THE FIRST PERICOPE IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

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The determination of the extent of a pericope in any section of the Bible is vital to a proper analysis and understanding of the text. It is inseparably bound up with analysing the structure of the passage, determining the various elements which may belong to a certain genre or Gattung represented by that passage, reconstructing the Sitz im Leben in which an oracle or literary piece was at home or out of which it was produced, and ascertaining the theological message intended by the speaker, writer, editor, or redactor. Frequently, scholars differ as to where pericopes begin and end, and accordingly they disagree on these related matters. This is the case with the pericope beginning at Isa. i 2. Scholarly views vary on the extent of this pericope, ranging from i 2-3 to chapters i-iv, with several critics considering i 2-31 as a unit. The purpose of this article is (a) to re-examine critically views which have been advocated as to the extent of the first pericope in the book of Isaiah, and to defend the view which seems to be supported by the best evidence; (b) to analyse the genre reflected in this pericope; (c) to suggest a possible Sitz im Leben for its emergence; and (d) to make a brief proposal concerning the relationship of its theological message to Isaiah's other oracles.

Apparently, one problem lying behind the attempt to determine the extent of a pericope is the definition of the word "pericope" itself. This English word is a transliteration of the Greek περικόπη, which meant "act of cutting around, section", and the Late Latin equivalent meant "section of a book". In some churches, it refers to a selection from the Bible appointed to be read in church or to be used as a text for a sermon. However, in scholarly usage it seems to refer to a (usually small) unit of scripture which is thought to have been what a prophet or some other speaker delivered at a specific time to a certain audience at a certain place, or to a literary unit which appears to form a complete whole because of either its poetic
form, content, consistency of speaker or audience, and the like, or a combination of these. I think that either of these is helpful when one keeps in mind the nature of the material with which he is dealing. For example, Jer. xxix 4-23 preserves a "letter" which Jeremiah wrote to Jews who had been carried into Babylonian exile with Jehoiachin in 598/597 B.C. On the other hand, Isa. i 2 ff. contains an oracle the prophet uttered orally to some audience (note "hear", "give ear", and "has spoken" in v. 2). This is not to say that the entire oracle has been preserved, or that the MT preserves the prophet's *ipsissima verba*, or that this oracle has not passed through a history of its own, or that the present Hebrew text should be allowed to stand as it is without emendation. Instead, the intention is to affirm that there is good reason to believe that Isa. i 2 ff. represents at least a part of an oracle Isaiah of Jerusalem delivered on some occasion, which the later editor of the complex to which chapter i originally belonged or the final editor of the book of Isaiah incorporated into his work because of its relevance to his own generation and circumstances, and thus adapted to his own theological purposes. This is just as likely (if not more so) as the view that this was a literary creation from the beginning, constructed perhaps to serve as an introduction to a literary complex on the entire book of Isaiah as a summary of Isaiah's message.

*The Extent of the Pericope beginning with Isaiah i 2*

1 1-iv 6. Recently J. D. W. Watts suggested that Isa. i-iv forms the first "pericope" in the book. Yet he does not mean Isaiah delivered this block of material to a single audience at one and the same gathering, but that chapters i-iv compose the first literary unit in the book. Now this is questionable in the light of the new superscription in ii 1, the change of subject from chapter i to chapter ii, the inner coherence of chapters ii-iv apart from chapter i, and other considerations.

1 2-ii 5. In three separate publications, P. R. Ackroyd argues that i 2-ii 5 is a coherent unit. Just as Mic. iv 1-3 forms an excellent

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