand" (cf. 1 Samuel 17: 8). His world-wide rule will lead to stability (4b, Heb. 3b). Perhaps the plural *w'eyashabu* (RSV "and they shall dwell secure") looks back to the plural in verse 3b (Heb. 2b), in which case it will refer to the restored Israel. It has been objected that the verb *y-sh-b* by itself nowhere has the sense "dwell in safety". On the other hand, it occurs several times with *lecolam* in the sense of "remain" or "endure" (cf. Joel 4: 20; Psalm 125: 1).

The opening words of verse 5 (Heb. 4) could be "this man shall be the peace" (AV), referring to the Messiah, or "this shall be peace" (RSV), referring to the whole of the following section. The former use of *zeh* is paralleled in Genesis 5: 29. It is apparently supported in this verse by the Syriac, which joins this phrase to the preceding verse, and by the Vulgate, which has *iste*, "this man". *Shalom* will then have the sense of "protection", as it appears to do in Zechariah 8: 10.

The second interpretation has the support of the LXX, and may be paralleled in Genesis 20: 13. In this case verses 5-6 need have

nothing to do with the Messiah, and may be a separate section. But the singular "he shall deliver" (verse 6, cf. AV, translating *w^hiṣṣil*—RSV alters it to the plural) appears to revert to the Messiah, and it is perhaps better to take the whole of verses 2–6 as one section. Thus the Messiah will give peace from the Assyrians, and His days will be marked by an ample supply of leaders.

Biph^ethaḥeiha, "in its entrances" (v. 6, Heb. 5) does not seem to make sense here, and the RSV is to be followed in reading *bapp^ethiḥa* "with the drawn sword", cf. Psalm 55: 22. This involves altering the vowels only, and is said to be supported by Aquila, the Quinta and the Vulgate.

The next section, consisting of verses 7–9 (Heb. 6–8) describes the role of Israel among the nations, while the remaining verses 10–15 (Heb. 9–14) predict Yahweh's purificatory judgement on Israel. This would remove the sources of corruption in her life, which included every class of objects in which she put her confidence rather than committing herself to Him.

The last two verses of the chapter present two interrelated problems. Verse 14 (Heb. 13) refers to the destruction of Israel's cities (*areika*). However, this word could be taken in the Aramaic sense of "thy enemies" (cf. I Samuel 28: 16), as "cities" have already been mentioned in verse 11 (Heb. 10). Secondly, two different interpretations are possible for the final verse of the chapter. It could be read as a warning that an unrepentant Israel will share the fate of other disobedient nations. This meaning would agree with the message of the section as a whole. If on the other hand the closing words of the preceding verse are rendered "destroy your enemies", the meaning will be that Israel, after undergoing God's discipline, will be the instrument of His wrath on the disobedient nations (cf. verse 9—Heb. 8). It is difficult to make a definite judgement, but probably the first meaning is preferable, because it better preserves the continuity of the passage, and so far as the present writer knows, the Aramaic sense of *car* is not supported here by any of the versions.

(To be concluded)

Westacre, Norfolk.