

The Non-mention of Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk
in the Deuteronomistic History

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Introduction

Among the many intriguing features of the Deuteronomistic History (hereafter Dtr) is the fact that, notwithstanding its evident interest in prophetic figures, the complex, Jonah (2 Kgs 14,25) and Isaiah (2 Kgs 18,17-20,19) excepted, fails to cite the "classical prophets" (hereafter CPs)¹ by name. In a series of recent contributions², I have attempted to account for the Deuteronomist's Prophetenschweigen regarding the CPs Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel³. In this study I shall investigate the case of three further CPs whom the Deuteronomist might have cited by name, but does not, i.e. Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk. In this investigation I presuppose two points which command fairly widespread agreement: 1) the ministries of the three figures as well as the basic content of their respective books are to be dated in the latter part of the seventh century B.C.⁴, and 2) the account of

- 1 I use this designation as the equivalent of the traditional Jewish category, the "Latter Prophets".
- 2 C.T. BEGG, A Bible Mystery: the Absence of Jeremiah in the Deuteronomistic History, *Irish Biblical Studies* 7 (1985) 139-164; idem, The Non-Mention of Amos, Hosea and Micah in the Deuteronomistic History, *BN* 32 (1986) 41-53; idem, The Non-mention of Ezekiel in Dtr, *Jeremiah and Chronicles* (forthcoming in *BETL*).
- 3 In these contributions my inspiration has been the following statement of F. CRÜSEMANN, *Kritik an Amos im deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk, Probleme biblischer Theologie* (FS G. von RAD; ed. H.W. WOLFF), München, 1971, 57-63, p. 57: "Die dahinstehenden Gründe (i.e. for Dtr's Prophetenschweigen) sind sicher vielschichtig, und so wenig eine Einheit wie die 'Schriftprophetie'. Sie aufzuhellen ist für eine Verhältnisbestimmung der dtr Theologie zur Prophetie unerlässlich und damit für das Verständnis dieser Theologie".
- 4 For further precisions on these points, see the commentaries.

this era in Dtr (2 Kön 21-24) was given final form- if not actually assembled for the first time- in the Exile⁵. As will be noted, it is precisely the juxtaposition of these two presuppositions which gives rise to the problematic of this study, i.e. why did the Exilic Deuteronomist who likely knew the earlier figures of the three prophets and their words opt not to mention them in his work⁶?

A. Zephaniah

I begin with the case of Zephaniah whose ministry is generally dated as the earliest of the three. Here, it might be noted, first of all, that, on various grounds, one might well expect mention of Zephaniah by the Deuteronomist. The title of the former's book dates his activity to "the days of Josiah" (Zeph 1, 1). Josiah, however, is one of the Judean kings whose reign the Deuteronomist describes in most detail, 2 Kgs 22,1-23,30. Moreover, in that account the Deuteronomist does associate Josiah with various prophetic figures, i.e. Huldah (2 Kgs 22,13-20)⁷ and the "prophets" who participate in the king's covenant-making (2 Kgs 23,3). Given therefore that the Deuteronomist does allot a substantial segment of his work to Josiah and does incorporate "prophets" into that presentation, how is it that he fails to utilize the figure of the Josian prophet Zephaniah in this connection⁸? In addition, it

5 I abstract here from the question of the composition history of Dtr. For my purposes it suffices to note that all scholars agree that the finale of Dtr, 2 Kön 21-25 was, at least, reworked by an Exilic Deuteronomist. Such a figure might very well, however, have been familiar with traditions associated with the three earlier prophets.

6 The question of this study naturally does not arise for those who regard one or other of the three prophetic books as Hellenistic pseudepigraphs, long postdating Dtr, so, e.g.: O. HAPPEL, *Das Buch des Propheten Habakkuk*, Würzburg, 1900; idem, *Das Buch des Propheten Nahum*, Würzburg, 1902; E. DAY, *The Search for the Prophets*, the *Monist* 15 (1905) 386-397, pp. 390-391; B. DUHM, *Das Buch Habakuk*, Tübingen, 1906; E. SELLIN, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch (KAT)*, Leipzig, 1922, 332-333 (Habakkuk); C.C. TORREY, *The Prophecy of Habakkuk*, *Jewish Studies in Memory of G.A. KOHUT*, New York, 1935, 565-582; L.P. SMITH-E.R. LACHMAN, *The Authorship of the Book of Zephaniah*, *JNES* 9 (1950) 137-142.

7 It might be noted that older scholarship often raised the question why Kings has Josiah's delegation repair to Huldah rather than to Zephaniah (or Jeremiah). J.M.P. SMITH, *Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum (ICC)*, Edinburgh, 1911, 169 brings together earlier surmises on the point as follows: "Zephaniah may have died before 621 B.C. or have been absent from the city at that particular juncture, or not have been in the confidence of the party pushing the reform".

8 Mention should at least be made here of the claim of D.L. WILLIAMS, *The Date*

might be noted that, according to various contemporary authors, there were in fact "Deuteronomists" who busied themselves with the prophet's words which they would have subjected to a fairly extensive "Deuteronomistic redaction"⁹. Why then, however, should the Deuteronomist responsible for Dtr not have taken a comparable interest in the "Zephaniah tradition"?

In attempting to respond to the above questions, I take as my starting point the widely held view that the preaching of Zephaniah both reflects conditions in Judah prior to the Josianic reform and itself was one of the factors precipitating the reform¹⁰. On this supposition there is, however, a feature to Dtr's presentation of Josiah which calls for special attention, i.e. the fact virtually its entire record of Josiah's thirty-one year (2 Kgs 22,1) reign concerns events of a single, i.e. his eighteenth regnal (2 Kgs 22,3) year, the year of the reform. In other words, the Deuteronomist has nothing to report concerning Josiah's first seventeen years of rule (just as all he relates of the last twelve are the brief notices on the king's death and burial in 2 Kgs 23,29-30a). As is well known, the Deuteronomist diverges in this regard from the Chronicler who narrates an extensive reform activity undertaken by Josiah in his eighth year of rule, 2 Chr 34,3-7 (even as he gives a far more detailed account of the circumstances of Josiah's death, see 2 Chr 35,20-25). In the same line a further observation can be made, however. In Kings, it is the finding of the book in the Temple which is depicted as the sole stimulus activating Josiah's reformatory zeal. In Chronicles, by contrast, as noted above, Josiah embarks on a major reform effort prior to and independently of his becoming acquainted with that book. The foregoing divergencies can be plausibly explained in terms of the Deuteronomist's Tendenz, i.e. he wishes to focus all attention on Josiah's eighteenth regnal year, and on the finding of the book in that year in particular, as the all-important moment in Josiah's long reign, and so passes over other doings of the king

of Zephaniah, JBL 82 (1963) 77-88, pp. 85-88 that Dtr does in fact mention the prophet Zephaniah, i.e. in its reference to a priest by that name in 2 Kön 25,18 whom WILLIAMS sees as identical with our prophet.

9 So most recently K. SEYBOLD, *Satirische Prophetie. Studien zum Buch Zefanja* (SBS 120), Stuttgart, 1985, 83-93.

10 So recently J. SCHARBERT, *Zefanja und die Reform des Joschija, Kunder des Wortes* (FS J. SCHREINER; ed. L. RUPPERT et al), Wurzburg, 1982, 237-254.

which Chronicles preserves¹¹.

The bearing of the preceding discussion on the Deuteronomist's non-mention of Zephaniah is not far to seek. For him to have cited Zephaniah- in conformity with what his recorded words seem to suggest- as a pre-621 influence for reform would clearly militate against the particular focus the Deuteronomist wants to give to Josiah's reign, *vide supra*. In other words, it is primarily in order to maintain the status of the discovered law book as the sole and sufficient stimulus to Josiah's reform activity that the Deuteronomist passes over Zephaniah.

Perhaps, however, several further factors bear consideration in this regard. The Deuteronomist's Josiah stands out as one who consistently, from his dispatching Sapahan to the Temple (2 Kgs 22,3) to his advancing to confront Neco (2 Kgs 23,29), takes the lead *vis-à-vis* those around him. The words of Zephaniah, on the other hand, while they do refer to the (mis)deeds of various Judean leadership groups (see Zeph 1,8-9; 3,3-4), remarkably nowhere (apart from the title, 1,1) mention Judah's king. Zephaniah's words could then leave one with the impression that the leaders of Josiah's time were able to do as they pleased without effective royal control. The Deuteronomist, however, might well have found such a presentation in conflict with his own image of a masterful Josiah. But further, there is the matter of the leaders themselves. In Zephaniah, "priests and prophets" (3,4) as well as various categories of civil officials (1,8; 3,3) appear as incorrigibly corrupt, fit only for destruction. In 2 Kgs 22-23, on the contrary, the leadership circles, e.g. priests and prophets (2 Kgs 23,3), both as individuals and groups, are all depicted quite positively as supporters, right from the start, of Josiah in his reform efforts. Here again, the Deuteronomist might well have perceived Zephaniah as one whose utterances conflicted too drastically with his own image of Josiah's reign.

My final consideration is of a more ideological nature. A prominent feature of Zephaniah's words is the concern expressed for the *persones miserabiles*¹². That concern is one shared by both the Deuteronomic Code (Deutero-

11 So e.g., G.H. JONES, 1 and 2 Kings, Vol. II (NCB), Grand Rapids, 1984, 603-604. For a contrary view see, however, H. SPIECKERMANN, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (FRLANT 129), Göttingen, 1982, 31-38.

12 On this feature, see J.L. SICRE, "Con los Pobres de la Tierra", Madrid, 1984, 315-336.

onomy 12-26) and, it seems, the historical Josiah, see Jer 22,15-16. But then, it is worthy of note that in his extensive account (2 Kgs 23,4-25) of the measures undertaken by Josiah to implement the prescriptions of the book found in the Temple- identified by scholarship with (some form of) Deuteronomy- the Deuteronomist makes no reference to the king's putting into effect any of Deuteronomy's "humanitarian" laws. This observation suggests, in turn, however, that the Deuteronomist would not have found Zephaniah's words with their emphasis on the disadvantaged of Judah particularly sympathetic (a like consideration may help explain his non-mention of e.g., Amos und Micah).

None of the above considerations, taken in isolation, seems sufficient to account for the Deuteronomist's failure to make room for Zephaniah in his work. Taken in concert, however, they constitute a rather formidable constellation of factors militating against a ready utilization of this figure by him.

B. Nahum

Dtr is clearly a history, not of the Ancient Near East in general, but of the one nation Israel. Already from that point of view then it is no great surprise to find that the Deuteronomist leaves unmentioned Nahum whose words stand out from those of most of the CPs in their focus, not on Israel, but on a foreign city, Niniveh. Is this all that needs to be said on the subject, though? Throughout the extended segment 2 Kön 15,19-20,11 one notes the attention given Assyria as the destroyer of the Northern Kingdom and as a life-threat to Judah's existence. Why then, it might be asked, should the Deuteronomist not have made use of a figure announcing the overthrow of the nation's archfoe, especially since doing so would have provided the basis for one of his characteristic prophecy-fulfillment schemas¹³ (one might suppose too that his doing this would have provided the Deuteronomist's readers with an effective hint of hope- if Israel's destroyer ended up being itself destroyed, could not one look for a like fate for Judah's annihilator, Babylon?).

13 On this feature of Dtr, see G.v.RAD, *Deuteronomiumstudien* (FRLANT 58), Göttingen, 1947, 52-64; W. DIETRICH, *Prophetie und Geschichte* (FRLANT 108), Göttingen, 1972, 22-26, 58-63.

In responding to the above question, I would call attention to a noteworthy feature to the Deuteronomist's presentation subsequent to the reference to Assyria in the account of Hezekiah's healing in 2 Kgs 20,1-11. Thereafter, the Deuteronomist's only mention of Assyria is the passing and obscure allusion to Neco's going up "to (against) the king of Assyria" in 2 Kgs 23,29. In other words, the Deuteronomist has, effectively, nothing to say about the whole momentous course of Assyria's history subsequent to Esarhaddon's accession (see 2 Kgs 19,37), even though that history— as the Assyrian documentation makes clear— had considerable impact on Judah's own fortunes and notwithstanding, as well, his own earlier attention to the "Assyrian factor" in the nation's history. The foregoing negative observation has, however, a positive correlative. Immediately following the narrative of 2 Kgs 20,1-11 which terminates the "Assyrian sequence" 2 Kgs 15,19-20,11, there stands the account of Merodach-Baladan's embassy, 2 Kgs 20,12-19 with its introduction of the Babylonians who, in Dtr's presentation thereafter (2 Kgs 21-25), will assume the role of Judah's key Gegenüber¹⁴. One might suggest then that, for the Deuteronomist, there are two quite distinct stages— an Assyrian and a Babylonian one— to the history he narrates (recall the periodization of history evident elsewhere in Dtr). The former stage gives way to the latter, in the Deuteronomist's presentation, towards the end of Hezekiah's reign, and thereafter the Deuteronomist simply dismisses Assyria from his purview in order to concentrate all attention on the Babylonian-Judean interaction. In such a presentation, however, Nahum and his predictions, reflective as they are of Assyria's final half-century, have no place.

C. Habakkuk

The final prophet for consideration here is Habakkuk whose preaching is generally dated to the last decade of the seventh century B.C. In contrast to Nahum, Habakkuk never mentions Assyria as such, his words focussing rather on the menace of the "Chaldeans" (Hab 1,6). From that point of view then re-

14 On the significance of 2 Kgs 20,12-19 as a structuring element within Dtr as a whole, see C.T. BEGG, 2 Kings 20:12-19 as an Element of the Deuteronomistic History, CBQ 48 (1986) 27-38.

ference to him and his words would be appropriate in the "Babylonian segment" (vide supra) of Dtr. How is it therefore that, nonetheless, the Deuteronomist makes no use of the person of Habakkuk? Here, I wish to base myself on some points about the prophet's words recently put forward by M.D. JOHNSON¹⁵. JOHNSON, first of all, depicts Habakkuk as a "disillusioned Deuteronomist" whose observation of his nation's plight in the period following Josiah's death led him to insistent questioning (see especially Hab 1,4) of Deuteronomy's correlation of prosperity and right behavior by the people¹⁶. The Deuteronomist, however, with his conviction, reaffirmed throughout his work, that none of the words of Deuteronomy- whether of promise or threat- will "fall to the ground" (see e.g., Jos 23,14-15) would surely have found this feature of Habakkuk's words offputting. In addition, there is the matter of Habakkuk's and Dtr's divergent perspectives on the Babylonians. The former, as JOHNSON points out, characterizes this people in terms expressive of fear and animosity (see 1,5-11, 13-17)¹⁷. The Deuteronomist, on the contrary, as I try to show elsewhere, throughout 2 Kön 20,12-25,30 refrains from any criticism of Babylon and, in fact, inculcates an implicitly "pro-Babylonian" stance¹⁸. In this respect too, then, the Deuteronomist would have found the words of Habakkuk- and the figure behind those words- ideologically problematic, and so, understandably, opted not to give them (and him) a place in his work.

Conclusion

The above reflections are an attempt to provide answers to a question about the figures of Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk which has received virtually no attention in previous scholarship. As such, my suggestions are necessarily partial and tentative. It is hoped, however, that they will, at the least, serve to stimulate the search for fuller and more adequate ones.

15 The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk I 4, VT 35 (1985) 257-266.

16 Ibid., 264.

17 Ibid., 261.

18 See my The Significance of Jehoiachin's Release: A New Proposal (forthcoming in JSOT).