A FRESH INTERPRETATION OF ZECHARIAH IX–XI 1)

BY

Douglas R. JONES

Durham

The well-established critical view that Zech. ix-xiv is quite separate in date and content from Zech. i-viii 2) has not yet led to a satisfactory interpretation of the later chapters. The use of סָבִי לַבֶּרוֹרִיהוֹ to introduce Zech. ix-xi and xii-xiv and Malachi has suggested that anonymous complexes have been collected in three parts, by the editor of the Book of the Twelve Prophets, and added to the last of the named prophecies. But whether a single prophet is responsible for cc. ix-xi, or whether it is itself a collection of two or more varied prophecies is not agreed. The main impediment in the way of establishing its date and meaning is the obscurity of the historical references. On the whole, the tendency since STADE's articles of 1881-2 3) is to regard the section as late. The background of ix 1-18 is often taken to be the conquest of Syria by Alexander the Great. The shepherds of ch. xi are commonly understood to reflect Ptolemaic rule of the early third century. מ in ix 13, it is alleged, must mean Greece. The common factor is the Greek period. Those features which led earlier scholars to give a pre-exilic date, in certain cases pre-721, in others pre-586, are then explained as archaisms.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a fresh interpretation of Zech. ix-xi. It will be argued that the most probable date is the first half of the fifth century and that none of the crucial passages demands a later date. A new historical reconstruction is required, and the detection of an autobiographical framework to cc. ix-xi will make it possible to discern the activity of a prophet living in or near Damascus, taking active pastoral responsibility for the Israelites of the northern dispersion in this region, and passionately devoted to the reunion of the people of God.

2) A distinction made as early as 1653 by Joseph INIEDE.

Vetus Testamentum XII
The immediate problem of the literary character of these chapters is posed by the presence within them of apparently pre-exilic and post-exilic elements. Eißfeldt 1), among others, has drawn forceful attention to this. But he has failed to suspect that the passages most convincingly interpreted of the Greek period may wear a different appearance when their true character is understood. It has been observed that the prophet (whom we call Second Zechariah) uses older oracles especially from Amos and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It has been assumed that the passages, as they now stand, are the result of a late eschatological redaction. The implication is that the historical allusions must be clearly found in the contemporary situation of the redactor. But may it not be that the prophet is wont to quote or use older prophetic passages, as also to use poetic or prophetic conventions, because he sees their relevance to his own day? Then he will not be adapting earlier oracles to the precise historical situation of his day. He will merely be recognising that his situation is generally envisaged in earlier prophecy. The historical allusions may well then be in part striking enough to suggest the connexion, but in part imprecise. For the older passage will always retain its own character. If this is true, the modern commentator may fall into the danger of seeking historical allusions which are not there!

This may now be illustrated.

ix 1-8

This passage contains a prophetic judgment against (as nearly all interpreters think) the cities of Syria, and certainly against Phoenicia and Philistia. It ends with a promise that the purified remnant of the Philistines will be incorporated in the holy people, who will be henceforth divinely protected. The passage is usually referred either to the period of the early Ptolemies or to that of Alexander the Great. The assumption is that a hostile campaign must be identified in the period after the exile when the conditions described in the passage were fulfilled. In 333 BC Alexander the Great won the battle of Issus, and as a consequence Palestine fell into his hands. The description

1) Einleitung in das Alte Testament (1934), pp. 485-493. S. R. Driver, Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, 9th ed., (1913) pp. 346-350) clearly analysed this feature, but thought that the most characteristic parts of the prophecy pointed to a date not earlier than 333 B.C. The pre-exilic sections he called “in part a re-affirmation, in a form adapted to the circumstances of the time, of older promises”. (p. 349).