

LITURGICAL TRADITIONS IN MIC.7

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I.

THE understanding of Mic.7¹ was helped considerably in the year 1924, when Hermann Gunkel published a study of 7:7-20.² In opposition to the predominant "literary critical" method of separating Biblical material into different sources, Gunkel wanted to use this passage to demonstrate the "literary historical" approach which he wished to carry through in the sphere of Old Testament research. His purpose was not to distinguish between primary written sources of a Biblical book, but to observe the representative forms (*Gattungen*) which occur in the text, to determine the practical basis for the origin of the textual elements and the milieu in which they were transmitted (the *Sitz im Leben*), and to deal with the text as a whole organically and not mechanically. His approach was in fact what has later come to be known as "form criticism." Gunkel brilliantly demonstrated that the whole passage, Mic.7:7-20, can be understood as a homogeneous composition. He thought of a poem in four parts which had been artistically composed and constructed like a liturgy to be used at one of Jerusalem's mourning festivals.³

¹ This paper is based on a study published in Swedish several year ago, "Mik.7 såsom 'messiansk' text med särskild hänsyn till Matt.10:35f. och Luk. 12:53," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 12 (1947), 279-302. Dr. John T. Willis of Nashville, Tennessee, used the original for his dissertation, and with the intention to make it available to readers not familiar with the Swedish language he sent the author a most accurate English translation. The author has now revised the contents, leaving out passages of interest only for the original readers, and inserting references to recent publications. He wants to express his sincere gratitude to Dr. Willis for his translation and suggestions.

² H. GUNKEL, *Der Micha-Schluss. Zur Einführung in die literaturgeschichtliche Arbeit am Alten Testament*, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik* 2 (1924), 145-78. [English translation: *The Close of Micah: A Prophetic Liturgy, What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays* (1928), 115-49. Tr.]

³ GUNKEL, *op. cit.*, 176. F. PRAETORIUS, *Zum Micha-Schluss*, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik* 3 (1924), wrote a sequel to Gunkel's essays, but limited his investigation to the metrical problem, 72f.

Several authors have also seen that Mic.7 is a liturgical type.⁴ It is evident that it contains an alternation of voices, and in general the style is very similar to Near Eastern sacral texts. Gunkel's thesis that Mic.7:7–20 is a liturgical composition points in the right direction.

Like many scholars, Gunkel did not connect Mic.7:1–6 with the rest of chapter 7.⁵ He thought that these first six verses contained "a violent invective of the prophet," and therefore were not of the same liturgical character as that which follows them.⁶ But these verses are not an "invective" at all, but rather a lament reflecting a time of adversity which results in a general desolation and confusion of the land. The passage begins with "Woe is me," and the speaker then describes the way he must suffer from the abnormal conditions around him. Now, there is considerable difficulty in assuming that the "I" who speaks is the prophet as only an individual. "I" occurs several times in verses 7–20 in precisely the same way, and Gunkel did not think that it should be identified with the prophet there. He interpreted it as a voice in the liturgical responsory, and there is no reason why the "I" of verses 1–6 should not be treated in the same way.⁷ In this case, nothing prevents our understanding Mic.7 in its entirety as a liturgical text.

There are details which support this interpretation. It is scarcely possible to understand the positive reply in Mic.7:4b as an answer directed to the prophet: "But on the day of your watchmen, when your visitation comes"; for a prophet does not have any "watchmen." Furthermore, there is evidence of an interrelationship between vv.1–6, which express a longing for a change in the present state of affairs, and the details of vv. 7–20, which give repeated information of what this change will involve. The "day" mentioned in v.4 recurs in vv.11f. And the

⁴ Among others G. HYLMÖ, *De s.k. profetiska liturgiernas rytm, stil och komposition*, I (1929), 10.

⁵ Those scholars who make a break between Mic.7:1–6 and 7:7–20 have often relied on J. WELLHAUSEN's verdict in *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* 5 (1892), 145.: Judgment and salvation prophecies are not allowed to come from the same mouth.

⁶ GUNKEL, *op. cit.*, 152.

⁷ J. LINDBLOM, *Micha literarisch untersucht* (1929), 10, emphasized that prophetic revelations are not to be treated as publications according to our logical standards, and yet separated Mic.7:1–6 and 7–20.

main reason for combining vv.1-6 and vv.7-20 is the quite natural possibility to bring out the characteristics of a homogeneous liturgical composition with a cultic background and with analogies in the system of worship in Israel and the ancient Near East. On the other hand, in examining the text of the preceding chapter, it becomes quite clear that there is no real connection between Mic.6 and 7. Neither the psalmodic "I" nor the responsory style occurs in chapter 6, but in the whole of chapter 7 these elements are fundamental.

An attempt may here be made to illustrate the advantage of assuming that Mic.7 is a unity and depends on ritual traditions connected with some liturgy, perhaps of a regular festival.

It seems probable that a festival which took place in the autumn at the end of harvest was in the background of Mic.7. V.1 refers to the after-gleanings and says that there is no more fruit. As such allusions to nature are characteristic of many ancient rituals, there is a reason to connect the Micah text with Israel's New Year Festival that was celebrated in the autumn after harvest (Ex.23:16, 34:22). Pentateuch passages of different age indicate that this festival involved two aspects: ceremonies of expiation concentrated on the Day of Atonement, and ceremonies of thanksgiving represented by the Feast of Tabernacles (Ex.29:29-37; Lev.16:29-34, 23:24-36; Num. 29:1-39; Deut. 31:10-13).

These elements of the festival evidently contained more and richer concepts than those mentioned in the principal sources of the Pentateuch. On the basis of a comparison with liturgical psalms and historical texts, one may assume that kings and priests took some active part in such ceremonies (Ps. 22:1-32 "David"; Ps.118:1-29 the house of Aaron, tents, branches; 1 Kings 8:22-66 Solomon, tabernacles; 12:32f. Jeroboam, tabernacles). The negative and positive aspects of the festival may further be compared with a structure characteristic of many prophetic oracles in their present form, and this is the dramatic combination of judgment and salvation prophecies. It is found in documents of very different age (Am.9:1-15, Isa.29:1-24, Mic.2:1-13, Zeph. 3:1-20, Zech.14:1-21, etc.), and thus seems to have been a natural tradition.

Mic.7 also contains two aspects of this kind. First it deals with the desolation of the land and the sinfulness of all men; then among other things it mentions the rebuilding of the demolished walls, the subjection of hostile people, and God's forgiveness of Israel's sins. The central figure speaking and acting in the text must first go down into the darkness, v.8; afterward he is raised up, and the Lord receives universal homage, vv.9ff. It is not necessary to argue that this central figure of Mic.7 should be the king, for it was always possible that the high priest, the prophet, or some other person assumed the ceremonial functions of the king (what British scholars have called disintegration and democratization).⁸ But certainly the central figure, the "I" of Mic.7, represents the land and the people as intimately as the king would have done in a temple service. This transition is not uncommon in Old Testament writings (e.g., Lev.16, Zech. 3f.), and is often found in Psalms of Penitence and of Innocence.⁹

By thus connecting Mic.7 with Old Testament liturgical traditions, a natural basis for understanding the text is attained. One must not believe that Micah (or the prophet behind this chapter) composed the oracle directly for a liturgical service. It may well be a prophetic imitation of traditional liturgical formulae. But in every passage, the ritual perspective facilitates a realistic understanding of the prophecy, as will be demonstrated by a more detailed examination.

II.

The first part of Mic.7 contains a lament over the desolation and corruption of the land, vv.1-4a. It is significant that when the speaker says "Woe is me" in v.1, he not only feels responsible for the corruption of the people, vv.2-4a, but also depicts himself as devastated as the land after the harvest: "Woe is me, for I have become as (*hāyîti kē*) [at] the gathering of the summer

⁸ S. H. HOOKE, *The Myth and Ritual Pattern of the Ancient Near East*, *Myth and Ritual* (1933), 6. The idea was taken over by Scandinavian scholars, for instance A. HALDAR, *Associations of Cult Prophets among the Ancient Semites* (1945), 92ff.

⁹ I. ENGNELL, *Gamla Testamentet* I (1945), 58.

fruit, As [at] the after-gleaning of the summer harvest. There is no cluster to eat, [No] firstling fig [such as] my appetite¹⁰ desires" (Mic.7:1). To some extent this undoubtedly concerns the land, as is quite clear by the way in which the desolation is described in the verse and also from the discussion in vv.2ff. about the disappearance of all moral order from the land. However, the after-gleaning, etc., is certainly used as a picture for a desolation of another type: otherwise there would not be that comparative "as" (*kē*) found in the first verse. Isaiah has a parallel which explains the connection in an interesting way: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the glory of Jacob shall be diminished, and the fatness of his body shall become thin. And it (or he) shall be as (*hāyāh kē*) [at] the gathering of the corn harvest, when the arm of the reaper cuts off the ears. And it (he) shall be as when one plucks ears in the valley of Rephaim, and an after-gleaning is left there, as when one beats down olives," etc. (Isa.17:4-6a). It is clear from the context that the subject of this passage is devastation by enemies. Then in the Isaiah apocalypse the same type of scenery is found to be a picture for the great future devastation of the earth: "as when one beats down olives," etc. (Isa.24:13). In a similar way the devastation in Mic.7:1 must be regarded as something more serious than the bareness after the natural harvest and the breaking on of autumn on the fields and in the gardens. This passage refers to external ravages (since in vv.8ff. certain enemies are mentioned) as well as to inner corruption (since in vv.2ff. general dissolution of morality is deplored): and both aspects should be considered at once (compare below). Eissfeldt suggests the catastrophe of Samaria in 732 or 722 B.C.¹¹ But here one must accept the possibility that the devastation of nature and the corruption of

¹⁰ In this passage, "my palate" is probably the literal meaning, for the basic sense of *nēpēs* seems to be "throat," "mouth," etc. This can be deduced from passages like Isa.5:14, Hab.2:5 (to open one's mouth), Numb.11:6 (our throat is dry, i.e., languishes because it has no food but manna), Prov.6:30 (to fill one's palate, viz., with food); cf. further Num.21:5, Isa.29:8, 55:2, Jer.31:25, Ez.4:14, Ps.69:11, Job 10:1, Prov.10:3, 27:7. Of course in other passages it can also be translated by "soul," as is usually done. It does not alternate so much in the context.

¹¹ O. EISSFELDT, Ein Psalm aus Nord-Israel, Micha 7,7-20, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 112 (1963), 264.

society were just illustrated by traditional references to enemies, as is often true of Old Testament and other Near Eastern religious texts when there is a question of the destruction of the land, the people and the temple. We think particularly of a prophecy against the people and the temple (Am.9:1) which stands in a decidedly eschatological context (9:2-6). Details found in the following verses confirm that Mic.7:1 also expects the land to lament over its desolation by ravages from without and by dissolution from within, because the prophet is thinking of an eschatological drama.

It is remarkable that here the land is even presented in a personified form. This is indicated by the word "my appetite" (*naṣṣî*); as the land has no appetite, a personal figure identified with the land must be speaking here. Many scholars have seen this, and thought of the central figure in the text as being Zion — a very debatable assumption, since the prophet neither mentions nor implies the name of Zion. On the contrary, the names of Carmel, Bashan, and Gilead in v.14 give the prophecy a northern perspective, and for good reasons it has been placed in the Northern Kingdom.¹² Therefore, in Mic.7:1 one had better think of a personal incarnation of the people and the country, so that the prophet speaks as if he were the king or the high priest representing Israel and the Holy Land. This function of the protagonist makes it possible to understand the words of v.8, which sound as if they were taken over from a Psalm of "David": "Even if I fall, yet I shall arise, and even if I sit in darkness, yet the Lord will shine for me" (see below). But if the prophet is central in the text as replacing the king or the high priest, we certainly have not moved very far away from the perspective obtained by those who make Zion central, although there is that geographical difference mentioned above. For in several respects the king of Israel, understood in the Psalms as "David" (or Solomon), is also the center of the people and the country. The heathen will finally come before him in humility to pay homage,

¹² F. C. BURKITT, Micah 6 and 7 a Northern Prophecy, *JBL* 45(1926), 159ff.; EISSFELDT, *op. cit.*, 262-65. — A. BRUNO, *Micha und der Herrscher aus der Vorzeit* (1923), deals with the Judean location of the book, but does not discuss chapters 6 and 7.

just as they gather together at Zion (Ps.2:1-12, 3:1-9, 72:1-17, etc.; Isa.2:1-4, etc.).

A central figure like the one found in Mic.7:1 — one who is placed on a par with the land, has been mistreated and despoiled, and now bitterly laments his adversity — is especially characteristic of the Psalter. The psalmist often laments the fact that he has been ill-treated, but then praises his deliverance and victory in the Lord, just as Mic.7 later speaks of reparation and triumph (Ps.6:3-10, 9:14-21, 10:1, 15-18, 18:5-20, 22:7-32, 31:10-17, 32:3-7, 38:3-23, 69:1-37, 88:4-8, 89:39-52, 102:4-23, 116:3-14, 118:10-21, 143:3-12). Several passages of these Psalms allude to the drama of a king or a person thought in analogy with a king, especially when his triumph over the enemies of the people is mentioned (e.g., Ps.2:8, 22:28, 72:9-11).¹³ This partial connection with kingship has found expression in the subscription of many Psalms, "for David"¹⁴ (in Ps.72:1, "for Solomon"). Outside the Psalter, there are other texts which represent this remarkable oscillation between the person speaking and his people and country (e.g., Lam.3:1-66; note "my people" in vv.14, 48, "the country" v.34, "my city" v.51). There are good reasons to regard Mic.7:1 in a similar connection. Further analogies with the Psalter are prominent subsequently in our text.

The lament over general corruption and ungodliness presented in that which follows is a typical phenomenon in some of the Psalms of Lament, where the protagonist seems to be the king or a righteous man who speaks on behalf of the people. Generally the ungodliness exists among the heathen, but occasionally the wickedness of his own people is also mentioned (e.g., Ps.4:3, 5:5f., 10, 10:3-1, 12:2-6, etc.). In these contexts there is no

¹³ Among many studies published on this subject, a most valuable essay is still A. R. JOHNSON, *The Role of the King in the Jerusalem Cultus*, *The Labyrinth*, ed. by S. H. HOOKE (1935), 71-111.

¹⁴ Interpreted as "for the Davidic king" by S. MOWINCKEL, *Kongespsalmerne* (1916), 59f.; *Psalmstudien* (1924), 72ff.; I. ENGNELL, *Studies in Divine Kingship* (1943), 177. The analogy between *lê Dāwīd* and *lê Ba'al* in the Ras Shamra texts is also significant: A. LODS, *Quelques remarques sur les poèmes mythologiques de Ras Shamra et leurs rapports avec l'Ancien Testament*, *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 16(1936), 117; he did not interpret *lê* as referring to somebody's liturgical function, but as indicating a specific kind of text.

great distinction between the internal offenders and external enemies. They seem to occur freely alternating with each other in different Psalms, and they both provide a reason for the affliction of the righteous leading character, appear as his adversaries, and are the objects of his triumph in the following revolution. We find the same conditions prevailing in Mic.7. First of all the leading character laments over the corruption in society: "The godly have disappeared from the land, And a righteous one among men cannot be found. All lie in wait for blood. Each one hunts for his brother with a net," etc. (Mic.7:2-4a). Then v.4b says that these wicked persons will be punished and scattered in the day of revolution. V.8 is occupied with the speaker's adversaries under the name of "enemies," and v.10 also calls them "enemies." In these latter verses, the enemies are slanderers of the speaker's faith in God, and they are said to be put to shame, but then in vv.12-13 and 16-17 the same is said of the heathen. Presumably there is no significant difference between these two groups; the point is that the prophet suffers as a result of the general wickedness, has the wicked for adversaries, and will later triumph over them. It is a motif which is easily recognized from the Psalter.

When reading Mic.7:2-4 about the wickedness which rules in the land, one should notice that the text does not simply deplore the objective reality of wickedness in the country. Instead, the leading character himself suffers from the actions of these evil persons. This is evident from v.4b, where the description of the general wickedness is directly followed by a hopeful proclamation concerning the destruction of the violent, which shows that the speaker is heartily engaged in the matter: "But on the day of your watchmen, when your visitation comes, then their confusion will take place" (Mic.7:4b). That the "watchmen" are the prophets is certainly a most natural assumption which seems to be generally acknowledged. It is the prophets who look for the day when a revolution will take place. The word order also justifies our translating the following words (*p^equddātkā bā'āh*) as a temporal subordinate clause, coordinate with the preceding expression "on such and such a day," so that the following demonstrative "then" (*'attāh*) sums up these two tem-

poral determinations. “Visitation” would also seem to be the most probable meaning of the noun (*p^equddāh*), as is generally assumed. However, it seems impossible that this word has a passive meaning here, like “being visited” (Num.16:29). For if it has to do with the person speaking in the preceding, his “visitation” in a passive sense is already a past fact and not future. On the other hand, the sentence can be understood without altering the text (as many have done), if “you” is referred to God and “visitation” with its suffix is taken actively, thus giving the meaning of “your visiting” (them). In other contexts the verbal substantive (*p^equddāh*) has various active meanings (Num.3:36, 4:16; Isa.60:17; 1 Chron. 24:3). Above all there is clear analogy in the expression “on the day of my visitation” (*b^eyôm poqdî*), that is, when I visit them in order to punish them (Ex.32:34).¹⁵ It seems to be God who is addressed in the Micah sentence as “you” (thou), for this secures a most natural basis for the expressions “the day of your prophets” and “when your visitation comes.”

However this may be, it is clear that the revolution mentioned in Mic.7:4b means consolation for the one who has just lamented over the general corruption (vv.2–4a). This is a good reason for connecting the passage with vv.7–20, where the leading character’s rehabilitation and triumph over enemies is described again. It will be demonstrated below that vv.7–20 imply similar connections with passages in the Psalms of Lament. The parallelism also shows that the lament over the corruption of the people found in vv.2–4 is not a proclamation of punishment for the corruption addressed directly to the transgressors, but resembles the Psalms in their effusion of lament over the suffering brought about by ill-disposed people, an effusion which is accompanied by hopeful words about the humiliation of the enemies. This confirms our hypothesis that Mic.7 is based on traditions in which the king or his representative was the leading character.

The text continues with a renewal of the lament over the general sinfulness. It culminates in the dissolution of the most intimate family ties: “Do not believe your neighbor. Do not trust

¹⁵ Notice also the LXX’s translation of Mic.7:4b: αἱ ἐκδικήσεις σου ἤκασιν, νῦν ἔσονται κλαυθμοὶ αὐτῶν. The word ἐκδίκησις here seems to have an active meaning.

in a friend. From her who rests in your arms You must guard the doors of your mouth. For son despises father, Daughter rebels against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; The members of a man's household are his enemies" (Mic.7:5-6).

Striking parallels to these verses have been brought to light from Near Eastern, Old Testament, and Jewish literature.¹⁶ They prove that what is described is not so much the actual historical situation in the prophet's time as the situation which, according to current religious ideas, was thought to begin immediately before the "last time." For ancient man his "last time" might very well be understood as something eschatological, although the motif would recur periodically in the cult.

Among the important discoveries of Nineveh there are several tablets with statements about general chaos in family and society before the beginning of a new era. The text K.4541 is very pessimistic: "During such a rule brother will devour brother, parents will sell their children for money, all lands will fall into confusion, the husband will forsake his wife, the wife her husband, the mother will shut the door against her daughter." K.7861 says that "the brother will kill his brother with arms, and the friend his friend." K.8708 speaks in a similar way: "Brother will destroy brother, son father . . . mother daughter . . . the bride . . ." Several cuneiform texts of this kind have been found.¹⁷ H. Winckler, who compared a couple of them in particular with the quotation of the Micah passage in Matt.10:35, called the oracles in question a "formula intended to characterize the end of all things."¹⁸

In the Old Testament there are several indications of similar thinking. According to Isaiah, oppression will prevail during the period before the downfall of Jerusalem, so that the young will rebel against the old and the poor against the noble (Isa.3:5). A special form of the moral dissolution are the foolish pranks of Saturnalian character referred to by Isaiah when he says that "the young rebels against the old, the poor against the noble"

¹⁶ A. JEREMIAS, *Babylonisches im Neuen Testament* (1905), 97f.

¹⁷ C. BEZOLD, *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyondjik Collection of the British Museum II* (1891), 880, on K.7861.

¹⁸ H. WINCKLER, *Geschichte Israels I* (1895), 123.

(ibidem), and that a child becomes the ruler of the people (Isa. 3:4, 12, etc.).¹⁹ Jeremiah's lament over the daughter of his people (Jer. 8:23–9:5) shows that the motif was connected with some ritual customs. First the Lord himself, using the prophet as his spokesman, laments and weeps over the destruction of the land (8:23; cf. 14:17). Jeremiah then expresses his desire to withdraw to a secluded "lodge" (*mālôn*; "booth" and "lodge" are parallels in Isa. 1:8). As in Mic. 7, the social perversity is then characterized especially by these words: "Let everyone beware of his friend, let no one confide in his brother. For every brother is guilty of treachery, every friend goes about and gossips" (9:3). Later the prophet speaks of destruction in nature (9:9). These are rather important similarities with Mic. 7. Comparable material is also found in Jeremiah's lawsuit against God, in which the land is said to be mourning and withering because of its wicked inhabitants (Jer. 12:4). "For your brothers and your father's house, these also deal treacherously with you, these also call out after you with a loud voice; you must not trust in them, even if they speak good to you" (12:6). Destruction among men is further mentioned in other verses of the same chapter along with destruction in nature, as is also true of Mic. 7. The last passage of the prophecy of Malachi says that Elijah will come before the terrible day of the Lord, and will "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 3:24).²⁰ It is clear from this paragraph indirectly that family conflicts will characterize the last time.

The physical and moral destruction mentioned by these Old Testament prophets are merely two expressions of the chaos which prevails when the deity withdraws before the great day of regeneration.²¹

In the Apocrypha similar lines of thought are found, implying that the last time will bring dissolution of all social forms. Without the idea of a Messiah, but also in an eschatological context,

¹⁹ J. LINDBLOM has dealt with this motif of "the upside down world" in his *Profetismen i Israel* (1934), 675; in his *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (1962), 366f., he only says that popular ideas may lie behind the description of social dissolution.

²⁰ The similarity between Mic. 7:5f. and Mal. 3:24 is also mentioned by LINDBLOM, *Micha* (n.7), 127.

²¹ I. ENGNELL, *Studies*, 32 e.p.

the perverse strivings are mentioned in Jub.23:18. The Ethiopic Enoch 100:2 says that a father will be able to kill his son or grandson and a brother his most venerated brother. Enoch 99:5 even states that some people will cut their little children into pieces, and that parents in general will reject their offspring. The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 70:6c mentions that the members of the family will plot against each other. Syr.Bar.48:32 speaks of general rebellion "in those days," and 48:35-38 says that all honor will be turned into shame, and that arrogance and passion will seize the lower classes and they shall wreak devastation. According to 70:3-6b, people will hate each other and fight against one another, the contemptuous will rise against the noble, and a general confusion will ensue. IV Esdr.6:24 also states that friends will fight against each other. All these texts speak of the distress of the last time. Sometimes the Messiah is also connected with the drama told by the same writings (as in Syr.Bar.70:9), although he is not mentioned in the passages quoted here above.

Jewish traditions found in the Mishna and the Talmud confirm that such lines of thought were a current eschatological motif. In the material presented by Billerbeck, *Soṭa* 9:15 is quoted as a parallel to Matt.10:35:²² "Shortly before the Messiah's appearance insolence will be great and oppression will increase . . . Young men will insult old men to their face, old men shall have to get up for boys, the son will dishonor his father, the daughter will rebel against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and 'the members of a man's household are his enemies' (Mic.7:6). The behaviour of that generation will be like that of a dog in so far as the son is not ashamed before his father . . ." Similar words occur in *Sanhedrin* Fol.97f., *Derek Ereṣ* *Ṣuṭa* 6 and the Midrash to the Song of Songs 2:13 (101a). The traditionists mentioned belong to the first generations.

In the New Testament according to Q traditions, Jesus also quotes Mic.7:6 to illustrate the disagreement between the members of the same family which his disciples will often find when they preach the gospel (Matt.10:35-36, cf. 10; Luke 12:53).

²² P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament I* (1922), 586.

Micah is supposed to have known about the social tensions which all mankind will experience in the days of the Messiah. It is only natural with regard to several Jewish anticipations referred to above.

The lament over iniquity found in Mic.7:5-6 corresponds to a similar lament in the preceding verses, 2-4a.²³ And just as the first instance of lament is accompanied in v.4b by a hopeful statement about a coming revolution, so also there follows in the second instance a response of happier intonation: "But I will eagerly look for the Lord, I will anxiously wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me" (Mic.7:7). This is directly reminiscent of passages in the Psalter where the godly and righteous protagonist is said to wait for the Lord and to know that the Lord will hear him.²⁴ In one case "David" exclaims: "O God, you are my God, I seek after you. My soul thirsts after you. My flesh longs after you as²⁵ a dry land, languishing without water. So I seek for you in the sanctuary in order that I may see your power and glory" (Ps.63:2f.; notice then v.12: "And the king shall rejoice in God"). Many similar cases are found (Ps.4:2-4, 5:4, 6:7-10, 17:15, 25:2,5,21, 27:13f., 37:34 ["wait for the Lord, take heed to his way, and he will lift you up to possess the land; you will see the ungodly uprooted"], 38:16, 39:8, 40:2, etc.).²⁶ These affinities with the Psalter confirm to a great extent the liturgical interpretation of Mic.7.

In its second part the Micah text continues as follows: "Rejoice not, you multitude of my enemies,²⁷ over me, for even if

²³ LINDBLOM, *Micha* (n.7), 125ff., emphasized the affinity between Mic.7:1-4 and 7:5-6 so much that he wanted to explain the latter verses as a secondary addition. It may be that the text has passed through different stages, although we can know nothing about them. But the important thing is that the two groups of verses deal with the same theme. This leads us to study the text as a continuous unit, such as we now have it.

²⁴ Valuable observations of similarities between Mic.7 and the Psalms were made by B. STADE, *Streiflichter auf die Entstehung der jetzigen Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Prophetenschriften*, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 23 (1903), 153-71, p. 164-71.

²⁵ The variant reading "as" seems more natural than the usual reading "in." However, there is scarcely any important difference.

²⁶ On this, as well as on the rest of Mic.7, see STADE (n.24).

²⁷ Here as in v.10a, the Hebrew text has a collective feminine ('ōyaḥtî "you my enemy"): W. GESENIUS-E. KAUTZSCH, *Hebräische Grammatik* (1909), 122f. As v.10b also shows, a host of enemies is meant (cf. p. 363).

I fall, yet I shall arise, and even if I sit in darkness, the Lord will shine for me" (Mic.7:8).²⁸ Connections with the Psalter may be established again (e.g., Ps.25:2, 30:2, 35:19,24, 88:7).²⁹ A liturgy said to be used for the dedication of the temple (Ps. 30:1) is particularly illuminating: "O Lord, you raised up my soul out of Sheol, you quickened me when I descended into the grave" (Ps.30:4). In another instance, where the victory of the Lord's anointed one has just been mentioned (Ps.20:7), the psalmist says: "These (the enemies) sink down and fall, but we are raised up and exalted again to our place. O Lord, deliver the king" (Ps.20:9-10a). On the basis of such comparisons, one is justified in assuming that Mic.7:8 depends upon traditions connected with kingship, though here the prophet has taken over the function of a protagonist.

But why must the speaker fall for a time and "sit in darkness" (7:8b)? The explanation is given in the following verse: "I will bear the Lord's wrath, For I have sinned against him, Until he carries out my cause And executes my right, Leads me out into the light, So that I may enjoy his righteousness" (Mic. 7:9). Here the speaker accepts the Lord's wrath as a punishment for his own sins, but the reference to enemies and gentiles in the context (vv.8,10,16f.) shows that he is also responsible for the sins of the whole people. Once again the conclusion is that the prophet has taken over liturgical traditions connected with kingship.³⁰ His lawsuit is also supposed to be against hostile powers of the heathen world, as in other contexts in which the speaker represents the elect people (e.g., Ps.7:1, 9:5ff., 17:2, 26:1, etc., or Isa.50:8f. concerning "the servant of the Lord").

The sequel confirms that the prophet is thinking of more than his individual transgressions. It says first that the enemies will come to shame (as described for instance in Ps.79:10, 115:2,

²⁸ According to the LXX: "over the fact that I have fallen; and I shall arise, since the Lord, if I sit in darkness, will shine for me." — The last words of the Hebrew text should perhaps be read instead: "the Lord is a light for me."

²⁹ G. WIDENGREN, *Konungens vistelse i dödsriket. En studie till Psalm 88, Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 10 (1945), 66ff., with references to parallels from the Tammuzreligion, published by M. WITZEL, *Tammuz-Liturgien und Verwandtes* (1935); G. W. AHLSTRÖM, *Psalm 89* (1959), 142-62 (rich material of the same kind).

³⁰ ENGNELL, *Studies* (n.14), index under "Collective responsibility of the king."

Joel 2:17, where the reference is clearly to the heathen): “And when the multitude of my enemies³¹ see it, Shame will cover them, They who say to me: Where is the Lord your God? My eyes will look on them, Then they will become dust trampled down, Like mud on the streets” (Mic.7:10). The protagonist will look on the enemies like a triumphant king on hostile armies. A glance at Mic.7:12 and 15–17 also tells us that here the enemies are something more than personal adversaries.

Furthermore, the representative position of the central figure is clear from the oracle found in the subsequent verses, and where the reference is again to the day of renewal previously mentioned (cf. vv.4,9): “The day when your walls are built up [again], that day your borders will be widely extended. It is a day when they shall come to you From Assyria to Egypt, And from Egypt to the River, And from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain” (Mic.7:11–12). Here attention suddenly passes over to the people, the land, or the city. This is quite natural if the central figure of the prophecy is seen in analogy to that of the Royal Psalms (Ps.72:8–11, etc.). As to the rebuilding of the walls, it should be pointed out that Mic.7 never mentions Jerusalem and that the Hebrew word (*gāḏēr*) refers to walls in the country. Beside this, one has to observe that a destruction and rebuilding of the land, the city, and the temple was a motif characteristic of Oriental lamentations (like Tammuz liturgies, 'Al'īyan Ba'al recitatives), and is also found in Old Testament traditions of pre-exilic origin (Ps.74:3–8 [different sanctuaries in v.8], 79:1–4 [thanks for salvation in v.13], Am. 9:1–15 [the house of Israel in v.9, the house of David in v.11]). Consequently the idea of rebuilding the walls cannot be used as an argument for dating the Micah text in or after the Judean exile. It is geographically outside the Judean perspectives of Ezekiel and Nehemiah, and does not mention Babylon and Jerusalem, but Assyria in v.12 and Carmel, Bashan and Gilead in v.14. These names refer to the historical and geographical horizon of the Northern Kingdom. Such a wider horizon is also represented by similar Old Testament prophecies (Am.9:3 Carmel; Zech. 9:10 Ephraim and Jerusalem, from sea to sea; 10:10 from

³¹ Cf. note 27.

Egypt to Assur, Gilead and Lebanon [chapters 9 and 10 were only later attached to Zech.1–8]). Accordingly the background of the restoration motif was not the fall of Jerusalem, but an older religious tradition (only later quoted in Jer.50:19 against the victories of Nebuchadrezzar).

No doubt the catastrophe of the enemies is thought of as total and final: “And the earth shall become a desert On account of its inhabitants, because of the fruit of their deeds” (Mic.7:13). This refers to the earth in contradistinction to the Holy Land, so the countries of the heathen are meant. It is a desolation which is expected to take place once and for all — otherwise the oracle would be rather meaningless. We know this eschatological motif from other prophetic passages (Isa.2:10–22, Joel 2:30–3:21, Zech.10:3–12).

God is addressed by the prophet in the following verse: “Watch over your people with your rod, The flock of your heritage, which dwells³² in seclusion in the forest on Carmel. Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in former days” (Mic.7:14). God is here thought of as a shepherd with a rod (cf. Ps.23:1–4), and the chosen people is a flock which is delivered by this royal shepherd from the desolation. Carmel with its forest is used as a picture of this seclusion. Bashan and Gilead indicate that Israel will be restored to the size it had in the good old days, in the tenth and ninth centuries. The geographical horizon is evidently that of the Northern Kingdom.³³

Next, the salvation of the people is compared with the Exodus of Egypt: “As in the days when you marched out of the land of Egypt, I shall cause them to see miracles” (Mic.7:15). It must be the people of Israel that is addressed by “you”; the change of persons is easily explained by what was said above concerning vv.11–12. As is evident from this and many other traditional elements of liturgy and prophecy found in the context, the description of the people’s oppression and salvation is not based on Israel’s occupation by Assur in 722 B.C. or the like (though it

³² Hebrew, *šōkēnî*, archaic form of the participle with a hireq compagnis.

³³ EISSFELDT (n.11), 262–64. His localization is supported by J. DUS, *Weiteres zum nordisraelitischen Psalm Micha 7,7–20*, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 115 (1965), 14–22; but DUS dates the prophecy around 1100 B.C. because he thinks it has to do with the ark.

may also have been used in such a situation), but on religious traditions of different age.

It is the gentiles who see the sensational miracle, and their depression is mentioned again: "The heathen see it and become ashamed Of all their power. They lay their hand upon their mouth, Their ears become deaf, They lick the dust like a worm, Like creeping things on the ground. They are frightened out of their strongholds, they come to the Lord our God with trembling, and stand in awe of you" (Mic.7:16-17). Again attention is drawn to the cycle of motifs found in the Royal Psalms, including the triumph of Yahweh and his anointed one at some coronation festival (Ps.2:6-12, etc.). It seems that "you" at the end of this verse refers to God, as in v.18a (in Ps.2:11 and 72:9-11 it is the king who receives veneration on God's behalf).

Now comes the last part of Mic.7, which is a hymn to God expressing the gratitude of the people over having received forgiveness of sins and salvation from the power of evil, and over having enjoyed the constant protection of God: "Who is a God like you, who takes away³⁴ sin And overlooks evil for the sake of the remnant of your heritage?" (Mic.7:18a). The people rescued from the desolation are still considered to be a remnant, a residue. It reads further: "He does not retain anger forever, But he is one who has delight in grace. He will again have mercy on us. He will tread down our sins. Indeed, you will cast into the depths of the sea All their sins. You will show faithfulness to Jacob, Grace to Abraham, As you swore to our fathers From the days of old" (Mic.7:18b-20).

The whole passage fits in remarkably well as a conclusion of the preceding liturgy of penance and confession of sins with its hopeful oracle about the rehabilitation of the protagonist, the deliverance of the people as a remnant after the general destruction of the earth, and the subjugation of the wicked powers. Here is the thanksgiving for the promises that were expressed previously. One may also recall the possibility of a connection with the ritual of the Day of Atonement which, according to the law, was designed precisely for the confession and expiation of the sins of the leaders and the people.

³⁴ Hebrew, *nāṣ'*.

III.

Mic.7 gives the impression of being formed like a liturgy, in which the prophet represents the people of Israel. He speaks in terms which seem to have been influenced by some ritual and festival traditions like those of the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles. The historical background is the Northern Kingdom, but religious traditions have a greater importance than historical circumstances. Seeing that the country and the people are destroyed by internal corruption and external aggression, the prophet confesses his own sins and the sins of the people. He must bear the Lord's wrath upon the people, but on a fixed day is reestablished by God, described as a rising again from the dead to life. The divine shepherd gathers a flock of his people into safety, permits it to spread on the old pastures again, and the prophet witnesses the humiliation of the heathen who must pay homage to the Lord. It is of particular interest to see how this prophet suffers on behalf of the people for their sins, so that he is familiar with the idea of vicarious suffering found in several psalms and prophecies. One can also discern a characteristic transition from a liturgy to eschatology.³⁵ Whether this liturgy was composed by Micah or has come into his collection for some unexplicable reason is a question which higher criticism will never be able to answer without a good portion of arbitrariness. It appears to be more instructive to use the method inaugurated by Gunkel, and to follow the stream of traditions in the light of comparative material.

This liturgical framework puts the quotation of Mic.7:6 in Matt.10:35-36 and Luke 12:53 in a particular light. Once the prophecy is no more understood to be concerned primarily with an individual biographical situation, but rather with a general eschatological perspective, it receives a transparency which shows why it was natural for Jesus and his apostles to apply the propheti-

³⁵ There are several modern studies of liturgy and eschatology with regard to various parts of the Book of Micah: W. BEYERLIN, *Die Kulttraditionen Israels in der Verkündigung des Propheten Micha* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 72, 1959); E. HAMMERSHAIMB, Einige Hauptgedanken in der Schrift des Propheten Micha, *Studia Theologica* 15 (1961), 11-34; A. S. KAPELRUD, Eschatology in the Book of Micah, *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961), 392-405.

cal words to their eschatological situation. Because of the many parallels to Mic.7:5–6 found in Old Testament, Apocryphal and Rabbinic writings (above, pp. 359f.) it seems probably that Jesus and people in his environment were also familiar with the eschatological perspective represented by the quotation. This observation is not intended to answer the popular but impossible question whether Jesus quoted Micah or was only said to have done so. But it proves that the choice of the quotation was not groundless. A special aspect of the eschatological perspective facilitated the choice: the suffering and resurrection of the righteous man who represents the Lord's elect people.³⁶

³⁶ Mic. 7 was not much used as a Christological prophecy. Probably the expression "I have sinned against the Lord" (Mic.7:9) prevented this. But reference can be made for instance to C. F. WILISCHEN-M. C. HAYMANN, *Biblia parallelo-harmonico exegetica* 4:4 (1764), 319ff.