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Author(s): Patrick D. Miller, Jr.
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SHORT NOTES

THE DIVINE COUNCIL AND THE PROPHETIC CALL TO WAR

A major breakthrough was made on the problem of the origin of the Day of Yahweh when Gerhard von Rad suggested that the origin of this eschatological theme is to be found in the ancient holy war traditions of Israel 1). More recently Frank M. Cross, Jr. has carried the discussion further by pointing out that the conflict between the view of von Rad and the older view of Sigmund Mowinckel is not as real as it may seem and that in fact the Day of Yahweh imagery comes out of the tribal league holy war traditions as they were carried through the royal cultus in the associations of ritual conquest with the enthronement 2). Additional support is given by Robert Bach's demonstration that the Sitz im Leben of the Gattungen of prophetic oracles which involve a summons to battle and those involving a summons to flight is the holy war of early Israel. A number of these oracles of course have to do with the Day of Yahweh 3).

There is still another element that needs to be taken into account in this discussion about the Day of Yahweh as well as the more general discussion of the form and content of the prophetic oracles. In a few places in the prophets — and further investigation may suggest still more than are put forth here — there are indications that the divine council 4) participates as a cosmic or heavenly army in the eschatological wars of Yahweh, those military activities associated

4) Increasing attention is being given to the place of the divine council in the prophetic materials in terms of both the content of their oracles and the office and role of the prophet as the herald or messenger of the divine council (e.g. I K. 22; Jer. 23: 18-23). See especially Frank M. Cross, Jr. "The Council of
with the Day of Yahweh, and that these conflicts (or conflict?) involved a joint participation of human or earthly forces and divine or heavenly armies. Such a situation is not unexpected inasmuch as the later heavily apocalyptic warfare such as we find in the Qumran War Scroll depicts just such a synergism. Even more important, however, is the fact that these prophetic oracles provide a further tie to the ancient traditions and conceptions of warfare in Israel. For from earliest times on Israel viewed her battles as under the aegis of Yahweh and with the participation of the various cosmic forces which he commanded as the Divine Warrior, general of the heavenly armies 1). This theological or mythological conception of Holy war which existed in Israel is preserved in numerous places, particularly the early poetry, where we see a common or traditional picture of the march from Sinai and the south into the land of Canaan as a great march of conquest with Yahweh going forth at the head of the armies of heaven and Israel (e.g. Deut. xxxiii 2-5, 26-29; 2) Jud. v; Ps. lxviii, esp. vss. 8-13 and 18; Hab. iii; cf. Josh. v 13-15, a most important reference) 3).

Yahweh in Second Isaiah," JNES XII (1953), pp. 274-77 and the literature cited there. More recently, cf. Herbert Huffman, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," JBL LXVII (1959), pp. 285-95; G. Ernest Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form Critical Analysis of Deuteronomy 32," Israel's Prophetic Heritage, New York: 1962, pp. 26-67; and James F. Ross, "The Prophet as Messenger," Israel's Prophetic Heritage, pp. 98-107. Von Rad and Bach have not picked up the important role of the council of Yahweh in these traditions and its importance as a tie between the earlier traditions and prophetic eschatology. Von Rad correctly argues that whatever mythical elements are associated with the Day of Yahweh are present from the beginning and have remained surprisingly unchanged in tradition up to late prophetic times. He regards these mythical elements, however, as "clouds, darkening of the stars, etc." and apparently holds them to be of little importance (G. Von Rad, op. cit., p. 107).


3) That this imagery is filled with reminiscences of Yahweh's battle as Divine Warrior against cosmic or divine enemies as well as Israel's historical enemies goes without saying, but such references are probably even more extensive than generally recognized. To say the least, the early poetry is fraught with mythological terminology or language while maintaining or directing this toward a fundamental historical concern.
**Isaiah xiii 1 ff.**

These verses, which as a doom oracle against Babylon and part of a larger collection, clearly belong to a much later time than Isaiah 2), treat of the Day of Yahweh as a great holy war involving the earthly and heavenly hosts. There are several problems in the text. The nature of the persons addressed in vs. 2 is unclear. Is the verse a call to Yahweh’s warriors to prepare for battle 3); or is it an address to the enemy? It is even possible to interpret the commands as an address to the divine council though that is not necessarily the best choice. In vs. 3 Yahweh levies a mighty host for battle. 4) Here also it is impossible to tell whether these are heavenly or earthly hosts or both. He calls them “my consecrated ones” (mequddāšāy), “my warriors” (gibboray—see below, p. 104, n. 1, and “my proudly exulting ones” (‘allizē ga’awātī). The use of the first person suffix might suggest that these warriors are indeed Yahweh’s assembly. Most important is the use of the term mequddāš, „sanctified, consecrated“, which belongs to the practice of holy war, in which the soldiers were purified and set under certain taboos before battle 5). Then come the words:

Yahweh Šēbā‘ôt is mustering (mēpq qed) a host for battle.
They come from a far-off land, from the ends of the heavens,
Yahweh and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth (vss. 4b-5)

Using the ancient designation “Yahweh of hosts”, the prophet announces that Yahweh has mustered a great army to wipe out the whole earth. The heavenly army is summoned “from the ends of

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1) The following presentation does not offer an exhaustive exegesis but rather those exegetical conclusions which have to do with the point that is being here demonstrated. Cf. von Rad, op. cit., pp. 99-100, for a discussion of the motifs of sacral war present in this oracle against Babylon.

2) As an example of the scholarly consensus see John Bright’s statement in Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, London: 1962, p. 499: “The historical circumstances here are those of a time much later than Isaiah’s.”

3) LXX apparently reads pithu “draw (a sword),” or the like for pithē in verse 2b, a reading that is probably to be followed. See Bach, op. cit., p. 58.


6) The verb pq sad is used regularly fot mustering the heavenly army in IQM, e.g. xii 4, 7. Cf. the discussion below of Is. XL 26.
the heavens”. If indeed kol-ha‘āres is to be interpreted as the whole earth, as seems to be the case, the picture is one of the final destruction in the Day of Yahweh—a destruction wrought by Yahweh and his heavenly army (vs. 5a). If the reference is only to Babylon, then the army may be interpreted as a combination of earthly and heavenly beings. Whatever the case may be on these various points where certainty seems impossible there can be no equivocation over the fact that the prophet announces a day of destruction, in which the divine army of Yahweh and possibly other armies will carry on a great holy war of judgement. Late though the text may be, the themes of the passage are clearly in the tradition of Israel’s understanding of warfare as a divine-human, cosmic-earthly endeavor, a tradition which is strong in the early poetic pieces of Israelite literature.

Joel iv 9 ff.

This passage, similar to Is. xiii in form and content, brings together a number of significant themes. Verse 9 begins with a heraldic call to the divine assembly to proclaim holy war (gīr’ū). Then the proclamation of the assembly goes out to the nations:

\[
\begin{align*}
gaddēšā & mīlbāmā | hā‘irū bāggebōrām \\
yiggēšā & ya’alū | kōl ḫanāšē bāmmīlḥāmā
\end{align*}
\]

Sanctify war, rouse up the warriors!
Let them draw near and go up,
All the men of war.

The language is again that of the holy wars, purifying the warriors (cf. Josh. iii 5; 1 Sam. xi 11; xxi 6), stirring them to go up to battle (cf. Jud. v 12; Is. li 9, etc.) The apocalyptic element appears prominently in verse 10 where the prophetic saying about the tools of war becoming the tools of peace is reversed, and plowshares and pruning hooks now become swords and spears. The weak and timid become mighty warriors. The nations are commanded to gather around. But then in the midst of this command a very significant change of address appears (vs. 11 b.):

\[
hanhat yhwh gibbōreykā
\]

Bring down thy warriors, Yahweh.

As has been recognized, this can only be a call for Yahweh to come forth with his heavenly army 1). The divine beings who make up the assembly of Yahweh are elsewhere called gibborim 1). The verb nāḥat confirms the fact that the heavenly warriors are involved. They are brought down from above whereas the nations are brought up (wēyaʿalāh, vs. 12) into the ‘ēmeq yehōṣāpāt.

The purpose of this warlike activity is made abundantly clear in vs. 12 b:

\[ \text{ki šām ṣēḇēb līṭpōt 'et-kōl-haggōyim missābīb} \]

For there I will sit to judge / all the nations round about.

The apocalyptic holy war is for the purpose of bringing about Yahweh’s judgement of the nations. Here is strong indication of the close connection between the imagery of Yahweh as warrior and Yahweh as judge. His judgement and justice are expressed in activities of war (cf. Jud. xi 27). 2).

Two aspects of divine warfare or the participation of the cosmos in divine warfare are present in the succeeding verses. The sun, moon, and stars are darkened (so also Is. xiii 10) reminiscent of the participation of these elements in Jud. v 20; Hab. iii 11; Josh. x 12-13). In vs. 16 the theophany of Yahweh from Zion takes place accompanied by Yahweh’s giving forth his voice and the shaking of heaven and earth—both aspects of theophany seen in Jud. v; Ps. lxviii; Deut. xxxiii; 2 Sam. xxii = Ps. xviii, and Hab. iii. Then the passage closes with the announcement of the return of paradise and a final proclamation of doom against the enemies of Judah. These verses, therefore, reflect much of the language and imagery of the early poetic material.


These verses from Jeremiah’s oracle against Babylon need only be mentioned. There is not strong indication here that the heavenly army fights with the armies of the nations. But the series of plural

1) Ps. ciii 20; possibly Jud. v 23. The word frequently appears as a designation of the angels in the Qumran literature. In IQM xv 14 the ṣāwraḥ ᵣʾlm are described girding themselves for battle. Col. xii 7 also appears to contain a reference to the angels as ṣāwraḥ. IQH contains frequent reference to the divine world: ṣāwraḥ ᵣḥym (iii 35-36), ṣāwraḥ pl? (v 21), ṣāwraḥ kwh (viii 11-12). So also the Angelic Liturgy and 4 Q Ber. See J. Strugnell “The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran, 4 Q Serek Sīrōt ‘Olat Haššabāt,” Supplements to VT, VII, Leiden: 1960, pp. 318-345, esp. 322 and 333. Strugnell also cites the use of gibbōrīm for divine beings in Enoch and Talmudic literature.

2) Cf. Wright, op. cit., p. 57.
imperatives 1) teva, qaddesza, and piqdı may be a call to the divine council to sanctify (qaddesza) and muster (piqdı) the nations against Babylon. The verses thus have affinities with both Joel iv 9 ff., and Is. xiii 1 ff. and may be brought into the picture.

Isaiah xli 26 and xlv 12.

Although these two verses do not involve the day of Yahweh or oracles calling for battle against the enemy, note should be taken of Cross' observation that "here Yahweh is pictured as marshaling and mustering his heavenly army." 2) This interpretation is given further support by Muilenburg who writes with regard to Is. xl 25-27: "Mowinckel believes that Yahweh is portrayed here as the shepherd of the stars. More likely the figure is military . . . God, the captain of the host, calls out his myriads upon myriads of stars, and each star takes its appointed place as its name is called. There they stand in their great battalions in response to the call of the captain. Not one is missing; each responds to the call of its own name" 3).

Christopher North has elaborated this observation most recently 4) by noting we have here three military terms. One of these is of course the saba', the host. The second term is the Hiphil of yasa' which means in this case that "Yahweh leads them out as a commander leads an army" (cf. xl iii 17; 2 Sam. v 2; x 16). The military figure, as North says, is continued in "by number" (cf. 2 Sam. ii 15 and 14 times in Num. i).

In his form-critical study cited above Bach asks the important question as to how the summons to battle and the summons to flight were carried over from the early holy wars into the prophetic oracles. He notes that von Rad has shown that the prophets of the ninth century in the northern kingdom must be understood out of the traditions of holy war and says further that his own study has made this connection even more certain 5). Bach then wishes to push the matter even further back to see if at the earliest stages of prophecy it can be demonstrated that there was a close association between

1) On the significance of the plural imperatives as a clue to the command to the council of Yahweh see Cross JNES XII (1953), p. 275, n. 8.
2) Ibid., p. 277, n. 21.
5) Bach, op. cit., pp. 102 ff.
the prophet and the call to holy war. Whether he succeeds in so demonstrating is perhaps questionable, but is not of immediate concern here 1). The fact that the ninth century prophets are closely associated with the traditions of holy war and thus form a connecting link between the tribal league practices of holy war and the later prophetic oracles—an association and connection that appears to be generally accepted 2)—is, however, of prime importance to the data presented in these pages. For they also form a connecting link between the early association of the holy war theology with the heavenly army imagery and the later association of prophetic eschatology and the day of Yahweh with that same imagery.

2 Kings vi 15-19.

In this episode the fear of Elisha’s servant upon seeing the great army of the Syrians is met by two reassuring signs. First is the reply of Elisha, who says: “Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” The phrase, “fear not!” (‘al tirā’, vs. 16) is a familiar word of encouragement and battle cry of holy war (Ex. xiv 3; Josh. viii 1; x 8, 25; xi 6) 4), the demand for complete trust in Yahweh, which lay at the very core of the theology and ritual of holy war. 3) The basis for the lack of fear is not merely that Israel’s army is greater than that of the king of Syria—a supposition that would probably be made automatically if verse 18 were not in the text. The army of Israel is not even present in this context. Rather, the servant looks up and sees on the mountain a mighty army of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha. These can be none other than the heavenly army of Yahweh, which comes to aid the prophet. The imagery is especially similar to Ps. lxviii 18 where

1) If Bach is on the right track in seeing the prophet taking over the charismatic’s job of calling the people to holy war—and certainly the prophets of the ninth century anyway are the proclaimers of holy war—then he provides an interesting and important support for G. Ernest Wright’s thesis of the Samuel compromise as indicating the original function of the prophet in Israel. That is, the charisma which was characteristic of the lōpēṯim in early Israel passes over to the prophet with the rise of kingship. The charisma thus becomes routinized in the office of the prophet (“The Nations in Hebrew Prophecy,” Encounter 26 (1965), pp. 225-370).


3) G. Von Rad, Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel, p. 10.

Yahweh is pictured coming from Sinai with chariots and warriors 1).

2 Kings vii 6.

After the siege of Samaria by Ben Hadad has lasted for some time, four lepers decide their only hope is to go over to the Syrian camp. When they enter the camp no one is there, and the following explanation is given: ‘For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, ‘Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come upon us’.” There can hardly be any doubt that what was understood as lying behind this noise was the heavenly army exactly as in the preceding account.

In this light the chariot and horses of fire which separate Elijah and Elisha at the former’s ascent into heaven (2 Kings ii 11-12) are also seen to be representatives of the heavenly army; and the cry of Elisha, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” is in the context a clear reference to the members of the divine army who fight for Israel 2). Whether the expression was originally so understood—it is applied to Elisha also (2 Kings xiii 14)—can not be definitely said, but in the light of these passages it is quite probable that it was. In any event the designation is out of the holy war traditions, traditions in which Elijah and Elisha firmly stood and which included early and late the imagery of the divine warrior and his heavenly army.

Richmond, Virginia

Patrick D. Miller, Jr.


2) I. Benzinger, Die Bücher der Könige (KHAT), Tübingen: 1899, p. 131; K. Gallinger, “Der Ehrenname Elias und die Entrückung Elias,” ZTK LIII (1956), pp. 129-48; G. Westphal, “אֱלֹהַי לְבָנָה”, Orientalische Studien Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag, Vol. II, Gieszen: 1906, p. 724. R. Kittel, (Die Bücher der Könige (HAT), Göttingen: 1900, pp. 188-89), who correctly sees the heavenly army as the basis for the chariots and horses of fire here and in chapter VI, fails to see that the warrior title of the prophet also belongs in that context although he does admit there may be some relationship.