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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

JULY, 1891.

ART. I.—ISAIAH AND MICAH.

THE relationship existing between the Sacred Books is a constant subject of interest to the Biblical student. Inspiration is evidently a different thing from originality; for the writers of the Old Testament freely used the works of their predecessors, extracting sometimes considerable portions, and adapting them to the object in hand. But it is when common matter is found in two writers who are contemporary that our special interest is aroused. This is the case with the Second Epistle of St. Peter as compared with the Epistle of St. Jude, and also with the writings of Micah as compared with those of Isaiah.

We naturally begin our examination of the relationship of these books by examining their opening. Isaiah tells us that he saw his vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Micah (whose full name was Micaiah) tells us what he saw in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. At first sight, these introductory verses seem to give Isaiah the start of Micah, but we must not forget that Uzziah was in seclusion for a long time, during which Jotham was reigning, so that we cannot be certain whether the one prophet was earlier than the other. If, as many students think, Isaiah was called to prophesy in the year that King Uzziah died, *i.e.*, in the beginning of the year, then the two writers were practically contemporary.

It is not easy to compare the length of the two prophets' careers. The tradition that Isaiah was put to death in the early years of Manasseh cannot be lightly laid aside, especially in the light of the fact that he wrote a life of Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxxii. 32). We cannot speak definitely about the

length of Micah's career as a prophet. His life was probably much more private than Isaiah's.

On comparing the books we find the subject concerning them complicated by the fact that one is very long and the other very short. Putting aside the question concerning unity of authorship in the case of Isaiah, we will take it for granted that Micah wrote the whole of the book attributed to him; and we proceed to inquire whether we can divide it up into periods. This is not at all easy in the case of any prophet who does not definitely mark his dates. No one supposes that we have the whole of what Micah spoke in public included in the seven short chapters which make up his book. Some might say we have a compendium; but the text does not read as a compendium. We have rather a Divinely appointed selection, written for all time, giving us an idea of the prophet's teaching on many occasions. We must never forget that the prophets were preachers witnessing for God, uttering and reiterating the promises and threats which He had made known by His servants of old. So says Zechariah, "Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye now from your evil ways and from your evil doings'" (Zech. i. 4).

There are only three natural divisions in the text of Micah which can be readily discerned. The first chapter might stand alone; from the second to the fifth ought to be read together; and the sixth and seventh ought also to be joined together. But there are no symptoms of a serious interval between these portions, and the whole might have been written in any of the reigns during which Micah prophesied.

If it be true that Micah made extracts from Isaiah he was anything but a mere copyist. He had characteristics of his own. Thus, he took special pleasure in alliterations and in play of words. Isaiah had this slightly, *e.g.*, Isa. v. 7: "He looked for judgment (*mishpat*) and behold oppression (*mispat*), for righteousness (*zedakah*) and behold a cry (*ze'akah*)." But there is nothing in Isaiah at all answering to the play on words to be found in the latter half of the first of Micah, the peculiarities of which may be seen in the margin of the Revised Version.

It is now our business to examine the related passages in the two books. In doing so we must avoid anything fanciful and far-fetched, and we have to bear in mind that the writers lived at the same time and in the same part of the country, breathing in the same religious, political, and social atmosphere, and having the benefit of access to the same religious books, among which the Pentateuch and Joshua are conspicuous. Whilst each prophet had his special revelations

of a Messianic character (see *e.g.*, Micah v. 2, concerning Bethlehem), the two had in the main the same class of message to deliver and the same class of sin to rebuke. Idolatry, witchcraft, oppression, lying, uncleanness, drunkenness, violence, bribery, are exposed by both with unsparing hand. The same punishment is threatened and the same deliverance foreshadowed, and in each book the promise comes close upon the heels of the penalty. This, however, is the general method of Divine teaching, as can be seen in the Pentateuch and in other parts of the Bible.

The opening words of Micah are very similar to those of Isaiah. The one begins:

Hear all ye peoples ;
Hearken, O earth, and the fulness thereof.

The other :

Hear, O heavens,
And give ear, O earth.

In the third verse Micah proceeds :

For behold the Lord cometh forth out of his place.

Here the words are identical in the Hebrew with the opening line of Isa. xxvi. 21. The resemblance might be accidental if it stood alone, but when it is one out of many points of similarity it must have its weight. It will be remembered that Isa. xxvi. is one of a group of chapters of far-reaching import. In both prophets the words quoted indicate the coming forth of the Lord to visit the earth (or the land) because of the iniquity of its inhabitants. They are not used by any other writer.

In the next verse Micah describes the coming of the Lord in terms borrowed from the Sinaitic manifestation :

The mountains shall be molten beneath him
And the valleys shall be cleft,
As wax before the fire,
As the waters poured down a descent.

As one reads these words it is impossible to forget the language of Isa. lxiv. :

Oh that thou wouldest come down,
That the mountains might flow down before thee,
As when the melting fire burneth,
The fire causeth the waters to boil.

Psalm xcvi. contains a similar idea, and all three seem to be poetic renderings of the history contained in Exodus.

The terms in which Judah's sin is denounced by Micah (chaps. ii, iii.) may be illustrated at large from Isaiah. We can

hardly call the one a quotation from the other. The penalty foretold in Micah iii. 4 runs thus :

Then shall they cry unto the Lord ;
 But he will not hear them.
 He will even hide his face from them at that time
 As they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.

Compare Isa. i. 15 :

When ye spread forth your hands,
 I will hide mine eyes from you ;
 Yea, when ye make many prayers,
 I will not hear :
 Your hands are full of blood.

After describing the darkness which shall come down on the false prophets, Micah proceeds to point out his own position, his duty being

To declare unto Jacob his transgression,
 And to Israel his sin.

Is it an accidental coincidence that we read in Isa. lviii. 1 ?—

Cry aloud, spare not ;
 Lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
 And show my people their transgression
 And the house of Jacob their sins.

The one looks wonderfully like a reminiscence of the other, and in each case we find in the context an urgent protest against oppression coupled with an exposure of sham religiousness.

Passing over for the present the notable passage in the beginning of Micah iv., we note the sixth verse :

In that day, saith the Lord,
 Will I assemble her that halteth,
 And I will gather her that is driven out,
 And her that I have afflicted ;
 And I will make her that halted a remnant,
 And her that was cast far off a strong nation ;
 And the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion
 From henceforth even for ever.

In Isa. xi. 12, 16, we are told that God "in that day"

Shall assemble the outcasts of Israel,
 And gather together the dispersed of Judah ;
 And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people.

Also (lx. 22j) :

A little one shall become a thousand,
 And a small one a strong nation.

And again (xxiv. 23) :

The Lord of Hosts shall reign
 In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
 And before his elders in glory.

These resemblances must be taken for what they are worth.

If they are more than accidental they would indicate that Isaiah, or whoever composed some parts of his book, may have been acquainted with the prophecy of Micah. But it is hazardous to draw any sure conclusion at present.

The words that follow shortly afterwards (Micah iv. 10) are remarkable :

Be in pain and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion,
Like a woman in travail ;
For now shalt thou go forth from the city,
And thou shalt dwell in the field ;
And thou shalt go to Babylon.
There shalt thou be delivered,
There the Lord shall redeem thee
From the hand of thine enemies.

The expression, "daughter of Zion," is common to Isaiah and Micah, and is to be found in the later prophets who used their writings. But here we have a plain prophecy of the Babylonian Captivity and of the redemption therefrom. Had Micah learnt it from Isaiah? Was he privy to the utterance contained at the end of Isaiah's thirty-ninth chapter? There is no reason why this should not have been the case; but there is this difference. Micah goes a step beyond Isa. xxxix., for whilst one gives the threat the other adds the promise. It is true that the fortieth and following chapters of Isaiah apparently foreshadow the return from Babylon, and take it as a type of a still greater redemption. No one, however, imagines that Micah borrowed the idea thence. It must, therefore, have been original,—in other words, a revelation. At the same time it must not be supposed that Babylon was "nowhere" in the time of Micah. Though Assyria was in the immediate foreground in the times of both Isaiah and Micah, Babylon was not far off. It played as conspicuous a part in Assyrian politics in those days as Ireland does in English politics now. There was quite sufficient political foreground for the inspired prophet to work upon when he threatened a Babylonian captivity, supposing he wrote in the days of Hezekiah, and quite enough of religious conviction based upon past experience to justify him in saying that the scene of captivity should be the scene of redemption. Had it not been so in Egypt long before?

Some passages about "the remnant" follow. Thus (Micah v. 3): "Therefore will he give them up until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: and the remnant of his brethren shall return unto (or with) the children of Israel." Also see verses 7 and 8, where "the remnant of Jacob" is again referred to as like to the dew which speedily departs, and like the lion which tramples down all

opposition. In the first of these passages the Hebrew is not the same as Isa. x. 21, 22, where the words are *shear jashub*.¹ In the later verses the root *shear* is used, but in another form (שאר instead of שאר). It is true that we find this form also in Isaiah six times, but no relationship between the books can hang upon it, for the word had no special technical sense in those days. The same may be said of the words, "the reproach of my people" (Micah vi. 16), which are the same in Hebrew as Isa. xxv. 8, "the rebuke of His people." The expression might be called a national one, being used as far back as Josh. v. 9. Still it is to be found in the group of chapters in Isaiah which we have already seen to be related to Micah, and the very next verse (Micah vii. 1), though a natural figure to any inhabitant of Judah, may be a reminiscence of another verse from the same group. The verse in Micah runs thus :

I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits,
As the grape gleanings of the vintage.

And in Isaiah xxiv. 13 :

There shall be as the shaking of an olive tree,
As the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done.

The verses which follow in Micah depict the sin of the people, and then there follows the expression of confidence :

I will look unto the Lord,
I will wait for the God of my salvation ;
My God will hear me.
Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy.
When I fall, I shall arise ;
When I sit in darkness, the Lord is a light unto me.

These words remind us of the substance of Isa. viii. 17, l. 10, and other passages, but there is not sufficient textual resemblance to ground any relationship upon.

We now revert to the celebrated passage in Micah iv., and in order to show its force we reproduce it with its surroundings :

Hear this, now, ye heads of the house of Jacob,
And princes of the house of Israel,
That abhor judgment,
And pervert all equity.
They build up Zion with blood-violence,
And Jerusalem with iniquity.

Therefore, for your sake, Zion shall be ploughed as a field,
And Jerusalem shall become heaps ;
And the mountain of the house as high places of the forest.
And it shall come to pass in the last days
The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established
In the top of the mountains ;

¹ Compare Isa. vii. 3.

And it shall be exalted above the hills,
And peoples shall stream unto it.
And many nations shall come, and say,
Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
And to the house of the God of Jacob ;
And he will teach us of his ways,
And we will walk in his paths.
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
And he shall judge amidst many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations far off.
And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares
And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.
And they shall sit each under his vine and under his fig-tree,
And there shall be none to make them afraid ;
For the mouth of the Lord of Hosts hath spoken it.
For all peoples will walk each in the name of his God,
But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God
For ever and ever.

On reviewing this passage it appears to us to be a natural growth, and it would never occur to anyone that the middle portion of it was an extract from a contemporaneous writer. There is a regular prophetic order about it. Zion and Jerusalem are established through evil practices. They shall be desolated. But in the last days they shall be re-established, and light and peace shall stream forth from them to all nations.

The succeeding sections prophesy of the double redemption—that from Babylon and that to be accomplished by the Child to be born at Bethlehem. It is a noticeable fact that the date of this prophecy is fixed by Jer. xxvi. 18, where part of it is quoted as having been uttered by Micah the Morasthite in the days of Hezekiah, and we are told that it produced a marked effect on the king, who feared the Lord and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil. This interesting passage naturally leads us to look back to the days of Hezekiah, and see if we can fix on any particular period when the incident referred to took place. We are told in 2 Chron. xxix. 3 that in the very first month of his reign he addressed the priests and Levites, reminded them of the sins of their fathers, especially in matters of ceremonial, and adds, "Wherefore the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, for lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this." Captivity, then, had begun in the time of Ahaz (compare 2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 16). The case, as described in Isa. i., is very similar, and it is curious that the words

“astonishment and hissing,” used above by Hezekiah, are used also by Micah in the same sense in chap. vi. 16. It thus becomes exceedingly probable that whilst the chronicler occupied himself specially with the religious and ceremonial defects of those days, it became the peculiar business of the prophets to call men’s attention to the moral and social offences of the age; and it is possible that the whole of the seven short chapters of Micah may give us a discourse, both warning and encouraging in its character, uttered during the first days of Hezekiah’s reign, and that they led to the reformation which took place there and then.

We now turn to Isa. ii. It begins as if it were the opening of the book, and as if the first chapter had been prefixed in later times: “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” Then follow the three verses which lie embedded in the long passage of Micah given above. The more we look at them in the light of their surroundings, the more they appear to be in their natural place in Micah, and to be an extract when appearing in Isaiah. The slight variations of the text need not here be dwelt upon; they may be partly intentional and partly due to copyists. It would seem probable that when the spirit of vision seized Isaiah, the first thing that presented itself to his mind was the remarkable utterance of Micah, with which he had every reason to be acquainted. He extracts the portion most needful to his purpose and holds it up like a light, before proceeding to dilate on the sins of the people, the judgments that must come upon them, and their subsequent restoration (chaps. ii., iii., iv.). That prophets should thus take a text for their sermon is no unheard of thing. The opening utterance of Amos is a text from Joel (compare Amos i. 2 with Joel iii. 16). If the view now offered be accepted, it will follow that the section of Isaiah with which we are dealing dates from some time not earlier than the days of Hezekiah, and if so, the early chapters are not in chronological order, and the call of Isaiah contained in the sixth chapter becomes his original call to be a prophet.

Another result of this view would be that in the case of the various resemblances between Isaiah and Micah, given in the earlier part of this paper, Micah is the original, and Isaiah embodies the prophet’s words in his own utterances.

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