

**ANCIENT HEBREW PROPHECY — POLITICAL TEACHING AND PRACTICE**

by *BINYAMIN UFFENHEIMER*

The subject of this essay requires explanation. By “political practice,” I refer to the rational use of a given power — be it charismatic, political or military — in order to accomplish specific aims within a concrete social or political situation. It must be stressed, however, that prophetic activity as such was not exclusively political, but included magical or symbolic actions as well. By the term “political teaching,” I refer to an ideal political and social goal, as well as to the means of achieving it, taking into due consideration concrete reality. Today, it is a commonplace that pragmatic considerations were far from being the prevalent factor which shaped the political thought of the classical prophets, as was the contention of a number of rationalistic scholars at the beginning of this century, such as Duhm; Hölscher and Wellhausen. Rather, it was closely interwoven with their assessment of reality in light of their religious and moral ideals, the realization of which was their primary demand. In brief — it was essentially conditioned by their “theo-political” approach to history.

Their political teaching, as well as the nature of their actions, underwent substantial transformations in response to the changing historical circumstances

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בנימין אופנהיימר, “מעשה מדיני והגות מדינית אצל נביאי הבית הראשון,” בטיפוסי מנהיגות בתקופת המקרא. ירושלים, האקדמיה הלאומית למדעים, תשל”ג, ע’ 37–53.

during the various periods of their activity. The aim of this essay is threefold: first, to describe and evaluate the changing nature of their action: second, to explore the changing relationship between teaching and action; third, to sketch the differing approaches of the major classical prophets to the existential problems of their times.

## I

In discussing prophetic action, we must clearly distinguish among three different periods.<sup>1</sup> I call the first, beginning with Moses and concluding with the establishment of the united monarchy, that of charismatic prophetic leadership. Moses' leadership encompassed all spheres of national life: his name is associated with the Exodus from Egypt; with the covenant made between God and Israel, which was tantamount to the establishment of the kingdom of God; and with the wanderings of Israel in the desert. The vocation of his follower Joshua, under whose command the tribes conquered Canaan, is depicted in terms of a prophetic call (Josh. 5:13–15). The same is true of the Judges, whose charismatic military leadership characterized the period of settlement. Buber's analysis of Gideon's negative attitude towards kingship (Jdg. 8:20–22), of the parable of Jotham (*ibid.* 9:8–20) and of the pragmatic framework of the Book of Judges,<sup>2</sup> as well as various clear hints scattered within the oldest strata of Biblical poetry — to which one must add the anti-royalist sections of the Book of Samuel, which were also composed at this time — indicate that the sporadic emergence of these charismatic leaders was understood as the realization of the kingdom of God and as a clear antithesis to the rulership of man.

The disastrous defeat by the Philistines at Eben ha-Ezer and the fall of Shiloh brought about the final collapse of this system. Samuel's initial response was an attempt to save the remaining vestiges of the kingdom of God. Two series of steps were taken towards this end. The first of these was the decentralization of the cult. The main innovation in this context was the introduction of the high-place as a suitable site for the offering of sacrifices: reference is made to the high-place in Samuel's own city and that at Giveath ha-Elohim (9:12–14, 19, 25; 10:5, 13). Secondly, attempts were made to create the psychological conditions for the rise of a new charismatic leadership, associated with prophetic groups (hinted at in I Samuel 10: 5–6, 10–12; 11:6) who apparently aroused the people to sacred war by means of dance, music and chant. When young Saul chanced upon such a group, he was caught up in their ecstasy — in the language of the Bible, the spirit of God gripped him (10:10; 11:6)—and he aroused the nation to a war against Nahash the Ammonite. The attempts to restore ancient charismatic leadership

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1. On the tripartite division of the history of Biblical prophecy, see my article, "Prophecy" (Heb.), *ha-Entseklpedyah ha-Mikra'it* (Jerusalem, 1968), V: 690–732.

2. M. Buber, *Kingship of God* (New York, 1973), pp. 59–84.

ultimately failed in face of the strong popular demand for a human king to counterbalance the centralistic military-political organization and technological superiority of the Philistines. Thus, with the establishment of Saul's kingship, the first period, that of prophetic leadership, reached its end.

The second period, that of militant prophetic opposition, was marked by the establishment of the hereditary monarchy. The prophets functioned during this period without any official political authority, acting at their own risk alongside the royal establishment, independently, according to their own convictions. The beginnings of this historical process is visible in the fluctuating relations between Saul and Samuel. During the reigns of David and Solomon there was a further drastic restriction of the field of prophetic activity, as its outstanding figures became official advisors to the royal court, thereby isolating them from the source of their vitality — their living contact with the people. The most noteworthy political document of this period is the prophecy of Nathan (II Sam. 7), containing the Divine promise as to the eternity of the Davidic monarchy. Nathan's enthusiastic celebration of it as the highest expression of God's love for Israel reflects the profound change that had occurred in the prophetic assessment of human kingship, particularly if one compares these declarations with the hesitant and reluctant approval granted by Samuel to the institution of the monarchy as such. This new approach was no doubt influenced by David's brilliant military victories; indeed, it itself contributed to the consolidation of the status of the Davidic monarchy. Moreover, the later classical prophets shaped their eschatological visions in terms of a future Davidic kingdom.

However, during Solomon's reign a militant prophetic opposition began to take shape, operating *sub rosa* among the northern tribes. This was to play a major role in the division of the monarchy, as indicated by the story of Ahijah the Shilonite (I Kings 11:29 ff.). The northern sources from the period after the split speak about the activity of these prophets at length. From them, we learn that some prophets had already begun to take an oppositionary stand during the reign of Jeroboam. Just as Nathan's prophetic activity strengthened the position of the Davidic monarchy in the south, the militant stance of the northern prophets prevented the stabilization and internal consolidation of the northern monarchy. As a result, no royal family succeeded in striking root there in a manner comparable to that of the Davidic monarchy in the south.

During the first generations, this opposition was relatively mild; however, during the reign of Ahab and his son it deepened in a manner unprecedented in Israelite history. The prophets had initially supported Ahab, who had fought bravely against the king of Syria; however, when he failed to observe the ban against Ben-Haddad, most of them became opponents of the royal house (I Kings 20 ff.), an opposition which turned into open rebellion as Jezebel's influence grew. In light of

Omri's and Ahab's tendency toward political involvement with the other nations of the region, whose benefit was evident in Ahab's predominant political and military role among the allies in the battle of Karkar (854 B.C.E.), appropriate conditions were created for his foreign queen to introduce the cult of the Phoenician Baal into Israel. Alt is mistaken in his claim that the narrative in I Kings 18 was originally a local story describing the confrontation of the zealots of YH with the cult of Baal Carmel (or, according to Eissfeldt, with Baal Shamayim), and that it was only a later redactor who gave it national significance.<sup>3</sup> Another assumption is likewise groundless, namely, that the religious-cultural confrontation was initiated by the zealots of YH, and that only a later editor attributed the initiative to the foreign queen, who started by introducing the cult of Baal.

This rebellion culminated in the revolution of Jehu, instigated by the young prophet sent by Elisha (II Kings 9). The purpose of this revolution, which was to become a broad-based civil rebellion of the followers of YH, was the destruction of the Omride Dynasty, and culminated in the bloody ascent to the throne of Jehu son of Nimshi. Elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> I have shown that the narrative of Jehu's rebellion reflects the spiritual crisis that took place after the prophets and zealots succeeded in uprooting the worship of Baal by placing upon the throne the bloodstained Jehu. The violent results of this prophetic conspiracy were so shocking that they catalyzed a sharp turnabout: from then on, the prophets relinquished the use of political violence for the attainment of their aims, and focused their activity upon education and public admonition. The symbolic, dramatic action, first introduced by Zedekiah son of Chenaanah (I Kings 22:11–12), thenceforth became an important tool with which to supplement their words. This great transformation marked the beginning of the third period: the birth of classical prophecy.

## II

How did the various political attitudes of the classical prophets take shape? Let us begin with a brief analysis of those of Amos and Hosea.

The essential message of the Book of Hosea — which, unlike Yehezkel Kaufmann,<sup>5</sup> I see as one unit — is that of internal social critique of the northern

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3. A. Alt, "Gottesurteil auf dem Karmel," *Kleine Schriften* (München, 1953–59), II, pp. 135–149; O. Eissfeldt, *Ras Shamrah und Sanchunjaton* (Halle, 1939), pp. 31 ff.

4. "The Significance of the Story of Jehu" (Heb.), *Oz le-David — [Sefer Ben-Gurion]* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 291–311. Cf. my *ha-Nevu'ah he-Kedumah be-Yisrael* | *Ancient Prophecy in Israel* (Heb.) | (Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 248–264.

5. Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot ha-Emuna ha-Yisra'elit* (Tel-Aviv, 1937–1956), III:93–95; B. Uffenheimer, "Amos and Hosea — Two Paths in Classical Prophecy" (Heb.), *Zer le-gevurot* | *Z. Shazar, Festschrift* | (Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 284–319.

kingdom of Ephraim, which was in the throes of social and ethical deterioration. At the end of one prophecy, he satirizes the manner in which the leaders of the country ran back and forth between the two great powers of his day: “Instead, Ephraim has acted like a silly dove with no mind: They have appealed to Egypt! They have gone to Assyria!” (7:11). This political instability is but one of the indications of the loss of spiritual balance and the breakdown of self-confidence which led to the pursuit of foreign cultures.

In the Book of Amos, on the other hand, the central subject is the relationship between Israel and the nations. According to his prophecies on the nations (1:1–2:3), God primarily punished them for their acts of cruelty and bloodshed against Israel, but Israel itself is required for *all* her sins (3:2), including those social evils which do not entail bloodshed. By this statement, Amos interprets the election of Israel as a special responsibility, imposed upon them by virtue of their being the vehicle of God’s revelation through His prophets. This interpretation aimed, among other things, at countering the claims of the ruling circles in the kingdom of Ephraim that the military and political victories of Jeroboam II were proof of God’s favor to Israel. The statement in 9:7: “‘To Me, o Israelites, you are just like the Ethiopians’—declares the Lord. ‘True, I brought Israel up from the land of Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir,’” likewise underscores that the unique status of Israel does not grant it any extra historical-political rights compared with other nations. His interest in the relations between Israel and the nations arose out of his social critique, rather than from any political reflections whatsoever.<sup>6</sup>

This same question emerges in a totally different context in the books of Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. The historical and political viewpoint of these three prophets was formed in light of the momentous decisions which confronted the Kings of Judah in their days, when Judah came under the sphere of influence, first of the Assyrian, and later of the Babylonian, Empire.

Two central dates stand out in the Book of Isaiah: 735 and 701 B.C.E. The sources for the events of the former year are Isaiah 7, II Kings 16, and II Chronicles 28. To these one may add the information that may be gathered from contemporary Assyrian sources. The situation described in the Hebrew sources is explained in terms of the efforts of the two allies to include Judah in their anti-Assyrian alliance, although at the beginning of this confrontation certain local factors may also have been at work: namely, the attempt of Ephraim and Aram to deprive Judah of its territories on the east bank of the Jordan.

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6. Uffenheimer, *op. cit.* (note 5).

Details of Tiglat-Pileser III's campaign in 734 along the Phoenician coast as far as the Egyptian border<sup>7</sup> indicate that there was in fact justification for the allies' fear of Assyria. Moreover, the Book of Kings indicates that Ahaz' policy involved a radical departure from that of his grandfather Uzziah. In applying for the help of the Assyrian king, he performed an act of political submission, implied in the phrase "I am your servant and your son" (II Kings 16:7), reminiscent of the submissive style of Assyrian vassal treaties. However, this change did not take place as the result of rational, balanced political considerations; rather, it was caused by confusion and fear which overwhelmed Ahaz, as may be seen from the account in Isaiah 7:1–2. Apparently, Isaiah's dramatic declaration before Ahaz preceded the king's act of submission to the Assyrian conqueror. Isaiah may have wished to prevent this act by encouraging the king, who was intimidated by two minor powers, Ephraim and Aram. Speaking of them contemptuously as "those two smoking stubs of firebrands," (7:4) he wanted to outline the situation in its true dimensions.

Isaiah appears to have opposed those circles who advised Ahaz to join the alliance of Aram and of Ephraim (Isa. 8:6, 12), based on a distorted picture of the real balance of power between Judah and its enemies. At the same time, he severely criticized Ahaz' call for help to Assyria; years later, he similarly condemned Hezekiah's courting of Egypt. However, under no circumstances ought one to interpret his request, "Be firm and calm," and his call, "If you will not believe, for you cannot be trusted (or, 'surely, you shall not be established')," (7:4, 9) as a sign of opposition to any and every form of political and military activity, as though he wished him merely to sit with folded hands and trust in God.

In order to properly understand the sentence, "If you will not believe, for you cannot be trusted" (*im lo ta'aminu ki lo te'ameynu*), one must realize that the verb *le-ha'amin*, as well as the corresponding noun, *emunah*, not only refer to inner psychological conditions, as one might think on the basis of its translation into European languages ("to believe," "glauben," "croire"). They also imply endurance and physical strength, as in such phrases as "his hands remained steady" (*va-y'he yadav emunah* — Ex. 17:12); "strange and lasting plagues" (*halaim ra'im ve-ne'emanim* — Deut. 28:59); and in I Sam. 2:35, 25:28; I Kings 11:38; Isa. 22:23, 25; and in the sense of "to persist" or "to last" as in I Kings 8:26; I Chron. 17:23, 24; II Chron. 1:9; etc. Here, the phrase *im lo ta'aminu* is not used as a transitive verb, as it is in II Chron. 20:20 ("Believe in the Lord your God, so you shall be established") in the sense of belief *in* some person or object, but as an intransitive verb, in the sense of "to be steadfast, trusting, firm," without

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7. See Inscription ND 406; Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, I, 235–240; *ANET*, p. 283.

reference to any object (Compare its usage in Isa. 28:16, “he that is faithful [*ha-ma’amin*] shall not make haste”).<sup>5</sup>

The call, “fear not, neither be fainthearted” (*al tira u-levavkha al yerakh* — 7:4) recalls the exhortation to the armies about to go into battle (Deut. 20:8) and words of encouragement to Abraham (Gen. 15:1, 6), both of which approximate the Deuteronomic formula, *al tira ve-al tehat* (Deut. 1:21; Josh. 8:1; etc.). There are also Near Eastern parallels to this usage, which also provide encouragement to people in times of war and travail.

The call in verse 3, “be firm and be calm,” (*hishamer ve-hashket*) is likewise one for spiritual courage and fearlessness (compare Deut. 4:9, 15, 23; I Sam. 19.2). Many years later, Isaiah further expanded his demand, in the words “For thus said my Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, ‘You shall triumph by stillness and quiet; Your victory shall come about through calm and confidence.’” (Isa. 30:15; cf. Deut. 4:9, 15, 23, 20:8; Gen. 15:1, 6; I Sam. 19:2).

The separation of spiritual courage from specific material acts transforms it into a general requirement for all proper political decision-making. This demand was first addressed to Ahaz when he was filled with fear of an enemy who turned out to be nothing more than a straw-man (Isa. 7:4, 9). But when the prophet wished him to ask for a sign, he avoided the issue (v. 10 ff.), because by that time, having already turned to the Assyrian king, he no longer had the spiritual fortitude to accept the consequences of a clear prophetic sign. Perhaps at that moment the delegation to Tiglath-Pileser III was already on its way. The prophet forecast the Assyrian invasion in frighteningly graphic terms (7:14 ff.); it may be that this occurred at the time of Tiglath-Pileser’s campaign along the coast in 734 B.C.E. The significance of the name “Immanuel” (God with us) and the verse, “None but the Lord of Hosts shall you account holy; Give reverence to Him alone, Hold Him alone in awe” (8:13), suggest that by that time his political outlook had already taken shape.<sup>9</sup> Isaiah’s vision of the divine king seated upon a high and

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8. Cf. R. Smend, “Zur Geschichte von אֱמַן,” *Hebräische Wortforschung. W. Baumgartner Festschrift* [Vetus Testamentum. Supplement. 16. (Leiden, 1967)], pp. 284–290; H. Wildberger, “Glauben, Erwägungen zu אֱמַן,” *ibid.*, pp. 372–386; M. Dahood, “Some Ambiguous Texts in Isaias,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20 (1958), pp. 41–43; S. Loewenstamm, *Tarbiz* 25 (1956), p. 470 ff. For a fuller discussion of the philological significance of the verb *ha’amin*, comparison with cognate Near Eastern languages, etc., see the original Hebrew text of this article, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–44, and the literature cited there.

9. There is no need to correct the use of the verb *takdishu* here, as this is often used by Isaiah in the sense of “to elevate, to revere.” Compare my article, “Isaiah 6 and its Rabbinic Exegesis” (Heb.), in *ha-Mikra ve-Toldot Yisrael* [J. Liver Memorial Volume] (Tel-Aviv, 1971), pp. 18–50, esp. p. 39.

exalted throne at the time of his own consecration to prophecy (Isa. 6) is here translated into political terms. During the reign of Hezekiah, this became a byword for the rejection of any reliance upon military might or upon foreign powers; it reflects Isaiah's opposition to Hezekiah's pursuit of Egypt, whose aim was to obtain political and military backing for his planned rebellion against Assyria. The prophet's words in chapters 30–31 are formulated in sharply antithetical terms: "Who set out to go down to Egypt without asking Me, to seek refuge with Pharaoh, to seek shelter under the protection of Egypt." (30:2) "For the Egyptians are man, not God, and their horses are flesh, not spirit; And when the Lord stretches out His arm, the helper shall trip, and the helped one shall fall, and both shall perish together." (31:3) Isaiah here formulates his principled opposition to the official policy, which went back to King Solomon, and was exemplified primarily by the Omride kings of Israel and by Uzziah and Hezekiah of Judah. The practical implication of this reliance upon God alone is to remove Judah as fully as possible from the realm of international politics.

Throughout the crisis of 701, Isaiah maintained his conviction that the King of Assyria must be resisted to the very end. In his words of encouragement to Hezekiah (37:22–35; cf. II Kings 19:20–34), which include sharp condemnation of Rabshakeh's words, Isaiah expands upon the historical outlook implicit in chapter 10 (whose date cannot be determined with precision). Here he develops the theory of "the rod of God's anger," based upon the assumption that Israel is at the center of world history; that is, that the ascent to power of the Assyrian conquerors is meaningful only if viewed in terms of the history of Israel, in which he was sent by God to punish His sinful nation. Sennacherib's arrogance in ascribing his victories to his own might and wisdom blinded him to the true state of affairs — namely, that he was a passive instrument of God's vengeance upon Israel. He will be punished for this and led to his destruction like a bull led by hook and bit (Isa. 37:29). At that moment in world history, 701 B.C.E., Judah's spiritual centrality will bear concrete political and military significance: "I will protect and save this city for My sake and for the sake of My servant David" (37:35). Isaiah takes as his point of departure the sanctity of the Temple Mount as the dwelling place of the Lord, an idea deeply rooted in the tradition of Psalms. His vision of the high and exalted King had shaped his negative evaluation of the self-complacent society of Uzziah's time (Ch. 2–3). He condemned it as the material embodiment of the arrogance of men who think to shape their lives autonomously, ignoring their true situation as His creatures. On the day of the Lord the haughtiness of man — which is also the source of the king of Assyria's hubris — will be broken. The fall of Sennacherib at the gates of Jerusalem will be proof of the absolute supremacy of the Lord and of the vanity of his claims. Thus, in chapters 10 and 37, the obscure visions of the terrors of the Day of the Lord found in chapters 2 and 3 are applied in concrete fashion to the Assyrian invasion. 37:26–27 implies that these events are the realization of an ancient



divine decree, the chapter concluding with words of comfort to the remnant of the House of Judah (37:31). Just as in Ch. 10–11 the emergence of a shoot from the stock of Jesse is related to the fall of Assyria, so in Ch. 37 the taking-root of the remnant of the Davidic house is connected with the disasters which will befall the King of Assyria. One may speculate that he believed that the ideal Davidic kingdom was about to take shape immediately upon the fall of Assyria, an event which seemed to him quite close.

The centrality of Jerusalem, Zion and the House of David in world history — assumptions which guided Isaiah in his thought concerning actual history — is also the basis of the eschatological vision in 2:1–4 and in Ch. 11. In point of fact, there is no reason to separate his eschatology from his political outlook. The very term “eschatology” seems inappropriate in speaking about his vision of an ideal Davidic king and the restoration of the remnant of the House of Judah, as these events were not expected at some remote future time, but were seen as growing organically out of the events of the prophet’s own time. The fall of the evil Assyrian kingdom is a precondition for the rise of the future Davidic kingdom; thus, the events of his own time are leading towards this utopia.

The second characteristic uniting the two aspects of his thought — the involvement in actual events and the portrayal of the ideal, utopian age — is the role of man in realizing this redemption. According to chapters 10 and 37, the fall of the evil kingdom will be entirely the work of God’s hand. The King of Peace will arise *after* the fall of Assyria. The literary connection between the end of Chapter 10 and the beginning of Chapter 11 becomes clear when we examine its images: at the end of Chapter 10 he refers to the hewing off of the crowns of trees and cutting down the lofty ones, while at the beginning of chapter 11 he speaks of the emergence of a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a twig from his stock. There is no room for human activism in the catastrophic events that will precede it: God’s outstretched arm alone acts in history. Thus, Isaiah’s unique historical-philosophical outlook precluded any demand that could be interpreted as calling for political activism. In its place, he demands strength of spirit and quiet anticipation while relying upon the Holy One of Israel, in whose hands lie the only initiative in world history. His demand to abstain from the traditional policy of alliance-making follows from this. Even during the siege by Sennacherib there is no change: his call is not for military activism against Sennacherib, but for firm and confident resistance. His encouragement to Ahaz in 735, in which he contemptuously refers to the kings of Ephraim and Aram laying siege to Jerusalem as “two smoking stubs of firebrands,” resemble those to Hezekiah in 701, which include an ironic polemic against the King of Assyria: the pose of the arrogant conqueror is naught but an illusion, for in truth he is a “bull” being led to his own destruction by hook and bit. It seems to me that his reluctance concerning Hezekiah’s activist foreign policy is also based upon the realization

that the ascent of Assyria and its domination in the region had deprived Judah, in practice, of the freedom of political action that it had enjoyed during the time that there had been a balance of power among its enemies. The political and military dominance of Assyria, alongside the passivity and lack of self-confidence of Egypt, now removed the possibility of any such freedom.

### III

Isaiah's contemporary, Micah the Morashthite, borrowed from him the vision of eternal peace at the End of Days, but there the similarity ended. Like Isaiah, he saw Judah at the watershed of human history; however, the verse which he added to Isaiah's prophecy, "Though all the peoples walk each in the name of its gods, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever," (4:5) indicates that he did not agree with the former's assumption concerning the future acceptance of monotheism by the nations.

His vision of the ideal king and of the future Israel also differed from that of Isaiah. In contrast to the purely spiritual features of the shoot from the stock of Jesse who will rule by the spirit of God and the strength of God's word in his mouth who shall appear upon the stage of history after the defeat of the evil kingdom, Micah envisions the future king in entirely different colours. He will be a fighting king, who will enter into an anti-Assyrian alliance with seven shepherds and eight princes of men (5:3-5) — that is, with foreign kings and princes — similar to what we know from Assyrian sources about Ahab, who in 854/3 B.C.E. participated in a regional coalition against Shalmaneser III. Moreover, his book contains a series of contemporary statements, apparently made during the siege by Sennacherib, namely: 2:12-13; 4:8-9, 10, 11-12, 13-14, whose literary leit-motif is the opening word: *'atah, ve-atah, atah*. In these sayings, the prophet asks the people and its leaders to wage an aggressive war against the enemy in order to remove the siege; this idea is expressed by each of the images mentioned here, from that of the one who makes the breach, namely the king, who goes before the flock through the gate of the city (2:13) to that of the woman in labor (4:10). Even the bull and his horns are used as a symbol of strength and power (4:13). The mention of the ban (*ibid.*) invokes memories of the campaigns of Joshua and the commandment to lay waste the seven nations of Canaan. A call to war is also implied in v. 14, whose meaning (unlike the accepted English translations) is apparently "Gather and organize yourselves into battalions, you, Jerusalem, who has many troops." It clearly follows from this that Micah champions military and political activism; he wishes to initiate a war against the enemy encamped about the gates of Jerusalem, and even advocates a policy of alliances with other nations in order to repel the Assyrian aggressor.

The image of the remnant of Jacob is drawn along lines similar to those of the description of the future king: it will not be a poor and needy people of shepherds

and tillers of the soil, as Isaiah had depicted them, but a fighting nation that imposes its fear upon others (5:6–7).

These prophecies seem to contain an echo of the sound of the ancient poetry of the period of the Conquest, such as is found in the sayings of Balaam (Num. 23–24). As opposed to the internalized strength implicit in Isaiah, one feels here an immediate sense of the vibrant life of a nation that has not yet lost faith in its own existence, as happened later in the Assyrian period. The Isaianic understanding of history is here stripped of its spiritualizing tendency, the eschatological vision also being molded by Micah's political and military activism.<sup>10</sup> He draws upon the martial motifs of early poetry, the parables and the early anonymous prophecies against the nations, such as those collected in Zech. 9–14, in which open aggressiveness against the nations is combined with the motif of vengeance.

#### IV

In contrast with both Isaiah and Micah, whose political outlooks and portrayals of the ideal future remained essentially constant throughout their prophetic careers, Jeremiah underwent profound changes in response to the changing situation: these changes affected the inner continuity between his political outlook and his portrayal of the ideal future. The point of departure for these reflections was the conviction that a world cataclysm was about to take place; his consecration as prophet filled his heart with the terrifying certainty that he had been sent to bring about this catastrophe through the word of God placed in his mouth (1:9–10). From this, it follows that divine fiat rules in the realm of world history, which may be actualized by the word of God, which is a tangible physical force. After some time had elapsed, it became clear to him that Judah would also be affected, for “from the north shall disaster break loose... for all their wickedness: they have forsaken Me and sacrificed to other gods and worshipped the works of their hands” (1:14, 16).

The vision of the cup of wrath in 25:15 ff.,<sup>11</sup> is certainly from that time, that is, close to the year 626 B.C.E., and not from after 605, as Kaufmann thought. This may be inferred not only from the list of nations in this chapter, which includes states which lost their independence during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, such as the Philistine city-states, but also from the fact that Babylonia is not mentioned

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10. See my article, “History and Eschatology in the Book of Micah” (Heb.), *Beth Mikra* 7:4 [no. 16] (1963), pp. 48–65.

11. The sequence of the passages in the traditional text is incorrect. I would conjecture that the correct order is: v. 15–16, 27–29, 17–26, 30–33, 34–38. Thus, one arrives at a vision relating to a divine command and its execution, including a prophecy of destruction. Most contemporary Bible scholars eliminate entire passages here in order to avoid this exegetical confusion.

there at all. King Sheshach, who is mentioned in the Masoretic text, does not appear in the Septuagint version, arousing the suspicion that this reference is a later addition.

In this vision, Jeremiah passes among the nations — including the King of Judah and his people — the cup of wrath, driving them mad with thirst for blood, and setting one against the other. The vision thus incorporates an embodiment of the magical function of the prophet. In the time of Zedekiah, Jeremiah sent Seraiah son of Neriah son of Mahseiah to curse Babylonia with the word of God: another example of a prophetic message accompanied by an act of explicitly magical significance (51:59–64). These acts express the mantic element in his heritage, which is particularly evident in his prophecies to the nations; this heritage is one pole of his approach, albeit one that he attempted to neutralize through the rational approach, which he developed consistently and energetically.

The first change in Jeremiah's interpretation of history took place at the time of the Josianic reforms, which reached their peak a few years after his own consecration as prophet, i.e., in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, in 621 B.C.E. In a vision, he saw the entire people repenting (3:21–25) in response to his impassioned words of rebuke and consolation (3:11–17, 18–20, 22a); but he was soon to be disappointed (5:1–2). It quickly became clear to him that the changes brought about by the reform were only external and ritualistic, and did not touch upon the relations between man and man. During these years, he was preoccupied with the anonymous enemy from the north (4:5 ff.).

The second change took place in 605 B.C.E., the year of the Battle of Carchemish, in which Nebuchadnezzar II, the young heir to the Babylonian throne, defeated the armies of Egypt and Assyria, thereby winning control of the entire region. At that point, it became clear to him that the enemy from the north was none other than Babylonia. The northern motif in his prophecies gave way to the Babylonian motif, and he declares: "The king of Babylon will come and destroy this land and cause man and beast to cease from it" (36:29). In a speech in the Temple, he declares: "Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth" (26:6), as the people had transformed the place into a "den of robbers" (7:11). The King of Babylonia is the rod of divine anger, executing judgment.

A further change took place after the exile of Jehoiachin, during the reign of Zedekiah, the final king of Judah. During the reign of this king, who was a Babylonian vassal, the political ferment within and around Judah grew, reaching the brink of military rebellion. In this chapter, it is related how, when the delegation from the surrounding kings reached Jerusalem — apparently in order to consult with the King of Judah regarding the final preparations for the

rebellion — Jeremiah appeared, with a yoke and chains around his neck, to warn against such a step. In his speech to the representatives of the nations, he articulated a new philosophy of history: world history is shaped by a creator God who acts kindly towards His world, and from time to time turns it over to whom He wills (27:5–6). Now Babylonia’s turn has come; the nations shall serve Nebuchadnezzar, “him, his son and his grandson... until the time of his own land comes” (*ibid.*, v. 7). Later on, he emphasizes that whoever rebels against this rule will only bring destruction to his own people and land; only that nation which places its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylonia shall live (*ibid.*, v. 11).

Implicit in these words is the realistic view that it is unwise to rebel against Babylonia, as it will cruelly suppress any rebellion — notwithstanding Hananiah son of Azoer’s contention that Babylonia shall fall “in two years” (28:3). It is interesting to note that this sober view of the situation is apparently shared by Jeremiah with the army officers responsible for the defense of the strongholds of the lowland and the mountain,<sup>12</sup> as may be seen from the Lachish letters. However, the prophet’s argument is of a clearly religious character, its main thrust relating to God’s universal plan. On the basis of this argument, whose point of departure is universal history (27:5–6), he also asks Zedekiah and Judah to place their necks under the yoke of Babylon. He thus abandons the Isaianic doctrine of the centrality of Judah, and asks their willing participation in the world-historical plan of the Creator. The Babylonian king is no longer the rod of anger who comes only to destroy, but “my servant,” that is, a king in whose hands is placed the fate of the entire world. There is also a decisive change in the manner in which Jeremiah views world history, as in his words to the representatives of the nations he does not inform them of an immutable divine decree, but confronts them with the choice between the path of life, namely, submission to the yoke of Babylonia, and the path of death and destruction, i.e., rebellion. The history of the nations is thus liberated from the burden of blind destiny; moreover, the essential distinction between world history and Israelite history is removed. There are no longer two realms subject to different laws, but a universal moral law, basing world history upon man’s free choice. The principles implicit in this speech are already found in Chapter 18, in the vision of the potter’s house. While there he still addresses himself to Judah, as may be seen from the conclusion (v. 11), the ideas are nevertheless formulated in general terms, including all of the peoples of the world under one rubric: “At one moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be uprooted and pulled down and destroyed; but if that nation against which I made the decree turns back from its wickedness, I change My mind concerning the punishment I planned to bring on

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12. See my article, “Jeremiah’s War with the False Prophets” (Heb.), *Sefer Neiger — Ma’amarim le-ḥeker ha-Tanakh* (Jerusalem, 1959), pp. 96–111.

it" (v. 7–8). This formula recognizes the educational significance of the word of God as a commandment addressed to man; the magical element of the prophecies mentioned above is completely absent.

The educational element in Jeremiah's mission, as we have described it, was intended to arouse the people to repentance, in order to cancel the evil decree that he had earlier declared. It follows from this that his prophecies were not meant as an irreversible decree, but as a warning whose fulfillment was contingent upon man's own behavior. By doing so, he liberated himself from the ancient mantic prophetic elements inherent in the prophecies to the nations, which he then proceeded to reshape in accordance with the needs of his historical situation. In rejecting the older doctrine of the centrality of Israelite history, he created a coherent set of ideas explaining both Israelite and world history within one comprehensive framework.

However, in describing the future redemption, he returned to the Isaianic concept of the Day of the Lord. In the "scroll of consolation" (Chapters 30–31), he describes the redemption of Israel against the backdrop of the day of the Lord: it will be a day of trembling and fear for the entire world and "it is a time of trouble for Jacob, but he shall be delivered from it" (30:7). The redemption itself is depicted in terms of Judah's restoration to its former glory: the return of the sons to their borders, the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom (33:15), the resettlement of the land, and the renewal of the Temple cult and pilgrimage festivals. To these restorative elements, which originate in the longing for past glories, are added utopian elements, particularly the extension and deepening of the spiritualizing tendency that had appeared in many of Isaiah's words. In speaking of the renewal of the covenant between God and Israel, he stresses that the covenant will be written upon their hearts (31:32), in contrast with the former covenant, which had been written upon tablets of stone. The knowledge of God will be universal, and man will no longer need to teach it to his fellow, "for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall know Me" (31:33).

The sanctity of Jerusalem will no longer be restricted to the Temple Mount; all of Jerusalem will be the "Throne of the Lord" (3:17), and all nations will turn to the name of God in Jerusalem. The ancient symbol of the presence of God, the ark of the covenant, "shall no longer be spoken of... nor shall it come to mind. They shall not mention it, or miss it, or make another" (3:16). This conception is later developed in the teaching of the renewal of heart and of spirit, which was articulated by Ezekiel in the vision of the Dry Bones (Ezek. 37:1–14). Its most striking expression was the forcible removal of the people of Israel from the midst of the nations: "As I live — declares the Lord God — I will reign over you with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm and with overflowing fury... I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are

scattered... I will make you pass under the shepherd's staff, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ez. 20:33-37).

## V

In conclusion, I would like to summarize the essential points that have been raised. First, one of the substantial differences between the earlier prophets and the literary prophets is in their attitude toward the use of violence for the attainment of political ends. The earlier prophets made use of force where necessary, unlike the classical prophets, who focused their activity solely upon preaching and exhortation. Second, the political problems which troubled the early prophets related primarily to the Israelite regime and to the paganism of their neighbors. The relationship to other nations is only touched upon in short isolated sayings, such as those related to Balaam (Num. 24:17-25), in which God proclaims His decree against this or that nation. These are occasionally explained (e.g., in Amos 1:3-2:3), in terms of some sin committed by that nation against Israel. Third, Israel's concrete relations to the nations became a central problem in the minds of the prophets only from Isaiah on, once Judah came under the influence of the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian empires. Three basic positions emerge in this context: both Isaiah and Micah saw Judah playing a central role in world history; while in Isaiah this is interpreted in strictly spiritual terms, in Micah it is associated with political and military activism. The distinctions between these two contemporaries are expressed both in their approach to immediate political problems as well as in their vision of the future image of the king and of the nation. The third approach was that of Jeremiah, which took shape fully only after the exile of Jehoiachin. According to this view, the people of Israel must adjust itself to the historical plan of the Creator, who periodically designates a king or a royal dynasty over the entire world. This approach is based, not upon the centrality of Judah, but on the Creator's concern for all His creatures. Jeremiah's doctrine attempts to free the history of the nations as such from arbitrary mantic decree and to ground it in the same ethical choice that is a time-honored principle in the interpretation of Israelite history.

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