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THESIS SUMMARY

MIKLÓS ÁDÁM

THE RELATIONSHIP OF PROPHETIC OFFICE AND INTERCESSION

IS IT A DUTY OF THE PROPHET TO INTERCEDE?

– Dissertatio ad doctoratum –

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In our present dissertation, we deal with the issues of prophethood and intercession. As far as the framework of the dissertation allows, we examine prophethood, its nature, its divine selection, and the responsibilities given to prophets arising from it. In a similar way, we examine the phenomenon of intercession, we map out what exactly intercession means, what belongs to it and what does not, in which cases it can be used, what is its “nature” and what are the criteria for its success. Next, we deal with the relationship between prophethood and intercession, prophetic intercessions, and the question of how prophethood includes intercession, to what extent do prophets intercede, how do they view this mode of mediation, how do they relate to it in the light of their own mission, or to put it another way, how much does the prophet consider, and to what extent does the Holy Scriptures consider it the duty of the prophet to intercede. In our paper, we analyze the issue both at the level of general and specific cases, that is, we examine specific scriptural texts that report on intercession, and based on these and reflecting on them, we formulate general rules regarding intercession, prophethood and their relationship.

1. In the second chapter examining the nature and “functioning mechanisms” of mediation and intercession, the first statement we want to examine is the differences between the Israelite religious mediation system and the Near Eastern practices of the time. It seems necessary to make the distinction for the sake of the basic statement of the dissertation (intercession does not belong to prophethood). It is necessary to make distinctions between the positions of mediators and the various mediator tasks within the scope of mediation, this makes our main thesis comprehensible at the first place. In order to prove this basic statement, we primarily rely on the scriptural texts themselves, which prove the difference between mediator roles and mediation tasks (about the differentiation of the mediators see e.g. 2Chron 26:18; Jer 18:18; Dt 17:15-19, about the different tasks of the different mediators see e.g. Dt 18:10-15; Num 27:21; 1Sam 10:5-13).

2. We would also like to prove that there is no special vocabulary for intercession in the Scriptures. We demonstrate this by examining the vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible, studying the context of each “technical term” and its resulting general meaning. In this regard, another significant confirmation is that the LXX also uses general expressions belonging to the semantic field of prayer in the texts informing about the execution of intercession, and the Latin translations follow the practice of the Hebrew and Greek versions in this respect, even though we know that in Latin a *terminus technicus* exists for intercession (*intercedere*).

3. We would also like to prove that, contrary to the general opinion, the act of intercession in the Old Testament only rarely *replaces* the sinner’s repentance but presupposes it explicitly or inclusively in significant and generally known passages. An example of this is

Gen 20, in which Abimelech repents in advance, Hezekiah's prayer (2Kgs 18) and his previous religious reform efforts can illustrate the truth of this statement, and Samuel's prayer for Saul in 1Sam 15 can be interpreted in the same manner.

4. We also examine the intercession of the prophet Amos, in connection with which a part of the scholarly community takes the position that the intercession should be considered successful, while the other part holds the opposite opinion. We ourselves take the latter position, and our judgment is based on the examination of the relevant text, as well as on the fate of the party in need of intercession (Samaria) and on the small degree of the change of judgment as a result of the prophet's prayer.

5. In the chapter discussing the relationship between prophethood and intercession, we prove the main claim of our dissertation, namely that the institution of prophethood does not have the obligation to perform intercession, in several steps. As a first statement, we study why the position before God alone is not a sufficient reason to regard the prophet as an intercessor *ex officio*. In this section, we draw attention to the institutionalization of the mediators' positions, from which it follows that the duty of intercession (if such a thing exists) cannot be limited to the prophet exclusively because he or she stands before God. In addition, we also apply a logical argument: if the intercession and the fulfillment of his words are both indicators of the prophet's credibility, then the two criteria can work simultaneously in only one case: if the prophet proclaims peace in a time of peace. However, this is rarely the case for the prophets of Israel.

6. We also want to prove that intercession, insofar as it is a duty arising from the office of a mediator, is, based on the scriptural passages available to us, connected in a much more natural and integral way to the institution of the priesthood, which, by its orientation and basic tasks, often positions itself in a situation suitable for intercession. Furthermore, we claim that one of the, if not the most outstanding, feasts related to the priesthood, the uppermost manifestation of the priestly service, the celebration of the Day of Atonement in Israel is atonement, which in terms of its essence and its rite differs little (if it differs at all) from intercession (which is therefore not simply a task of the priesthood, but its highest manifestation). To prove this, we examine and explain the relevant texts of the Scriptures again. On the other hand, in the prophetic self-interpretation and in the divine commands related to the vocation stories, we do not find even a hint of the *duty* of intercession.

7. We also want to prove that the primary task of prophethood is to inform the people, so we must also understand prophetic intercessions within this framework. In proving this statement, we are helped by the texts that present the prophet's job in this way (e.g. Jer 37; Jer 42; 1Kgs 22; 2Kgs 3).

8. We also state that the prophets in Israel are characterized by compassion *with God*, that is, in the basic behavior and attitude of the prophet, his primary task is to emphasize unity with God. He must represent God in front of the people, not only with his message, but also with his life, and this makes it especially problematic to connect the role of intercession to the prophethood while taking into account the humanity of the mediator.

9. Gen 20:7 calls Abraham a prophet in the context of intercession, but we prove that the two statements are not primarily related to each other. To prove this, we use the tools of textual criticism, the examples found in parallel Ancient Near Eastern literature, and the explanation of the text, which points out: We must understand Abraham's prophetic quality in a different way than the Scriptures usually use the term.

10. In the case of Moses and Samuel, we show that the mediation categories we use cannot be applied uncritically to the two great mediators of Israel, given that their role as mediators includes all the tasks of mediation (we present this with a bunch of texts), so the approach that considers their intercessions as manifestations of their prophetic office, is a preliminary assumption that the text neither confirms nor refutes (since it does not formulate and think along these categories).

11. In the case of the prophet Ezekiel, we want to prove that the term used in Ez 13:5 "standing in the breach" is not (primarily) an expression of the (failed) intercessory task of the prophets. We support this statement by examining the statement's immediate context, i.e. the direct explanation of what the prophet meant by "standing in the breach" (Eze 13:4-11). In addition to the correctness of our statement, it can be considered as further evidence that in Eze 22:30 God repeats the expression through the prophet, but this time not in relation to the prophets, while the meaning of the statement, emerging from the immediate context and the parallel wording of Jer 5, is still not "intercession."

12. In the fourth chapter of the dissertation, we make statements about Jeremiah, the person. The first of these is that Jeremiah does not intercede because it is the prophets' duty, in fact, it is more likely to say that in the times after the exile, intercession is understood as a prophetic task because Jeremiah interceded. However, Jeremiah did not do this because he felt it as his prophetic duty, but different reasons prompted him to act as an intercessor.

According to our approach, the historical situation in which Jeremiah operates is serious and, according to the prophet's interpretation, threatens with potentially irreversible consequences, and in this situation, all means should be used to avoid punishment (the reality of which only a few people, apart from the prophet, are willing to acknowledge), including intercession too. In addition, Jeremiah's self-interpretation may be determined by his family's

priestly identity, which, for the reasons discussed in the previous chapter, may be determined by the priestly understanding of the *obligation* to intercede. This priestly identity is also fraught with traumas, since Jeremias is a successor of Abiathar, and more distantly Eli, a priestly family that was hit with a curse that has never been revoked. However, this also directs Jeremiah's attention to Samuel, with whom Jeremiah likes to identify himself, and who saw intercession as his forced duty, and the possibility of suspending intercession was understood by Samuel for himself as a sin. Even more markedly, however, the prophet identifies with the mediator who is the intercessor *par excellence* in the history of Israel: Moses. In other words, the prophet does not exercise the service of intercession as a consequence of the prophetic *munus*, but for the reasons just listed, in contrast to the other prophets, who actually interceded only rarely.

In support of the above statements, we cite textual evidence and contexts that point to data potentially relevant to the Prophet's self-interpretation. We also use linguistic approach when we try to establish possible connections between different texts. In particular, we are helped by rarely used expressions, the possible meaning of which thus moves within a more limited framework, and which are thus suitable for proving the relationships that may have influenced the prophet's understanding of himself.

13. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, we find some texts in which the God of Israel expressly forbids the prophet to intercede. Our claim regarding these sections is as follows: historical data helps us understand the bans; they point to the historical contexts that prompt God to forbid the prophet to intercede. There are reasons to assume that the prohibitions occurred in 607 B.C. (Jer 7:16 – Jehoiakim's ascension to the throne and the "party" of the *'Am ha'aretz* falling into the background), in 601 (Jer 14:11 – Jehoiakim's termination of the Babylonian vassal alliance) and in 594 (Jer 11:14 – Zedekiah takes part in an anti-Babylonian conspiracy) are uttered in three years when the turn of Jerusalem "politics" toward Egyptian direction brings the possibility of the destruction of the city by Babylon close to realization. To prove this statement, we primarily examine the internal connections found in the book of Jeremiah, as well as the connections between Jer and 2Kgs, but we also pay a lot of attention to the prohibitions themselves, to establish their exact meaning and the circumstances of their birth.

14. In the dissertation, we also claim that the reason for the prohibitions in the book of Jeremiah is not that God has decided in advance to carry out the punishment. Although in the case of some texts we do not consider this interpretation to be wrong, Jer generally shows a different attitude. When we make this claim, we do so on the horizon of our understanding of the Holy Scriptures regarding prophecy, which testifies that the future-revealing words of the prophet serve to change the present and thus avoid the visioned events, which is therefore an

option according to the conviction of the prophet. Jeremiah himself behaves in the book named after him (even in the days of the siege) as if he believed that the punishment, i.e. the destruction of the city, could still be avoided.

15. We also want to refute the approach that attributes too much influencing power to the intercession, which would hinder God in the carrying out of his plan, that is, in the destruction of the city. This view is contradicted by the fact of the destruction of the city, while Jer reveals that the prophet did not stop using the tool of intercession (because logically, that is why it was forbidden to him on three different occasions). But this assumption is also contradicted by the conviction of the Bible, which never portrays intercession as coercion, but always as dialogue. Our method therefore also in these cases reflects on the immediate context of the examined texts, as a further step we study the meanings emerging from the wider context of the book named after the prophet Jeremiah, and as a final approach we look at the understanding of the Scriptures regarding these concepts.

16. As a final statement, we formulate the approach that can serve as a middle way in understanding the importance of intercession between the – perhaps somewhat extreme – approaches mentioned in the two paragraphs above. Our prerogative is the following: intercession is not an independent event, it has antecedents, goals and consequences. If the subject of the intercession is the people for whom the mediator stands before God, the object of the intercession is often some sin that has punishment and consequences. Based on the sections we have examined, the purpose of intercession is most often to postpone the punishment, which can give the people the opportunity to realize their sin, repent and act in accordance with the divine will with new actions to create new consequences, which make the punishment obsolete. (After all, the punishment itself is done with a purpose.) However, from the book of Jeremiah, a picture emerges of a Judah that would interpret the postponement of the punishment as the absence of the sin, which understanding would result in the continuation of the sinful behavior, but this would only add to the seriousness of the punishment, putting the entire existence of the people in danger. According to our approach, intercession is therefore an unsuitable tool in the situation outlined in the book of Jeremiah, and that is why God forbids it. When proving this final point, in addition to the already listed methods, we use the already proven theorems of the dissertation, with the help of which, on the one hand, logically, and on the other hand, by correctly deducing the meaning of the text, the validity of this statement can be seen.

Therefore, the dissertation does not simply aim to refine a general, but in our view, not entirely correct understanding (regarding the relationship between prophethood and

intercession), but also reveals (at least partially) the reasons for the birth of this understanding, and it also provides a deeper insight into the nature of intercession as well as of prophecy, and the way they are related, while also enabling a more accurate understanding of such important biblical characters as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, or the prophet Jeremiah.