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Hope under Judgement: The Prophets of the Eighth Century BCE

In August 1999 an international conference on 'A Biblical Theology of Hope' was organised by Dr Brian S. Rosner in the University of Aberdeen. In this issue of the Evangelical Quarterly we present five of the papers on different aspects of the topic. The first is by Hugh Williamson, Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, who has written extensively on the Book of Isaiah.

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According to the record of Peter's sermon in Acts 3:24, 'All the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days', while according to the first letter ascribed to him, 'Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry' (1 Pet. 1:10). As Ronald Clements pointed out in an essay more than twenty years ago, this understanding of prophecy seems to fly in the face of two of the most significant results of the study of the prophets by modern critical scholarship. On the one hand it presupposes that the prophets proclaimed a unified message, whereas any textbook on prophecy in ancient Israel is likely to concentrate on drawing out the distinctive message of each prophet or prophetic book, and on the other it makes clear that the prophets focussed primarily on a proclamation of salvation, whereas if we had to use a single word to summarize the content of at any rate the majority of the prophetic books, that word would be judgement.¹

¹ R. E. Clements, 'Patterns in the Prophetic Canon', in G. W. Coats and B. O. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Authority* (Philadelphia, 1977), 42–55, reprinted in R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* (Louisville, 1996), 191–202. Some of the arguments are repeated and developed in *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London, 1978), chap. 6. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that in his appreciative critique of Clements's position, B. S. Childs has relied wholly on this latter work, and not on the initial essay, which he might have found somewhat more congenial; cf. *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London, 1985), 128–32 (see, for instance, his comment that 'the relationship between text and historical situation is a more complex and subtle one than is envisioned by a direct, historical referential reading'). For a broader discussion of the perceptions of prophecy in antiquity, see J. Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London, 1986).

In his exploration of this apparent dichotomy, Clements warns of the danger that 'the literary-critical and theological aspects of the task' of interpretation may 'fall apart into two irreconcilable compartments of scholarship' (p. 55). The answer, he believes, lies in 'devoting more attention than has usually been given to the literary structure and "patterns" of the written prophetic collections' (pp. 43-4). He observes that even the most doom-laden prophets, such as Amos, conclude in their canonical form with a word of salvation, and regardless of the literary history which led to this circumstance—a history which has frequently led to such sayings being first dismissed as secondary and then ignored²—we should recognize that they bear witness to a pattern of interpretation which has been woven into the very fabric of the prophetic corpus.

From observation, Clements moves back to explanation, and this he finds primarily to lie in what would nowadays be called the process of relecture. Words that were originally delivered to a specific, and not always recoverable, historical situation, came over the course of time to be applied more broadly. This was true first of the message of judgement, as when, for instance, Amos's prophecy of 'the end' of Israel in Am. 8:2 was reapplied to the later fall of the southern kingdom of Judah in Ezk. 7:1-4. Such a reapplication, which can be multiplied many times in the prophetic books and which focussed especially on the events of 587 BCE, clearly played its part in giving the impression that the prophets had spoken with one voice. And support for this may be found already at an early, pre-canonical stage in the development of the literature with the summary statements in the Deuteronomic History to the effect that God had repeatedly warned his people of the need for repentance 'by my servants the prophets' (2 Ki. 17:13; see also 24:2).³ Here, then, we seem to have clear evidence for the emergence of the view that the prophets delivered a unified message.

Secondly, however, Clements argues that the same is true of the proclamation of salvation. He does not doubt that in many cases later oracles to this effect have been added in the post-exilic period to the words of the pre-exilic prophets, and he accepts that the major impetus in this direction came from the turn from judgement to restoration which was brought about by the post-exilic restoration of Judah and

² See, for instance, how they are treated in the otherwise admirable W. Zimmerli, *Der Mensch und seine Hoffnung im Alten Testament* (Göttingen, 1968), chap. 7 (ET, *Man and his Hope in the Old Testament* [SBT, 2nd series 20; London, 1971]).

³ There has been some lively discussion of this in the pages of JSOT, initiated by A. G. Auld's challenge to the summary represented above. The various contributions have been helpfully collected in P. R. Davies (ed.), *The Prophets: A Sheffield Reader* (The Biblical Seminar 42; Sheffield, 1996), 22-126; see too B. Vawter, 'Were the Prophets *Nābī's?*', *Biblica* 66, 1985, 206-20.

the fact that the fulfilment at that time turned out to be so much less spectacular than what had at first been hoped. But he also maintains that some of the earlier prophets themselves may have initially held out some smaller-scale hopes for their people's future, especially in Judah following the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE, and that these too may have been reworked or re-read in the light of later historical developments. As he himself puts it, 'What has happened is that quite disparate prophecies, expressing greater or lesser possibilities of hope for Israel's future, have acquired a relatively uniform pattern of interpretation in the light of the situation which arose after 587' (p. 52).

In these ways, then, Clements maintains that the survival of written prophecy as a living word through changing historical circumstances has led to the development of a united witness to a hope in the future of God's dealings with his people. At the time of publication, his approach, seeking to reflect positively on the canonical shape of the prophetic literature, was innovative, and has today become something more of a commonplace.⁴ Nevertheless, among those of us who are still wedded to an historically based reading of the Old Testament, the dichotomy between critical reconstruction and later reception remains disturbing. The value of Clements's work is that he has shown that this is already present within the Old Testament itself, and he ventured some initial proposals to seek to bridge over the gap. By posing the topic for this paper as 'hope under judgement', however, we are invited to reflect further on the foundations for this bridge, to explore the theological rationale which the books themselves present for their development into the shape which they have now assumed.

A point of entry into this undeniably difficult subject may be found in three passages in the book of Isaiah, since they explicitly relate

⁴ Interest in the canonical shaping of the prophetic literature has taken various forms; the influence of wisdom, for instance, has been urged by G. T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (BZAW 151; Berlin and New York, 1980). Currently the most lively area of debate focusses on the shape of the Book of the Twelve as a whole; though this goes beyond the limits of the present essay, its relevance to the topic which Clements raised is obvious; for reflection on this, together with bibliography up until the time of writing, see J. Barton, 'The Canonical Meaning of the Book of the Twelve', in J. Barton and D. J. Reimer (eds.), *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (Macon, GA, 1996), 59–73; more recent discussions include a number of the contributions to J. W. Watts and P. R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (JSOTS 235; Sheffield, 1996); E. W. Conrad, 'The End of Prophecy and the Appearance of Angels/Messengers in the Book of the Twelve', *JSOT* 73, 1997, 65–79, and 'Reading Isaiah and the Twelve as Prophetic Books', in C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans (eds.), *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (SVT 70; Leiden, 1997), 3–17; E. Bosshard-Nepustil, *Rezeptionen von Jesaja 1–39 im Zwölfprophetenbuch: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Verbindung von Prophetenbüchern in babylonischer und persischer Zeit* (OBO 154; Freiburg, 1997).

positive hope for the future with the commitment of some of the prophet's words to writing.⁵ It is widely believed that all three indeed derive from the eighth-century prophet, and space constraints require that this has to be assumed here as well. As I have sought to explain more fully elsewhere,⁶ a clear progression may be traced through these three passages, no doubt reflecting an understandable development in Isaiah's own thinking in the light of changing circumstances.

In the first instance, 8:1–4, the message is terse, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz', and the time-frame for its fulfilment is brief: 'For before the child knows how to call "My father" or "My mother", the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria' (verse 4). The situation, of course, is the threatened invasion of Judah by the coalition of Aram and Israel, so that the words as written imply a political message of reassurance to Judah.⁷ The concern that reliable witnesses should attest the writing (verse 2) will have been in order to guarantee in advance of its fulfilment that Isaiah had indeed faithfully envisaged the surprising and unexpected outcome. It is an important theme, which will recur later in a more developed context.

This relatively straightforward account is embedded in a wider first-person narrative relating to Isaiah's stance throughout this early phase in his ministry (roughly speaking, Isaiah 6 + 8). If one aspect of this has been seen to be successful, the response to his appeal as a whole was clearly less so. Although there are many difficulties at all levels in unravelling precisely all that was involved, there can be no doubt that his appeal to the people and its leaders was not accepted.⁸ In consequence, at the close of the section, we find his famous pronouncement:

⁵ For an introduction to the wider topic of the nature of hope in the first part of the book of Isaiah, see J. Barton, *Isaiah 1–39* (OTG; Sheffield, 1995), 64–82.

⁶ See H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford, 1994), 94–106.

⁷ There is considerable debate about the precise course of events involved, about the time when Isaiah may first have used the name, and whether it was already being reinterpreted by him at the time when he wrote it down and named his son. This does not, however, materially affect the issues discussed above. For a helpful survey of opinions, see S. A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis* (SBLDS 123; Atlanta, 1990), 180–84. For alternative views to the consensus regarding the causes for the threatened invasion, see B. Oded, 'The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered', *CBQ* 34, 1972, 153–65; R. Bickert, 'König Ahas und der Prophet Jesaja: Ein Beitrag zum Problem des syrisch-ephraimitischen Krieges', *ZAW* 99, 1987, 361–84; and R. Tomes, 'The Reason for the Syro-Ephraimite War', *JSOT* 59, 1993, 55–71.

⁸ The close connection between rejection of the prophetic word and its commitment to writing in Isaiah has also been emphasized by C. Hardmeier, 'Verkündigung und Schrift bei Jesaja: Zur Entstehung der Schriftprophetie als Oppositionsliteratur im alten Israel', *TGl* 73, 1983, 119–34; see too D. Jones, 'The Tradition of the Oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem', *ZAW* 67, 1955, 226–46.

Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion (8:16–18).

As in the previous passage, the writing down of the message is again undertaken in the presence of witnesses,⁹ and the eventual outcome remains one of hope.¹⁰ Alongside this, however, there are significant developments to be observed. In the first place, the fulfilment is cast off into the further future. Although at this stage Isaiah clearly expects still to be alive at the time when his hopes will be realized, no time scale is mentioned. The impression is of the need to settle down to wait for a considerable period. Secondly, the reason for this is that a period of judgement must first intervene, a clear implication of the words that the Lord 'is hiding his face from the house of Jacob'. Both these points seem to relate back in the wider literary context to the gloomy prognostication of 6:11, where in response to his question 'How long, O Lord?', Isaiah is told, 'Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate'.¹¹ This passage, then, sets a pattern of expectation which many scholars have recognized, particularly on the basis of 1:21–26, to be authentically and characteristically Isaianic.¹² Chronologically and in terms of substance, salvation follows judgement, but for Isaiah and his faithful associates, this implies an expression of hope under judgement.

⁹ In different ways, the children of verse 18 and the disciples of verse 16 both function in this way. For discussion of the latter group, which is controversial, see *The Book Called Isaiah*, 98–9.

¹⁰ Against O. H. Steck, 'Bemerkungen zu Jesaja 6', *BZN.F.* 16, 1972, 188–206 (p. 201, n. 33), the use of 'wait for (*hikkā*)' and especially 'hope (*qiwwā*)' is indicative of a positive expectation; see Th. Lescow, 'Jesajas Denkschrift aus der Zeit des syrisch-ephräimäischen Krieges', *ZAW* 85, 1973, 315–31 (326); D. W. Van Winkle, 'The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah xl-iv', *VT* 35, 1985, 446–58 (448); H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 1–12* (BKAT 10/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980²), 346–47 and 353 (ET, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* [Minneapolis, 1991], 368 and 374–75); G. Waschke, *TWAT* vi, 1225–34.

¹¹ It is likely, though not absolutely certain, that those commentators are right who argue that verses 12–13 were added at a later stage, possibly reflecting a reapplication of verse 11 to the Babylonian conquest. The verbal associations between verse 11 and 1:7 suggest that within the context of Isaiah's own writing the events of 701 BCE were initially regarded as the fulfilment of the anticipated judgement. As will soon become clear, however, any hope that this would usher in the anticipated era of salvation was to be quickly dashed.

¹² See, for instance, H.-J. Hermisson, 'Zukunftserwartung und Gegenwarts kritik in der Verkündigung Jesajas', *EvTh* 33, 1973, 54–77, reprinted in *Studien zu Prophetie und Weisheit: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (FAT 23; Tübingen, 1998), 81–104; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39: Das Buch, der Prophet und seine Botschaft* (BKAT 10/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1982), 1648.

The third passage for consideration takes these developments even further. The authentic parts of Isaiah 30 are clearly to be dated to a much later phase in Isaiah's ministry, as they relate to Sennacherib's invasion of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah in 701 BCE. More than thirty years have passed, therefore, and once again the prophet finds that his words of guidance are spurned by the people. In consequence, he records the instruction:

Go now, write it before them on a tablet,
and inscribe it in a book,
so that it may be for the time to come
as a witness forever.¹³
For they are a rebellious people,
faithless children,
children who will not hear
the instruction of the Lord. (30:8-9)

Two related points need here to be highlighted. In the first place, it is clear that by now Isaiah has abandoned all expectation of seeing within his own lifetime the realization of the hope to which he had earlier given expression, and to which he still holds. Indeed, it is cast not just into the indefinite future, as most English translations imply with their 'for the time to come', but more particularly to the *yôm 'ah'rôn*, which even if it does not have all the overtones of English 'the last day' (cf. Pr. 31:25) nevertheless implies a specific and climactic occasion. Secondly, and in consequence of this fact, Isaiah and his circle will clearly no longer be able to function as witnesses when that day comes; we find instead that the book itself takes over that role. By demonstrating that God had already warned of judgement to come, it will serve to vindicate his involvement in events which might otherwise have been taken to be a sign of his impotence. Judgement is quite as much a 'mighty act of God' as salvation.

Several consequences follow from this brief glance at three remarkably coherent passages. First, it is clear that there were aspects of Isaiah's understanding of the nature of future hope which developed through time. This needs to be borne in mind when considering other passages relevant to this theme elsewhere in the book. One of the main criteria which scholars use in discussions of the authenticity of oracles within any prophetic book is that of their ideological coherence with material which can be most securely attributed to the prophet in question. This implies a static view of the prophet's thought, however,

¹³ In line with most of the ancient versions and virtually every modern commentator, NRSV here rightly revocalizes *lā 'ad as l'ēd*. There are some other textual difficulties in this verse which do not, however, materially affect the present discussion; for discussion, see Wildberger, *Jesaja* 28-39, 1166-67.

which may sometimes be justified but which we have seen needs to be significantly qualified in the case of Isaiah.

Secondly, alongside this there is a clear underlying consistency in the fact that Isaiah believed that judgement could not be God's final word. Its severity and duration might be contingent upon human response, but that could not subvert, only delay, the inauguration of the ideal society based on justice and righteousness which seems to lie at the heart of a number of the passages in Isaiah's own writing which give expression to the nature of his hope for the future.¹⁴

Thirdly, our observations have a bearing upon the issue of the extent to which Isaiah's hope may be defined as a remnant ideology. Clearly, for so long as Isaiah and his associates expected personally to survive the judgement and see the dawn of a new era, as expressed in 8:16–18, talk of a remnant makes sense, and the parallel in thought with 1:21–26, where the judgement is viewed as a process of refining, so that something now present survives the process to participate in the new order, has already been pointed out. But by the end of his ministry, this view had been superseded by an understanding that the whole of the present generation, to go no further, had been condemned (see especially 22:14), so that it becomes meaningless to talk of a remnant as usually conceived, with its emphasis on individual survival. The radicalization of judgement has its inevitable corollary in the altered nature of future hope from remnant to restoration, and talk of a remnant has itself to be reinterpreted in terms of Israel or the community of God rather than of individual survivors.

This analysis of the development in Isaiah's thinking about the nature of hope under judgement may help us as we move on to consider the topic in other books of the period. Paradoxically, however, I propose that further reflection on other aspects of Isaiah may provide us with the necessary introduction.

As is well known, much material was added over the course of time to the oracles of Isaiah until eventually it came to the state in which we know it today. There were two main forms which this process took, and in traditional scholarship these have been sharply distinguished. On the one hand there was the addition of all the material now found in chapters 40–66, and this has usually been treated in such isolation from the first part of the book as effectively to have made of it a separate work or works. On the other hand there are smaller or larger additions to the nucleus of Isaiah's own sayings in chapters 1–39, whose precise extent is admittedly disputed but which are agreed to be present by all but the most conservative of commentators. The tendency

¹⁴ I have attempted to develop this observation in *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Carlisle, 1998).

has been to accord less attention, and consequently less theological significance, to the material thus identified.

More recent scholarship has not by any means gone back on these literary-critical conclusions, but there has been some major rethinking of the processes which lie behind this activity, with significant implications for interpretation. In addition, it has come to be appreciated that there are important connections between the two types of addition, with consequences which bear closely on our primary topic.

In the first place, there is increasing recognition of the fact that, however much we may wish to emphasize the differences between them, there are significant connections between the two main parts of the book of Isaiah.¹⁵ Thus, without any intention to deny him his own distinctive viewpoint and modes of expression, nor to deny the importance of other influences upon him, Deutero-Isaiah may in my opinion best be read as consciously proclaiming the dawn of that day of salvation for which Isaiah of Jerusalem had looked.¹⁶

Alongside this, however, we can also see that there are many of the so-called additions within Isaiah 1–39 which both in outlook and terminology are strongly reminiscent of this second part of the book, so that the suggestion that they are closely connected naturally suggests itself. In other words, we need to study the two aspects of the later development of the book of Isaiah in the closest possible relationship with each other.

A simple example may clarify the point. As part of his announcement of the divine summons to Assyria to execute judgement, he writes, 'He will raise a signal for a nation far away' (5:26).¹⁷ In Deutero-Isaiah, this same image is used in a reversal of the motif, the nations now being summoned to assist in the gathering of the dispersed Israelites after the judgement of exile: 'I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples, and they shall bring your sons ...' (49:22). Finally, this same reversal is attested in the first part of the book in a passage which is widely agreed to have been added long after the time of Isaiah himself: 'He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel' (11:12).

¹⁵ The flood of publications on this has now reached far beyond the point where it can be sensibly documented.

¹⁶ See *The Book Called Isaiah* for fuller development of this suggestion.

¹⁷ NRSV here silently follows the common emendation of the plural *laggōyīm mē'rāhōq* to the singular *l'gōy mimmērḥāq*. While it is plausible to assume that this is what Isaiah himself would have written, in view of the continuation of the description in the singular, it is noteworthy that there is no strictly textual support for the emendation. In my opinion, the change to the plural may be better explained as the result of conscious redactional activity when this passage was moved from its original position with the remainder of the refrain poem in 9:7–10:4, for reasons which I have explored in *The Book Called Isaiah*, 132–35.

This use of related idiom and vocabulary to indicate the nature of hope as reversal of the condition of judgement is common in Isaiah, and there are occasions when its close juxtaposition in the first part of the book gives a somewhat jarring tone, on which basis scholars relegate part of it to the status of a later addition. Indeed, it has sometimes been labelled midrashic. Clear examples, which cannot be analysed here in full, include the transition in 8:22–23, the addition of 10:12, and the various reapplications of the name Shear-jashub in 10:20–23, to go no further. When viewed in the context of the book as a whole, however, we can see that this is by no means arbitrary. It is but a reflection on a small scale of the design of the book as a whole, whereby the proclamation of salvation by Deutero-Isaiah was consciously modelled as a fulfilment of what Isaiah himself had foreseen, but not experienced. Historically, the impact of judgement in the fall of Jerusalem has made itself felt in opening the way for the realization of the deferred hope by Deutero-Isaiah, but theologically the redaction of the first part of the book to reflect these same two poles ensures that later readers will understand that what has been learned through history remains valid for future generations as well; hope and judgement cannot be separated, nor can the text be cherry-picked for the word which we choose to hear. The shape of the book as it developed is not unfaithful to the nature of the hope which Isaiah himself came through experience to formulate.

If we turn now to two other eighth-century prophets,¹⁸ we may find that the guidance from what we have seen writ large in the book of Isaiah is also reflected here on a smaller scale, though one further complicating factor must also be taken into consideration, namely the fact that in the case of Amos and Hosea the initial audience was the northern kingdom of Israel rather than the southern kingdom of Judah.

If the autobiographical account of his five visions in Amos 7–9 is to be believed, Amos's future expectations also underwent development, though the process was much more compressed than in the case of Isaiah and it tended to move in the opposite direction. From an initial hope that the judgement might be averted by intercession (7:1–6), he soon arrived at the understanding that it could not, so giving rise to the categorical assertion 'the end has come upon my people Israel' (8:2) with its related vision of the destruction of the sanctuary and of every one of the people: 'those who are left I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away, not one of them escape' (9:1). This and related passages elsewhere in the book sound like judgement without hope.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, space precludes attention to the book of Micah in the present discussion.

It is for this reason that many scholars have concluded that the closing verses in the book (9:11–15), which comprise a strong and unconditional assertion of future blessing, must have been added secondarily.¹⁹ It is true that attempts have been made to circumvent this conclusion by various means: perhaps all categorical statements in the prophets have an inbuilt assumption of contingency, for instance, as is clearly the case in the parade example of Jonah's announcement of the overthrow of Nineveh; perhaps the forms of speech in the cult have influenced the prophet here as elsewhere; perhaps the prophets retained an overriding belief in the grace of God, which could not but come to expression in the end; or perhaps it is simply unrealistic to look for complete consistency, so that we must learn to live with the unresolved tension.²⁰

In my opinion, however, discussion of authenticity is a distraction from consideration of more interesting and ultimately significant issues which arise out of this text. I here single out three points which relate particularly to our central theme.

First, whoever was responsible for this closing section of the book, there can be no doubt that it reflects a Judean standpoint. The reference to David, albeit qualified and muted, is clear, and one can hardly suppose that a northern audience would have regarded it as encouraging. In this respect, the end of the book echoes the standpoint of its introduction, which affirms that 'the Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem' (1:2). This, of course, ties up with what we in any case know must have happened, namely that we can only have received the book in the first place by way of a transmission history in the south and that the words of Amos must have been sufficiently valued there for it to have been preserved.²¹ If we pause to ask why this

¹⁹ Other passages which might be thought to hold out a hope for the future either do not do so at all (3:12) or are at the very least heavily conditional and qualified (5:4–5, 14–15).

²⁰ A broad selection of older scholarship which adopts one or other of these explanations is surveyed in G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, 19742), 207–8 (n. 300) and 473; for fuller discussion, see H. G. Reventlow, *Das Amt des Propheten bei Amos* (FRLANT 80; Göttingen, 1962), 90–110; E. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1970), 135–38; A. S. van der Woude, 'Three Classical Prophets: Amos, Hosea and Micah', in R. Coggins, A. Phillips and M. Knibb (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (Cambridge, 1982), 32–57; D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC; Waco, 1987); 395–400; J. H. Hayes, *Amos, the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and his Preaching* (Nashville, 1988), 223–28; F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24A; New York, 1989); S. Paul, *Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, 1991), 288–90.

²¹ This, of course, is a commonplace of modern research and its implications are worked through in most of the recent commentaries, such as H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2: Joel und Amos* (BKAT 14/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 19752) (ET, Joel and Amos [Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1977]). An accessible introduction is furnished by R. B. Coote, *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia, 1981). The question of a Deuteronomiac redaction is also related.

might have been so, we can hardly fail to reply that it must be because the words of Amos were seen to have been vindicated in the events which led up to the eventual fall of Samaria and the annihilation of the northern kingdom as an independent political entity. The hope of which the book speaks is not a qualification of the judgement which predominates, but precisely something which arises out of the conviction that the judgement was of divine intent in the first place and had taken place exactly as Amos had foreseen. If the prophetic word had thus been vindicated in the historical arena, then those who survived by virtue of their being in a tangential but related state to those to whom the words were originally addressed would do well to take heed and to consider its implications for their own situation. In other words, the preaching of Amos should now serve as a witness to the Judean audience. And the references to Zion and David suggest that they were not far removed from the circles within which the Isaiah tradition was also first preserved.²²

This last observation leads naturally to our second point, for it is not sufficiently appreciated that the closing verses of Amos have not been tacked on in an isolated or incoherent manner, but rather echo and reverse some of the major oracles of judgement earlier in the book. The literary procedure which gives rise to an expression of hope is thus very much of a piece with what we saw to be the case in Isaiah, and it emphasizes once again how wrong-headed it would be to drive a wedge between God's work in judgement and in salvation so far as the prophets are concerned. The evidence leading to this conclusion has been most fully worked out, so far as I am aware, by Groves,²³ and I cannot even summarize it all here; let merely a couple of the most striking allusions serve by way of illustration. (i) 'I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen' (9:11) recalls both 'fallen, no more to rise, is maiden Israel' (5:2) and 'they shall fall, and never rise again' (8:14); (ii) 'they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine' (9:14) reverses 'you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in (inhabit) them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine' (5:11). More could be added, but these must suffice. Being addressed to a Judean audience, and read in the light of the comparable procedure in the book of Isaiah, they suggest strongly that the southern tradents of Amos's words took his word of judgement with the utmost seriousness. At the same time, however, we may recall Wolff's comment that 'it is

²² The whole question of the relationship between Amos and Isaiah has been studied by R. Fey, *Amos und Jesaja: Abhängigkeit und Eigenständigkeit des Jesaja* (WMANT 12; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1963).

²³ J. W. Groves, *Actualization and Interpretation in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 86; Atlanta, 1987), 179-91.

remarkable how little this final redaction's eschatology of salvation has penetrated the preceding book of Amos'.²⁴ In this respect, there is a contrast with Isaiah. There was no attempt to deny or soften what had happened to their northern neighbour, but rather it was assimilated, *mutatis mutandis*, into the pattern of expectation which we have already seen developed in southern prophetic circles.

Finally, parts of these closing verses relate not only to other passages of the book of Amos but also to the books which now stand beside it in the book of the twelve as a whole. Following Nogalski,²⁵ Jeremias, for instance, emphasizes that verse 12 forms a bridge to the book of Obadiah immediately following, while verse 13 is verbally linked with Joel 4:18 (ET 3:18), just as Am. 1:2, already referred to, is linked with Joel 4:16 (ET 3:16), the book which comes immediately before Amos.²⁶ Although it would be speculative to unravel the literary history which lies behind this observation, its effects are clear: 'these relationships are to prevent the reader of the book of Amos from reading it in isolation ... [T]he reader should know that Amos' own witnessing voice belongs together with the other witnessing voices in the book of the Twelve Prophets. Only in relationship to one another and together with one another do these voices constitute the word of God opening up Israel's future' (p. 170).

Reflecting on these observations about the closing verses of the book of Amos, we may conclude that there is no evidence for hope as regards the northern kingdom as a political entity (indeed, in 9:8 it is characterized as 'the sinful kingdom' which is to be destroyed from the face of the earth). Nor do we have any evidence on which to base an assessment about what Amos himself may have thought about Judah's future. What we can say, however, is that in the south the book was transmitted and augmented in a way which is strongly reminiscent of the Isaiah tradition. That is to say, just as in Isaiah 30, the book rather than the person of the prophet functions first as a witness for the future with regard to God's work of judgement. The audience of the book is not the same as the prophet's audience, however. Rather, it is turned now to address the people of Judah, and, as we have seen, there is evidence from Ezekiel and elsewhere that this word of witness was heeded by some, at least, and that it was reapplied to the later circumstances of the Babylonian conquest. And secondly, being now read in this southern perspective, the confidence is expressed that in a coming day there will yet again be a future for the people of God when the re-establishment of the Davidic empire gives rise to restoration and prosperity

²⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 354.

²⁵ J. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; Berlin, 1993), 97–122.

²⁶ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos* (ATD; Göttingen, 1995), ad loc. (ET, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville, 1998], pp. 169–70).

for Israel,²⁷ so explicitly reversing the earlier situation. The hope is thus not illogical or discordant, but grounded in the reliability of the word of the God who has already demonstrated his faithfulness to that word in his judgement. It is not so much hope under, as because of, judgement.

In many respects, the book of Hosea is more complicated than that of Amos, and space does not permit a full discussion. As regards our particular topic, there continues to be a wide variety of opinion as to whether or not Hosea himself entertained a lively future hope, and if so what form it took.²⁸ That he may have differed from Amos in this respect would not be surprising, given that he was himself of northern origin and so may not have been able to set himself over against his fellow countrymen in the way that Amos did as an outsider, and indeed it seems difficult to ascribe all of the more extensive material which deals with the future in a positive tone to later editors. Furthermore, this material cannot be neatly parcelled up, as it was to a large extent in Amos, but it is woven more integrally into the fabric of Hosea's recorded words.²⁹ In this, it reflects what many regard as one of the characteristics of his prophecy, namely a tension between judgement and salvation which reaches back ultimately into the very person of God himself, as Hosea understood him:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
 How can I hand you over, O Israel? ...
 My heart recoils within me;
 my compassion grows warm and tender.
 I will not execute my fierce anger;
 I will not again destroy Ephraim;
 for I am God and no mortal.
 the Holy One in your midst,
 and I will not come in wrath.³⁰ (11:8-9)

²⁷ The close association of just rule and economic prosperity is a well-known theme elsewhere in the ancient near East as well, and comes to particular expression in the Old Testament in Psalm 72.

²⁸ See, for instance, the useful survey in G. I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective* (JSOTS 28; Sheffield, 1984), 9-20.

²⁹ This is not to deny that there are three major sections in the book, each of which has the overall shape of a move 'from accusation to threat, and then to the proclamation of salvation'; so H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1974), p. xxxi (German original: *Dodekapropheten 1: Hosea* [BKAT 14/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1965²]), whose analysis has been widely adopted. This does not imply, however, that expressions of hope are confined to the last part of each section.

³⁰ As so often in Hosea, there are textual difficulties in this passage, for which the commentaries should be consulted. Although some differences might be proposed from the translation of the NRSV cited above, they do not, in my opinion, alter the main thrust of the passage. Against the older view that the passage should be construed as the expression of an exceptionally harsh form of judgement, see, for instance, G. I. Davies, *Hosea* (NCBC; London and Grand Rapids, 1992), 260-64.

Yet even when full allowance is made for these observations, and with the most generous possible ascription of material to Hosea himself, there remain important points of connection with our earlier discussion. Nevertheless, closer inspection will show that this has been done in a way which still respects the integrity of that which was distinctive of Hosea himself.

In the first place, it is clear that, like Amos, the book has gone through a process of Judean redaction which has left its mark in the text. The extent of this is variously estimated,³¹ but as a minimum the following verses, or more usually glosses within them, are widely so regarded: 1:1, 7; 3:5; 4:5, 15; 5:5; 6:11; 10:11; 12:3 (ET, 2). It is noteworthy that these glosses, which need not all be ascribed to the same hand, apply both words of condemnation and of promise to Judah; the tension of Hosea's words to Israel is here retained.

Secondly, the treatment of the names of Hosea's children in chapters 1 and 2 reminds us forcibly of the procedure noted in Isaiah whereby reversal of fortune was expressed by picking up earlier phraseology and applying it in a contrary direction. In 2:24-25 (ET, 22-23) this takes the form of a simple reversal, whereas in 2:1-3 (ET, 1:10-2:1) it includes some elements which are more subtly nuanced. Many commentators regard both passages as Judean, but even if, with Wolff, and most recently Macintosh,³² we were to assume that Hosea was himself responsible for them, perhaps late in his ministry, their redactional placement remains striking and distinctive from anything we find in Amos. At the very least we should have to assume that 2:1-3 has been moved from its original position (Wolff assumes that this will have been with the material at the end of chapter 2) in order 'to exhibit immediately the entire range of tension in the prophet's message'.³³ (The same point, of course, applies even more strongly if they are a later, Judean addition.) Whereas in Amos such a reversal was held back to allow the word of judgement to make its maximum impact, here the introductory section of the book leads us at the outset to expect a more complex theological relationship between judgement and hope in the book which is to follow. Appropriately in a prophet who shared personally in the suffering which judgement would bring, we find here a hope struggling triumphantly to emerge

³¹ Contrast, for instance, Emerson, *Hosea*, with the far more radical G. A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation* (SBLDS 102; Atlanta, 1987).

³² A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1997), *ad loc.*

³³ Wolff, *Hosea*, 26. Even on Yee's quite different understanding of chapter 1 and of the redactional process which has led to its present form, the same point nevertheless holds true; cf. Yee, *Composition and Tradition*, 64-76.

from the darkness, grounded exclusively in the grace and mercy of the sovereign Lord.

Finally, again appropriately, there is a wistful ambivalence about the nature of that hope as viewed from a northern standpoint. Whereas Amos could contemplate the complete destruction of the northern kingdom while he and/or his successors could still envisage a future of the people of God through the kingdom of Judah, for Hosea and his tradents things were inevitably less straightforward. The solution which the introductory chapter to the book proposes is that 'the people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head' (2:2 [ET, 1:11]). The latter title seems deliberately to avoid the use of 'king', and may well include a backward glance to the earliest period of Israelite history, prior to and contemporary with the emergence of a monarchy. At the least, there is no support here for the dynastic principle which had become so discredited. More significantly, however, the notion that future salvation would come about by a reuniting of the divided kingdoms neatly does justice to the seriousness of the judgement expressed on the northern kingdom as an institution while retaining a place for its people, and this view will have been congenial also in the south, as Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others demonstrate. That it should there have been interpreted in Davidic terms (3:5) was perhaps only to be expected.

We started this introductory survey of hope in the eighth century prophets by observing the almost apologetic manner in which Clements drew attention to the disparity between the ancient perception of the prophets and the modern critical reconstruction of what they had to say. In seeking to advance a little on his own valuable reflections, I have tried to indicate that in fact critical scholarship has done us no disservice in emphasizing the centrality of the word of judgement. It is a word which we are tempted to contrast with that of hope, but in fact we have seen that in various ways Isaiah, Amos and Hosea relate the two together in the closest possible ways. Without it, hope becomes emasculated into wishful thinking, divorced from the reality of present horrors, and the God of hope becomes little more than a benign, and so ultimately uncaring, Father Christmas caricature. By contrast, the nature of the hope which emerged in the harsh social and international climate of the eighth century Levant was inevitably made of sterner stuff, and we should not be surprised that it was recalled as predominant in the first century. Indeed, the witness of the prophets' written words was appreciated far earlier than that, not only at the time of canonical formation, but in the very period of the post-exilic restoration itself when the first flush of excitement in return from exile and rebuilding of the temple could so easily have degenerated into

complacency, which again is the very denial of hope. We may therefore leave the last word to Zechariah's faithful exposition:³⁴

Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or heed me, says the Lord. Your ancestors, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your ancestors? So they repented and said, 'The Lord of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do.' (Zech. 1:3-6)

Abstract

At first sight, there seems to be a conflict between modern perceptions of the eighth-century prophets as those who announced judgement and later perceptions of them (for instance, in the New Testament) as those who announced salvation. This article seeks to develop and influential discussion of this problem by R. E. Clements. In particular, it is argued that the expressions of hope in Isaiah, Amos and Hosea have not been added in an arbitrary fashion, but rather draw out the implications of taking the word of judgement seriously. The redactional and literary links between these passages and the bulk of the books in which they stand provide an important clue for both historical and theological interpretation.

³⁴ In addition to the commentaries, see especially R. Mason, *Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics after the Exile* (Cambridge, 1990), 198-205.

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