

To: David Roskies

ELG: Notes on Muffs' "Prophetic Repentance".

12/5/79

p.1 #1 - Need to spell out more specifically the evidence that Jeremiah, Elijah, and Samuel went thru a process of repentance.

p.1, #2 - I am curious to see the evidence that Jonah was, indeed, "rehabilitated."

p.2 I don't agree with Yochanan's reading of Jonah. I don't think Jonah was concerned w/ "losing face" but w/ the idea that strict justice can be mitigated by God's compassion; see E. Fromm, The Art of Loving; Thayer Warshaw, "The Book of Jonah," in K. R. R. Gros Louis et al., Literary Interpretations of Bib. Narratives; J. L. Gresham, Prophetic Conflict; et al.

I also disagree w/ Yochanan's exegesis of the gourd episode. Altho Yochanan may have a legitimate interpretation, he needs to make the case for it (and aginst other interpretations) through textual analysis.

p.2 bottom: We have absolutely no way of telling whether "Jonah got the message." I think - and students have arrived at this independently - that the book ends without a response from Jonah because it is up to the reader to decide whether Jonah, the strict-justice s.o.b., or God, the compassionate and life-loving one, is right. The book is a parable for the benefit of the audience.

ELG: Notes on Muffs' "Prophetic Repentance" (2)

p. 3 The "midrash" supplied by Mic. 7: 18ff. is, in my view then, one reader's response to the question directed to the audience. It is, therefore, completely appropriate, whereas ~~the~~ such a response by Jonah ~~is~~ would not be appropriate. His usefulness as a character in the parable has been spent.

p. 3 bottom The description of Dead Sea Scull pescharim is not precise or misleading. (This is not the place to discuss it).

(or contextually)

p. 6 Synchronically, the psalm of salvation from drowning is made to be more appropriate than Yochanan allows: For God's act of having Jonah swallowed by the fish is salvation from drowning!

On "Midrash Elijah"

p. 1, l. 7 I Kings 18. so passim.

(I'm not bothering here to indicate editorial corrections & typos.)

p. 3 Elijah was not, in my reading, so much an "egotist" as an "idealist." He was not prepared for the rapid wearing-off of his temporary, one-shot triumph. He thought the revolution was over.

p. 5, l. 1 Elijah.

l. 6. I would read the present pointing lc? "He saw (the reality of the situation)," not lc? "he was scared."



ELG: Notes on Muffs (3)

p. 8, l. 8 - The threat to Elijah's life was not "slight," it was certain.

ll. 12ff. - The functions of Elijah's sleeping as escape and Jonah's going down to sleep are contextually much different. Elijah is depressed. Jonah is apathetic to the plight of everyone on board ship. A contrast is drawn between Jonah, who cares nothing for the lives of others (Ninevites, sailors), and the sailors, who manifest a remarkable concern for human life.

(The message of Jonah is that of Ezek. 18:32.)

Notes - N.2 - I don't think Ahitophel committed suicide in order to save face. Rather, he knew that his ~~ad~~ counsel was always correct (the reader knows this, too), and so he preferred to die by his own hand than be executed by a victorious David; cf. Saul's suicide. (This is also the reading of Uriel Simon, my teacher.)

Overall, this is not an article proper, but material (of the lecture sort) that could be transformed into an article on midrashic reading of depressed prophets: Jonah and Elijah. But to show that this is a literary reading requires text-based arguments. As I've indicated, I don't think this is the peshat (especially in the case of Jonah). - Do you need the ms. back?