SHEAR-JASHUB (ISAIAH VII 3) AND "THE REMNANT OF WRATH" (PSALM LXXXVI 11)

According to Isa. vii 3 the prophet Isaiah had a son named Shear-jashub. That this name had symbolic significance is clear from Isa. viii 18, where the prophet declares, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion". Furthermore, it is clear from the presence of Shear-jashub alongside Isaiah in Isa. vii 3 that the name had some specific significance in the context of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, and the fact that he is there mentioned in the preamble to an oracle of salvation addressed to Ahaz suggests that his name implied deliverance for Judah. In Isa. x 20-3 the name is interpreted both positively "a remnant will return...to the mighty God" (v. 21) and negatively "only a remnant of them will return (sc. to God)"), but both meanings are irrelevant to the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, and in any case, Isa. x 20-23 is generally recognized to be a later addition. Nor does the view that the name signifies the survival of a remnant of the army of the southern kingdom 1) provide the necessary message of hope demanded by the context, even on the most optimistic interpretation of the word "remnant".

Sensing that some new interpretation is required, É. Lipiński, "Le Pǔ yśub d’Isaïe vii 3", VT 23 (1973), pp. 245-6, has argued that a satisfactory sense may be obtained by a slight repointing of the name from šē’ēr yāšūb to šō’ēr yāšūb “le sang retombera”, referring to the bloody revenge that would fall upon the invading Syrians and Israelites who are besieging Jerusalem in Isa. vii. Lipiński’s view certainly has the merit of providing an explanation of the name which expresses deliverance for Judah and therefore fits the context, but its emendation of the text requires that it should be accepted

Vetus Testamentum XXXI, 1 (1981)
only if no more satisfactory explanation can be found. This can, in fact, be done. In his recent commentary on Isaiah, R. E. Clements ²) has argued that we should understand the name Shear-jashub “a remnant will return” as applying to a remnant of the enemy Syrians and Israelites who are besieging Jerusalem in Isa. vii. This not only conforms to the context by providing a message of deliverance for Judah but is also consonant with the fact that the one other passage in Isaiah employing the root יר which is indubitably authentic (Isa. xvii 3, 6) specifically relates it to Syria and Israel at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. The name Shear-jashub therefore expresses a message of judgement for the enemy and deliverance for Judah comparable to the names of Isaiah’s other sons Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa. viii 1-4) and, in my opinion, Immanuel (Isa. vii 14-16) ³).

From where did Isaiah derive this notion of the survival of a mere remnant of the enemy which seeks to capture Jerusalem? There is wide agreement that Isaiah’s message in Isa. vii-viii must be seen against the background of the Zion theology of such psalms as xlvi, xlviii and lxxvi in which belief in the inviolability of Zion is expressed, Isaiah simply making the modification that this is not automatic but that faith also is required (cf. Isa. vii 9b). In this connection, it is widely believed that the name of Immanuel “God is with us” derives from Ps. xlvi 8, 12 (Eng. 7, 11) Yahweh ʾĕḇāʾōṯ ʾīmmanaḵ “the Lord of hosts is with us” ⁴). The new suggestion which I wish to make is that the name of Isaiah’s other son, Shear-jashub, understood in Clements’s way, should also be seen in the light of Zion theology and specifically against the background of the comparable Zion psalm lxxvi 11. J. A. Emerton has undertaken a very thorough, careful and convincing study of this verse and concluded that it should be rendered as follows: “Surely thou dost crush the wrath of man, thou dost restrain the remnant of wrath” ⁵). The “remnant of wrath” (ʾĕḇēṯ hēmōṯ) here clearly denotes what survives of the enemy nations which come to attack Jerusalem and whose defeat is celebrated in this psalm, and in view of the widely accepted background of Isa. vii-viii in the Zion theology of such psalms as xlvi, xlviii and lxxvi, it is attractive to suppose that the concept of the remnant reflected here lies behind the reference to Shear-jashub. If it is not from this specific psalm that Isaiah drew the idea, it is surely from the same circle of ideas to which Ps. lxxvi 11 alludes.

Oxford

John Day