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Hammering Swords into Plowshares: A Metaphor for Peace in the Prophetic Literature

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Abstract: While there are numerous passages on God of the Hebrew Bible being conceived as “a mighty warrior” who engages actively in wars and flights on behalf of Israel against the nations in the so-called “holy war traditions”, one can also cite the reversal of war in the vision of Isaiah and Micah in their literary formulation of fostering peace and harmony with a metaphorical articulation of hammering military weapon of war into agricultural instrument of production. This article aims at studying the metaphor of beating of swords into plowshares as a vision of peace in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 in connection with Joel’s reversal of the metaphor in his call for a total war. The fluidity of the metaphor for peace and the polyphonic nature of texts stand out as characteristics of the biblical traditions as these three prophets or their prophetic communities have handed down to us. The passages also revealed their different historical dimensions and the contextual concerns of the communities that inscribe and preserve the textual heritage. In a word, texts, especially those written in the Hebrew Bible, are historically and culturally conditioned. It is also found that metaphors for war and peace persist throughout the biblical tradition with their roots going back to the Mesopotamian and Northwestern Semitic background of a divine warrior who flights on behalf of his or her own people to bring about peace and redemption from the enemies. The notion was adopted and reused in the eschatological imagination of “the Day of YHWH”.

Key Words: Prophetic Literature, Hammering Swords into Plowshares, Peace Metaphors, The Day of YHWH