

Notes on Zechariah.

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IN no characteristic does post-exilic prophecy differ more widely from pre-exilic prophecy than in its lack of the ethical element. The earlier prophets were primarily preachers of righteousness. Amos 7¹⁶, "prophesy unto Israel," is defined in the parallel clause as "utter a word against the house of Isaac." Micah 3⁸ declares, "Truly I am full of power by the spirit of Yahweh . . . to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." Jeremiah sums up the mission of all his predecessors in the words, "Yahweh hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them . . . saying, turn ye now every one from his evil way and from the evil of your doings." In contrast to this the post-exilic prophets brought no call to repentance, but were rather promoters of the ritual and predictors of the coming glory of Judah.

The reason for the change is not difficult to find. The threatenings of the older prophets had not extended beyond the exile, and when that catastrophe occurred it was natural to suppose that the full measure of punishment for national sin had been reached, and that now the tide of divine favor would turn. Moreover, the exile did unquestionably accomplish a considerable work of reformation. The old naturistic associations of the Hebrew religion were cut off; the God of the prophets had vindicated himself as the true God; and, consequently, there was a more or less complete adoption of prophetic doctrines. The reformation fell far short of the ideals of the great prophets of an earlier age, and compromised with ritualism far more than these prophets would have been willing to do; still, it was important enough to encourage the belief that Judah was now restored again to the favor of God and that the days of her affliction would soon be over.

The transition from the old type of prophecy to the new is seen in Ezekiel. From the moment that Jerusalem fell and the captivity of the nation was complete the tone of Ezekiel's preaching changed

entirely. Up to that time he had announced the divine judgment upon a sinful nation quite in the spirit of the earlier prophets, but after that time he ceased denunciation and devoted himself exclusively to consolation and prediction of restoration (ch. 33-48).

Deutero-Isaiah does indeed pronounce woes upon the apostate portion of Judah, but for the nation as a whole he has only encouragement and promise. The key-note of his book is struck in the opening words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her time of service is accomplished, that her punishment is accepted, that she hath received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins" (Is. 40^{1f.}). Accordingly, his message is not one of doom, but of hope: "The captive exile shall speedily be loosed" (51¹⁴).

Haggai finds nothing to criticise in the little community at Jerusalem, except that it has not completed the temple, and when this work is once resumed, his outlook into the future is wholly optimistic.

Zechariah stands upon exactly the same theological ground. Nowhere does he speak of the restored Judah as sinful, or represent the Lord as angry with it. It is the fathers who were sinful and who brought down God's wrath upon them: "They refused to hearken and turned a stubborn shoulder, and made their ears deaf that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts like adamant, lest they should hear the instruction and the words which Yahweh Sebaoth sent by his spirit by the hand of the former prophets: therefore came there great wrath from Yahweh of hosts" (7^{11f.}). Similarly in 1⁴⁻⁶, the fathers would not receive the word which came by the former prophets, and, therefore, judgment came upon them. In 1¹⁵ the prophet brings the word of the Lord, "I *was* angry a little" with Judah. Here the tense is significant, as showing that it is not with the present generation but with its forefathers that Yahweh was displeased, and even with them he was angry only "a little." This last expression is characteristic of Zechariah's optimistic view of the moral character of Judah.

Not against Judah but against the heathen is Yahweh angry. "I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease, for I was angry but a little, but they helped for evil" (1¹⁵). "They that go to the north country give vent to my wrath against the north country" (6⁸).

Upon Judah Yahweh looks with favor only. "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great zeal" (1¹⁴). "Thus saith Yahweh unto the nations that plunder you. . . . He that smiteth

you smiteth the apple of his eye" (2¹² [Heb.]). "Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth, I am zealous for Zion with a great zeal, and I am zealous for her with great fury. Thus saith Yahweh, I have returned unto Zion and have taken up my abode in the midst of Jerusalem" (8²⁻³). "But now" (*i.e.* since the rebuilding of the temple has begun) "I will not be unto the remnant of this people as in the former days" (8¹¹). Most striking of all for disclosing the conception of Zechariah is 8^{14f.}: "Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth, As I thought to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith Yahweh Sebaoth, and I repented not, so again I have thought in these days to do good unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not."

With this conception of the attitude of God towards Judah there was no occasion for a call to repentance, and, consequently, Zechariah did not utter it. The repentance of Judah has already taken place in exile (1⁶). Repentance was the message of the "former" prophets (1⁴ 7¹²), but now the message of the prophets is, Build the temple, and believe the predictions of the glory that is presently to be revealed (8³⁻¹¹).

Corresponding to the absence of the preaching of righteousness in Zechariah is the optimism of his outlook into the future. Unlike the earlier prophets, he sees no impending day of judgment, from which only a remnant shall escape, but only victory, peace, and blessedness for his people. Cf. 1^{16f.}, The temple shall be completed, Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and the towns of Judah shall overflow with prosperity; 2⁴ (Heb.), The heathen powers that have injured Judah shall be destroyed; 2⁸⁻¹⁷ (Heb.), Jerusalem shall have no need of a wall. When the power of the heathen is broken she shall fear no attack, for Yahweh himself will be a wall of defence to her. The exiles shall return from Babylon, many nations shall turn to Yahweh, and Jerusalem shall be the centre of God's rule on earth; 3⁷⁻¹⁰, Joshua, the high priest, shall enjoy a mediatorial function like that of the angels. His presence in Jerusalem is a sign of the speedy coming of the Messiah. A gem with seven facets, which has been deposited with Joshua as an ornament for the coming king, shall soon have the name of its owner (Zerubbabel, cf. 4⁹ 6¹²) engraved upon it. Then the golden age shall begin; 4^{6-10a}, Zerubbabel is promised that he shall finish the temple; 6¹⁰⁻¹⁵, A crown is to be made and to be laid up for the Messiah, who is presently to appear and to finish the temple. Then the Jews that are far away shall return and help to beautify the temple; 8²⁻¹⁵, The land shall again be full of inhabitants, the exiles

shall return from all lands, Judah shall be blessed with boundless prosperity.

This brief survey makes it clear that Zechariah has no thought of sin in Judah and no anticipation of judgment upon her. Consequently, he cannot in any sense be called a preacher of righteousness like the older prophets.

There are, however, several passages which, on the ordinary interpretation, seem to be in contradiction to the general tenor of the book, as I have just exhibited it. I wish now to examine these to see whether Zechariah really contradicted himself by assuming occasionally the rôle of an ancient prophet, or whether the current interpretation of these passages is inaccurate.

The first passage that I shall consider is 7^{8^{ab}}. Here we read, "And the word of Yahweh came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth, saying, Execute true justice, and show mercy and compassion each towards his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the alien, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart." This sounds very much like the old prophetic message of repentance and righteousness, and it seems to be adopted by Zechariah as his own message; but when we read on in the next two verses, "'They refused to hearken . . . to the words which Yahweh Sebaoth had sent . . . by the former prophets, therefore came there great wrath from Yahweh Sebaoth,'" it becomes evident that the call to repentance is not addressed to Zechariah's contemporaries, but to their forefathers. Moreover, in vs.⁷ we read, "Are not these the words which Yahweh cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited," but the words of the prophets are not given unless we join vs.⁹ immediately to vs.⁷ From these considerations it is evident that vs.⁸, which assigns the words that follow to Zechariah, is an inaccurate scribal interpolation. (So Orelli, Wellhausen, Nowack, G. A. Smith.) Zechariah has no intention of adopting the message of the "former" prophets as his own (cf. 8¹⁴); he cites it merely to show how it was fulfilled, and how thus an argument was given for believing the message which he himself brought. Cf. 8⁹, "Let your hands be strong that ye may hear in these days the words from the mouth of the prophets who are in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh Sebaoth is laid."

A similar case is found, it seems to me, in 1^{1^{ab}}, although I am not aware that this has ever been suggested: "The word of Yahweh came unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, saying, Yahweh hath been sore displeased with your fathers, and thou shalt

say unto them, Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth. Turn unto me, saith Yahweh of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith Yahweh of hosts." There is much that is peculiar in this passage. (1) In the first place, after the statement that Yahweh was sore displeased with the fathers, we should expect an account of what he did to the fathers; but instead of this we read: "And thou shalt say unto them," which must introduce a message to Zechariah's own generation. (2) The combination of tenses, "Yahweh was angry, and thou shalt say," is abnormal. The only natural construction would be, "And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth, Yahweh was sore displeased with your fathers." (3) "And thou shalt say unto them" is no natural way to introduce a new oracle to the people of Jerusalem. If they were meant, we should expect a specific mention of them here at the beginning of the book. In its present context, "them" can only refer to the "fathers" who have just been mentioned. (4) The message which the prophet is here apparently told to bring to his generation, "Turn unto me and I will turn unto you," was, according to vs.⁴, the message of the "former prophets," and, according to vs.⁶, Judah in exile has already repented.

From these considerations it is clear that at the beginning of vs.³ what is needed is not "and thou shalt say," referring to the prophet, but "and I said," or "and he said," referring to Yahweh. Should we point וְאָמַרְתִּי instead of וְאָמַרְתָּ, regarding it as one of the rare cases of the perfect with ו conjunctive, or should we boldly change the consonantal text to וְאָמַר or וְאָמַרְתָּ? The passage would then read, "Yahweh was sore displeased with your fathers, therefore I (he) said unto them, Turn unto me and I will turn unto you." This makes the verse consistent with its context and with the teaching of the rest of the book. The message of the "former" prophets is referred to, not with the intention of urging it anew upon the prophet's own age, but simply to show how their words were fulfilled.

The next passage that I shall consider is ch. 3. Zechariah sees the high priest Joshua, the head and representative of the Jewish community, standing before the interpreting angel. He is clad in filthy garments, and the Satan accuses him to the interpreting angel. This is commonly supposed to mean that Judah, represented by its high priest, is sinful either morally or ritually, and, accordingly, vs.^{4b} is translated, "And he said unto him, Behold I have caused thine *iniquity* to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel." Similarly vs.^{5b} is translated, "And I will remove the *iniquity* of that land in one day."

That these interpretations are wrong ought to be evident from the fact that the charge of the Satan is repudiated by the interpreting angel in the words, "Yahweh rebuke thee O Satan, Yahweh who hath *chosen* Jerusalem." Even ritual remissness cannot be meant, for, according to 8¹¹⁻¹², Yahweh is satisfied since the building of the temple has begun again. Accordingly, פְּוֹן in these two passages must be translated 'penalty,' as in Ex. 20³ 34⁷. Joshua's filthy garments, therefore, are a symbol of the material distress into which the post-exilic community was plunged. The great problem of the day was, why did Judah suffer? The charge of the Satan expresses the view of many, that this was a sign that she was still sinful in the sight of God. This view the prophet repudiates, and declares that the filthy garments will soon be exchanged for glorious ones, and then there will be no room to argue back from Judah's misfortune to her sinfulness. Yahweh will remove those evils which men regard as the penalty of sin, and then Judah's righteousness will be vindicated.

The next passage to be noted is Zech. 5. This contains two closely related visions which are mutually supplementary, and which cannot be interpreted apart from one another. The prophet sees a flying roll twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad inscribed with curses. Vs.³, as translated by Wellhausen and Nowack, then reads: "This is the curse which goes into effect upon the whole land. Every thief has long gone unpunished, and every perjurer has long gone unpunished.¹ Now I set the curse in operation, saith Yahweh Sebaoth, and it shall enter into the house of the thief and into the house of him who hath sworn falsely by my name, and shall abide there and shall consume its wood and stone." In the next vision Zechariah sees an ephah measure. This is explained by the angel in vs.⁶, as translated by these two scholars: "This is their iniquity in all the land."² Zechariah then sees a female figure seated in the ephah, which is explained, "This is the evil." Two winged females then carry off the ephah with "the evil" in it, and the angel says, "They are going to build for it a house in the land of Shinar, and establish and prepare for it there a resting place."

On this interpretation, the land of Judah is full of iniquity, which is first to be punished with a curse, and then to be removed to the land of Shinar. This interpretation seems to me very doubtful, for the following reasons: (1) כָּל הָאָרֶץ in vs.³ and ⁶ cannot mean "all

¹ Read כָּמֵה instead of כְּמֵה as in 7⁸, and insert לְשֹׁקֵר after הַנִּשְׁבָּע as in the next verse.

² Read with LXX עֵינֵיהֶם 'their iniquity' instead of עֵינֵיהֶם 'their eye.'

the land," but must mean "all the earth." In Zechariah ארץ regularly means "earth," unless expressly limited by the addition of Judah or something similar in the context, and the phrase כל הארץ always means "all the earth" (cf. 1¹¹ 4^{10, 14} 6⁶). This is its meaning in the immediate context of the passage under discussion, 4¹⁴. If this be true, the sinners in question are not Judaeans, but residents of other countries. (2) If זינם בכל הארץ (vs.⁹) and הרשעה (vs.⁸) both mean the sin of Judah, then there is no distinction between the ephah and the woman in the ephah. What would be the sense of saying that the sin of Judah was put into the iniquity of Judah to be carried away? (3) If the ephah means the sin of Judah, why is it carried to Babylonia? The idea that the sin of Judah could be transferred bodily to Babylon is too extraordinary to be ascribed even to Zechariah. The ephah is carried to Babylonia simply because it belongs there. (4) If the sinners of vs.³ are not Judaeans, and if "their iniquity" in vs.⁹ means the iniquity of the heathen, then הרשעה in vs.⁸ must be like עון in 3^{4, 9}, in meaning the penalty of the ancient sins of the nation rather than actual wickedness.

The passage as a whole, then, will have to be interpreted thus: The thieves of vs.³ are the people who in the past have plundered Judah, particularly the Babylonians. Those who swear falsely by Yahweh are the apostate Jews who have remained in Babylonia. These have long gone unpunished. Judah, on the contrary, although righteous, is suffering still the evils which men regard as the penalty of sin. This state of things shall not last: Yahweh will bring the iniquity of the nations (the ephah) to the land of Judah in order that the misfortunes of Judah (the symbolic woman) may be put upon it: then it shall be carried back to Babylonia. Thus there will be effected a right adjustment of rewards and punishments. Babylon will have the misery that she deserves, and Judah will be freed from the misery that she does not deserve. A cover is put on the ephah so that the misery may not escape from it, and a house is to be built for it in Babylonia in order that it may never come back to Judah.