CALL AND FRUSTRATION
A New Understanding of Isaiah viii 21-22

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"It is to be observed that Isaiah did not resist the call, but, unlike Jeremiah, obeyed willingly." This remark of Johannes Lindblom 1) describes adequately the usual view regarding the main difference between the personalities of these two great OT prophets.

A comparison of Is. vi and Jer. i, the passages normally regarded as the "calls" of these two prophets also confirms this impression. The motif of hesitation is explicit in Jeremiah—"O, Lord Yahweh, I do not know how I shall speak..." (Jer. i 6); no similar impression mars the surface of the account in Is. vi 2). Isaiah is certainly afraid when confronted with "the king, Yahweh Sebaoth", but his fear is caused by his awareness of being unclean during his encounter with the sacred in the situation itself. After being cleansed, and having heard Yahweh's question ("whom shall I send?"), Isaiah replies apparently without reluctance, "Look! Here I am! Send me!" (Is. vi 8).

This impression is reinforced by the fact that the book of Isaiah contains no passage corresponding to the so-called "confessions" of the book of Jeremiah. I shall not be able to discuss here the problems concerning the authenticity and extent of these texts, and shall accordingly merely note my agreement with these scholars who believe that it is in some way not unreasonable to connect these materials with Jeremiah's own person 3).

2) The two passages do not quite belong to the same literary category; see e.g., W. Zimmerli, BK AT XIII, 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969), pp. 16-21. It is therefore incorrect to force a common pattern upon them, as e.g. N. Habel has done in designating both Jer. i 6 and Is. vi 11a as "The Objection" in ZAW 77 (1965), pp. 308, 312. 'ad mätäy 'adinäy belongs on the other hand—along with many expressions in Jeremiah's confessions—to the language of lamentation; cf. e.g. Ps. xc 13, xciv 3. One could perhaps find a connection via this route, if, with J. L. Mihelic, one were to assign Jer. i 4-19 to the confessions; see Interpretation 14 (1960), p. 43, n. 1.
3) Among the classics of research on the prophets which have rejected the
The book of Jeremiah knows him as a prophet against whom obstructions were heaped up (e.g. Jer. xi 21). This element emphasizes, to the reader who understands Jeremiah as the true prophet, the yawning gap there was between Yahweh and Israel at this time. The words “You may not prophesy in Yahweh’s name” prove that Israel was sinful, and the complaints contained in the confessions magnify this impression by illustrating how the prophet who responds to the call of Yahweh becomes isolated from his sinful society; moreover, other texts indicate not only that the prophet stood alone, but that he found his ostracism so unbearable that he was compelled to protest against it.

Jeremiah, however, was not the only prophet whose proclamation brought him into opposition with his contemporaries. The books of Amos and Micah contain expressions which indicate that these prophets too had opponents who wished to silence them (Amos ii 12, vii 16; Mic. ii 6). The Elijah legend records that the prophet was in the extremity of isolation when it occurred to him that he contradicted his contemporaries to such a degree that his life was endangered (1 Kgs xix). This phenomenon occurs with such a regularity entailing “dass die Gott Zugewandten für die menschliche Geselligkeit verloren sind” 4). It is hard for readers in much later times to determine when this observed regularity has influenced those who passed on the traditions concerning the holy man, or when they were expressed by the prophet himself. But it is important to recognize that either the prophet himself or his tradents depict his situation so that posterity can observe how exposed the prophet was. An exposed situation can fuel a frustration which leads the prophet to express himself as if it is God who is the actual enemy (Jer. xx 7 f.) 5).

I shall concern myself in what follows with the traditions about Isaiah to determine if his work does not nevertheless contain texts suggestive of inner conflicts in the personality of this otherwise so

authenticity of the confessions, G. Hölscher’s Die Profeten (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 396-9, is the most prominent, since Hölscher was especially concerned with the psychological experiences to which these texts bear witness. Note his use of Jer. xx 7 (p. 32). The change of attitude regarding the question of authenticity is due mainly to the efforts of W. Baumgartner, Die Klagedichte des Jeremia, BZAW 32 (Giessen, 1917), esp. pp. 68-79); see also, however, S. Mowinckel, Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia (Kristiania, 1914), in particular his list of “Group A” texts, regarded as authentic passages, pp. 20 f.


5) On the background, see D. J. A. Clines and D. M. Gunn, ZAW 88 (1976), pp. 395 f.