

What Flows

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November 20, 2017

Mic 2:6

(BHS)

אַל־תִּטְּפוּ יְטִיפוֹן
לְא־יִטְּפוּ לְאֵלֶּהָ
לֹא יִסַּג כְּלִמּוֹת:

(NIV)

“Do not prophesy,” their prophets say.
“Do not prophesy about these things;
disgrace will not overtake us.”

“Prophesy” is from the weak *Pe-nun* (google it) verb *nataph*. Both times in line 1 it is a verb, despite NIV. “Prophesy ye not, they prophesy” (Darby). Prophets are prophesying that Micah should stop prophesying. The Judeans and their prophets did not want to hear any negative prophesying. They preferred their own positive outlook.

Those of you who have studied Hebrew may be experiencing cognitive dissonance. This is not the word for “prophesy” that you learned your first year in seminary (*naba'*; and as a noun: *nabi'*. Remember?) Translations convey this different ways. “Quit your preaching” (Holman); “Do not speak out” (NASB); “Don’t say such things” (NLT).

All of these are good, but there is something lost in translation. Although *nataph* does mean prophesy a few times elsewhere, often it means “to flow” or “to drip.” “The clouds *dropped* water” (Judg 5:4); “mountains shall *drip* sweet wine” (Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13); “the heavens *poured down rain*” (Psa 68:8).

Take a look at Prov 5:3. The adulteress’ lips “drip honey”—a symbol for the smoothness and seductiveness of her speech (see also Job 29:22; Song 4:11). Perhaps in Micah some sort of double entendre is intended. Preaching or prophesying is also “flowing” or “dripping.”

Mic 2:11 reads, “If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, ‘I will preach (*nataph*) to you of wine and strong drink,’ he would be the preacher (*nataph*) for this people!” The people of Judah wanted a prophet who would flow for them wine and beer. To paraphrase 2:6 and 2:11, “‘Stop dripping,’ say the pourers. ‘Do not stream these things, for disgrace will not overtake us’ ... If one says, ‘I will decant for you wine and beer,’ he would be just the pitcher for this people!” To be popular as a preacher was to pour out intoxicating drink.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Couldn’t Micah have made the same charge against our own generation? Keep it flowing, without word of consequences. Keep dripping the intoxicant. Stay anesthetized. I never will be held responsible. I don’t have to think about trouble ahead. Jesus said much the same thing about his own generation. He told his critics that they listen to anyone and everyone except him (John 5:43).

But Jesus also stood up and preached, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37 – 38). You don’t have to go thirsty. Jesus flows the Spirit for you.

The only question is, for what are you thirsty? What satisfies that thirst? Are you thirsty for the things of God? If so, God promises that your thirst will be substantially quenched in this life, and fully in the life to come. But if your thirst is for beer and wine—and pleasures and accolades and perks of this life—then you will remain more or less dry in this life, with (according to Micah) inevitable future parching and disgrace.

Most of us, I think, are of two minds. We do genuinely thirst for the things of God, but we also want to find satisfaction in this world too much—and are willing to sin to get it. We daily struggle between these impulses. But the part of us who desires to know God gradually gains ground. This struggle will continue until Jesus returns, and we are seated at his table, to drink with him in his kingdom. It is to that fully satisfying libation we press on. Amen,
Flow Lord Jesus!