Jacobs, Mignon R.

The Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah

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John T. Willis
Abilene Christian University
Abilene, TX 79699

Jacobs advocates that the structure of the final form of the book of Micah demonstrates that this prophetic book has a conceptual coherence. The book of Micah is the product of redactors who reconceptualized earlier materials and purposely organized them in a specific order to proclaim their message to their audiences. These earlier materials include competing and sometimes contradicting perspectives, but the very incorporation of these clashing perspectives into a single work assumes an overarching perspective of the final redactors, who used textual and substantive (conceptual) elements to achieve their purposes. The coherence of this book and its conceptuality are not the same thing; coherence is a manifestation of conceptuality. Coherence is inherently conceptual, and a hearer or reader may perceive it by means of “the structure and conceptual interconnectedness of the units of a work.” It consists of “the interrelationship of the parts of a work to create an overall logical unity” (226). A small unit of the book of Micah may be coherent, but its function in the book is the role it plays in the book’s larger conceptual framework.

After brief acknowledgments, a list of abbreviations of works cited, and an introduction sketching the content of the volume, Jacobs divides her main work into three parts, the first and third containing two chapters each, and the second containing three chapters.
Part 1 surveys a history of research on the book of Micah relevant to the concerns of this book and a description of Jacobs’s method. Part 2 discusses the structure and coherence of the book of Micah, then the levels of coherence in chapters 1–5 and 6–7. Part 3 treats concepts and conceptuality, ending with a synthesis and conclusion. The volume concludes with an appendix containing Jacobs’s translation of the book of Micah with text-critical notes, a nine-page bibliography, and indices of biblical references and modern authors cited in the work.

Applying “the method of concept-critical analysis” (54) to the book of Micah, Jacobs contends that the “macro-structure” of this prophetic book is chapters 1–5 and 6–7. The perspective of chapters 1–5 is universal in that these chapters begin by viewing Israel as one of the nations summoned by Yahweh in 1:2 (101–2) and conclude by proclaiming that Yahweh will unleash his vengeance on the nations that do not obey him in 5:14 (156). Israel’s leaders are the source of Israel’s sin, and Jerusalem is the center of Yahweh’s judgment and hope. The perspective of chapters 6–7 is particularistic, characterized by a concern about how the nations will understand Israel’s destruction. The concern for Israel’s fate binds together the two parts of the book. The “concepts” that hold the book together are justice, sin, judgment, and hope, but the “conceptuality” of the book of Micah is both judgment and hope, which concerns the fate of Israel, affected both by Israel’s sin and by God’s response to Israel’s sin. God’s judgment, then, affects Israel’s existence, but judgment is not God’s last work; beyond judgment is hope rooted in and springing from God’s mercy and forgiveness (222–23).

Jacobs’s work is an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue concerning the structure of the book of Micah and books of the Hebrew Bible in general. Several issues deserve further discussion. Jacobs refers to her approach as “the method of concept-critical analysis” (54) or “the concept-critical method” (196), but is this approach really a new “method”? Is it not rather another way of doing Redaktionsgeschichte (redaction criticism)? By and large, contemporary scholarship has abandoned the idea prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that redactors of biblical books preserved earlier materials handed down to them with no concern for orderly arrangement, adding words, phrases, or paragraphs here and there for little or no apparent reason. Scholars now think of redactors as “authors” who used, reapplied, adapted, and modified materials handed down to them in order to proclaim a specific message to their audiences and thus as theologians; Jacobs uses this approach (229).

Jacobs summarizes the message of the redactors of the book of Micah under the rubrics of justice, sin, judgment, and hope. Certain aspects of Jacobs’s work call for clarification and further discussion. Her work calls for a more thorough description of the community or communities addressed by these redactors. Jacobs points out that references to “the
The four main concepts Jacobs finds in the book of Micah—justice, sin, judgment, and hope—appear in all the major prophetic books, and thus these categories are only partially helpful in understanding the message of the book of Micah. Would it not be preferable to discuss the concepts that actually occur in this book in dealing with the major categories? These are: justice (3:1, 8, 9; 6:8; as on pp. 197–202), sin (1:5, 13; 3:8; 6:7; 7:18; etc.; as on pp. 203–8), divine punishment (1:5; 2:3–5; 3:4, 6–7, 12; 6:13–16; see pp. 208–16), gathering the scattered “flock” (2:13–13; 4:6–8; 5:3–5; 7:14) or “remnant” (2:12–13; 4:6–7; 5:2, 6–7; 7:18) from exile, restoring devastated Zion (4:1–5, 7–8, 10, 11–13; 7:11), reviving the crushed Davidic dynasty and with it Yahweh’s kingship (2:13; 4:7–8, 9; 5:1–5), defeating (4:13; 5:4–5, 7–8, 14; 7:8–10, 16–17) or converting (4:1–5) the nations, and forgiving the sins of Israel (7:18–20).

The function of Mic 2:12–13 in the book is problematic. Jacobs follows David G. Hagstrom (The Coherence of the Book of Micah: A Literary Analysis [SBLDS 89; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 85) in arguing that this passage is a “semi-climax”; that is, it announces hope for the remnant but does not constitute a major division in the book (71). This supports her division of the book into two parts: chapters 1–5 and 6–7. However, it seems more likely that 2:12–13 is a summary of Yahweh’s promises to his people, which will be expanded and explained in chapters 4–5 and 7:7–20, indicating that the book falls into three parts: A—a long doom section (1:2–2:11) followed by a short hope section (2:13–13); B—a short doom section (ch. 3) followed by a long hope section (chs. 4–5); and A’—a long doom section (6:1–7:6) followed by a short hope section (7:7–20).

This volume is well done, yet the proofreader(s) failed to detect numerous printing errors, such as the omission of “Bemerkungen” before “über” on page 18, notes 21 and 22; “Zeigler” instead of “Ziegler” on page 30, note 71, line 3 and page 265 under Rudolph; “Katholischen” instead of “Katholische” on page 30, note 71, line 3; “daughters”
instead of “daughter” on page 155, line 10; “low to anger” instead of “slow to anger” on page 211, line 6; “Eineitung” instead of “Einleitung” on page 260 under Bleek; “Vandenboeck” instead of “Vandenhoeck” on page 261 under Duhn; “Davie” instead of “Davies” on page 161 under Durham.

On the whole, Jacobs’s work on the conceptual coherence of the book of Micah is well worth careful consideration. Her contributions to research on this little prophetic book are invaluable.