CONDITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE ISAIAH SCROLL (DSIa)

BY

ARIE RUBINSTEIN
Manchester

The following remarks are devoted to the elucidation of conditional constructions in DSIa which differ in their form from the corresponding constructions in the MT. Such constructions fall, broadly speaking, into three classes:

1. Constructions which are perfectly coherent as they stand and are regular from the point of view of their syntax, but appear to yield a different sense from the corresponding passages in the MT. This class contains but one example, viz. lxiv 2, which is not conditional in the MT, but may be so in DSIa.

2. Constructions in which a waw is prefixed in DSIa to a verb in the protasis or apodosis, and

3. Constructions in which the form of the verb in the apodosis is different from that in the corresponding passage in the MT.

This classification, while convenient, does not imply that the three classes are in all cases mutually exclusive. It remains to be added that for the purposes of the present remarks “conditional constructions” include optative sentences which shade off into conditionals and a number of other constructions which, though not explicitly conditional in form, virtually assume the character of conditionals, chief among the latter being a number of comparative clauses. The instances dealt with do not claim to be exhaustive, but it is hoped that few will be found to have escaped notice.

Class 1.

lxiv 2. Exegetes, both ancient and modern, interpret the words הבושח וരאתה לא נקוה as a circumstantial clause meaning ‘when thou didst terrible things which we hoped not for’. This, however, leaves verse 2 rhythmically unbalanced, repetitive and inconsequential. The DSIa passage, on the other hand, is much less difficult and exegetically
altogether more probable. For the reading הָרַע, for MT הָרַע אֲלֵב, might not be fortuitous, even if not original, and could be taken as a conditional, viz. ‘when thou doest terrible things, we hope’. Clearly, such a construction cannot be read into the MT passage, since the tenor of lxiv 1 suggesting as it does that God’s mighty deeds of vengeance are welcome, makes the phrase, הָרַע אֲלֵב inappropriate as an apodosis of a conditional sentence. Further, in DSIa one must reckon with the possibility that רֵדֵדְתָּה מַעְשֶׁה הָרֵעֲךָ מִלָּה in the second part of the verse under discussion, may be another conditional construction. Now although conditions expressed by the juxtaposition of bare perfects in the protasis and apodosis are extremely rare in the OT, מַעְשֶׁה הָרֵעֲךָ מִלָּה in Proverbs xviii 22 being probably the only clear example 1), they are not uncommon in Rabbinic Hebrew 2). At any rate, there is nothing to preclude the supposition that such a usage may have been current anciently or, at least, known at the time when the Scroll was copied. The important point to note is that strictly interpreted the DSIa passage will be found to possess two merits: (a) lxiv 2 would be made up of parallel clauses, and (b) lxiii 19 b—lxiv 2 would form a continuous section sustaining a strong note of importunity, lxiv 2 being explanatory of the impassioned ‘O that thou hadst rent’ etc., in lxiii 19 b.

The DSIa reading הָרַע could still fit into a circumstantial clause —‘when thou doest terrible things we hope for’, i.e. the kind of terrible things we hope for. One feels, however, that if the context of מַעְשֶׁה הָרֵעֲךָ מִלָּה is to be interpreted in a past sense, הָרַע would be more suitable, unless indeed the allusion is to past events but the hope contemporaneous with the utterance, when the imperfect הָרַע would seem appropriate, i.e. ‘when thou didst (the kind of) terrible things we hope for’.

Class 2.

iii 7. The reading אָשִּׂיח in the apodosis is clearly inferior to that in the MT. One would expect here either the bare imperfect as in the MT or the perfect consecutive. Unlike in the three following examples, the additional waw may have been intended to have the

1) Constructions in which the waw is prefixed to a noun or pronoun, either at the head of the protasis or apodosis, are excluded.

2) Cf. M. H. SEGAL, A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew, Oxford 1927, § 484 (i). A good example occurs in the Gemara, Erubin 65a—‘wine has entered, secret has come out’.