ESCHATOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

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There is usually no doubt among scholars (and even less among ordinary readers of Scripture) that there is an eschatology in the Book of Micah. Where the doubt comes in is whether this eschatology can be ascribed to Micah himself or whether it is a later addition to the words of the prophet. Certain trends can be discerned in the discussion. In the opinion of fundamentalists and strictly conservative scholars the prophecies of weal may as readily be ascribed to the prophet himself as the rest of the oracles. This point of view met strong opposition from critical scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries, and their general position, as advocated by scholars like WELLHAUSEN 1), MARTI, DUHM, HÖLSCHER, MOWINCKEL, ROBINSON, and many others, came to be widely accepted. The analyses given of the Book of Micah have been highly valuable. They have undoubtedly thrown new light on it and have produced lasting results. They are based on strict logic and use categories from Western European thinking. This is the method a scholar has to apply; but Western logic can also be pressed too far, if it does not take account of the actual Oriental background of the words of the Hebrew prophets 2).

The chief results of an analysis may be indicated briefly. MOWINCKEL, whose analysis I choose as an example 3), finds the words of Micah himself in chs. i-iii, oracles of doom. Chs. iv and v contain prophecies of weal, all considered as later additions. In chs. vi-vii 6 there are again oracles of doom, but as their character deviates from that of the oracles of chs. i-iii, it is thought likely that they were uttered by another prophet than Micah, though they may come from him. Ch. vii 7-20, a passage with a strong hope of Israel's restoration is

1) Skizzen und Vorarbeiten 5, 1892, pp. 145 f.
2) So also J. LINDBLOM: Micha literarisch untersucht, 1929, p. 10.
3) GTM MM III, pp. 666 ff.
regarded as an addition, in the style of a “prophetical liturgy”.

This analysis seems logically cogent; but we must recognize its limitations and not draw too far-reaching conclusions. It is obviously a classification according to contents; and the grouping of the oracles shows that the traditionists had already collected groups of oracles with similar subject matter. The scheme can easily be recognized: oracles of doom are grouped together, and so are the oracles of weal, in the traditional order: first doom, then restoration. What complicates the situation in the Book of Micah is the fact that the scheme occurs twice. This does not necessarily imply that more than one prophet is speaking. It may be that the words of doom in chs. vi and vii are less hard than those in chs. i-iii, but that only tells something about the methods of the traditionists. There must be striking differences between the two collections to justify the assumption that there were different authors. Differences of theme and purpose called for different styles in ancient Hebrew poetry and preaching.

Another problem must also be mentioned. It is closely connected with the stylistic one just mentioned. It is the much discussed question whether the same prophet could preach both doom and complete restoration. Too much Western logic has been applied to the discussion of this question. It is usually held that a prophet who fervently preached doom and destruction could not at the same time weaken the effect and the earnestness of his appeal by promising a bright future when his people had gone through the trial. This may sound perfectly logical; but it is nevertheless Western logic at its worst. It is a point of view which is far too narrow and which does not take account of the realities of life. People who went through the last war know that there is little comfort in the prospect of a bright future if one knows there will come an ordeal which will mean a decimation of the population. This fact takes the sting out of the use which has been made of Jer. xxvi 18, where the hard doom in Micah iii 12 is mentioned. The elders in the time of Jeremiah praised King Hezekiah because he did not put Micah to death for his words of doom. Actually, this quotation from Micah and the comments on it do not at all exclude the possibility that Micah may also have uttered oracles of weal.

Some analogies from other prophets may be of interest. Isaiah, whose oracles of doom were as absolute as those of Micah, called his son Shear-jashub (vii 3). He knew that in spite of the imminent