

breath with the eternal Jehovah and the life of the Divine Spirit; and so spoken of in a way which shews the belief of that Apostle to have been an article of faith in the community amongst whom he laboured. The paradox is only another proof how boundless must have been the impression produced by the life of the Christian Founder, and how impossible it is to account for the construction of that Life on any mythical principle of New Testament interpretation.

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*MICAH'S PROPHECY OF THE BABYLONIAN
CAPTIVITY.*

MICAH iv. 10.¹

THERE are few more difficult chapters in the prophetic writings than that of which this passage forms a part. It is so full of abrupt transitions and seemingly inconsistent expressions that one is tempted to give up critical exegesis in despair, and fall back on the old-fashioned view that the Scriptures in general and the prophecies in particular are a congeries of isolated texts without any logical connexion. The key to the Chapter is supplied by Stade's remark that Verse 11 is the continuation not of Verses 9, 10, but of Verses 1-4. The ideal picture traced in those verses belongs to the future; but "now" (render iv. 11, "but now" etc.) a host of enemies is gathered together against Jerusalem—strange contrast to the idyllic description which opens the prophecy! Verses 5-10 ought to be bracketed;

¹ "Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there Jehovah shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies."

probably (as Stade has shewn¹) they did not belong to the original draft of the Chapter. It would be presumptuous to pronounce too positively as to the date and authorship of this supplementary passage. We may, if we please, ascribe it to the Soferim, those industrious and gifted students and editors of the prophecies, who, with a younger son's portion of the Spirit, connected together and filled up the somewhat fragmentary records of antiquity. But it is also not impossible to refer it to Micah himself, who may be conceived of as adding it by an after-thought, to represent a subsequent revelation (comp. Isa. xxxix. 6²), just as Isaiah appears to have obscured the original meaning of some of his prophecies by introducing allusions to subsequent circumstances.

And now let us take Verses 5-10 by themselves. Verse 5 is evidently inserted to prepare the way for the sequel. Verses 6, 7 and Verses 8-10 form two little oracles by themselves. Their import is the same. It seems as if the writer felt that the former little prophecy was too vague, and so he appended the more precise revelation in Verses 8-10. The first point insisted upon is that "the first dominion" shall return to Jerusalem, *i.e.*, the kingdom of David shall be restored. Then a strange and sudden transition occurs. The prophet speaks as if Jerusalem were being besieged; nay, more, as if it were already captured, and its inhabitants giving way to unmanly lamentations. He has therefore changed his point of view. He is no longer thinking of the coming golden age; nor yet has he returned to the actual present. Rather he is midway between the two. He sees the melancholy interval, during which Judah is

¹ See Prof. Stade's article on the Book of Micah, in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1881, pp. 161-171.

² The present writer, however, for reasons explained in his Commentary, doubts whether it is a tenable view that Isa. xxxix. was really written by Isaiah, and accurately reproduces his prophecy.

to be driven into exile ; and he describes the various stages of the calamity—first, the going out of the city ; then, the dwelling in the open country, houseless and unprotected ; and lastly, the coming to Babylon, the scene of captivity. This last feature of the description has given rise to much discussion.

According to Verse 6, it was Assyria, and not Babylonia, which Micah regarded as the last great foe of Israel ; why, then, should the threat take this form, “ Thou shalt go even to Babylon.” It should be remembered that the earlier kingdom of Babylon had been conquered by Tiglath-Pileser ; that Merodach-Baladan’s brave attempts to obtain an independent position were fruitless ; and that Babylon only became the seat of a great empire a century later. The reply which has been offered to this objection is twofold : (1) that Babylon is here mentioned only as a province of the Assyrian Empire ; and (2) that, according to 2 Kings xvii. 24 (confirmed by the Annals of Sargon), Sargon transported a part of the rebellious population of Babylonia to N. Israel, which we may safely presume that he replaced by captive Israelites ; and that this was a sufficient warrant to Micah for warning his countrymen of Judah to expect a like fate. This is no doubt an ingenious reply ; and yet is it not clear to an unprejudiced eye that Babylon is here mentioned as the seat of the great imperial power (the world-empire, as our Germanizing writers call it), and not as a mere provincial capital ? A still more serious objection remains, viz., that Verse 12 appears to give a directly opposite statement to Verse 10. We are there told that the hostile nations have been brought to Jerusalem for no other reason than that they may be destroyed within sight of their coveted prey. We must not explain away this inconsistency, and are forced to assume either that these words, “ and thou shalt go even to Babylon,” are (together with the rest of Verses 5–10) the interpolation of a later

editor of the prophetic writings, who overlooked or misunderstood Verse 12, or else that they represent a subsequent revelation received by Micah himself. The former view is no doubt likely to be regarded with great suspicion by elder Biblical students, who are accustomed to assume that Providence has so jealously guarded the integrity of the Scriptures that alterations in their original form are absolutely inconceivable. But we must remember that "the permanent function of the Old Testament for Christians is simply to point to Jesus Christ as the Saviour both of Jew and of Gentile, and that no superficial changes of the text are of any religious importance which leave the performance of this function unimpaired." It is quite certain that the early Jewish students of Micah were pre-occupied with the idea that the Babylonian Captivity must be discoverable in the passage under consideration. One of them (doubtless representing the current exegetical tradition) has introduced, with a freedom reminding us of the Targums, words distinctly referring to this captivity, into the early Greek version of Chapter iv. 8, the latter part of which now runs, *καὶ εἰσελεύσεται ἡ ἀρχὴ ἡ πρώτη, βασιλεία ἐκ Βαβυλῶνος τῇ θυγατρὶ Ἱερουσαλήμ.* It is no disrespect to these early editors and paraphrasts to say that the words which they have inserted are not in harmony with the original meaning of the passage, as elicited by a careful study of the context. For (as Abraham Geiger, that prince of Jewish scholars, has abundantly shewn) they regarded the Bible as having an ever fresh meaning, to be discovered by a thoughtful regard to the wants of each succeeding age; they held in fact a doctrine of "development." In a certain sense, indeed, this prophecy *was* fulfilled in the Babylonian Captivity; for the words of Micah are too high and grand to suit the circumstances of Jerusalem in the days of the prophet. "Whether it be for the repentance of Hezekiah, or for any other reason known

only to God, Jerusalem was not suffered to come to such extremities as the Prophet describes, and consequently the Divine interposition was not so striking and unique."

Still, as has been remarked above, the other view, viz., that Micah himself inserted either Verses 5-10 as a whole, or at least the clause "and thou shalt go even to Babylon," by an after-thought, when he revised and worked up the first rough notes of his discourse, is perfectly tenable. Which solution is to be preferred, depends upon the results of a general survey of the text of the prophetic writings, which not one Biblical student in a hundred is qualified to make. It will be some gain, however, if students friendly to criticism will accustom themselves to the idea of the *growth* of prophetic discourses, and to inclose later insertions in brackets when they can be so clearly made out as in the present Chapter. If, in short, the student will read as a continuous passage, Micah iv. 1-4, 11-13, v. 1-4, 7-15, he will obtain a much clearer view of the original sense of the prophecy. It will not be of much use to study the section in its present form, until he has done this; and to comment on the text will be only to "darken counsel by words without knowledge."

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