

死の克服:カルデヤ人の場合
(イザヤ書 47 章 8-9 節)

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ABSTRACT D. T. Tsumura, “Overcoming the Death: the Case of the Chaldeans” (Isaiah 47:8-9).

How to overcome death has been the major concern of human beings throughout the history. Isaiah 47:8-9 indirectly refers to the method used by the ancient Babylonians to overcoming the power of death. The prophet Isaiah criticizes their boastful attitude with irony, saying that they will be destroyed despite their confidence that neither widowhood (אַלְמָנָה) nor childlessness (שְׁבוּלָה) fall on them.

These two terms appear in a Ugaritic ritual text (KTU 12.3/UT 52), and the paired concepts are known from an Aramaic incantation text on a magic bowl from the time of the Sassanian Persian (Montgomery Text 3:2 f.). In both texts, the power of a divine being who brings death to human beings is symbolized by two weapons, i.e. the weapon of widowhood and the weapon of loss of children.

The Ugaritians tried to overcome death ritually by cutting down the vine which symbolizes the god Death-and-Evil. Such a practice of imitation is called “sympathetic magic”. In that Aramaic magic bowl, the angel of death, who holds the weapons in his hands, is conjured by an incantation.

In the light of these extra-biblical religious practices, we may better understand what kind of message the prophet Isaiah tried to convey to his contemporaries. Exegetically, שְׁבוּלָה means “the loss of children” rather than “sterility” and has nothing to do with the motif of fertility. Hence, “a childless widow” refers to a widow who lost her children, not to a woman who has never had a child and then lost her

husband.

The prophet Isaiah thus warns the Chaldaeans, i.e. the Babylonians, about how empty and vain are their magical practices which try to overcome the power of death. Yahweh certainly abhors such idolatrous practices as being “abomination” to him: see Deut 18:10-11.