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Fischer, Irmtraud

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World Peace and “Holy War” – Two Sides of the Same Theological

Concept: “YHWH as Sole Divine Power”

A canonical-intertextual reading of Isaiah 2:1-5, Joel 4:9-21, and Micah 4:1-5

IRMTRAUD FISCHER

There is a long-standing tradition in Christianity that reproaches the Hebrew Bible, the so-called “Old Testament,” with the fact that it is violent, that its image of God affirms force and is therefore an incitement to acts of belligerence. This tradition (which is nothing other than an anti-Jewish interpretation) reads texts like Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 as eschatological passages that speak of a future beyond time (often conceived in Messianic terms) and thus have no real meaning for the practical politics of the contemporary world. Because of their distant perspective, these texts with their visions of peace did nothing to correct the image of a warlike Old Testament.

There is no doubt that both texts are speaking of a time different from the one in which they are written (“in the days to come” Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). But what conception do they have of this anticipated future? How will peace happen? Will it be a lasting peace? And what role does Israel play in it? Does this vision apply to the period of the Neo-Assyrian empire’s campaigns, or should they rather be read as a later reaction to them? If the latter is true, what implications does it have for the relevance of the texts?

I would like to address these questions through an intertextual reading, starting from the canonical text as it appears today in Hebrew editions.¹ I am assuming that the passages, each from a different canonical corpus, interpret one another. Thus it is not just a case of Isa. 2 influencing the other two passages. A holistic reading of the Bible gives rise to a semantic fabric in which the three prophetic books of Isaiah, Joel, and Micah are interwoven. Through this semantic interweaving the three texts regarding swords and plowshares in the context of war and peace explicate each other.²

1. From Assyrian Times...

The heading to the book of Isaiah in 1:1 ascribes the words of the book to the prophet Isaiah who was active in Jerusalem and dates it to the second half of the eighth century. This location of the *whole* book in a particular time and place is due to pseudepigraphy, a very common practice in the Ancient Near East whereby texts are attributed to famous literary or historical figures in order to enhance their authority.

As a rule, pre-exilic texts are found only in chapters 1-39, while Deutero-Isaiah (40-55) contains primarily exilic texts and Trito-Isaiah (56-66) exclusively post-exilic texts. Nonetheless, an eighth-century date is by no means certain for the passage under discussion (Isa. 2:1-5), given the prevalence of later editorial intervention. It has frequently been argued in recent years, on cogent grounds, that the passage belongs to a relatively late layer of the book, which assumes the existence of parts of Trito-Isaiah.³ For our inquiry this would mean

¹ The order of the books differs in the various versions of the canon. As Brandt has shown, Isaiah is usually the first book of the major prophets: *Endgestalten des Kanons*.

² See Fischer, "Schwerter oder Pflugscharen?"

³ See e.g. Bosshard-Nepustil, *Rezeptionen von Jesaja 1-39*, 253-58; Fischer, *Tora*, 24.

that we are confronted with a passage that purports, by virtue of its headings, to belong to the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem but which in fact comes from the late Persian period.⁴ Does this mean that Isa 2:1-5 cannot be read against the historical background of the Assyrian campaigns? Not at all, for this is exactly what the canonical text intends, when by a double system of headings in 1:1 and 2:2 it ascribes the word and the vision to the same “Isaiah son of Amoz,” albeit not expressly of the same period (cf. the distinctive absence of dating in 2:1). This can only mean that the *book* of Isaiah wanted our passage to be understood as a vision of Isaiah, but not necessarily as a text from the period of the monarchy, in accordance with the conventions of the literary phenomenon of pseudepigraphy.

Our dating of the passage might lead to the premature conclusion that the whole issue of the Neo-Assyrian period and its understanding of war and peace is anachronistic. Such a conclusion is false insofar as it is practically impossible to date with certainty the composition of any biblical passage, since the Bible is essentially “tradition-literature.” It is a type of literature that transmits historical events not for the purpose of recording history but mainly because of their theological significance. This means that even in texts where the time of narration (when the text was composed) is very close to the time narrated (when the events narrated took place), *the theological focus on the events narrated is more central than the historical focus.*⁵ Accordingly, narrated history in the Bible is always theologically interpreted history and thus in itself a reaction to historical events.

⁴ For the frequently proposed dating to the Persian period, see Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, 90, and Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 93, who places Isa. 2:2-4 in the time of King Cyrus of Persia (ibid., 98).

⁵ On the double chronology of narrative, see Ricœur, *Temps et récit*.

The Assyrian campaigns of the eighth century BCE, which led to the total destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 and to near disaster in the southern kingdom of Judah in 701 (where Jerusalem alone was spared as if by a miracle), left a lasting imprint in the historical narrative of the nation. The traumatic consequences of Assyrian warfare and the propaganda associated with it⁶ continued to have a huge effect on literature centuries later. When, for example, the book of Judith at the end of the second century BCE represents Nebuchadnezzar as an Assyrian king reigning in Niniveh and places him in the Persian period (cf. Jdt. 1:1; 16:3, 10), it is clear that a theological perspective of history has precedence over historical accuracy. Giving the Babylonian king this identity allows the book to have the classic “enemy from the North” (cf. Jer. 1:13f.) invade the country. Jdt. 1-3 has echoes of Assyrian war propaganda and the experience of a plundering, destroying army that sweeps down from the North, crushing all the countries in its path like a threshing-flail. Memory of the terrible events is as alive as if they had happened yesterday.

Thus it appears that the place of Isa 2:1-5 in the book of the eighth century prophet does not necessarily mean that the passage reflects historical events. Rather, it reflects the collective memory of those events. On the one hand, the Neo-Assyrian period remains relevant at all times and on the other, even biblical texts from the Neo-Assyrian period can never provide more than a reaction to the events of that period, since they are always intended as an interpretation of events in the light of Israelite religion.

The implication for the relevance of the passage to (contemporary) international relations is that it shifts the point of departure from the “original” meaning to the history of interpretation. This very shift in perspective proves to be an essential condition for an

⁶ See the contribution of Theodore Lewis in this volume.

inter-disciplinary dialogue with political scientists. As a result it becomes possible not only to understand a text historically but also to highlight its potential for application in different times and to different political circumstances.

2. Word and Torah of YHWH for Israel and the Nations: the Double Incipit of the Written Prophecy in Isa. 1-2

Historically, I see Isa. 2 as a post-exilic text, which structures the composite Book of Isaiah and is formulated with Isa 1 as a double incipit⁷ to the whole book:

Isa. 1	Isa. 2
<p>1:1 The <i>vision</i> of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he <i>saw</i> concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.</p> <p>1:10 Hear the WORD OF YHWH, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the <i>law (tôrâ) of our God</i>, you people of Gomorrah.</p>	<p>2:1 The <i>word</i> that Isaiah the son of Amoz <i>saw</i> concerning Judah and Jerusalem.</p> <p>2:3 ...for out of Zion shall go forth the <i>law (tôrâ)</i>, and the WORD OF YHWH from Jerusalem.</p>

The above text conveys the vision and the word that are attributed to the prophet Isaiah. This double heading is, however, a double introduction to the book of Isaiah not only in form but also in content, as a pair of hermeneutic spectacles for the double vision of the

prophetic writings as a whole. Whoever begins reading the latter prophets will immediately encounter in the opening chapters of Isaiah the comprehensive mission of the prophets: They are the heralds of the judgment upon their *own people*, should the latter not come to its senses but continue to sin and abandon YHWH (cf. 1:3f). They have been sent to proclaim the “word of YHWH” and “Torah of our God” (1:10).

The Torah refers to the five books of Moses, but in an earlier study I have shown that the prophetic message in the final canonical text was understood as an updating of the Torah itself, as legislative instructions for Israel.⁸ The fate of the people is decided by their hearing and obeying the word. They can be saved from ruin only by doing justice and righteousness (1:16f.27f). If they refuse to listen to the Torah of Moses as updated by the prophets, salvation will be possible only after the bitter experience of catastrophe (1:24ff.).

According to this late theological concept, however, the prophets are not only there to warn their own people that they must find a just solution to social ills in the light of YHWH. They also grasp the reality of Israel’s situation in international politics: its coexistence with *foreign nations*. The nations as well as Israel are subject to the word of YHWH and its practical effects. Large sections of the prophetic writings attest to this in detail, in the so-called “oracles against the nations” (cf. Isa. 13-23). Most are prophecies of doom, but the vision of Isa. 2:1-5 for the “days to come” proclaims the peaceful coexistence of all peoples through a common search for YHWH’s Torah and word, which may be learned at Mount Zion. The declarations of judgments against the nations and the

⁷ See in more detail Roberts, “Double Entendre.”

⁸ Cf. Fischer, *Tora*, 118ff.

warnings to Israel to do justice should be read through these hermeneutical spectacles.⁹ Thus Isa. 1-2, when read in the context of the canonical text, are an introduction to the message of the canonical written prophets as a whole.

3. Peace through Recycling of Weapons into Tools (Isa. 2:1-5)

The vision of Isa. 2:1-5 is presented as relating to Judah and Jerusalem and to a time other than the present one. “All the nations” and “the many peoples” voluntarily set out for YHWH’s mountain, which towers over all heights as the highest of mountains.¹⁰ The peoples make their way to the temple mount, on Zion, because it is from there that Torah and the word of YHWH go forth. They climb up to the God of Jacob, because he will give guidance in international legal disputes.¹¹ As a result of acceptance of YHWH’s *Torah from Zion*, foreign peoples will beat their weapons of war into agricultural implements. “It is not said to be the Torah of Moses. It is just torah. Whatever the content of this torah is, it causes people to reorient themselves and redirect the passions of their life.”¹² In consequence, not only will violent political disputes cease, but there will also be an end to military training. Without arms and trained soldiers, war can no longer be waged. Interest in “learning war” will be replaced by the fascination of “learning Torah” (cf. e.g. Deut. 5:1; 6:1).

⁹ Cf. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Zion,” 124.

¹⁰ Recently Croatto has suggested a different meaning for *goyyim* in Isa. 2: “Throughout the book of Isaiah, terms like “nations / islands/ ends of the earth” ... do not primarily define people, but *geographical realms*.” (“Nations,” 145.)

¹¹ Schwartz proposes on the basis of textual amendments that the passage is not about a pilgrimage of peoples but a summons to the Jerusalem law court. The Torah that the people await would thus be the universally accepted international law that is dispensed there: “Torah From Zion.”

¹² Bailey points out that the worship that the peoples desire “...is cognitive. They seek instructions. They want to learn.” (“Isaiah 2:2-5 and Micah 4:1-4,” 56.)

This vision relates to the distant future. Present realities are not, however, lost from sight: first the House of Jacob itself is required to walk by the light of YHWH (2:5). Realization of *the* Torah, the Torah of Moses, by the people on Zion is the precondition for Torah going forth from Mount Zion for all the nations.¹³

4. Interpreting Bible: No Text Without Another...

Biblical texts arise from many different historical and sociological contexts. The moment, however, that a text is recognized as having canonical value and gains entry into a collection of holy scriptures, the community that defines those scriptures as canonical will no longer read the text in isolation. No matter what its original context was, its new context in an immutable corpus gives it a new dimension of meaning.

This empirical characteristic of the historical process regarding canonical writings is the starting point for an intertextual reading of biblical texts.¹⁴ The term “intertextuality,” created by Julia Kristeva almost half a century ago and which she herself applied to potentialities for dialogue in an entire culture,¹⁵ is mostly defined more narrowly in biblical studies.¹⁶ Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, which is based on the readers’ construction of meaning, is applied in biblical exegesis mostly to eras and cultures that have a reciprocal relationship or to texts from mutually dependent historical periods.

Internal relationships between biblical texts where the capacity for dialogue is creative of meaning – identifiable through such features as direct quotation, similar

¹³ Cf. Lohfink, “Bund und Tora,” 41-43.

¹⁴ What is meant by intertextuality is well summarized in the articles in Still and Worton (eds.), *Intertextuality*.

¹⁵ Kristeva, “Bachtin.”

¹⁶ Rakel, *Judit*, 8-40, offers an informative overview of the different concepts of intertextuality and their application in exegesis.

vocabulary, comparable narrative structures, or a similar cast of characters – were already recognized in early Jewish exegesis. Jewish scriptural interpretation began not so much as an attempt to give the texts a historical grounding or to reconstruct their origins but rather as “interpretation of scripture by scripture”: one text interprets another.

Intertextuality does not normally inquire into the chronological order of texts. If we do not wish to ignore the chronological question, however, intertextuality will apply at the latest from the point when the text was incorporated into a canonical corpus. A reader familiar with the Bible can make connections not only following the canonical order of its books but also in reverse; for a first-time reader the order of the passages under discussion is Isa. 2:1-5, Joel 4:9-21, and Mic. 4:1-5. On reading the Bible for a second time, however, the reader already knows that Isaiah’s vision of beating swords into plowshares is not the last word on the subject, but that Joel will call for the opposite to happen and that Micah will make a declaration similar to Isaiah’s, albeit with different consequences regarding recognition of the god of Israel. In canonical scriptures one text interprets the other without regard for their historical origins or the order in which they are read, since individual texts as such are no longer deemed relevant, but the totality of the texts.

5. Plowshares to Swords: The Day of YHWH for the Recalcitrant Nations (Joel 4)

⁹Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for battle! Arouse the warriors, let all the fighters come and draw near! ¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let even the weakling say, “I am strong.” ¹¹Rouse yourselves and come, all you nations; come together from roundabout. There bring down your warriors, O Lord (*YHWH*)! ¹²Let the nations rouse themselves and march up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit in judgment over all the nations roundabout. ¹³Swing the sickle, for the crop is ripe; come and tread. For the winepress is full, the vats are overflowing! For great is their wickedness. ¹⁴Multitudes upon multitudes in the Valley of Decision! For the day of the Lord (*YHWH*) is at hand in the Valley of Decision. ¹⁵Sun and moon are darkened, and stars withdraw their brightness. ¹⁶And the Lord (*YHWH*) will roar from Zion, and shout aloud from Jerusalem, so that heaven and earth tremble. But the Lord (*YHWH*) will be a shelter to His people, a refuge

to the children of Israel. ¹⁷And you shall know that I the Lord (*YHWH*) your God dwell in Zion, My holy mount. And Jerusalem shall be holy; nevermore shall strangers pass through it. ¹⁸And in that day, the mountains shall drip with wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the watercourses of Judah shall flow with water; a spring shall issue from the House of the Lord (*YHWH*) and shall water the Wadi of the Acacias. ¹⁹Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate waste, because of the outrage to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed the blood of the innocent. ²⁰But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem throughout the ages. ²¹Thus I will treat as innocent their blood which I have not treated as innocent; and the Lord (*YHWH*) shall dwell in Zion. (JPS)

The subject of Joel 4:10 is retooling in the opposite direction. The phrase is used in the context of a divine summons to the nations to “sanctify war” (4:9) and order a general mobilization. Even the worst coward is to say of himself “I am a hero!” Conscripting the last remnants into the army goes together with massive rearmament, for which the weapons at hand are insufficient. Even iron ploughs and pruning hooks are to be melted down for making into weapons. There is no need of men or tools for civilian life, for there is no civilian life any more.

The Christian West is familiar with the spectacle of arms being manufactured from every available metal, especially the melting down of church bells. People knew that when things came to such a pass, the war was as good as lost. Nonetheless, until today production of weaponry takes precedence over machinery for civilian purposes, even at the cost of countless lives through starvation.

Although the conversion of weapons of war into agricultural implements is found twice in the prophetic writings and the opposite process only once, down to the present day it is the call in Joel 4:10 that more closely reflects human reality. Should it have been otherwise in Old Testament times? To what, therefore, does the conversion of civilian and military hardware in the Hebrew Bible refer?

Excursus: YHWH's War: Without Swords and Spears

Other than in these three passages, the conversion of civilian and military hardware receives no mention in the Hebrew Bible, nor are ploughs and pruning hooks mentioned in connection with swords and spears. Three of the four items, omitting pruning hooks, are found in 1 Sam. 13:19-22, which recounts the nascent Israelite kingdom's state of armament and the Philistine threat to it. The Philistines have a monopoly over iron-working. The Israelites are dependant upon their expensive aid even for sharpening their plows. Iron weapons are clearly under an export ban. Thus at the beginning of the Philistine wars there is not a sword or spear to be found in the whole land of Israel. It is with such inadequate arms that the fighting begins, but it ends in victory for Israel not because of military superiority but because YHWH fights on behalf of his people.

The couplet “sword” and “spear” is found in the story in which David first appears as a war hero. Goliath, the Philistine champion who is armed to the teeth, has only contempt for the youthful David and his inadequate weaponry. David, however, replies: “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of YHWH Seba’ot, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Sam. 17:45). From the continuation of the narrative it appears that the couplet refers exclusively to the situation in which David wages war against the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam. 21:9).

It is therefore no coincidence that among the nations called to arms in Joel 4:2, 9, the Philistines are singled out, alongside Tyre and Sidon (4:4). Even if all the nations arm themselves to the teeth, using everything including civilian equipment, Israel knows – from the historical account of its wars with the Philistines – that it can withstand them

unarmed. The Bible tells us that war will not be decided by Israel’s inadequate armaments but solely by YHWH’s aid.

Consequently, when in Joel 4 YHWH summons the nations to the decisive battle in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (translated: “YHWH judges”,¹⁷ vv. 2, 12), it is described with motifs of theophany and “holy war.” There is nothing in this divine pronouncement about his own people also having to arm themselves. God alone will provide for the coming “Day of YHWH” (v. 14). Not even fortifications are necessary to protect the people from the onslaught of the nations on Zion, for YHWH himself is a refuge for his people (v. 16).

The purpose of this war waged by YHWH is – just like David’s battle with Goliath – recognition of his people and lasting peace for his dwelling-place, for Zion and Jerusalem:

1 Sam. 17:46-47	Joel 4:17
<p>... All the earth <i>shall know that there is a God in Israel</i>. And this whole assembly <i>shall know that YHWH can give victory without sword or spear, for the battle is YHWH’s and he will deliver you into our hands.</i>”</p>	<p><i>And you shall know that I YHWH your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mount. And Jerusalem shall be holy; nevermore shall strangers pass through it.</i></p>

As Wolff already stressed,¹⁸ the consequences of going up to Zion, whether to receive torah there (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2) or to do battle (Joel 4:9), are therefore one and the same: on the mountain where YHWH is present among his people, war will cease.

6. The Fate of the Nations in the Books of Isaiah and Joel

The result of the convergence of peoples on Zion is thus the same in both cases. Their common goal, however, should not be taken as reducing the difference in their means. For nations that are involved in terrible military conflicts, it is cynical to judge a war solely by its outcome: that peace will some day somehow be restored, if only because the bloodletting has left both sides exhausted. Even if it is one's own side's commanders who started the war, recourse to armed force means unspeakable suffering for the population. When YHWH establishes world peace, therefore, it is not a matter of indifference whether it happens through the understanding of the peoples or through an avenging war of extermination. Does Joel regard the difference as meaningless? To answer that question, it is necessary to examine the context of the statements in Isaiah as well as in Joel.

Joel 4:9ff. has its counterpart in 2:1ff.¹⁹ There, the "Day of YHWH" is announced also for his own people. To bring it about, YHWH uses a fearsome army that no one can resist. Israel must also be judged if it does not turn back to God with all its heart (2:12-17).

¹⁷ On the motif of judgement see the contribution of Lewis in this volume.

¹⁸ Wolff, "Schwerter zu Pflugscharen," 281.

¹⁹ Cf. Wolff, *Joel. Amos*, 89.

Joel's message here is in good Isaian tradition:²⁰ if Israel does not heed the Torah and the Word of YHWH (Isa. 1:10), there will not be the peace envisaged by Isa. 2:1-5. According to the book of Isaiah, the attraction of Torah for the nations (2:3) lies in the observance of the Torah of Moses by Israel on Mount Zion (2:5). If the Torah and word of YHWH are rejected, God himself will erupt in anger against his people and bring a people from afar, a terrible armed host, to execute his sentence (5:24-30). But also the nations who with YHWH's authorization act as instruments of judgment against Israel will not go unpunished for their war crimes. The oracles against the nations in Isa. 13ff bear eloquent witness thereto. Nevertheless, neither for Israel nor for the nations is divine judgment the last word. In Joel 2:18ff. YHWH declares that he will never again leave his people to be a mockery among the nations (Joel 2:19; cf. Isa. 25:8). Any nation that opposes it will certainly be powerless (Joel 2:20), but the global extermination of peoples is not thereby contemplated. Just as the book of Isaiah ends with the statement that "all the nations" (*goyyim*) will come (Isa. 66:18ff.) in order to see YHWH's glory (66:18) and "all flesh" (all humanity), will come in order to pray to YHWH on his holy mountain (66:23), Joel 3:1 predicts the pouring out of the divine spirit on "all flesh."

The expression "all flesh" is normally universal in scope, but almost all modern scholars restrict its application in Joel 3:1 to Israel, for two reasons.²¹ First, the parallel in Ezek. 39:29, where God likewise declares that he will pour out his spirit, but solely on Israel. Second, Joel 3:1 in the passage immediately following the reference to "all flesh" speaks of "*your* sons" and "*your* daughters," of "*your* old men" and "*your* youth". Here it is undoubtedly Israel that is addressed. Nonetheless, as I have discussed in detail in my

²⁰ On the intertext to the book of Joel, see Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*.

²¹ Cf. Jeremias, „Denn auf dem Berg Zion," 35.

monograph on a non-gender-biased interpretation of prophecy, the text can also be understood as meaning that while the spirit is poured out on “all flesh” – and thus also on the nations – only in Israel will the whole people, regardless of gender, age, or social status, receive thereby the gift of prophecy.²²

7. Israel as Prophet for the Nations

If one follows the two texts that stand in opposition to Joel 4:10, the nations put aside their weapons because they accept the *Torah from Zion* as instructions for themselves. The Torah from Zion, which is the word of YHWH (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2), is not, however, the *Torah from Sinai*, which applies exclusively to Israel.

JHWH's Torah	for Israel	for the nations
place of revelation	Mount Sinai	Mount Zion
mediator	Moses (cf. Exod. 20:18-21; Deut. 5: 23-31)	Israel (cf. Isa. 42:1-4; Joel 3:1ff.)

²² Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen*, 242-44. Followed by Scoralick, *Gottes Güte*, 173.

This conclusion emerges from the so-called (in Christian context) “first servant song,” where a clear distinction is made: the nations are already awaiting the Torah imparted through the servant of God (Isa. 42:4) and are therefore open to these instructions. The continuation of 42:4 stresses that YHWH created *all* the inhabitants of the earth and gave them breath and *spirit* (42:5). YHWH establishes his servant as a “light of nations” (42:6). In the final, canonical version of the book of Isaiah this servant is unambiguously the people of Israel (cf. 49:3). In order to fulfill this task to be, as a good servant, the prophet for the nations, Israel must first go “by the light of YHWH” (Isa. 2:5) and live according to his Torah.

According to the book of Isaiah, the Torah for Israel will be imparted and made relevant to the present day by the prophets as the word of YHWH (cf. 1:10; 8:16, 20; 30:9). The prophets are the successors to Moses, giver of the law at Sinai and prophet *par excellence* (cf. Deut. 18:15-18).²³ Transmission of the Torah to the nations occurs through Israel as prophetic servant of God, which becomes a “Moses for the nations” on Mount Zion (Isa. 2:1-5) because it has the Torah in its heart (51:1-8).

Thus when in Joel 3:1ff the spirit is poured universally upon “all flesh,” it is not a unique conception (cf. Isa. 42:5). But the spirit engenders prophecy only for Israel, so that it can fulfill its mission of imparting Torah to the nations at Zion and in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2; cf. Joel 3:5). Like the giving of the law to Israel at Sinai, this event will be accompanied by fire and smoke (Joel 3:3; cf. Exod. 19:18ff). Acceptance of the

²³ On this concept of prophecy cf. Fischer, *Tora*, 121-24, and Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen*, 39-62.

Torah of Mount Zion as “international law”²⁴ (cf. Isa. 42:1, 4) will, however, cause the nations to transform their weapons into tools for cultivating the land (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3).

The pronouncement of the pouring out of the spirit, which will lead to persons of both genders and of any age or status among YHWH’s people becoming prophets, is always interpreted as the end of the phenomenon of prophecy. If, however, prophecy is understood as interpretation and application of the Torah appropriate to one’s own era, then the purpose of giving the spirit at Zion is that there should remain in Jerusalem only persons who live according to Torah and will make Zion a magnet for the nations. Moses’ wish that all the people become prophets through YHWH’s spirit (Num. 11:29) would thereby be fulfilled.

Because of the pouring out of the spirit, there is no longer any need for an intermediary as at Sinai/Horeb, where the people had been afraid of a direct encounter with God (Deut. 5:4-30; 18:16-18; cf. Exod. 20:18-21). No longer does an individual act as mediator for communications between God and the people, but everyone in Israel possesses this gift of prophecy. Israel as a people then uses the gift to act as mediator to the nations. Joel 3 predicts the abolition of prophecy insofar as it is no longer necessary in Israel, since all now possess it. But prophecy does not become obsolete in Israel, because it will henceforth mediate between God and the nations.

According to Joel 3:1, the gift of the spirit will occur *before* the coming of the terrible “Day of YHWH” which will turn the sun and the moon to darkness (3:3f.; cf. 4:15). This terrible day comes after the pouring out of the spirit, which will make the people on Mount Zion into prophetic mediators for the nations (cf. Isa. 42:1ff.), but on that day *all* who invoke YHWH’s name will be saved on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem

²⁴ Crüsemann points out that there is no international law in the Torah: “Frieden lernen,” 16.

(Joel 3:5). Whoever then among all the nations answers the summons to make plowshares and pruning hooks into weapons against YHWH, he – and only he – will be subject to the sentence of extermination in Joel 4. Here again Joel stands squarely in the Isaian tradition: when the new world comes into being and “all flesh” pray to YHWH in his temple, he who still refuses to do so will become an abomination for “all flesh” (Isa. 66:23f.).

For Joel, the “holy war” that YHWH wages on Zion is not against those who come to Zion in peace seeking Torah. Those nations have neither weapons nor soldiers (Isa. 2:4). The war is waged against those who march against Jerusalem intent on destruction (Joel 4:9ff.) and reject the order to beat swords into plowshares and all that it entails. At Zion, however, there are no weapons for this war nor is there any need of them. YHWH alone will guarantee a secure civilian life, which makes the winepresses overflow (Joel 2:22-27).

8. Swords to Plowshares: Peace under Vine and Fig-tree (Mic. 4)

If one reads the parallel text to Isa. 2:1-5 in Micah in the canonical order, that is, after the book of Joel, the difference in details regarding the nations are immediately apparent.²⁵ In Isa. 2:2f “all the nations” and “many peoples” make their way to Mount Zion. In Mic. 4:1f. there are “peoples” and “many nations” that pour into Jerusalem. Those nations who heeded the call to make their agricultural implements into weapons and were defeated in the war of YHWH are evidently not among their number – it no longer consists of “all the nations.” Mic. 4 therefore does not expect that YHWH will judge universally “among

²⁵ The differences between the two texts are demonstrated by Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Zion*, 124f.

all the nations” and “for many peoples” (Isa. 2:4), but “among peoples” and “for many nations” (Mic 4:3). The war of YHWH of Joel 4:9ff. has evidently decimated the nations.

In the canonical order, therefore, the vision in Mic. 4:1-3 can only be fulfilled *after* the events predicted therein. The continuation of the vision in vv. 4-5 shows that the same applies to the postulated sequence of events in Joel 4.²⁶ The vastly superior armament of the enemy and the lack of sword and spear in Israel refer to the victory that young David won over the Philistines because he made war in the name of YHWH Seba’ot (1 Sam. 17:45ff.). The young kingdom of Israel could not defend its land against the Philistines with sword and spear, but solely through deliverance by its God. David, the inadequately armed warrior of Israel in the war of YHWH, made firm the borders of his empire. Under his son and successor Solomon, Israel could enjoy the fruits of the wars of YHWH:

1 Kings 5:5	Micah 4:4
“All the days of Solomon, Judah and Israel from Dan to Beersheba dwelt in safety, <i>every man under his vine and under his fig-tree.</i> ”	“But <i>every man shall sit under his vine and under his fig-tree</i> ; with no one to make him afraid...”

²⁶ The book of Joel is certainly later than Isaiah and Micah.

In Mic. 4:4f. people can enjoy the fruits of the war of YHWH of Joel 4. They are no longer terrorized by the nations. Everyone can enjoy peace and be at ease under his vine and fig-tree.²⁷ Not only does Israel continue in the name of YHWH, its god; so do all (remaining) nations, each in the name of its own deity, for ever and ever.

The vision in the book of Micah evidently sees no contradiction for the nations in accepting the Torah of Mount Zion, which points the way to peace, and worship of their own deities.²⁸ It is not the temple of YHWH – as the site of an international oracle – that stands at the center of attention for the nations (cf. Jer. 51:44: the nations flocking to Bel in Babylon), but Jerusalem, Zion, and the mountain with the house of YHWH. It is the mountain of the gods as such and therefore towers over all mountains and hills, for it is the mountain where Torah is revealed to the nations. Mic. 4:1-5 does not conform with the end of Isaiah, which expects cultic worship of YHWH by all nations (Isa. 66:18-23). In Micah, YHWH prescribes a world order among the nations, but not their worship.

9. Variations on the Theme “YHWH Puts an End to War”: Psalm 46 und Joel 4

What Joel 4 presents as a nightmare scenario for recalcitrant nations and Isa. 2 and Mic. 4 see as a vision of peace, Ps. 46 celebrates in an antiphonal hymn.²⁹ Wherever YHWH makes war, he himself is the refuge for his people (v. 2; cf. Joel 4:16), even amid the raging tumult of the nations (v. 7; cf. Joel 4:14), when heaven and earth, seas and mountains quake (v. 4; cf. Joel 4:16). Here also, these events take place at Zion. It is within this divine city, fed by the waters of a river (v. 46:5; cf. Joel 4:18), that he has his

²⁷ On this aspect of mediterranean material culture, see the contribution of Fales in this volume.

²⁸ Lohfink translates the clause concessively: “as long as the other nations worship their own deities” (“Der neue Bund,” 119).

dwelling v. 5f.; cf. Joel 4:17). And it is there that the “God of Jacob” puts an end to war (v. 8, 12), breaking lances and arrows (v. 10). In accordance with the concept of YHWH’s war, God demands that the nations abandon their schemes and recognize his divinity (v. 11; cf. 1 Sam. 17:45ff.; Joel 4:17), his preeminence over the Earth and its peoples.

By contrast, the visions of peace in Isaiah and Micah let the nations seek the “God of Jacob” of their own accord (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). They voluntarily destroy their swords and lances, because fascination with the Torah and the word that goes forth from Zion brings them to accept its instructions (Isa. 2:3f; Mic. 4:2f.). The war that YHWH wages for his people is intended to make Israel acknowledge its god residing on Zion (Joel 4:17) and the nations acknowledge the God of Jacob’s sway over all peoples (Ps. 46:11). In its conception of the end of war, Psalm 46 takes a middle way between the two views described above: destruction of weapons is not at the initiative of the nations but of YHWH. He takes over the task of their removal in order to bring the nations to acknowledge God.

Ps. 46 finds a worthy successor to its theology in a woman’s song of thanksgiving: after killing a tyrant and thereby destroying the war machine of an all-conquering, brutal enemy (cf. Jdt. 1-5), Judith celebrates her god, who puts an end to war (Jdt. 16:2). In the book of Judith, the weapons are destroyed not by the all-powerful divinity but by the hand of a pious woman, who turns the enemy’s weapon against himself.³⁰

10. World Peace as a World Order Planned by YHWH

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the connections between these passages, see the contribution of Williamson in this volume.

³⁰ Compare this leitmotiv in Jdt. 13:16.

The swords and plowshares message was probably *delivered* in the Persian period in the province of Judah, on the basis of the conditions prevailing in that period.³¹ The community on Mount Zion at that time lacked independence and was forcibly demilitarized, having to get by without any defenses (cf. Isa. 54:11-17 and the stories in the book of Nehemiah regarding the politics of building the city wall: Neh. 2-7). They occupied the land without first having to conquer it for themselves, but possession of the land was under constant threat because they had no effective means of defense.

In those circumstances, the demilitarized community on Zion could only rely on YHWH's help and not on their own strength. In Israel's history, however, there were altogether few occasions when the people on Zion could prevail by force of arms against the great powers of the Near East. In the time to which these passages *relate*, covering a time-span from David (1 Sam. 17:45ff.) to the future (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1), dwelling in security in the land is presented as being from the outset the result of YHWH's waging war. Even the founder of the Israelite empire is able to complete the occupation of the land and the securing of its borders not through his famous heroes or his own bravery and military experience, but through YHWH alone, as typified by the motif of Israel's inadequate weaponry. When under attack, Israel hopes for the Day of YHWH for those recalcitrant nations who persist in mounting assaults upon Zion but can achieve nothing, albeit armed to the teeth.

It is possible that this motif arose in the Assyrian period as a utopian counterpoint to the real political conditions of the time. It is not of vital importance for the theological message whether the passages about beating swords into plowshares were actually based on the traumatic experiences of the Assyrian siege or on a collective memory of those

³¹ Cf. also Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Zion*, 122.

experiences. Throughout biblical times Israel had to learn over and over again that it was too weak militarily to withstand the super-powers of the Ancient Near East on its own. Accordingly, time and again it set its hopes on divine intervention to escape the consequences of armed conflict.

For future days, however, the message embodies the hope that YHWH's war will itself be superfluous. Through the Torah that comes forth from Mount Zion the nations will come to realize that they no longer need their weapons. Training in preparation for war will also cease. For communal study of the Torah in the peaceful land the plowshare remains necessary, in order to ensure daily sustenance through bread, as does the pruning hook, in order to produce wine for the festival. The nations that have acknowledged YHWH as the sole deity, and therefore seek his presence and guidance, will be welcome to participate in the festival on Mount Zion at the end of days (cf. Isa. 25:6-8). Those nations, on the other hand, that march on Zion armed and hostile, will there encounter the all-powerful war-god YHWH, who will defeat them once and for all. To that extent, world peace, as envisaged by Isa. 2 and Mic. 4, is not in contradiction with the "holy war" of Joel 4. They are two sides of the same coin: "YHWH as the universal god of all nations."

Does this message confirm the image of a cruel and violent Old Testament? In the passages in which the God of Israel intervenes in the war, there is never any question of a war of aggression, only of the need for defence against invaders. Neither the stories of David and Goliath and Judith and Holofernes nor our three texts bear witness to a warmongering attitude in the Hebrew Bible. To the contrary: foreign nations and their leaders perish by the very weapons that they raise against God's people. In the biblical

conception, the problem lies not in Israel's potential for violence or that of its god, but in the aggressive expansionist policies of certain members of the international community.

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