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MICAH 6 AND 7 A NORTHERN PROPHECY

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THE Book of Micah falls into two well-defined parts, as separable as Isaiah 1—39 and Isaiah 40 ff. The first five chapters present many difficulties in detail, but the point of view of the Prophet is everywhere the same. He is a Judæan, but not a Jerusalemite. To him, as to all Judæans, David is the national Hero, but it is not David the King in Zion and Jerusalem, but rather David the guerilla chieftain, the warrior who came from Bethlehem and took refuge in the cave of Adullam. The really characteristic utterance of 'Micah the Morasthite' was recognised as such so long ago as the days of Jeremiah: it is 'Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps' (see Jer. 26 18).

In 'Micah' 6 and 7 we are in another atmosphere, and it is generally recognised that these chapters must be assigned to a different author from that of 1—5. When did he live? The usual answer appears to be that 6 and 7 1-8 may belong to the bad days of Manasseh, while 7 7-20 must be later still because they seem to be written during the Captivity. Prof. Nowack in his article "Micah" in *Hastings' Dictionary* even speaks of 'Zion' suffering for her sins and of the hope that Jahwe will 'build the walls of Jerusalem.'

As a matter of fact neither Zion nor Jerusalem is mentioned in chaps. 6 and 7, and the object of this paper is to suggest that the walls, which in 7 11 are to be rebuilt, are those of Samaria. It is noteworthy that all the geographical allusions in these chapters belong to the horizon of Northern Israel.

Carmel, Bashan, Gilead (7 14) are all Northern: so is Gilgal (6 5). As far as one can see it is at Gilgal, not at Zion, that the would-be worshipper proposes to come with his costly ritual offerings (6 6 ff.). Then again the reference to Omri's statutes and to the house of Ahab (6 10) fit Northern Israel, and do not fit Judah, whether in Nebuchadnezzar's time or at any other period. Aaron also (6 4), who made the Golden Calf, seems to have been more revered in Northern Israel than in pre-exilic Jerusalem, where from the time of Solomon the Sons of Zadok had had the pre-eminence. Is it not the case that the references in 6 4 and 7 20 to the stories narrated in the Pentateuch recall the manner of the Northerner Hosea (12 3 f., 12 f., etc.) rather than that of any other of the Prophets?

And the 'Captivity' of 7 7-20, of what sort is it? The exiles are in Assyria and Māsōr. There is no mention of Babylon or the Chaldeans, and if Māsōr does mean Egypt it is at any rate a word characteristic of the times of Isaiah, not of those of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (see 2 Kings 19 24, Is. 19 6). Indeed I venture to claim that there is nothing in the thought or theology that is inconsistent with a Northern Israelite origin, nothing which would make such a theory an anachronism. The Hebrew style is, of course, somewhat different from the very peculiar style of Hosea, and indeed I am not suggesting that Hosea was the writer of these two chapters. But if Micah 6, 7 were incorporated with the Book of Hosea and read continuously with it I do not think any one who was unfamiliar with these works would be conscious of any serious differences either from a theological point of view or from the political and social state of things set forth.

One further point may be noted in conclusion. Micah 6 3-8 has received many panegyrics in modern times and I do not propose to add to the number. But if the view of these chapters here indicated be adopted, we have a parallel in the prose of 2 Kings 17 23-41 to what the prophet formulates so nobly. In that passage the ecclesiastical historian, writing from the point of view of the Southern Kingdom and of Josiah's reformation, tells us how the new settlers from Babylon and Sepharvaim did not know how to worship Jahweh,

the God of the land, and how the King of Assyria sent them a priest of the Old Religion, whereby the worship of Jahweh was set going again, though in the eyes of our historian it was conducted in an unauthorized fashion. In 'Micah' 6 6-8 we also have set before us a man of that very time who does not know how Jahweh must be worshipped. He is ready to practise all manner of heathen rites, even to the sacrifice of his first-born child. Who and what sort of man is this? Not surely Balaam, and not any Israelite; it is rather the earnest but ignorant settler in Palestine who knows nothing of the religion of Elijah and of Amos. Our Prophet gives him the great Answer: in my view it is the swan-song of Northern Israel, a sort of view from afar of personal religion, like Moses viewing the Promised Land from Pisgah, while for the Judaeans who came after was reserved the more prosaic and more difficult task of organizing the Prophetic Vision into a working system in actual operation.