The Judgment of Foreign Peoples in Amos i. 3–ii. 3

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THE attitude of a Hebrew prophet toward foreign nations appears to be determined, as a general rule, by the attitude of such nations toward the prophet's people; it is friendliness for friendliness, hostility for hostility. This is manifestly the case in Is. 7, 17[1-3] (Ephraim and Syria), 10, 31 (Assyria), Nahum (Nineveh), Zeph. 2 (Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Assyria), Jer. 46 (Egypt), 49 (Ammon, Moab), Ezek. 25 (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia), 26–28 (Tyre, Sidon), 29–32 (Egypt), 35 (Edom), Obadiah (Edom), Is. 13, 14, 21[1-10], 43, 47 (Babylonia), 45 (Cyrus), Jer. 50, 51 (Babylonia), Zech. 2[6-13] (Babylonia), 1[15] (unfriendly nations), Mal. 1[2-4] (Edom), Zech. 9[1-8] (Syria, Tyre, Philistia). In other cases the historical relations of the peoples and the tone of the prophetic passage are uncertain; so in Is. 14[29-32] (Philistia), 15, 16 (Moab), 18 (Ethiopia), 21[11-17] (Dumah, Arabia), 23 (Tyre), Jer. 25[15-31] (all nations except the Babylonians). In none of these cases is the prophet's denunciation or applause dependent on the moral character of the nation in question. The sudden change of front in the seventh and sixth centuries is significant. Nebuchadrezzar is regarded by Jeremiah and Ezekiel as an invincible monarch and as Yahweh's instrument for the purging of Israel, and they are friendly to Babylon; but when Cyrus approaches and there is hope that captive Israel will return to its own land in peace, the prophet of that time gives vent to fierce exultation over the imminent downfall of Chaldea. The

necessary inference from all these facts is that, while the intranational moral code of the prophets was good, their judgment of foreign nations was in these cases morally low, and that Yahweh, as they thus describe his conduct, was not just.

It is held by many recent expositors, however, that the denunciation of foreign peoples in Amos is based on purely moral grounds — that the atrocities mentioned are condemned not because they were inflicted on Israel but because they were sins against humanity. This is by no means clear. They all refer to deeds committed in war, and in ancient Semitic warfare cruelty was the universal rule. In this regard the Israelites did not differ from their neighbors. According to the record Saul by Samuel's direction (1 Sam. 15) put the Amalekites to the sword, men, women and children; Jehu (2 K. 9, 10) slew all the males of Ahab's family, and Jezebel, and a temple-full of Baal-worshipers; Menahem (2 K. 15^{16}) did in Tiphsah just what is charged in Amos against Ammon; and wholesale slaughter is enjoined in Deut. 13^{15} 25^{19}, and is promised by Yahweh in Deut. $32^{41.42}$; and while these prescriptions in Deuteronomy were never carried out, their spirit is the same as if they had been carried out. Only in one passage (Hos. 1^{4}) is there any condemnation of such procedures on the part of Israelites, and in this passage the ground of condemnation seems to be not the cruelty of the act but the religious apostasy of the house of Jehu. In fact this strenuous way of conducting war was not regarded as wrong. When Elisha (2 K. 8^{11-13}) weeps over Hazael's future deeds, it is not at their cruelty, but for the reason that Israel will be the sufferer; Hazael thinks it a "great thing" that is promised him, and Elisha was doubtless of the same opinion.

Devastation of territory and slaughter of the inhabitants are the things charged against Damascus, Edom and Ammon in Amos; they might also be charged against Israel, and there is no good reason to suppose that in such a case Israelite moralists would condemn them. However, a distinction is made in Deut. $20^{13.14}$; the men are to be killed, but the

women taken as slaves. This rule is a hundred or more years later than Amos. It is possible, however, that he anticipated it, and that in the indictment of Ammon he lays the stress on the treatment of women; but comparison with 2 K. 8^{11-13} and the expression in Amos 1^{13} "that they might enlarge their border" make it probable that he is thinking merely of the slaughter as intended to get control of Israelitish territory.

The charge against the Philistines and Tyre is selling captives into slavery. This also was permitted by the laws of war of the time, and was probably practiced by the Israelites; the special prohibition of the sale of Israelite slave wives to foreigners (Ex. 21^{8}) and of foreign slave wives (Deut. 21^{14}) makes it probable that other slaves might be sold. There is no evidence that the Israelites engaged in wholesale slave-trading as the Phœnicians and Philistines are said to have done; but the right of such trading is recognized in the Torah, and is not called in question anywhere in the Old Testament. It is not said whether the captives sold by the Philistines and Tyre were Israelites or others, nor is the precise nature of the "covenant of brothers" violated by Tyre stated, and therefore the interpretation of the paragraphs devoted to those two countries is doubtful. The obscure phrase גלות שלמה seems to refer to the carrying off of all the people of some community; but our historical records give no information on this point, and we can only surmise from the context that the reference is to some Israelite city or region.

As to the offence of Moab (2^{1}) it is impossible to say, from the Masoretic text, what its precise nature was. The text of vss. $^{1.2}$ is in disorder,[1] and the historical reference, if there be one, is not known. The paragraph, on its face, alludes to a ritual crime, some insult to a dead king of Edom. If this be connected with the campaign of 2 K. 3, it is to be noted that Edom was then the ally of Israel, and

[1] In 2^{2} I suggest the omission of the words ומת and מואב so as to bring the expression into accord with that in 1^{14}; מואב may be gloss and ומת erroneous scribal repetition from the preceding word.

insult to the one was insult to the other. In any case no strictly moral consideration is involved.

It appears from this review that it cannot be said that the judgment of foreign peoples in Amos rises above the narrow national point of view. How much of this introductory denunciatory section is from the hand of the prophet Amos it is not easy to determine. The paragraphs on Tyre and Edom (and that on Judah) are pretty certainly of later origin. That the book begins with a string of denunciations is a surprising fact. The only other example of such a prologue (omitting the monographs of Nahum and Obadiah) is Zech. 9^{1-6}, in which the countries mentioned are Syria, Tyre (and Sidon) and Philistia; the coincidence is noteworthy, though not decisive for the date of the Amos passage. For the purpose of this note the dates are of secondary importance.