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THE PROPHETIC PROTEST:  
FORM AND FUNCTION

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by  
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June 1965

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CHAPTER I  
THE PROBLEM OF PROPHETIC PROTEST  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM OF PROPHETIC PROTEST

The seemingly unique phenomenon of the "Confessions" of Jeremiah was the prism through which von Rad in 1936 viewed all the prophets:

In Jeremiah ist auch Amos, Jesaja, Micha, Zephania, in ihm sind ihr Dienst und ihre Verantwortung, aber auch ihre stummen Leiden und Enttäuschungen gegenwärtig als eine unsichtbare aber sehr wirkliche Erblast.<sup>1</sup>

While he operates from a theological basis in applying the protests of Jeremiah to a fundamental view of prophecy, he did not fully note that there are numerous other prophetic protests and confessions which, while not as poetically developed, perpetuate many of the features of Jeremiah's protests.<sup>2</sup> What is true here of von Rad seems to be true generally of biblical scholarship; to the writer's knowledge, there has been no significant attempt to isolate the various prophetic protests and to study them as a literary or theological unity. Most of the concern has centered in Jeremiah's protests. Upon further study it has impressed the

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard von Rad, "Die Konfessionen Jeremias," Evangelische Theologie, III (July 1936), 274.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph L. Mihelic, "Dialog with God," Interpretation, XIV (January 1960), 48.

writer that a correlated study of all prophetic protest may provide a helpful tool in understanding the office of the prophet. It is from this perspective that the present study of prophetic protest was pursued and is now offered.

For sake of definition, the prophetic protest, as developed in this paper, is any personal challenge to Yahweh concerning Yahweh's imposition of unfair burdens upon the prophet. As will be developed, the specific imposition, the specific burdens vary according to the protest; however, it is the individual nature of the protest and the integral bond to the office of the prophet which provide basic recognition points of the protest. This definition provides also the definite limitation that all other challenges, such as those in the Psalter or in the wisdom literature, are outside the scope of this study, except as they must be investigated with a view to understanding prophetic protest.

To reach the objectives stated, three subdivided studies have been undertaken. The first study (Chapter II) is an investigation of the formal and literary features of prophetic protest. Because the assumption is often conveyed that particularly Jeremiah relied heavily upon the style of the lament Gattung of the Psalter, the relationship between lament and protest must be explored. Likewise, similarities between the wisdom literature, particularly Job, and the protest and

the similarities between the Rib and the protest demand a detailed investigation. After the comparisons have been investigated and the significant contrasts noted, an attempt is made to characterize consistent patterns which appear in the various protests.

The second study (Chapter III) is an attempt to correlate the various protests by the function which formed the situation within which the prophet uttered his protests: intercession, imprecation, personal verification. The limitations of the literary study are readily apparent by the divergence of the literary styles of the varying protests. Thus, the study of function provides a helpful method of understanding questions beyond the scope of form and style: relation of the protest to the prophetic office, the place of the prophetic call in the life and protest of the prophet, the theology and possible implications of the prophetic protest. The final study (Chapter IV) is an attempt to view the termination of the prophetic protest; it investigates the divine response to and resolution of the protest. While the fourth chapter is a smaller study, its content has direct bearing not only upon the protest itself but upon the place of the protest within the prophetic office and upon the prophet as he stands under Yahweh. Because of the paucity of systematic investigations of the protests, the writer has felt that the third and fourth chapters would be more profitably developed from the primary

source of the prophetic personalities and literatures of the Old Testament. The absence of bibliographical notes does not indicate an absence of indebtedness to any scholars but an absence of specific consultation of the admittedly sparse helps. Those secondary sources which have provided the framework within which the writer has developed his thoughts have been noted in the bibliographical list at the end of the paper. Two final, smaller details of procedure should also be noted by the reader: the Scripture translations which appear within the paper are those of the writer, except as otherwise noted; the Scriptural references given are those of the Massoretic text.

As the reader will note throughout the study, the writer has reached the conclusion that prophetic protest is an integral part of the prophetic office. As seen from a literary and formal perspective, the protests are couched in various literary styles, as is consistently true of the larger prophetic message. The literary individuality of the prophet prevents a precise formal classification of the protests. As seen from the perspective of function, the protests with rare exception can be understood only from the prophetic office, specifically from the prophetic call. The foundation, the bases, the content of the protests are distinctly prophetic. As viewed finally from the perspective of divine resolution, the protests are a sufficiently common part of the life of



the prophets that even Yahweh's response, when recorded, centers in the ministry of prophecy. Within the distinct context of prophecy lies the significance of the form, function, and divine resolution of prophetic protest.

The formalist methodology of comparative study not only makes it possible to study the prophetic protest, as it appears in the various prophets, but also makes it necessary to study whether there are in the protests any formal characteristics either related to other forms of Old Testament literature or perhaps distinctive to the protests themselves. While such attention has been called to possible relationships of Jeremiah to other literatures, yet the prophetic protests as a group have not to this writer's knowledge been studied as a distinct unit. This chapter will investigate possible relationships with other Old Testament literatures (chiefly psalm, wisdom literature, *hith'pawot*) and seek evidence of prophetic distinctiveness in the protests.

#### Relation to the Letter *hith'pawot*

The similarities between Jeremiah and certain of the psalms had long been recognized. The reaction of many scholars was to attribute the authority of such psalms to Jeremiah himself. However, as the opinion became increasingly

Walter Baumgartner provides a list of such scholars from the time of Kautsky in the contemporary S. J. Ball, Walter Baumgartner, *The Hith'pawot and the Psalms* (Gleason Verlag, New York, 1937), pp. 1-2.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FORM OF PROPHETIC PROTEST

The form-critical methodology of exegetical study not only makes it possible to study the prophetic protest as it appears in the various prophets, but also makes it necessary to study whether there are in the protests any formal characteristics either related to other forms of Old Testament literature or perhaps distinctive to the protests themselves. While much attention has been called to possible relationships of Jeremiah to other literatures, yet the prophetic protests as a group have not to this writer's knowledge been studied as a distinct unit. This chapter will investigate possible relationships with other Old Testament literatures (lament psalm, wisdom literature, Rib form) and seek evidences of prophetic distinctiveness in the protests.

#### Relation to the Lament Gattung

The similarities between Jeremiah and certain of the psalms has long been recognized. The reaction of many scholars was to attribute the authorship of such psalms to Jeremiah himself.<sup>1</sup> However, as the opinion became increasingly

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Baumgartner provides a list of such scholars from Theodore of Mopsuestia to the contemporary C. J. Ball. Walter Baumgartner, Die Klagegedichte des Jeremia (Giessen: Verlag von Alfred Toepelmann [Vormals J. Ricker], 1917), pp. 1-2.

accepted that the psalms were of post-exilic origin, the similarity between Jeremiah and the psalms led many scholars not only to reject the Jeremianic authorship of the psalms, but also to question the authenticity of such portions of Jeremiah; those portions were relegated by many scholars to the proposed post-exilic origin of the psalms.<sup>2</sup> However, more recent studies, particularly that of Walter Baumgartner's Die Klagegedichte des Jeremias,<sup>3</sup> which employs the form-critical methodology, have tended to demonstrate in a more intense study that the similarities, while certainly present, are not close enough to indicate an identity of form.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is necessary to investigate this relationship very precisely, because a possible relationship can determine authorship, date, and consequently also interpretation.

The formal characteristics and style of the Klagelied des Einzelnen, according to Westermann's classification are Anrede, Klage, Bekennnis der Zuversicht, Bitte, Motive,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Baumgartner describes his work as a specific reaction against the prior trends of his day.

<sup>4</sup>Bentzen also states that the former rejection of the Jeremiah passages "has been completely altered by the views of the form-critical school." Aage Bentzen, Introduction to the Old Testament (Third edition; Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad Publisher, 1957), p. 121.

Lobgelübde, and Gewiszheit der Erhörung.<sup>5</sup> Psalm 17 provides one structural arrangement of these elements: 1-2--invocation, 3-5--protestation of innocence, 6-9--supplication, 10-12--complaint, 13-14--prayer for vengeance, 15--assurance that God hears prayer with possibly a vow of future obedience. Although these elements do not appear in a consistent order throughout the lament psalms, and although several elements may be missing in specific psalms, yet this combination of features, as well as the "I," commonly comprise the individual lament Gattung. While it is true also that Gattungen may be mixed in particular psalms (Ps. 40),<sup>6</sup> the basic pattern outlined above provides adequate background for comparison with the prophetic protest.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Claus Westermann, Das Loben Gottes in den Psalmen (Dritte Auflage; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963), p. 49. A concise development of this structure can also be found in his "Struktur und Geschichte der Klage im Alten Testament," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, LXVI (1954), 44-80. Kraus identifies the following consistent features: address, baring of soul, complaint, prayer of vengeance and trust, basis of Yahweh's grace, honor, faithfulness, protestation of innocence, vow, awaiting with assurance Yahweh's answer. Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalmen: I. Teilband, in Biblischer Commentar Altes Testament (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, c.1960), XV/1, xxlv-xxlvi.

<sup>6</sup>Artur Weiser, The Psalms: A Commentary, translated from the German by Herbert Hartwell, in The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1962), p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>Although the various lists of lament psalms vary according to the commentator, the list provided in Baumgartner (p. 6) is assumed for this paper.

Baumgartner's study of Die Klagegedichte des Jeremia is a standard work in this investigation. This writer agrees with him when he limits the strict Klagegedichte of Jeremiah to 11:18-20, 15:15-21, 17:12-18, 18:18-23, 20:10-13.<sup>8</sup> As will be seen below, the remaining protests lack the essential features of the lament Gattung, and cannot be considered formally with those listed above. Because the protests of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Joshua, Gideon appear in prose form, they cannot be considered here. Likewise, the protests of the call form a distinct situation. However, also to be investigated in the study of the lament Gattung are Is. 63:15-19, Mic. 7:8-10, and Hab. 1:12-17. The procedure followed here will be to examine the formal, stylistic, vocabulary similarities of these poems, to extract those elements foreign to the lament Gattung, and to draw tentative conclusions.

The first poem to be considered is Jer. 11:18-20:

Yahweh revealed it to me, and I knew;  
 then you showed me their evil deeds.  
 I was like a meek lamb  
 led to the slaughter.  
 I did not realize that it was against me  
 they devised their schemes:  
 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit;  
 let us cut him off from the land of the living,  
 that his name be remembered no more.'

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<sup>8</sup>Baumgartner's general classification seems helpful: Die Klagegedichte Jeremias--11:18-20, 21-23; 15:15-21, 17:12-18; 18:18-23, 20:10-13; Gedichte, die den Klageliedern nahestehen--12:1-6, 15:10-12, 20:7-9, 20:14-18; the others treated are poems not related integrally to the lament Gattung.

But, O Yahweh of hosts, who judges righteously,  
 who tests the heart and the mind,  
 I would see your vengeance upon them,  
 for to you have I committed my cause.

The formal structure of this poem is somewhat tenuous. Verses 19-20 are thoroughly compatible with the lament form: v. 19--profession of innocence and complaint, v. 20a--invocation and trust, v. 20b--prayer for vengeance with hope for assurance. As Baumgartner says, "nur v. 18, die Warnung, fällt aus dem Schema heraus und hat dort gar keine Parallele; da verrät sich eben der Prophet."<sup>9</sup> As considered by style, the similarities are certainly present; however, the presence of v. 18 as undisputedly integral to the poem but foreign to the lament Gattung, as well as the lack of the majority of lament characteristics prevents an identification from being made.

The actual vocabulary used also betrays a relatedness in thought to the lament:<sup>10</sup> sheep for the slaughter--Ps. 44:12, 23;<sup>11</sup> שׁוֹרֵט --Ps. 35:4, 56:6, 64:7, 140:3; specifically oral schemes--Ps. 71:11, 74:8; ַדָּבָר אֶל־עַלְמָי --Ps. 83:5; common

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>10</sup>No effort will be made in these analyses to provide an exhaustive examination of words and phrases; those presented here are only representative, although significant, words.

<sup>11</sup>Weiser draws a further parallel here not merely with the Psalter but with the background of the cult. Artur Weiser, Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia: Kapitel 1-25:13 in Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1952), XX, 106.

transition of Jer. 11:20,  $\text{נָתַתְּ לִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לִבִּי}$  --Ps. 22:4, 59:6, 69:14;  $\text{שָׁמַר לִי אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה}$  --Ps. 7:10, 17:3, 26:2;  $\text{לִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לִבִּי}$  --Ps. 22:9, 37:5.<sup>12</sup> Obviously the list is far from complete, and not all the parallels of those traits mentioned are listed. However, the common heritage becomes apparent. Yet two considerations must be kept in mind: the presence of an undisputedly authentic v. 18 which is unparalleled in the Psalter, and also the fact that similarity need not prove identity. In fact, to relegate the various expressions of the lament Gattung strictly to that Gattung would prejudice a possibly independent expression of similar feelings which would have to employ at least similar vocabulary.

At any rate, the formal study of this poem as a literary unit does serve to distinguish 11:18-20 from 11:21-23 and makes the suggestion of both Baumgartner and Weiser probable, that the Drohwort of 11:21-23 was appended to the earlier poem in the process of compilation.<sup>13</sup> This attraction becomes a further testimony to the likely authenticity of 11:18-20, and renders improbable the textual emendation suggested by Rowley that the several poems of 11:18-12:6, after his proposed

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<sup>12</sup>Duhm says that "etwas 'auf Jahwe wälzen' ist eine sprichwörtliche Redensart." Bernhard Duhm, Das Buch Jeremia in Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament (Tübingen and Leipzig: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1901), XI, 113.

<sup>13</sup>Baumgartner, p. 33 and Weiser, Jeremia, p. 105.

deletions and rearrangement, become one unified whole.<sup>14</sup> Any further conclusions will be reserved until all the poems have been investigated.

The second poem under consideration is Jer. 15:15-18:

You, Yahweh, have known;  
 remember me and visit me,  
 and avenge yourself for me upon my persecutors.  
 Do not in your long-suffering take me away;  
 know that for your sake I have borne reproach.  
 Your words were found and I ate them,  
 and your words became for me a joy  
 and the delight of my heart;  
 for your name has been endowed upon me,  
 O Yahweh of hosts.  
 I have not sat in the company of merrymakers;  
 [nor] have I celebrated.  
 Because of your hand, I have sat alone,  
 for you have filled me with indignation.  
 Why is my pain perpetual,  
 and my wound incurable? it refuses to be healed.  
 Will you persist in being to me like a deceitful [stream],  
 [like] waters which [cannot be] relied on?

The formal structure of this poem bears a more consistent similarity than did 11:18-20 to the elements of the lament

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<sup>14</sup>Rowley's proposed order is 11:18, 12:6, 11:19, 11:20, 12:1-3, 11:21-24; he rejects 12:4-5 because they stem from a foreign context. However, he raises more problems than he solves: there is no textual or version evidence; the proposed abruptness of 11:18 is not actually solved; 12:4b has a definite prophetic reference applicable to this context; the final placement of 12:4-5 is not given and difficult to determine; the proposed arrangement seems arbitrary and doesn't consider the literary suggestions made by Baumgartner. These poems are best understood as brought together through attraction of common subject by the compiler, so that there is no need for proposing an inherent unity between the poems. H. H. Rowley, "The Text and Interpretation of Jeremiah 11:18-12:6," American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, XLII (1926), pp. 217-227.



Gattung: v. 15a--invocation and prayer; v. 15b--prayer and profession of innocence; vv. 16-17--profession of innocence, v. 18--complaint.<sup>15</sup> On the surface of its form, the poem can easily be identified as a formal lament. As the vocabulary is analyzed, further direct parallels can be traced:  $\text{נָוּן}$  --Ps. 40:10, also 69:20, 142:4;  $\text{יָדָה}$  --Ps. 25:6, 74:2, 89:48; the combination of  $\text{קָדַשׁ}$  and  $\text{יָדָה}$  --Ps. 8:5, 106:4;  $\text{עָלַי}$  --Ps. 7:2, 35:3, 119:157;  $\text{פָּרַחְתִּי}$  --Ps. 69:8; separation for God's sake--Ps. 1:1, 26:4-5;  $\text{לֵב}$  --Ps. 32:4, 38:3, 39:11;  $\text{לֵבִי}$  --Ps. 119 passim;  $\text{לֵבִי}$  --Ps. 38:4, 102:11;  $\text{לֵבִי}$  --a characteristic introduction of the complaint;  $\text{לֵבִי}$  --Ps. 39:3;  $\text{לֵבִי}$  --Ps. 13:2, 74:10, 77:9. While the listing is far from exhaustive, the common formal characteristics are evident.

However, again the study is not complete unless several items are mentioned which seem foreign to the Psalter and which perhaps disallow a complete identification of this poem with the lament Gattung. In the first place, the harshness of v. 18b is hardly characteristic of the Psalter;<sup>16</sup> while the laments do implicitly challenge Yahweh to act, they do not generally accuse Yahweh as directly as does Jeremiah here. Secondly, although Duhm understands the  $\text{לֵבִי}$  which Jeremiah

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Baumgartner's suggestion, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

ate (v. 16) as "die ganze göttliche Offenbarung" which are to the Psalmist (19:11) sweeter than honey,<sup>17</sup> nevertheless the distinctly prophetic content (rather than Torah, wisdom, cult) of the  $\text{ד' } \gamma \text{ } \beth$  seems preferable; cf. Ez. 2:8-3:3. Thirdly, the separation which the prophet attributes to Yahweh's hand was not a separation from the wicked as in the Psalter, but from those who rejoice; this particular demand from Yahweh is unparalleled in the Psalter.<sup>18</sup> Fourth, the reference to Yahweh's hand may indeed have parallel in the Psalter, as noted above; if so, the hand is interpreted as punitive with physical consequences. However, it is equally possible and, in the light of prophetic background, preferable to understand Yahweh's hand as indicative of prophetic compulsion, as 1 Kings 18:46, 2 Kings 3:15, Is. 8:11, Ez. 1:3, 3:14, 8:1, 40:1. This is further supported by the parallel in v. 17b which links Yahweh's hand with the  $\text{ד } \gamma \text{ } \beth$  with which Yahweh had filled the prophet. In the Psalter, this  $\text{ד } \gamma \text{ } \beth$  is Yahweh's indignation as vented upon the psalmist; here, however, the  $\text{ד } \gamma \text{ } \beth$ , while of divine origin, is experienced by the prophet upon his people. The stance of the prophet is quite evident here and quite distinct from the Psalter. From the context it is also quite possible that the pain and wound suffered by

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<sup>17</sup>Duhm, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup>Baumgartner, p. 36.

Jeremiah (v. 18) are not completely physical or even inflicted by his persecutors, but a wound which results from Yahweh's hand upon him, the indignation he feels toward his people, which produced the reaction recorded in 20:7-9. Also to be noted is the unusual ending of this poem. Only Ps. 88 ends with a similar accusation (without a vow or certainty of Yahweh's hearing or even a prayer of imprecation), and no psalm concludes with such an open-ended question.<sup>19</sup> Finally, though not least important, is the sequel to Jer. 15:15-18, the divine response of 15:19-21. Baumgartner includes these verses under his treatment of the Klagegedicht. However, because these verses have no parallel in the lament (or in the Psalter), but rather preserve a strong prophetic thrust, they have not been treated above as part of the poem.<sup>20</sup> Yet in view of the inherent connection of these verses with the preceding (15:19 begins the divine response with } > 3 ), 15:15-18 cannot be considered without 15:19-21.<sup>21</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>19</sup>This feature finds a parallel only at Lam. 5. What conclusions, if any, can be drawn from this unique parallel are beyond the scope of the present study.

<sup>20</sup>Baumgartner, pp. 39ff. The strongest parallel in the lament is the certainty of Yahweh's response and the consequent vow. Distinct here, however, is the concrete oracle from God--a prophetic trait--and the lack of resolution of Jeremiah's complaint.

<sup>21</sup>Weiser suggests a cultic background for an understanding of the divine response. Weiser, Jeremia, pp. 137, 140.

the strong prophetic tone of these verses gives proper perspective to what has gone before: יִשְׁפָּזֵךְ 7D9ן --1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 5:16,<sup>22</sup> שִׁרְשִׁירָן 'D3 --Ex. 4:16, Jer. 1:9, יִשְׁרָן 7ןִן --Ex. 3:12, Judg. 6:16, Jer. 1:8,19. The mere fact of the divine response, unparalleled in the Psalter, particularly with its call to repentance and its reference to the prophetic call, prevents a precise identification of Jer. 15:15-18 with the lament Gattung.

The third poem which shows similarity to the lament Gattung is Jer. 17:14-18:

Heal me, Yahweh, and I will be healed,  
 save me, and I will be saved;  
 for you are my hope.  
 Behold, they are saying to me,  
 "Where is the word of Yahweh,  
 Let it come now."  
 I have not urged you [to bring] evil;  
 I have not desired the day of destruction.  
 You know;  
 what came out of my lips  
 has been open to you.  
 Do not be to me a terror;  
 you are my refuge in the day of evil.  
 Let my persecutors be put to shame,  
 but let me not be put to shame;  
 let them be dismayed;  
 but let me not be dismayed.  
 Bring upon them the day of evil,  
 and destroy them with a double destruction.

Again the formal elements of this poem are easily identified:  
 v. 14--prayer-invocation; v. 15--complaint; v. 16--profession

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<sup>22</sup>Although this may be understood from a cultic background --cf. 1 Kings 3:15--it is best understood here as prophetic.

of innocence; v. 17--prayer and confidence; v. 18--prayer of vengeance.<sup>23</sup> Elements of the lament Gattung appear on the surface, as they do also in the vocabulary employed: נָדָה --Ps. 6:3, 41:5, 60:4; יָשׁוּב --Ps. 3:8, 6:5, 7:2; יָנִיזָה נִיזָה נִיזָה נִיזָה --Ps. 71:6, 109:1; יָנִיזָה נִיזָה נִיזָה --Ps. 89:35; the concept of Yahweh's knowledge of (the innocence of) one's ways--passim, cf. Ps. 139:4; יָנִיזָה נִיזָה נִיזָה --Ps. 62:8, 71:7, 142:6; יָשׁוּב --Ps. 31:18, 35:4, 40:15; the imprecations in general are found throughout the Psalter. A close study of the text again reveals elements which do not correspond with the Psalter lament. In 17:15 the precise basis of the complaint is the popular rejection of the word (again prophetic) as much as the person of the prophet; the centrality of the word is distinctive. Likewise, it is true that "in einem Psalm wäre v. 16a undenkbar."<sup>24</sup> The prophetic stance becomes more evident here; there is not only innocence at stake but the prophetic office in an implied intercession, whereas the psalmist is rarely concerned about the good of his persecutor. This stance is further evident in the יָנִיזָה נִיזָה נִיזָה of v. 16c. While there is a parallel expression in Ps. 89:35, the context here is strongly that of the prophetic word, as in Jer. 15:16 and particularly in the יָנִיזָה נִיזָה נִיזָה of 15:19. Thus again

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<sup>23</sup>Cf. Baumgartner's structural analysis, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

the similarities are striking between Jeremiah and the lament, but there are too many elements which are not only absent in the Psalter but also point to a completely distinct background, that of the prophet.

Jer. 18:19-23 comprises another poem similar to the lament:

Give heed, O Yahweh, to me,  
 and hear the voice of my contention.  
 Is evil recompensed for good?  
 for they have dug a pit for my life.  
 Remember that I stood before thee  
 to speak good for them,  
 to turn away your wrath from them.  
 Therefore give their sons over to the famine;  
 deliver them up to the power of the sword,  
 and let their wives be childless and widows.  
 May their men be fatally stricken,  
 their young men smitten by the sword in battle.  
 May their cry be heard from their houses  
 when you bring the raiders upon them suddenly,  
 for they have dug a pit to take me  
 and have laid snares for my feet.  
 But you, Yahweh, know  
 all their plots for my death.  
 Do not forgive their iniquity  
 and their sins do not blot out from before you;  
 let them be overthrown before you;  
 deal with them in the time of your anger.

The component parts can be labeled as follows: v. 19-- invocation and prayer, v. 20--complaint and profession of innocence, vv. 21-22a--prayer for vengeance, v. 22b--complaint, v. 23--confidence and prayer for vengeance.<sup>25</sup> These stylistic traits find further support again in the individual words and

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<sup>25</sup>Baumgartner's analysis is on p. 48.

phrases used:  $\text{נ} \psi \rho$  --Ps. 5:3, 17:1, 61:2;  $\psi \text{נ} \psi$  --Ps. 4:2, 54:4, 130:2; the complaint of receiving evil for good--Ps. 35:12, 38:32, 109:5;  $\text{נ} \text{נ} \text{נ}$  --Ps. 25:6, 74:2, 119:49;  $\text{נ} \text{נ} \text{נ}$   $\text{נ} \text{נ} \text{נ}$  --Ps. 57:7, 119:85;  $\text{נ} \text{נ} \text{נ} \text{נ} \text{נ}$  --Ps. 140:6, 142:4;  $\text{נ} \text{נ}$  --Ps. 74:22, 119:154. Although the remarks made by Baumgartner about the distinctiveness of v. 18 cannot be shared in this context because the literary connection of v. 18 to vv. 19-23 seems tenuous,<sup>26</sup> yet this poem also contains within itself elements foreign to the Psalter or the lament Gattung. Perhaps the most indicative statement of the poem is its reference to the prophetic office and the intercession in v. 20: Jeremiah stood before Yahweh, Jeremiah spoke good for them to turn away Yahweh's wrath. Such a stance of intercession can hardly adhere to the lament; Ps. 109:4, which is textually troublesome, provides the closest parallel. Likewise, the precise imprecations seem to reflect a background of warfare not consistently developed in the imprecations of the psalms.

The final Jeremiah poem under consideration is 20:10-13:

For I hear the whispering of many,  
 Terror all around,  
 "Denounce him! let us denounce him!"  
 [say] all my intimate friends,  
 watching for my fall.  
 "Perhaps he will be deceived,  
 and we can overcome him,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

and can take our revenge on him."  
 But Yahweh is with me as a terrifying warrior;  
 therefore my persecutors will stumble;  
 they will not prevail.  
 They will be put to great shame,  
 for they will not succeed,  
 their eternal ignominy will not be forgotten.  
 O Yahweh of hosts, who tries the righteous,  
 who sees the heart and the mind,  
 I would see your vengeance upon them  
 for to you have I committed my cause.  
 Sing to Yahweh,  
 Praise Yahweh;  
 for he has delivered the soul of the needy  
 from the hand of the evil ones.

The structure of this poem is closer perhaps than any to the lament form: v. 10--complaint, v. 11--trust and assurance, v. 12a--prayer and trust, v. 12b--prayer for vengeance with hope for assurance, v. 13--thanksgiving.<sup>27</sup> Special note must be given here to v. 13. Because of its "very singular transition to the tone of the Psalms," this verse has long been regarded as from a foreign context, if not a completely later addition.<sup>28</sup> However, the recognition of the lament form in the psalms with a similar mixture of expressions (Ps. 6:9, 22:22) has granted the strong possibility of authenticity and integrity to the verse in this context.<sup>29</sup> Such authenticity

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<sup>27</sup>Cf. Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>28</sup>This is the conclusion of C. H. Cornill, The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text, translated from the German by C. Johnston, in The Sacred Books of the Old Testament (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1895), p. 63. Cf. also Duhm, p. 166.

<sup>29</sup>This is the conclusion of both Baumgartner (p. 51) and Wilhelm Rudolph, Jeremia in Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1947), p. 115.



and integrity form at least a live option.<sup>30</sup>

The more detailed stylistic traits again show a marked similarity between Jeremiah and the lament Gattung. Jer. 20:10a presents a problem of its own, because it is a verbatim parallel of Ps. 31:14a. Although Baumgartner suggests that the passage is an interpolation in Jeremiah,<sup>31</sup> it is difficult to make a judgment in either case. In both cases the passage fits the context integrally, and there would be a loss were it removed. Perhaps v. 10a is original with neither but inherited by both. Other parallel features are not lacking, however, even if v. 10a is judged non-authentic:

□ 3 0 0 7 1 5 8 --Ps. 38:12, 41:10, 88:9, 19; 3 0 0 --  
Ps. 9:4; 3 0 7 --Ps. 13:5; cf. also the prior poems which contain many words repeated here, especially 11:20 which is virtually a verbatim parallel. In Jer. 20:10-13 there are seemingly no elements which are decidedly foreign to the lament Gattung and exclusively distinctive of the prophetic background, except possibly for the prior context; however, because there are no compelling reasons to make 20:7-9 an

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<sup>30</sup>Holladay presents an alternative view, that this verse may well be an extremely bitter sarcasm and irony rather than a pious psalm sentiment. William J. Holladay, "Style, Irony and Authenticity in Jeremiah," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXXI, 1 (March, 1962), pp. 52-53.

<sup>31</sup>Baumgartner, p. 50.

inseparable part with 20:10-13,<sup>32</sup> the context is only suggestive and not determinative.<sup>33</sup> Thus this poem will have to be evaluated from its context within the prophetic book and its possible relation to other similar poems.

At this point, it is necessary to introduce also other prophetic protests which seem to approach a possible lament form. As will be noted during the investigation, the similarities below are generally not as obvious as in the protests considered above; yet they cannot be excluded. The first such protest is Is. 63:15-19:

Look down from heaven and see,  
 from your holy and wonderful abode on high.  
 Where are your zeal and your might?  
 The yearning of your heart and your mercies  
 are withheld from me.  
 For you are our Father,  
 though Abraham does not know us,  
 and Israel does not acknowledge us.  
 You, O Yahweh, are our Father;  
 our Redeemer from of old is your name.  
 Why do you make us err, O Yahweh, from your ways?  
 [why] do you harden our heart that we no longer fear you?  
 Turn for the sake of your servants,

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<sup>32</sup>As Hyatt observes, "in the first [vv. 7-9] God is the primary antagonist of the prophet, whereas in the second [vv. 10-13] God is his protagonist against his human enemies." James Philip Hyatt, "The Book of Jeremiah," The Interpreter's Bible (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, c.1956), V, 972.

<sup>33</sup>Westermann classifies Jer. 20:7-11 under his study of the individual lament without further comment. He has seemingly neglected vv. 12-13 and the obvious dissimilarities between 20:7-9 and the Psalter due to its prophetic casting. Westermann, "Struktur," p. 56.

for the tribes of your heritage.  
 Only for a short time has your holy people possessed  
 [until] our adversaries trampled down your sanctuary.  
 We have become like those over whom you have never ruled,  
 upon whom your name has never been endowed.

The structure, not as easily identified, can be described as follows: v. 15--prayer and complaint; v. 16--trust; v. 17--complaint and prayer for deliverance; vv. 18-19--complaint. The terms used to describe the structure are those of the lament,<sup>34</sup> but the tenor of the poem is not as closely similar as the poems of Jeremiah. Certainly there are also verbal similarities:  $\text{סָוֹב}$  and  $\text{בָּשׂוּ}$  --throughout the Psalter; v. 15a is a precise parallel of Ps. 80:15a,  $\text{וַיִּסְוֹבֵנוּ}$  --Ps. 25:6, 69:7, 119:77;  $\text{וַיִּסְוֹבֵנוּ}$  --Ps. 47:10, 105:6;  $\text{וַיִּסְוֹבֵנוּ}$  --Ps. 69:10, 79:5, 119:129;  $\text{וַיִּסְוֹבֵנוּ}$  --Ps. 74:10;  $\text{וַיִּסְוֹבֵנוּ}$  --Ps. 63:3, 77:14, 102:20. Again, alongside these similarities, the following distinctions should be noted: although Ps. 107:40 does use  $\text{וַיִּסְוֹבֵנוּ}$  (Hiphil), it talks of physical wandering, so that nowhere does the Psalter accuse Yahweh of "making us err" as does Isaiah here. The background of Is. 63:18 seemingly talks of a political defeat which, while not uncommon in the Psalter, can equally suggest the background of a prophetic message. In short, similarities are evident, but the basic

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<sup>34</sup>The term "lament" is used by Muilenberg to describe this section. James Muilenberg, "The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66," The Interpreter's Bible (New York and Nashville: Abingdom Press, c.1956), V, 737.

structure (its communal accent) and certain individual features of the poem render an identity of protest and lament unlikely.

A second possible poem for consideration is Mic. 7:8-10:<sup>35</sup>

Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy,  
 for though I have fallen, I will rise;  
 though I sit in darkness,  
 Yahweh will be a light to me.  
 I will bear the indignation of Yahweh  
 for I have sinned against Him,  
 until he shall contend my cause  
 and effect my justice.  
 He will bring me forth to the light;  
 I shall see his vindication.  
 Then my enemy shall see,  
 and shame will cover her who said to me,  
 "Where is Yahweh your God?"  
 My eyes will gaze at her,  
 then she will be trampled down  
 like the mire of the streets.

The structure of this protest is as tenuous as that from Isaiah: v. 8--address to enemies and trust, v. 9--innocence and profession of confidence of hearing, v. 10--certainty of prayer. The structure has a strange introduction, the address to the enemy, which is unusual in the Psalter, although not

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<sup>35</sup>Robinson agrees with Gunkel's judgment that this section is an individuelles Klagelied. The problem of such identification is demonstrated by Lindblom, however, who classifies Mic. 7:1-4, 7 and 8-12 as laments. Theodore H. Robinson, Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten: Hosea bis Micha, translated from the English by Otto Eissfeldt, in Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1938), p. 150. Johannes Lindblom, "Micah Literarisch Untersucht," Acta Academiae Aboensis Humaniora VI (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1930), pp. 130-131.

totally absent: cf. Ps. 9:6. Other features again can be found in both bodies of literature: Yahweh as  $\text{יְהוָה}$  -- Ps. 27:1;  $\text{יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ}$  -- Ps. 41:5, 51:5;  $\text{יְהוָה}$  -- Ps. 35:1, 43:1;  $\text{יְהוָה}$  -- throughout the Psalter;  $\text{יְהוָה}$  -- Ps. 27:6, 54:9;  $\text{יְהוָה}$  -- Ps. 89:46. However, the distinctiveness of the introduction, the fact that the enemy is described as "her" (v. 10--perhaps reflective of Babylon?), and the lack of an address to Yahweh suggest that the lament Gattung is not the primary background for this poem, but is merely similar in isolated instances.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, note must be taken also of Hab. 1:12-17:<sup>37</sup>

Are you not from of old,  
Yahweh, my God, my Holy one?  
we will not die.  
O Yahweh, you have set him for a judgment,  
and you have established him for chastisement.  
[You have] eyes too pure to look upon evil,  
and are not able to behold wrong.  
Why do you look on treacherous men?  
[why] are you silent when the wicked swallows up

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<sup>36</sup>Weiser, who is not averse to identifying lament forms in Jeremiah, here finds the closest literary parallel in the prophetic liturgy, such as Is. 33. Artur Weiser, Das Buch der Zwölf Kleinen Propheten I, in Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949), XXV, 259.

<sup>37</sup>Bentzen (p. 156) and Horst both identify this section as a lament; Elliger, however, while terming it a Klage, expresses doubt about its adherence to a Gattung. Friedrich Horst, Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten: Nahum bis Maleachi, in Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1938), XIV, 173-174. Karl Elliger, Das Buch der Zwölf Kleinen Propheten II, in Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1950), XXV, 33-34.

the man more righteous than he?  
 You have made man like the fish of the sea,  
 like creeping things that have no ruler.  
 He brings them all up with a hook,  
 he drags them out with his net;  
 he gathers them up in his seine;  
 therefore he rejoices and exults.  
 Therefore he sacrifices to his net,  
 and burns incense to his seine;  
 for by them his portion is plenteous  
 and his food is abundant.  
 therefore is he to empty his net  
 and mercilessly slay nations without end?

If a structure can even be developed from this poem, it would be only tentative: v. 12--trust, v. 13--trust and complaint, vv. 14-17--complaint beginning with trust (?). At best this is only sketchy, because the connection between this and the lament form appears only in the address to Yahweh and certain terms:  $\text{זֶרַח שׁוֹרֵשׁ} \text{ } \psi \text{ } \tau \rho$  --Ps. 71:22, 78:41, 89:19;  $\text{זֶרַח} \text{ } \tau \lambda \text{ } \tau$  --Ps. 59:6, 119:158;  $\psi \text{ } \tau \tau$  --Ps. 28:1, 50:21;  $\psi \text{ } \tau \tau$  --Ps. 69:16, 124:3. Hab. 1:2-4 have not been mentioned because they are completely complaint and are separated from 1:12-17 by vv. 5-11, a divine response. The list of similarities becomes almost irrelevant before the message of the protest. As in Jer. 15, the divine answer is inconsistent with the Psalter. The psalmist is not generally concerned about the eternal slaying of the nations (v. 17). Likewise, the center of the protest concerns the success of a specific agent of Yahweh who has overstepped the (political and military) bounds set by Yahweh. The historical situation is very concrete and does not center in the author primarily; a

prophetic message seems most probable.

For the sake of completeness reference should be made to extra-biblical laments. In addition to the bibliographical note of Gemser, Pritchard and Widengren provide a wealth of lamentations which parallel in many instances the lament of the Psalter. These parallels extend even to a strong plea and demand that the deity vindicate the author; the boldness of the protest is not entirely absent. However, to this writer's study and knowledge, the accusations of distinctly prophetic protest, that is, protest built upon the prophetic office, is not paralleled in any of these lamentations.<sup>38</sup>

This survey of suggested and possible protests which bear similarities to the form of the lament Gattung has several conclusions germane to this study. First, the similarities are evident, not only from the structural elements but also from the detailed vocabulary. However, to conclude that this Gattung forms either the Sitz im Leben or the formal skeleton of the protest is an ambitious conclusion. Too many elements of the lament are missing: consistent invocation,

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<sup>38</sup>B. Gemser, "The Rib- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," in Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), p. 135. See also Ancient Near Eastern Texts, edited by James B. Pritchard (second edition; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 379-385, 434-437, 456-463, and Geo. Widengren, The Accadian and Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation as Religious Documents (Stockholm: Bodförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1937).

assurance of audience, vows, thanks.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the elements which do appear regularly do not appear in a consistent pattern or order. The strong prophetic background thoroughly permeates the entire expression of these protests; Baumgartner lists fifteen distinctly and obviously prophetic allusions in the Jeremiah protests and others can be listed as given above.<sup>40</sup> Baumgartner also suggests that the occasional nature of the protests and their seemingly spontaneous (geistlich as opposed to kultische) expression sets them off from the Psalter.<sup>41</sup> A further application of the lament as a part of the cultic life of Israel does not seem to apply at first hand to the protests. The briskness and harshness with which they address Yahweh is not paralleled in the Psalter, and it seems more likely that particularly the protests of Jeremiah were preserved through his secretary rather than through the cult.<sup>42</sup> Finally, it is clearly evident that this Gattung is

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<sup>39</sup>Concerning the last item, Baumgartner (p. 81) finds an all but total lack; Jer. 20:13 he terms "eine schwache Spur."

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 70. Westermann overstates an essentially true judgment when he says that "der Unterschied liegt darin, dass bei der 'Anklage Gottes' in den Psalmen Gott das Objekt, in der prophetischen Anklage das Subjekt ist." Claus Westermann, Grundformen Prophetischer Rede (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1960), p. 49.

<sup>41</sup>Baumgartner, pp. 70, 81.

<sup>42</sup>Perhaps Weiser is correct in directing the cultic background of the lament in Jeremiah into a fresh appraisal of the alleged antithesis between prophet and cult. However, it seems difficult, as Lindblom suggests, to place these particular



not at all related to the majority of the protests, and related only on the surface to those presented above. Exactly what the precise relationship is between the protests studied above and the lament is difficult to determine. There is surely a difference between the actual form of the lament Gattung and mere similarities to that Gattung. Likewise, merely to conclude that a literary unit could stand in the Psalter is far from a definite conclusion. Perhaps it is safe to conclude that the manner of expression and the vocabulary employed preserves a common poetic style without being bound exclusively to the Psalter:

Seine Worte sind in die Form des Klagelieds gekleidet, aber der Inhalt geht weit über die typischen Klagelieder der Psalmen hinaus und ist nur bei einem Propheten denkbar.<sup>43</sup>

Thus the manifest similarities are recognized, yet the freedom of background and expression is also granted. Both must later be considered as all the protests are viewed together.

#### Relation to the Wisdom Literature

A second relationship often suggested between the protests, particularly those of Jeremiah (12:1-6, 15:10, 20:14-18)

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protests into a cultic background or usage. Weiser, Jeremia, pp. 106, 137, and particularly 179-180. Johannes Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1962), p. 162. Cf. also Bentzen, p. 121.

<sup>43</sup>Rudolph, p. 91.

and Habakkuk 1, and other Old Testament literatures is that between the protests and wisdom literature, specifically Job. Of course, it is recognized that Job cannot be characterized by any consistent and distinct literary form(s).<sup>44</sup> Thus the relationship must center in content and expression. In order to avoid sweeping generalizations, an investigation of the bases, contexts, and expressions of the protests in question must be made.

The first general similarity often noted is the concern of Jeremiah and Habakkuk, common to Job, with the prosperity of the wicked:

Why does the way of the wicked prosper?

[why] do those who are treacherous thrive? (Jer. 12:1)

Why do you look on treacherous men?

[why] are you silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1:13)

Although this search runs throughout Job, two extended examples are 21:7-26 and 24:22-25. A closer look at the background of the pleas of the prophets, however, betrays a subtle difference in the questioning. While Job places his question of a cosmic scale so as to question Eloah's ordering of all the world of man, Jeremiah and Habakkuk seem to have a particular reference as they talk of the wicked and faithless.

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<sup>44</sup>Fohrer provides a list of distinctive forms as they appear in the book of Job. Georg Fohrer, Das Buch Hiob, in Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, c.1963), XVI, 52-53.

Both the prior and latter context of Jer. 12:1-6 are talking of the "men of Anathoth" (11:21), "your brothers and the house of your father" (12:6). The wicked seem to be definite people in Jeremiah's mind, not a universal term for the godless in general. Likewise, Habakkuk, although his plea appears at first glance more general, seems to define the particular object of his plea in 1:12-17 as, according to the consensus of scholarship, the Chaldeans.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the protest of the prophets has not reached the stage of a general theodicy, but is concerned with the immediate problem confronting the prophet.<sup>46</sup> In this same context, it should be noted that Job further refines the direction of his argumentation (9:22-24, and elsewhere) into a bitter complaint against the arbitrariness of Eloah (not merely prosperity of the wicked, but equality of wicked and righteous before an unconcerned Eloah. It seems that Job, unlike the prophets, is not demanding a solution to his problem, but is content with venting his anger against Eloah.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, the divine answer upon both prophetic protests is significant. Yahweh's answer to Job does not concern his specific request, but his entire stance

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<sup>45</sup>Horst, p. 175.

<sup>46</sup>Rowley, p. 217.

<sup>47</sup>Perhaps there is significance in the fact that Job argues differently to Eloah than do the prophets to Yahweh.

against Yahweh. The answer to the prophets is, on the other hand, more apposite to the specific background of the protest itself. This answer, along with the wider context of the prophetic protest, provides an unmistakable prophetic background for the protest: Jeremiah is recalled to his prophetic office, Habakkuk is reassured of Yahweh's control of the history the prophet had been preaching. The surface similarities do not allow a precise identification, even of general tenor.

The second major similarity which is pointed out between the prophetic protest and Job is the strong displeasure with life as it confronts the author. Here such protests as Jer. 15:10, 20:14-18, perhaps even 1 Kings 19:4, are drawn together with such passages as Job 3, 6:8-13, 10:18-22. However, a closer look again reveals some basic distinctions. Elijah's protest in 1 Kings 19:4 is a protest from the specific situation of Jezebel's threat (19:2) and is consciously linked with his prophetic office and the fate of fellow prophets (19:10, 14). His call for death is a call of despair, of a wish to be relieved of his prophetic burden. Job's despair, on the other hand, is linked to his personal suffering and his wish is to be relieved of Eloah's oppressive hand. The task of the prophet is the decisive difference. The same applies to Jer. 15:10. Here Jeremiah does not actually wish for death itself, although he does despair of

life. However, the despair grows from the prophetic office of intercession (15:11) which is rejected by those very people for whom he has interceded. Jeremiah speaks from a specific situation, whereas Job's despair is a summary of his suffering. Perhaps the closest parallel of prophetic protest to Job is the protest of Jer. 20:14-18:

Cursed be the day  
 on which I was born;  
 the day on which my mother bore me,  
 let it not be blessed.  
 Cursed by the man  
 who brought the good news to my father,  
 "A son is born to you,"  
 making him very glad.  
 Let that man be like the cities  
 which Yahweh overthrew without mercy;  
 let him hear a cry in the morning,  
 and an alarm at noon;  
 because he did not kill me in the womb  
 so that my mother would have been my grave  
 and her womb forever pregnant.  
 Why have I come forth from the womb  
 to see toil and sorrow  
 that my days be spent in shame?

If this passage be isolated from its context and studied as an isolated unit, there are no apparent elements of background hints which distinguish it from the parallel passages in Job, especially ch. 3. However, while 20:14-18 must be studied as an independent unit from a literary perspective--it is a unity distinct from 20:7-13<sup>48</sup>--yet its context must be recognized for larger study. Its authenticity is nowhere doubted and

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. Baumgartner, p. 67 and Weiser, Jeremia, p. 180.

since it contains nothing contrary to the prophetic corpus, its interpretation must be taken from the rest of Jeremiah, as enlightenment from parallel literatures is sought:

Die beiden Stücke [Jer. 20:14-18 and Job 3:3-9] sind einander erstaunlich nahe, sie decken sich fast in allen Motiven. . . . Literarische Abhängigkeit der einen von der anderen Stelle anzunehmen, ist keineswegs notwendig. Die in beiden Stücken ganz gleiche Struktur weist auf eine vorliterarische feste Form, die nur aus Fluchwunsch und Begründung bestand. Diese Form wird hier und dort verschieden variiert und erweitert. Man kann sagen, dass die Ausprägung bei Hiob entwickelter also bei Jeremia; man kann also annehmen, dass die Hiobform jünger ist. Aber sicher ist das nicht; ein Nebeneinander wäre nicht unmöglich.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, problems proposed and emotions felt by the prophets are not unique in the Old Testament. The prophetic protest thus finds similarities and parallels in the wisdom literature, particularly that of Job. The presence of these parallels, evident particularly from Jer. 20:14-18, certainly indicates that the formal consideration of the protest elsewhere must be tempered also with this relationship.<sup>50</sup> However, the fact that wisdom literature appears later than the

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<sup>49</sup>Claus Westermann, Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1956), p. 32.

<sup>50</sup>While Duhm (p. 115) sees parallels to this passage in the Psalter, Baumgartner (pp. 54, 59, 61) rightly sees that by content the psalms and Job can be closely related, although the formal aspects of this passage prohibit an identification with the lament psalms. Cf. also Fohrer, pp. 50-51, and Westermann, Hiob, pp. 31-33.

prophetic protest<sup>51</sup>--at least the protests considered here-- and the fact that the wisdom literature studied here is not characterized by literary forms applicable to the prophetic protest make an identification tenuous. The further prophetic background of the protests and the prophetic casting of the specific problem proposed (concrete, occasional background, relation to the prophetic office) make an identification dangerous:

Eine literarische Abhängigkeit des Hiobdichters von dem Propheten ist nicht anzunehmen; die menschlich schlichtere Art des Jeremia und das in die mythischen Bereiche hinaufgreifende Pathos dem persönlichen Charakter dieser beiden Gestalten verwachsen, dasz jede ihre eignen Originalität für sich beanspruchen darf.<sup>52</sup>

This is particularly true as one realizes that the protests here considered represent only a small number of all the protests. The similarities where present must be recognized, but as a general pattern, the relationship seems superficial.

#### Literary Independence of the Prophetic Protest

One final suggestion concerning the literary study of the prophetic protest stems from the presence of Rib terminology.

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<sup>51</sup>Cf. Julius A. Bewer, The Literature of the Old Testament (third edition; New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 171.

<sup>52</sup>Artur Weiser, Das Buch Hiob in Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1951), XIII, 38.

The importance of the Rib has been widely developed in prophetic literature: covenant Rib--Mic. 6, Is. 1:10-20, Rib against the nations--Is. 43:8-13.<sup>53</sup> Some scholars suggest therefore that Jeremiah is adapting the Rib setting to his complaint against Yahweh; Blank states categorically that "directly or ultimately the form of the confessions [of Jeremiah] goes back to the law courts."<sup>54</sup> Holladay, after a presentation of technical legal terminology here and elsewhere, suggests the proper translation of Jer. 12:1: "Thou art innocent, O Lord, whenever I lodge a complaint with thee, yet I would pass judgment upon thee."<sup>55</sup> While certain features of the Rib are certainly present, most notably the fact that the accusations of the prophets are built upon previous commitments from Yahweh (His call, His very nature--see below, Ch. IV, 3),<sup>56</sup> as well as familiar vocabulary (ל'ך, וְעַשְׂתָּהוּ, etc.),

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<sup>53</sup>Cf. G. E. Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in Israel's Prophetic Heritage (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1962), p. 52. A wider development is found in Julian Harvey, "The 'Rib-pattern', Prophetic Indictment Upon the Breaking of Covenant," unpublished English translation of "le 'Rib Pattern' requisitoire prophetique sur la rupture de l'alliance," Biblica, XLIII (1962), 172-196.

<sup>54</sup>Sheldon H. Blank, "The Confessions of Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer," Hebrew Union College Annual, XXI (1948), p. 337.

<sup>55</sup>Holladay, p. 49.

<sup>56</sup>Boecker demonstrates how the accusation of the prophets upon the people are built upon the previous commands of God. The same, it would seem can apply to the prophet's accusations against Yahweh. Hans Jochen Boecker, Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament (Neukirchen: Neukirchen-Ullyn, c.1964), pp. 71-94.



פִּתְּוֹ), yet the identification of a strict form is somewhat tenuous. The attitude of the prophet, while defiant and accusing, is that of a creature before his Creator and Caller, so that while Yahweh is placed on the defensive in certain protests, He is still God:

Jahwe hier gleichzeitig als Rechtspartner (als Angeklagter) und als Richter vorgestellt ist. Der Prophet stellt seine Anfrage (. . . פִּתְּוֹ) nach dem Gluck der Götlosen in der Absicht, damit Jahwe, der doch für das Geschick der Menschen verantwortlich ist, unter Anklage zu stellen. In diesem Sinne ist Jahwe Rechtspartner des Propheten. Aber dieser kann seiner Anklage nirgendwo anders also eben vor Jahwe vorbringen. So ist Jahwe zugleich der Schiedsrichter.<sup>57</sup>

Thus Gemser seems closest to the truth when he describes the Rib not as a distinct literary form in all cases but as a "pattern of Hebrew mentality."<sup>58</sup>

As one surveys all the prophetic protests, the impression of literary independence steadily grows. Even the closest parallels between some of the protests and other literary forms (lament, wisdom literature, Rib) fall short when pressed

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 132. Holladay is also correct, however, in finding Jeremiah's feelings to be a protest rather than a puzzlement. Holladay, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup>This is the title and thesis of Gemser's article. Blank (p. 338), however, feels that the fact that Jeremiah, although Yahweh in 11:20 reveals the plots to him, calls to Yahweh to remember his plight proves that the form has dictated a seeming contradiction. However, this same situation throughout the Psalter makes Gemser's view more attractive.

for detail;<sup>59</sup> this is particularly true when those protests are viewed from the remaining majority of protests which seem to have no literary antecedent. Just as there is no consistent literary pattern within any particular prophet, so no one form can be used to characterize all the protests. Perhaps the most helpful approach is to view these protests as only one part of the larger prophetic works in which they appear. Within those works are evidences of many literary forms which are developed and adapted by the prophet according to his specific needs and artistic temperament: Jer. 7 and 11 seem to be deliberate adaptations of a covenant renewal sermon; Is. 7:13-17 can be understood as a form of royal psalm; the Rib against the nations in Second Isaiah seems an adaptation from the Rib against Israel in First Isaiah; Baumgartner lists other forms which the prophets utilized in their adapted forms ("die Leichenklage, das Spottgedicht, das Trinklied, das Wallfahrtslied").<sup>60</sup> In summary, when the various literary forms, particularly also those in an adapted form, seem to be recalled, the protests must be understood at least in part in the light of those forms. However, in so far as the forms are incomplete and the parallels not precise, the basic context of the pericope must provide the primary background.

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<sup>59</sup>Baumgartner, p. 59.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

Thus the independence of these protests consistently asserts itself. There seems to be no single form, whether from other literatures or from the protests themselves, which can serve to unite the protests. In the first place, the protest may appear as part of narrative prose (Gen. 18),<sup>61</sup> as part of a larger poetic work (Is. 63), as an independent ejaculation (Hos. 9:14), or as an independent poem (Jer. 20:14-18). The protest can appear in summary fashion (Jer. 45:2-3) or as spontaneous and unresolved (Hab. 1). The protests further range from a very personal request from Yahweh to an accusation against Yahweh to a communal supplication. It is extremely difficult to find a common literary bond between Abraham's plea for a son (Gen. 15) and Elijah's wish for death (1 Kings 19), between Ezekiel's protest about eating food cooked over human dung (Ez. 4:14) and the national plea of Is. 63. It becomes evident that it is not only difficult to bind these protests together from a formal standpoint, but it is difficult therefore even to isolate what should be formally classified as a protest: von Rad describes Cain's remonstrance

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<sup>61</sup>In the case of the protests preserved in prose form (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Elijah), the problem of later editorializing and recasting of the original protest dampens an effort to characterize those protests. It should be noted in passing that all the Pentateuchal protests derive from the Yahwist (or Yahwist-Elohism) tradition.

as a protest, although it is clearly not prophetic;<sup>62</sup> the line between the protest of Is. 63 and the general community lament is extremely thin. Perhaps the most that can be done is to describe the recurring elements characteristic of prophetic protest: there is a wide use of various particles, many of which never occur in the Psalter and rarely in wisdom literature;<sup>63</sup> there is a consistent boldness of stance before Yahweh; as the burden of suffering is described, Yahweh is often blamed as its cause;<sup>64</sup> there is a consistent qualification of Yahweh;<sup>65</sup> the prophet continually reflects upon the personal and prophetic promises made by Yahweh, so that the call becomes central to the protest;<sup>66</sup> the divine response to

<sup>62</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, translated from the German by John H. Marks, in The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, c.1961), p. 102.

<sup>63</sup>Generally the vocabulary appearing frequently in the protests comprise the most frequently appearing vocabulary throughout the Old Testament. Most of the words which appear regularly in the protests but not over three hundred times in the Old Testament--these would be the special words if any--are words with a distinct prophetic and moral overtone: ׀, ׁ, ׂ, ׃, ׄ, ׅ, ׆, ׇ, ׈, ׉, ׊, ׋, ׌, ׍, ׎, ׏, א, ב, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח, ט, י, ך, ם, מ, ן, נ, ס, ע, ף, ץ, ם, ן, נ, ס, ע, ף, ץ, ם, ן, נ, ס, ע, ף, ץ. There are a surprising number of particles used which never appear in the Psalter and only rarely in wisdom literature: ׀, ׁ, ׂ, ׃, ׄ, ׅ, ׆, ׇ, ׈, ׉, ׊, ׋, ׌, ׍, ׎, ׏, א, ב, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח, ט, י, ך, ם, מ, ן, נ, ס, ע, ף, ץ, ם, ן, נ, ס, ע, ף, ץ.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Gen. 15:2, Ex. 5:22-23, Judg. 7:7, Is. 63:17, Jer. 20:7. This can appear in the form of questions to Yahweh (Hab. 1:2, Jer. 14:8-9) or statements concerning life under Yahweh (Num. 11:14, 1 Kings 19:10, Jer. 45:3).

<sup>65</sup>Cf. Jer. 14:8, 15:15, 18:23, 20:12.

<sup>66</sup>Since this will be developed at length below, it will not be treated here. Cf. Chapter III.

the protest is not infrequent.<sup>67</sup> As these characteristics are listed and are seen to appear with some regularity, they cannot serve as either a structure or definitive recognition points of the prophetic protest; they are post facto descriptions of a basically inconsistent phenomenon.

This chapter has sought to investigate by literary means a consistent pattern upon which the protest can be structured and around which the protests can be grouped. Because, however, the study of literary form has given no consistent guidelines upon which to structure the protest, a pattern must be sought in the study of the function of prophetic protest. As will be noted below, the one feature which can be looked to as uniting a majority of the protests is the background of the prophetic call.<sup>68</sup> However, because that relationship is not primarily one of literary form but rather of content and function, the discussion of that relationship cannot be given here. It must finally be said that as the study of function is applied to prophetic protest, the various functions must

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<sup>67</sup>Cf. Chapter IV.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Norman Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," soon to appear in Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. This paper has provided many of the references treated in the call section below. Cf. also Gerhard von Rad, "Die Konfessionen Jeremias," Evangelische Theologie, III, 7 (July, 1936), p. 274.

also be weighed by both the positive and the negative findings of this chapter, the literary form.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FUNCTION OF PROPHETIC PROTEST

The prophetic protest is that personal accusation and challenge addressed by the prophets to Yahweh concerning His imposition of unfair burdens upon the prophet. As the circumstances and situations surrounding a particular protest will vary, so its content and purpose will vary. It is the purpose of this chapter to study the prophetic protest according to its various functions (as intended by the prophet) and thus to isolate as much as is possible the essential features and bases of prophetic protest. The division chosen must be somewhat selective because the various functions are not mutually exclusive; however, the division is not unnatural. First those protests will be studied which concern the people, namely intercession and imprecation, and secondly those which concern the prophet as he personally stands before Yahweh.

#### The Prophetic Protest as Intercession

The first function of prophetic protest is that of intercession. Intercession itself is a consistent and integral role in prophetic ministry: Moses and Samuel; Yahweh's repeated proscription of intercession to Jeremiah (7:16, 11:14, 14:11) seems to provide the exception which proves the

rule.<sup>1</sup> What, however, is distinct about the intercessions studied here is that their basis lies in a prophetic protest against the announced designs of Yahweh. Such intercession is not merely a pleading with Yahweh, but a challenge to Yahweh, a direct confrontal stemming not from a helpless creature with a humble plea, but from an upright spokesman with a direct accusation.

In many situations of general prophetic intercession, the identity of the prophet seems so closely related to his membership in the people of Israel, that his individuality becomes blurred. In a few cases of prophetic protest-intercession a similar understanding seems to hold. Ez. 34:9, Josh. 7:7, Judg. 6:13, Is. 63:15-19, Jer. 14:7-9 all present an intercession in the first person plural, so that the prophetic element (and protest) is not apparent at first glance. A closer look, however, reveals a significant mixture of number and person in these intercessions: first singular and first plural ("me" and "us" in Is. 63:15,17), third singular-plural and first plural (Josh. 7:7ff.). While the sense seems to convey that when the prophet is interceding for his people, he is considering himself to be one of those people and as such is interceding also for himself, yet it

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. also the obvious assumption behind Jer. 15:1, 27:18 that intercession and prophecy are integrally related.



becomes readily apparent also that the prophet is suffering not only with the people but also for them and thus bringing his intercession to Yahweh on this double basis. Thus in Isaiah there is a close relationship between the fact that "the yearning of your heart and your mercies are withheld from me" and the fact that Israel is "like those over whom you have never ruled, upon whom your name has never been endowed" (Is. 63:15-19). In the case of Gideon such intercession stands in the immediate context of his call as judge and prophet (Judg. 6:13ff.).<sup>2</sup> Moses can describe the people as stiff-necked and yet immediately ask Yahweh to "pardon our iniquity" (Ex. 34:9). Thus the prophet comes to Yahweh not merely as an Israelite, as a prophet who shares in Israel's burden, but as a prophet who bears the burden of Israel as well.<sup>3</sup> The basis for Moses' intercession finally comes to be himself and his stance of grace before Yahweh: "If I have found favor in your eyes, . . . go in our midst . . . and

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<sup>2</sup>At first glance, one may question whether Gideon should be included in a discussion of prophetic protest. The context surrounding his call seems to indicate, however, a religious, even cultic background which far supersedes a purely military function assigned to Gideon by Yahweh. At any rate, the conclusions made from the Gideon material are not such that cannot be supported from other prophetic protests.

<sup>3</sup>Because of the many-sided problems surrounding the Suffering Servant poems of Isaiah and because they do not offer direct accusations against Yahweh, in spite of their elevated doctrine of suffering, the poems will not be developed in this paper.

pardon our iniquity" (Ex. 34:9).

The prophetic stance in such intercession also becomes readily visible in the bitterness of the protest-intercession. Isaiah not only confesses that "we no longer fear you" but charges Yahweh with making them err and hardening their heart (Is. 63:17). Likewise Jeremiah (14:7-9) can combine words of complete faith in Yahweh ("O Hope of Israel, its Savior") and a confession of sin with an accusation which is more than a mere motivational device; rather he registers a bitter protest:

Why should you be like a stranger in the land,  
like a wayfarer who turns aside to spend the night?  
Why should you be like a man overwhelmed,  
like a mighty man unable to save?

The tenor of such accusation provides a fleeting glimpse of the deeper frustration and protest even in the midst of these intercessions in which the prophet identifies himself closely with his people.<sup>4</sup> The prophet is not merely protesting his situation but the failure of Yahweh to act; the prophet does not merely offer his request but hurls a direct rebuke and challenge to Yahweh.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Because of these two features (the individuality of the prophet and the bitterness of the protest) this form of intercession, although it may be formally distinct in its use of the first person plural to include all of Israel, is essentially no different from that which follows.

<sup>5</sup>As has been developed in Ch. II, such a stance of prophet against Yahweh appears only in a prophetic context. Such a stance is generally foreign to the psalmist, while not the stance but intercession is generally not integral to wisdom literature.

In most prophetic protest-intercession, however, the distinct identity of the prophet as separate from his people is more clearly maintained. The people are spoken of in the third person ("your people", "this people", "them") as though the prophet is distinct from them; the picture seems to be that of a mediator, one who stands between people and Yahweh reflecting both but belonging to neither. Since such prophetic protest-intercession comprises the full chronological span of prophecy (Abraham to the exile) and since prophetic intercession comprises a major portion of prophetic protest, the protest-intercession will be studied by its distinctive features rather than by a full examination of each protest.

The first major feature which spans protest-intercession is that the foundation of the intercession does not stem from the prompting of the people for such intercession.<sup>6</sup> While it is certainly obvious that the suffering of the people provides the background for intercession--otherwise there would be no need for intercession--yet the prophet does not speak because he has been asked to speak. The prophet speaks not in the first instance as a delegated Israelite, but as a prophet, the mediator who speaks directly to Yahweh without need of

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. also Is. 37:1-4 and Jer. 37:3.

recourse to the people.<sup>7</sup> This remarkable freedom of intercession is true whether the judgment of Yahweh upon Israel is already accomplished or is only proposed for the future. In the first instance, Joshua, after the defeat at Ai (Josh. 7), presents his case immediately before Yahweh without a directive from the people to do so. More significantly, the first response of Gideon upon being called by Yahweh are words of immediate intercession. In some cases the immediate background of prophetic intercession may lie in a complaint made to the prophet by the people: as to Moses after Pharaoh's command of bricks without straw (Ex. 5) or as to Elijah when the widow charges that her son's death was due to his presence (1 Kings 17). However, the intercession itself is not requested by the people; the prophet in his boldness simply throws this complaint into the face of Yahweh and demands His action. The same is well illustrated when the judgment is seen to be decreed for the future; the prophet reacts before he ever confronts the people with Yahweh's oracle of judgment. So, for instance, in the visions of Amos (7:1-3, 4-6) and Ezekiel (9:3-8) the prophetic intercession is an immediate reaction to Yahweh's decree. This holds true also when the

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<sup>7</sup>It seems not unlikely that this role of mediator is closely bound to the formal role of covenant mediator. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to pursue a statement of precise relationship.

announcement is made without a vision. Abraham (Gen. 18: 23-33), who had never lived in Sodom and Gomorrah and knew but few of its inhabitants, immediately presented his intercession for the sake of the city--even the wicked of the city.<sup>8</sup> Moses (Ex. 32:11-13) upon hearing Yahweh's judgment concerning the golden calf idolatry of Israel, presented his protest-intercession before he had gone down to his people. Thus, the foundation for the prophetic protest of intercession does not lie first of all in the people. It stems very directly from that ministry which is the prophet's, the ministry of mediator.

A second consistent and basic feature of protest-intercession is that its foundation lies not only in the prophet, but it lies also at the hand of Yahweh Himself. The prophet does not protest his people's suffering itself as vehemently as he protests the fact that the people's suffering is due to Yahweh's hand. Of course, it cannot be overlooked that there are confessions of sin in these intercessions. Yet the place attributed to the sin of the people is not central to the protest itself: in Ex. 32:31 and Jer. 14:7 the sin of the people is confessed, but the accusation follows that the sin did not deserve the punishment Yahweh had imposed; in Is. 63:17 it is not only true that Israel erred,

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<sup>8</sup>Gen. 20:7 specifically refers to Abraham as a prophet.

that "we no longer fear you," but the cause of such apostasy is laid directly at the hand of Yahweh, "Why do you make us err, O Yahweh, from your ways? [why] do you harden our heart that we no longer fear you?" Sin is not the central basis of the protest-intercession; the basis rather lies with Yahweh Himself.

Thus the prophets can attribute the cause of Israel's suffering directly to Yahweh's action:

"Why have you done evil to this people?" (Ex. 5:22)

"Why have you ever brought this people across the Jordan, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?" (Josh. 7:7)

"But now Yahweh has given us up; he has given us over into the hand of Midian." (Judg. 6:13)

"Why do you make us err, O Yahweh, from your ways? [why] do you harden our heart that we no longer fear you?" (Is. 63:17)

"Why have you smitten us, so that there is no healing for us?" (Jer. 14:19).

Regardless of the spiritual status of the people, regardless of the prophet's subsequent message to the people, in his protest to Yahweh the prophet presses the charge of the responsibility of Israel's oppression directly to Yahweh.

In other protest-intercessions the equation may not be as direct, although the charge is no less clear. Israel is suffering because Yahweh has neglected His people and failed to keep His promises:

Pray, Lord, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where are all his wonderful deeds which our fathers recounted to us, saying, "Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?" (Judg. 6:13)

In some cases the charge of failure is directly tied by the

prophet to his own call; Yahweh has not only been unfaithful to His people, but even to His prophet:

O Lord, why have you done evil to this people?  
 Why did you ever send me? Ever since I came to  
 Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil  
 to this people, and you have not at all saved  
 your people. (Ex. 5:22-23)

Moses' charge is that he had fulfilled his role by speaking in Yahweh's name (as commissioned in 3:14, 4:12-15), but Yahweh had failed to keep His promises to both the people and the prophet.<sup>9</sup> The blame of responsibility is taken by the prophet directly to the hand of Yahweh. It cannot be said that the prophet overlooks or whitewashes the responsibility of the people; when he speaks to the people, he presents Yahweh's oracle of judgment in all its severity. However, when the mediator is speaking with Yahweh, his primary concern is not with the people. The function of intercession on behalf of the people takes its content from the protest which the prophet hurls against the person of Yahweh.

Since therefore the foundation of the protest-intercession does not lie in the people, but directly with Yahweh, therefore the remedy and the motivation for remedy must also center in Yahweh. Obviously these bases for Yahweh's action proposed by the prophet are not as isolated as they must appear when studied here, nor are they mutually exclusive. However, the

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<sup>9</sup>The centrality of the prophetic call in the protest will be specifically developed below.

variety of bases and their essential, common features will become apparent.

Yahweh is a God who should (and must) deliver His people first of all because He is a God of mercy and long-suffering. Moses in an unusual (for him) stance pleads with Yahweh simply on the basis of "the greatness of your  $\text{בְּרִית}$ "; for support he quotes almost verbatim Ex. 34:6-7 (Num. 14:18-19). Amos (7:2,5) and Ezekiel (9:8) base their pleading upon the helplessness of Judah (the remnant) and the consequent reaction of mercy called for from Yahweh. Because such reactions appear so seldom in these prophets, and when they do appear take the form of ejaculations rather than extended dialogs, it is difficult to determine whether a more protesting attitude lay behind what appears to be humble pleading. As the texts stand, the prophets appeal hopefully to the mercy of Yahweh. In most appeals to Yahweh's mercy,<sup>10</sup> however, the prophet first acknowledges and reminds Yahweh of His past deliverance of His people and His promises for future faithfulness to the people. Thus, the intercession becomes more than a simple pleading; here is a challenge built upon Yahweh's mercy, that He should continue that mercy into the future. Because Yahweh has "brought [your people] forth from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand," therefore

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<sup>10</sup>The specific term here is Yahweh's  $\text{בְּרִית}$ , His covenant faithfulness (Num. 14:19).



Yahweh should continue to preserve His people, in spite of the golden calf incident. At the same time, Moses calls on Yahweh to "remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own person concerning the promise of descendants and inhabitation " (Ex. 32:11-13). Because Yahweh is a God who has forgiven, therefore He should forgive now (Num. 14:9). Perhaps Gideon more forcefully than the prophets above makes a direct challenge and rebuff of Yahweh's mercy; while reviewing Yahweh's past deliverances and His promises in the fact of Israel's present suffering, he queries: "Where are all his wonderful deeds which our fathers recounted to us?" (Judg. 6:13). Yahweh's mercy is called on and challenged to become operative, not merely because Israel is so helpless, but because Yahweh fails to be Yahweh without manifesting His mercy.<sup>11</sup>

The prophet can appeal secondly to Yahweh's basic integrity as the basis of deliverance. Moses particularly confronts Yahweh with the consequences of His proposed judgment by asking Him what the nations, particularly the Egyptians whom He had just defeated, will say and think--not of Israel, but of Yahweh Himself (Ex. 32:12, Num. 14:13-16). It is Joshua,

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<sup>11</sup>Perhaps this is the background also for those poems in the prophets which, while not addressing Yahweh directly, present the prophets' sympathetic grief so vividly that an answer from Yahweh is certainly looked for: Jer. 8:18-9:1.

however, who makes the most pointed use of this cajoling. He proposes that if Yahweh continues his oppression of Israel and the Canaanites hear of it, they will rise up and kill Israel. The implication is that it is not Israel who will suffer, although they be killed, but Yahweh because His people will be defeated. Yahweh must save His people, because of His personal integrity, His stake in the history of Israel. After his recital of the conditions above, Joshua ends his protest with the direct challenge: "and what will you do for your great name?" (Josh. 7:9). He does not invoke Yahweh's action for the sake of Israel, but for the sake of Yahweh's name, for His integrity. So also Jeremiah, after the confession of sin and after his castigation of Yahweh's failure (or implied inability) to act, bases His intercession on the fact that "your name is endowed upon us" (Jer. 14:9). When this motive appears in other intercessions the aspect of Yahweh's integrity is central.<sup>12</sup> Israel is of importance and to be saved specifically because Israel is Yahweh's people, and His integrity will not allow His name or His work (deliverance of Israel) to be profaned. The center of the motivation is Yahweh's integrity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Ex. 33:13: "Consider too that this nation is your people."

<sup>13</sup>It is not difficult to detect an antecedent here of the later popular abuse of this theme, the doctrine of the inviolability of Zion.

A third protest motivation is the appeal and challenge to Yahweh's righteousness; He must save His people because He is a righteous God by nature. Naturally it can be assumed that this may be the basis of all the protests; yet there are special and specific appeals made to Yahweh's righteousness aside from the general pattern that because Yahweh has wronged His people, therefore to right the wrong He must deliver His people. Abraham in his intercession drives to the core of Yahweh's righteousness. He characterizes Yahweh as "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25) and then asks if He could honestly destroy the righteous men along with the wicked. Since that is inconceivable, Abraham presses this point to the extent that his intercession ceases to be mere pleading; his bristling use of the particles  $\text{עַל־כֵּן}$  and  $\text{וְעַתָּה}$  seek to force Yahweh into a position where he can do nothing else but grant Abraham's request. This is no longer prayer, but pressure, a direct protest built upon Yahweh's nature (perhaps also His conscience) as righteous. So also Elijah uses Yahweh's righteousness as a tool against Him. The widow had blamed the death of her son on Elijah's presence, and Elijah in his intercession protests that it is not right of Yahweh to punish the widow on Elijah's account (1 Kings 17:20). In effect Elijah accuses Yahweh of being unfair and implicitly demands Yahweh's deliverance upon the widow.

Thus, as the prophet constructs his protest-intercession

before Yahweh, He does not hesitate to accuse Yahweh of wrong and to demand that He remedy the situation. The demand itself can range from the gentlest pleading through reminding, challenging, cajoling to accusing and threatening.<sup>14</sup> The stance of threat introduces one final aspect of the basis of the prophetic protest-intercession, that of the person of the prophet himself and his personal importance as a tool before Yahweh. Implicit in Elijah's intercession for the widow (1 Kings 17:20) is an exasperation with Yahweh because the widow and Elijah both recognized Yahweh's judging hand applied to Elijah through the death of the widow's son. It seems that Habakkuk follows a similarly devious route of logic from seeming personal lament (1:1-3) to national intercession (1:19). Moses, however, makes the most brazen use of his own office as Yahweh's prophet. He can threaten, by offering an ultimatum to Yahweh by saying in effect that if Yahweh doesn't forgive His people, Moses no longer desires to be His prophet: "and if [you will] not [forgive them], blot me, I pray, out of your book, which you have written" (Ex. 32:32). In addition to the prophetic threat concerning his person the

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<sup>14</sup>Perhaps also Is. 24:16 should be understood in this sense: Isaiah seems to portray a tension between the joys of the coming age and the reality of the present as experienced through their own suffering. This seems to be also a hidden plea for Yahweh's hasty deliverance--not merely of himself but of the people in the future age.

consequences of the threat concerning his call as Yahweh's prophet are drawn out. The fact that Yahweh has not delivered His people reflects not only upon Yahweh's faithfulness to the people but upon His faithfulness to His chosen prophet. The very lack of deliverance is a negation of Yahweh's promise at Moses' call (Ex. 5:22). "Why did you ever send me?" is a cry of both helpless frustration and bitter rebuke, because Moses did "speak in your name," although Yahweh refused to act. The theme of protest based upon the call will be developed later; the importance of this feature here is that the prophet adds another dimension to the necessity of Yahweh's action: Yahweh must act not only because He must right a wrong for which He is responsible, but also because He must be faithful to His promise made through the prophet's call; it almost seems as though Yahweh is held personally accountable by the prophet. In yet another pericope Moses ties the personal relationship of Prophet to Yahweh with the fortunes of Israel: "if your presence will not accompany [us--or me] [the subject of the protest of vv. 12-14], do not lead us up from here." (Ex. 33:15). Again it is not merely the challenge for Yahweh to act that is significant, but the fact that it hinges upon Yahweh's faithfulness to the prophet. Accusation, threat, rebuke all form part of the prophetic protest-intercession as they revolve around Yahweh and the prophet in dialog for the sake of Israel. Upon this delineation of the central and

essential features of prophetic protest-intercession, certain concluding observations can be made. First, in the protest Yahweh is considered the (direct or indirect) agent of the evil plaguing Israel; the people's sin may be involved but that sin does not form the root of the protest. Secondly, because Yahweh is the agent of suffering, He also has the ability to remedy Israel's evil. Yahweh may have neglected or refused His people, but He has the power to effect their deliverance. Thirdly, Yahweh is also assumed as willing to listen and even repent of the designs of judgment which He has brought or is planning to bring upon Israel; therefore, it is the prophet's role to motivate Yahweh by his pleading, cajoling, provoking, threatening, accusing, reminding, coercing. In other words, the protest of the prophet seems to be an assumed prerogative by him. While the prophet does not go unrebuked for his protesting at times, his right to protest is never challenged by Yahweh. This assumption seems further borne out by the almost brazen confidence and boldness with which the prophet protests: the prophet finds no need to consult with the people; the prophet does not hesitate to accuse Yahweh of being the cause of evil; the prophet does not shrink from threatening Yahweh with his own person; the prophet feels the boldness to question Yahweh's relationship with him personally. The prophet is a true mediator, not merely a messenger, and as such appears regularly in a kind

of council with Yahweh.<sup>15</sup> It must be noted that such protest in no way deters the prophet's message to the people, nor does it alter that message; the message to the people is given finally by Yahweh Himself, even when necessary above the protest of the prophet (Jonah). However, the right of appeal never seems to be closed. Finally, the observation must be made that Yahweh is assumed to be in control over all things: the people, their fortunes, the prophet. This confidence and impregnable faith provides insight into the intensity of the prophet's questionings and protests and understandably brings the validity of the prophetic call into question; yet this central trust and the underlying confidence in Yahweh's faithfulness allows the prophet to protest vehemently because he is confident that Yahweh can and will restore His people.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Prophetic Protest as Imprecation

The second function toward which the prophetic protest is directed is that of imprecation. While intercession purposes to suspend the pronounced judgment of Yahweh, imprecation

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<sup>15</sup>For this conception of the prophet as in the council of Yahweh, cf. Jer. 23:18, also Amos 3:7.

<sup>16</sup>From the nature of prophetic intercession here presented the proscription of intercession to Jeremiah takes on added significance. Since he, in other ways to be shown later, is himself the word from Yahweh, his inability to intercede is a direct work of judgment upon Judah.

purposes to activate Yahweh's suspended judgment. However, imprecation is not actually a full complement to intercession, because in both the people are the object of the protest and Yahweh is the subject. As will become evident, the prophet again stands between people and Yahweh, so that the imprecation like the intercession is related to the prophet not as he is an Israelite (as in the Psalter), but as he is Yahweh's called prophet. The procedure of study will be the same as above; only central features, as illustrated by individual imprecations, will be developed.

The first consideration in an attempt to understand prophetic imprecation is not a hasty view of its content, but rather an investigation of its bases. As becomes apparent, supporting all prophetic imprecation is the prophetic conviction of the basic righteousness of Yahweh. Jeremiah particularly underscores this confidence as the basis of his pleading with Yahweh and the implied assurance that Yahweh will act:

Righteous are you, O Yahweh, when I contend with you,  
 yet I would speak of justice with you;  
 Why does the way of the wicked prosper?  
 Why do those who are treacherous thrive? (Jer. 12:1)

As in 11:20 (20:12) Jeremiah posits his confidence in Yahweh's righteousness, although, as 12:1b develops, he doesn't see that righteousness in operation. Likewise his plea of 18:20 ("Is evil recompensed for good?") presumes a God who is righteous and judges righteously. At the same time, however, such



appeal to the righteousness of Yahweh is not merely a statement of faith; it is a challenge to action. Jeremiah in the juxtaposition of 12:1a (Yahweh's righteousness) and 12:1b (the prosperity of the wicked) presents what should be according to Yahweh's righteousness an inconceivable situation; therefore this statement is also a call to action. Jeremiah spells this out more concretely in vv. 2-3: Yahweh has planted the wicked so that they grow; however, they have rejected Yahweh; therefore, Yahweh is called on (from His basic righteousness and integrity) to remove these men from the earth. In fact, according to v. 4 even nature suffers because of this situation. Yahweh must resolve this inequity because His righteousness is at stake.

Standing as a complement to this emphasis on Yahweh's person and nature is the prophet's protestation of his own innocence, as one who has deserved none of the abuse he suffered and therefore as one who deserves Yahweh's deliverance. The prophet pictures himself as a helpless victim of the plots and abuse of the wicked: Jer. 11:19, 12:4, 17:15, 18:23, 20:10, Mic. 7:10. In fact, Jeremiah felt himself so innocent that he was not even aware of the plots until Yahweh Himself revealed them to him (11:18). To this ignorance and innocence the prophet poses the pregnant challenge: "You know [their plots]" (Jer. 11:18, 18:23). However, the protest is not merely that the prophet is a helpless victim, but also

that he is an innocent and undeserving victim of the abuse he is receiving. Jeremiah takes special care to plead that he has not provoked the ire of his persecutors; rather he has "stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them" (18:20).<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah can even say in complete innocence: "I have not urged you [to bring] evil; I have not desired the day of destruction; you know; that which came out of my lips has been before you" (17:16). It is literally true to Jeremiah that he is receiving evil as a recompense for the good he had performed (18:20). Jeremiah further suggests that his innocence not only stands before his persecutors but even before Yahweh: "You, O Yahweh, have known me; you have seen me; you have tested my mind toward you." (12:3) Yahweh knows Jeremiah's heart and motivations and desires, and He knows, Jeremiah feels, that there is no guilt in him. This motif of the innocence of the prophet is given, however, one final and significant perspective which again contains an implicit challenge for Yahweh's action. The prophet is innocent of all his abuse above all because that which provoked the ire of his persecutors did not arise from the prophet himself; it was that word from Yahweh which the prophet was

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<sup>17</sup>This seems also the sense behind Moses' frustration of Ex. 17:4. He does not actually imprecate or bring protest against Yahweh, but his innocence and his integrity as prophet are placed as the basis for his request for Yahweh's resolution.

compelled to speak (20:7-9). Although the prophet resisted that word and attempted not to speak it, he had no choice; and it is upon that involuntary, compelled ministry that the prophet is subjected to abuse. As in all the above elements of the innocence of the prophet, this last perspective looks in part to Yahweh's mercy, but primarily to Yahweh's righteousness and the necessity of His deliverance. Although, as will be seen below, the force of the demand is not as strong as in prophetic intercession, yet the prophet does feel that he has the undeniable basis from which to call and challenge Yahweh into action.

As one studies these imprecations closely, it becomes evident that the imprecation is not based solely upon the righteousness of Yahweh even when conjoined with the protest of the innocence of the prophet; this would not of itself be uniquely prophetic. The significant basis lies precisely where these two meet, namely upon the intimate relationship between the prophet and Yahweh. Therefore, while the abuse suffered may seem on the surface to be directed merely against the prophet--if only thus, then merely a righteous individual--yet the close identity of the prophet (and his word) with Yahweh makes any sin against the prophet as a prophet a sin at the same time against Yahweh who called and speaks through the prophet. Moses, for instance, draws this identification very clearly. After Korah had rebelled against Moses'

leadership, Moses accuses, "Therefore you and all your company have gathered together against Yahweh." Upon this immediate identification Moses directs Yahweh ( $\text{ךָ}$  plus jussive), "Do not regard their offering" (Num. 16:11,15). In the one protest preserved from his ministry Hosea (9:14) so identifies himself with Yahweh and the judgment He pronounces upon the nation that he simply appends his personal imprecation to the oracle of Yahweh; again there is no question of Yahweh's rejecting his imprecation, the prophet merely gives his directive (imperative). In other imprecations this immediate identification is not quite as apparent; however, it is assumed nonetheless. When Jeremiah and Micah complain about the mockers who abuse them, that which is specifically noted as being mocked is not merely the prophet himself, but the word which he speaks: Jer. 12:4, 17:15, 20:7-9, Mic. 7:10. According to Jer. 11:21, the very cause and content of the plots of Jeremiah's persecutors was their prohibition: "Do not prophesy in the name of Yahweh."<sup>18</sup> Here Jeremiah makes the identification and the challenge of his protest as keenly felt as he can.<sup>19</sup> The men of Anathoth prohibit Jeremiah to

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. also Amos 2:12, 7:12-13, Mic. 2:6.

<sup>19</sup>This can also be understood as a direct opposition to Yahweh who had specifically called Jeremiah to speak "whatever I command you" (1:7). In other words, Jeremiah is placing his opponents directly into the theological camp of Yahweh's enemies.

prophecy on pain of death (11:21). Jeremiah, however, cannot but prophesy because the hand of Yahweh compels him (20:9). Therefore the rejection of Jeremiah's message is the rejection of Yahweh as well, and as such demands Yahweh's judgment.<sup>20</sup>

Without doubt there is a blurred mixture of the prophet's personal vindictiveness and his theological identification with Yahweh. However, it seems that even the vindictiveness he feels is not purely his own; not only his words but his soul and its emotions are governed by Yahweh. The prophet is "filled with the wrath of Yahweh" (Jer. 6:11). His suffering is in part a suffering due to Yahweh's indwelling: "Because of your hand, I have sat alone, for you have filled me with indignation" (Jer. 15:17). However, this relationship is to be defined, it seems inevitable that the prophet should suffer abuse because of the prophetic word which he speaks and offense because of the divine indignation he feels. Thus, it almost seems that prophetic imprecation is inevitable. When the righteousness of Yahweh is not asserted upon the rejection of the prophet and his word, the prophet feels the freedom and the necessity to challenge Yahweh to rectify His word; by rectifying His work, Yahweh is at the same time vindicating

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<sup>20</sup>This is the implication also of Ezekiel's protest (21:5): "Ah Lord Yahweh, they are saying of me, 'Is he not a maker of allegories?'". Ezekiel's suffering stems from the rejection of the word with which as its prophet he is inseparable.

His prophet because the two have become inseparably bound.<sup>21</sup> Prophetic imprecation, in other words, is built immediately upon the prophetic office, not merely upon the general persecution of the pious, as in the Psalter.

In addition to understanding the bases of the prophetic imprecation, it is helpful to investigate also the manner in which these imprecations were invoked. At first glance, the range of prophetic stance seems as comprehensive as above in the intercession. There is the calm, confident, yet expectant statement of what the future will be when Yahweh does bring His judgment to bear: Jer. 20:11, Mic. 7:10. A more pleading stance is suggested when the prophet employs the jussive in a modal sense, a kind of optative "let him, may he be . . .": Jer. 11:20, 17:18, 18:21. Finally there is also the outright directive given to Yahweh: imperative--Jer. 12:3, 15:15, 17:18, 18:21, Hosea 9:14; or  $\text{N}$  plus the jussive--Num. 16:15, Jer. 18:23. The general tenor of the invocation and challenge, however, does not seem as bold as in the intercession. While protest and challenge are directly and forcefully given to Yahweh, the direct rebuke and accusation are not as fully developed. Nowhere does the prophet present the ultimatum to Yahweh when he imprecates as Moses did in his intercession of

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<sup>21</sup>Thus Jeremiah in 15:15 uses the Niphal imperative in a reflexive sense:  $\text{N}$   $\text{P}$   $\text{J}$   $\text{N}$  --"avenge yourself for me".

Ex. 32:32. This leads one to conclude that while imprecation may be an inevitable consequence of the prophetic office, it is apparently not as clearly an integral part of that office as is intercession, even though both are built directly upon the prophetic ministry.

After a consideration of the bases and the invocation of the prophetic imprecation, it is possible to place the content of that imprecation within its proper perspective. What the prophet calls down upon his persecutors must be directly related to the rebuke which those persecutors have given not only to the prophet but to Yahweh. The language of the imprecation is extremely harsh. However, there seem to be two consistent features which characterize such imprecation. The first is that the harshness of the imprecation is not so much to be understood hyperbolically as theologically:

Therefore give their sons over to the famine;  
 deliver them up to the power of the sword,  
 and let their wives be childless and widows.  
 May their cry be heard from their houses  
 when you bring the raiders upon them suddenly,  
 for they have dug a pit to take me  
 and have laid snares for my feet.  
 But you, Yahweh, know  
 all their plots for my death.  
 Do not forgive their iniquity  
 and their sins do not blot out from before you;  
 let them be overthrown before you;  
 deal with them in the time of your anger. (Jer. 18:21-23)

The images used to give expression to the imprecation are images drawn from the day of destruction, the day of evil (Jer. 17:18), that day when Yahweh's judgment becomes final

and He destroys the godless.<sup>22</sup> In just as harsh terms, although more theological, Jeremiah asks Yahweh to cut them off from Him; "do not forgive . . . do not blot out their sins" (18:23) is parallel to Moses' imprecation, "do not regard their offering" (Num. 16:15). The core of the imprecation is that judgment which was one of the basic elements of the prophetic message from his call (cf. Is. 6:9-12, Jer. 1:10, 13-16); the prophet only challenges Yahweh not to fail in this judgment upon these specific people. The second essential feature of the imprecation to be noted is that the prophet does not merely challenge Yahweh's judgment of the wicked, those who have abused Yahweh's prophet, but he also calls for Yahweh's establishment of him as Yahweh's prophet. In His judgment of the wicked stands Yahweh's assurance to the prophet that He has regarded him:

Let my persecutors be put to shame,  
 but let me not be put to shame;  
 let them be dismayed,  
 but let me not be dismayed. (Jer. 17:18)

When Jeremiah makes the distinction between the persecutors and himself he is not merely asking vengeance against them; he is also demanding vindication, vindication not merely of himself as an offended person, but as Yahweh's prophet. There seems to be a strong implicit echo here of the promise of

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. the close similarity of vocabulary and imprecation in Jer. 6:11-12, 9:20, 14:10, 15:5-9, 21:5-7.



Yahweh in the call that "I will be with you to deliver you" (Jer. 1:8, 19) which Jeremiah is recalling and challenging before Yahweh. He calls on Yahweh to be with him in this specific circumstance, that the wicked be judged and Jeremiah be vindicated, because the prophetic word is at stake.

Prophetic imprecation is a many-sided prayer-demand that Yahweh take His rightful place as judge upon those who have rejected Him through the prophet. Its bases are not merely Yahweh's righteousness, not merely the prophet's innocence, but the rejected and suffering ministry of prophecy, Yahweh's called and compelled spokesmen. Therefore, the prophet calls Yahweh's judgment to reject those who reject Him and to vindicate Himself and His word through the prophet (Jer. 15:15). At stake is the prophetic call and the promises made upon it, but at the foundation is the basic prophetic conviction and faith in the faithfulness of Yahweh to Himself and to His prophet.

#### The Prophetic Protest as Personal Verification

The third major function of prophetic protest is that of personal verification. In the first two functions, intercession and imprecation, the object of the protest's concern was the people; here, however, the object of concern is the prophet himself and his place before Yahweh. Of course, the whole of prophetic protest ties these functions together to

such an extent that the two major concerns (people and prophet) not only overlap but are interrelated. However, because this inter-relationship has been developed above, the final function will deal primarily with those pericopes in which the protest of verification is central;<sup>23</sup> the preceding relationships will be assumed and only referred to in passing.

The one consistent element of prophetic protest which stands distinct from all others is the objection in the prophetic call. Because of the distinctness of the call objection and because, as will be seen, the call is central to all ensuing protest, the prophetic call must be treated first. Basic to all the calls of the prophets is the unshakable conviction that it is Yahweh who selects His intended prophet. The objections to the call suggest implicitly that from a human perspective there is no apparent merit or special capabilities inherent in those called. Yahweh operates according to His own standard: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I

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<sup>23</sup>Special mention should be made of two protests, which though uttered by a prophet are not directly related to the prophetic office. In Gen. 15:13 Abram complains that Yahweh has given him no offspring, and in Ez. 4:14 the prophet protests Yahweh's command that he eat food cooked over human dung on the basis of his ceremoniously pure life. In neither case is a direct accusation made, but more important in neither case is the prophetic ministry or the prophet-Yahweh relationship called into question. Thus they stand distinct from what has been defined as prophetic protest.

appointed you to be a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5).

In reaction to Yahweh's seeming arbitrary selection comes the prophet's objection,<sup>24</sup> an objection which is distinct from the subsequent because the objection centers entirely in the person of the prophet and betrays no direct reprisal against Yahweh.<sup>25</sup> The precise content of the objection may vary, although the variation is not significant (for the purposes of the present study): personal unworthiness--Judg. 6:22, Is. 6:5; inability to speak--Ex. 4:10, 6:12,30, Jer. 1:6; lack of the message and identification as Yahweh's prophet--Ex. 3:13, 4:1, 6:12, Judg. 6:17,39, Is. 40:1; question of personal adequacy--Ex. 3:11, Judg. 6:15. In essence, however, Moses summarizes the nub of the call objection when he asks, after his other objections had been answered by Yahweh, "Oh, my Lord, send I pray, some other person" (Ex. 4:13--RSV). The objection itself is totally prophet centered, and yet significant

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<sup>24</sup>It should be noted that of the major, explicit call narratives recorded, two lack the response of protest: Samuel and Ezekiel. However, the call of Samuel (1 Sam. 3:2-18) in a temple context seems to be a call to a broader ministry than only prophecy. Ezekiel's call account, on the other hand, seems to assume an objection to which the divine warning of 2:8 is directed. It may also be that the reference to the "bitterness in the heat of my spirit" (3:14) reflects Ezekiel's reaction to the call, rather than to the entire vision.

<sup>25</sup>The only possible exception to this might be the retort of Isaiah (6:11), "How long?". This prophetic protest seems to center in Yahweh's mercy for the people or possibly the prophet's reluctance for such a commission, but not primarily in personal inadequacy for the call.

because echoes of it can be detected in later prophetic protest.

Upon this prophetic objection to the call of Yahweh, Yahweh binds the prophet to Himself with a double bond: His commission and His promises. There is great significance that the commission extended by God to the prophet consists at its center of "whatever I command you you shall speak" (Jer. 1:7). Whether the prophet must eat Yahweh's word (Ez. 2:8-3:3) or whether Yahweh simply provides the words when needed (Ex. 4:11-14), the content of the prophetic message is determined by Yahweh Himself.<sup>26</sup> In support of this message and His prophet, Yahweh promises His aid. If one phrase characterizes this promise of Yahweh, it is the recurring promise, "I will be with you" (Ex. 3:12, Judg. 6:16, Jer. 1:8,19). Even when this formula is not literally employed, the sense of Yahweh's promise of support is strongly conveyed and becomes basic to prophetic life--and, as such, basic to prophetic protest. The prophet thus is a hand-picked tool of Yahweh used to convey His message and supported by Yahweh Himself.<sup>27</sup>

This complex of the prophetic call (call, objection, commission, and promise) forms the direct and immediate background for all the following prophetic protest of personal verification.

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. also Num. 22:38 (Balaam) and 1 Kings 22:13-14 (Micaiah).

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Amos 3:8.

As do certain features of intercession and imprecation, the protest of verification bases itself directly upon the prophet as he is Yahweh's prophet, not merely as he is an oppressed, pious Israelite. Consequently, it is possible to understand such protest as a form of Rib against Yahweh. The prophet recalls the conditions and promises inherent in his call and cries to Yahweh with bitter accusation because Yahweh has failed in His promises and has overstepped the conditions of the prophetic call.

The most consistent, personal protest levelled by Moses against Yahweh is that He has left Moses alone to handle the children of Israel. Moses recalls for Yahweh His promises: "Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my eyes'" (Ex. 33:12), but later confronts Yahweh with this precise promise: "Why have I not found favor in your eyes, that you place the burden of all this people upon me?" (Num. 11:11). The center of his complaint does not lie simply in the fact that "the burden is too heavy for me" (Num. 11:14), but the fact that "I am not able to carry all this people by myself" (Num. 11:14).<sup>28</sup> Yahweh has overstepped His demands upon Moses and as such has violated that call

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<sup>28</sup>Elijah also implies that Yahweh has failed to be with him, because "I, even I only, am left" (1 Kings 19:10,14). His burden consequently is too heavy also: "It is enough" (1 Kings 19:4).

under which Moses serves Yahweh:<sup>29</sup> "Moses said to Yahweh, 'See, you say to me, "Bring up this people" but you have not told me whom you will send with me.'" When Moses complains about the lack of a promised helper, he is not merely talking of Aaron or any human helper. It seems rather that Moses is subtly but no less positively questioning whether Yahweh has fulfilled His promise that "I will be with you" (Ex. 3:12). The burden of the people is too heavy, because Yahweh has not carried His share of the burden. Moses thus not merely questions the call from Yahweh but demands his verification from Yahweh as Yahweh's prophet in terms of conformity to the call. It is precisely in this line of recall and charge that Jeremiah, upon the abuse and suffering which he has undergone for the sake of Yahweh, despairs of Yahweh's repeated promise to be with him (Jer. 1:8,19) by asking, "Will you persist in being to me like a deceitful [stream], [like] waters which [cannot be] relied on?" (Jer. 15:18). Both Jeremiah and Moses looked to Yahweh for the help which Yahweh had promised they would receive but in vain. They question not only, therefore, Yahweh's failure to keep His promises, but the nature of the call under which they are serving.

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<sup>29</sup>The centrality of the call distinguishes this protest from the protest offered to Yahweh by Cain (Gen. 4:13-14). Cain too cries out against his divinely imposed burden, although that burden is a direct punishment, not a consequence of the prophetic ministry.

As noted also in his imprecations, Jeremiah repeatedly despairs of His present suffering and demands a rectification from Yahweh. In the first place, Jeremiah looks back at his call as he views all the strife and contention of his life and recalls that he was only a youth when Yahweh called him as His prophet. Thus he accuses Yahweh of having taken unfair advantage of him:

You have seduced me, Yahweh,  
and I was enticed;  
you have overwhelmed me,  
and you have prevailed. (Jer. 20:7)

Jeremiah was not only seduced, but also overpowered; Yahweh had so taken control of Jeremiah that his life no longer belonged to him. Jeremiah had no control over the message he was giving (20:8), over the consequences of that message (20:8), or even over the decision whether or not to convey that message (20:9).<sup>30</sup> Yahweh had so overstepped the bonds of the call that Jeremiah uses terms which question the motives of Yahweh.<sup>31</sup> Rather than Yahweh being with Jeremiah to deliver him, Yahweh has taken advantage of him and has left him to the

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<sup>30</sup>Although the perspective of Jonah is completely different, this is the basis of his protest. He did not want to preach for fear of Nineveh's repentance and Yahweh's mercy, yet he was under divine compulsion.

<sup>31</sup>The word  $\text{סִבְּוִן}$  conveys a sense of non-rational persuasion. It can be used in a sense of seduction (Ex. 22:15) or again of enticement as by the lying spirit of Micaiah's vision (1 Kings 22:20) and reflected perhaps also by Ezekiel (14:9). At any rate, it is a disparaging term which questions Yahweh's motives.

devices of those who plot evil against him (20:10).

A more consistent theme of prophetic protest is the complaint that the abuse which the prophet is suffering has its cause in Yahweh Himself.<sup>32</sup> The prophets repeatedly insist upon their innocence by asserting that they themselves did indeed fulfill their commitment to Yahweh's call. Moses particularly juxtaposes these two thoughts: "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not at all saved your people" (Ex. 5:23). Moses did his part; Yahweh's deliverance is still wanting. Again Jeremiah maintains consistently that he not only fulfilled his role but performed it to its limit:

Your words were found and I ate them,  
and your words became for me a joy  
and the delight of my heart;  
for your name has been endowed upon me,  
O Yahweh of hosts. (Jer. 15:16)

When there is fault to be found, the prophets assert that they consider themselves innocent of any blame because they have done precisely what they were called to do.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Baruch, Jeremiah's disciple, also felt, whether of himself or from his close identification with Jeremiah, the oppressive hand of Yahweh and complains: "Woe is me, for Yahweh has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I can find no rest" (Jer. 45:2-3). What may seem a simple lament on purely literary grounds is given a prophetic cast because of Baruch's ministry and because he is rebuked and answered by Yahweh through Jeremiah.

<sup>33</sup>Thus Yahweh's call to Jeremiah to repent (15:19-21) is a distinct challenge from Yahweh to Jeremiah, not an approach of Jeremiah himself.



The fault lies rather with Yahweh. In the first place, abuse is suffered because Yahweh's word conveyed by the prophets has made the prophet offensive to the people and on that basis the victim of their plots. As demonstrated in the imprecation function, the basis for persecution does not lie with the prophet as an individual but with the prophet as bearer of Yahweh's word.<sup>34</sup> Continuing the accusation that Yahweh has overpowered him, Jeremiah complains:

For as often as I speak, I cry out,  
 "Violence and destruction," I shout.  
 For the word of Yahweh has become for me  
 a reproach and a derision all day every day.  
 If I say, "I will not remember Him,  
 and I will no longer speak in His name,"  
 there is in my heart like a burning fire  
 shut up in my bones;  
 and I am weary with holding it in  
 and I cannot. (Jer. 20:8-9)

Not only "for your sake I have borne reproach," (Jer. 15:15), but Yahweh's compulsion is so strong that the prophet cannot do otherwise. Because Yahweh's hand is on Jeremiah, it is he, inseparable in the people's eyes from the word he preaches, who has become the laughingstock. He wants no part of such consequences, yet he suffers it because he is Yahweh's tool proclaiming His message. In Jeremiah's case, this offense is further compounded by the fact that Yahweh has placed further

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<sup>34</sup>Elijah's persecution cannot be understood as based merely on piety either, because he links his future with the fate of the others of "your prophets" who have been slain. (1 Kings 19:10,14)

restrictions upon his life: he cannot intercede,<sup>35</sup> marry, feast with or sympathize with Israel. In short, Yahweh, in this seeming extension of the first call of chapter 1, has so dominated Jeremiah's life that he himself has become the reproach; Jeremiah in his person has become that word which the people reject. Through all this Jeremiah protests his innocence and demands Yahweh's promise to be with him, to deliver him.<sup>36</sup> The harmony of the call has been destroyed-- at the hand of Yahweh through His oppression of Jeremiah and His failure to act for him.

There is yet another dimension, however. Due to the prophetic compulsion Jeremiah has not only become offensive to the people because he bears and is Yahweh's word. Jeremiah further suffers because he has been so filled with Yahweh's wrath and judgment that the people, with whom he longs to join, have become offensive to him. When he complains that "Because of your hand I have sat alone, for you have filled me with indignation" (Jer. 15:17), he is not merely mourning his fate at his people's hands but the fact that, being filled with

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<sup>35</sup>These are expressions from Jeremiah which seem to picture his chafing under the restriction of intercession, significant not only for the role of intercession in the prophetic ministry, but for the prophets' general rebellion from compulsion: cf. Jer. 8:23, 13:17.

<sup>36</sup>So also Samuel questions Yahweh's command and implicitly demands His presence, although the element of protest is secondary: 1 Sam. 16:2.

Yahweh's indignation, he must stand alone before the people. He cannot join with them, because he is no longer one of them:

I am filled with the wrath of Yahweh;  
I am weary of holding it in. (Jer. 6:11)

My heart is broken within me,  
all my bones grow soft;  
I am like a drunken man,  
like a man overcome by wine,  
because of Yahweh  
and because of His holy words. (Jer. 23:9)

This intimate communion between prophet and word and Yahweh is promised in the prophetic call, but as it works itself out in the prophetic ministry, it brings consequences unforeseen by the prophet. Thus Elijah calls for an end to his life by protesting, "I have been very jealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts" (1 Kings 19:10),<sup>37</sup> although it had seemingly had no effect on his fortune. There almost seems to be an implicit challenge that Yahweh has not been jealous for His prophet. Moses seems even to caricature his call in order to shame Yahweh into fulfilling the promise of help:

Have I conceived all this people? Did I bring them forth, that you should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries the suckling, to the which you swore to their fathers?" (Num. 11:12)

Yahweh has so captivated the prophet that he is no longer

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<sup>37</sup>This kind of self-assertion almost seems, on the basis of the parallels above, to be a protest of innocence as well; perhaps it even recalls his call which is not otherwise recorded or alluded to.

himself. In other words, on the one hand Yahweh has failed in His promise to be with the prophet, because of all the suffering borne by the prophet precisely because of his bearing Yahweh's word, and on the other hand Yahweh has taken advantage of the prophet and forced him into situations not apparent at the call. The objection of the call, centered in the personal inadequacy of the prophet himself, was overcome by Yahweh's commission and His promises. The objections upon the life of the prophet now center upon that commission and those promises and charge that it is Yahweh and not the prophet who is found wanting.

Therefore, the prophets suggest a resolution as part of their protest. In several isolated instances, the prophet has already resolved the problem himself and accepts the situation as part of his prophetic ministry:

Woe is me because of my hurt;  
 my wound is grievous.  
 But I said, "Surely this is a sickness,  
 and I will bear it." (Jer. 10:19)

In other cases the prophet may have linked his suffering to his personal sin and thus makes neither an accusation nor a demand for vindication (cf. Mic. 7:10, Jer. 10:24; cf. also Is. 49:4, 50:6-7).

In other cases, as seen particularly in the imprecation section above, the prophet demands Yahweh's vindication. There is a challenge which looks to Yahweh's promise for help and invokes it on the prophet's behalf: imprecation on the

mockers and vindication which implies verification as a prophet under Yahweh's favor upon him. Because this feature has been developed above, it will be passed by here. Note should be taken, however, that Moses demands specific, further support as a verification of his call as prophet: Ex. 33:12-18, Num. 11:11-15. This can only be understood from the background of a question in Moses' mind concerning his role as Yahweh's prophet, as though the first call were invalid.

A very significant resolution of the prophet centers, however, in the prophet's call for his death. After Moses had charged Yahweh with evil, with abandoning the prophet, and after his caricature of his call in Num. 11:11-15, he concludes that "If this is the way you will deal with me, pray kill me at once, if I find favor in your eyes, that I may not see my wretchedness." So also Elijah says after the summary of his life, "take my life from me" (1 Kings 19:10,14). This second resolution of the problem of the call proposed by the prophets seems just the opposite from the first. Whereas the former challenges Yahweh to pick up His part of the prophetic ministry, the prophet here gives up (or threatens to) completely. The significance does not lie merely in the drastic nature of the threat but in the implication that since Yahweh has not performed His proclaimed purposes, He has broken the relationship at the call and now the prophet merely asks that Yahweh terminate finally his prophetic

activity.<sup>38</sup> While it may be that such a request is an hyperbolic ultimatum or statement of despair to challenge Yahweh to action, it seems more natural to take the prophet at his word--here Jonah 4:3 also provides background not only for the reality of the death (wish)(threat), but for its close connection with the strong wish to be relieved of the prophetic burden.<sup>39</sup>

The prophetic protest of verification is built directly and immediately upon the prophetic ministry. The prophet who has been called and commissioned by Yahweh above his objections finds himself in a position of suffering and abuse simply because he is Yahweh's prophet. Protesting his own innocence, He places the blame on Yahweh's hands and challenges Yahweh's activity, that He keep His promises, that He not overburden the prophet, or else that He terminate the prophetic activity completely.

#### Summary of Function of the Prophetic Protest

By function, the prophetic protest can be divided into

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<sup>38</sup>It is in this context that Jeremiah's curse upon his birth must be understood. On the surface it may appear that its closest counterpart is the similar strain in Job 3. However, its close position to the protest of 20:7-13 and the parallel thoughts expressed by other prophets, and the severity of Jeremiah's other protests suggest strongly that the prophetic basis for this pericope be assumed.

<sup>39</sup>So Jeremiah pleads, not to the point of death however, for the termination of his prophetic compulsion: cf. Jer. 9:1.

three concerns: intercession, imprecation, and personal verification. Because, however, these functions overlap and because one prophet, even one pericope, may contain all three functions, several common features can be drawn from the entire corpus of prophetic protest. Basic to all protest is the conviction that Yahweh is in control. At times it may not seem so, at times it may be a burden that He is in control; yet Yahweh's sovereignty is supreme. The remedy for the evil is to be found in Him. Secondly, there seems to be assumed a basic right of the prophet to challenge Yahweh's actions, a right inherent in his office yet above the office, as the protests of verification show. The protest is spoken by the prophet, not any individual; the protest is built upon distinctly prophetic experience; the protest in many cases can be traced to the prophetic call. Yahweh has established an intimate relationship with His prophet which offers to the prophet the open confidence of bold protest to Him. Because, however, the protest does not represent the final word of dialog with Yahweh, the resolution of the protest must be considered, the burden of Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RESOLUTION OF PROPHETIC PROTEST

One final investigation of the prophetic protest concerns itself with the (divine) response to and resolution of the protest. Since the protest does not stand alone or in a vacuum, but rather arises from the continuing dialog between prophet and Yahweh, it is necessary also to place the prophet's protest into this larger perspective. By investigating the divine reaction, it is possible better to understand the human protest.

As developed above, there are some protests which seem to have been resolved within the prophet and accepted as part of his ministry. While in their recorded form they do not involve direct accusations against Yahweh, they do, however, imply a definite struggling for resolution, which had perhaps been answered privately by Yahweh.<sup>1</sup> However, little can be deduced confidently from these summary accounts of prior protests.

There appears to be a large number of protests which seem to evoke (in their recorded state, at least) no response

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<sup>1</sup>Note the mention of sin (Mic. 7:10) and the recognition by the prophet of his need for correction (Jer. 10:24).



from Yahweh nor mention of resolution. A proper question might be to consider whether there is any common feature (by form or function) which characterizes the type of protest which records no response. Formally considered, these protests seem on first glance to suggest a kind of consistency. They seem to be either the very short, terse ejaculation (Is. 22:4, 24:16, Ez. 11:13, 32:5, Hosea 9:14) or the protest which shows close similarities to the lament form (Is. 63:15-19, Jer. 17:14-18, 18:19-23, 20:7-14, Mic. 7, Hab. 1). One wonders, however, whether this is a regular pattern or the result of sheer coincidence: certainly Jer. 4:19-21 is to be placed into this category although it is far removed from the lament form; on the other hand, Jer. 11:18-20 and 15:15-20, which bear similarities to the lament form, do receive a strong response from God. A formal pattern, therefore, seems unlikely. The same seems to hold as these protests are studied by function. Intercession and imprecation comprise the majority of instances, but the most bitter of the protests of validation (Jer. 20) is also to be found. It is extremely doubtful that a pattern or distinctive form can be constructed on such limited evidence. Likewise, it is idle to speculate on the possible significance of the lack of a response, because it may simply be that the preserved record is incomplete in the sense that it does not record the full prophetic experience concerning his protest. At the most, the lack of a response

may indicate that the protest itself is not so unusual that it must be met on every occasion, and that the prophetic ministry continued under the tension of unresolved protest.

The first direct response to the prophetic protest considered is the affirmative reply, in which Yahweh grants that which formed the protest. Because, in some instances, the protest is primarily occasional, the resolution meets only the situation at hand: the promise of a son to Abraham (Gen. 15:4-6), water from the rock (Ex. 17:5ff.), the raising of the widow's son (1 Kings 17:22), permission for Ezekiel to cook his food over cow dung rather than over human dung (Ez. 4:15). In most instances, however, the granting of the protest involves the direct action of Yahweh on behalf of the prophet. When the prophet intercedes for his people, Yahweh often accepts that intercession; on the basis of the prophet's plea, "Yahweh repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" (Ex. 32:14). As the basis of intercession often lay with the prophet, so it is significant that the basis for Yahweh's repenting in the resolution does not seem to lie with the people,<sup>2</sup> although Yahweh's mercy is involved, but with the prophet. Thus the prophet appeals to Yahweh and on that basis Yahweh turns aside His designs. In

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<sup>2</sup>For instance, in Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:23-32), the people are rarely referred to directly.

other situations, Yahweh not merely repents of His present designs, but promises His action on the prophet's behalf. It must be carefully noted again that, as the intercession and imprecation developed above take their fullest significance only as they are integrally related to the prophetic office, so the resolution is at least as much directed to the prophetic office as to the people involved in the protest. As Moses intercedes for his people in Ex. 33:12-18, he charges that he himself has not found favor in Yahweh's eyes. Yahweh's first response does not concern the people, therefore, but the reaffirmation that Moses has found favor in Yahweh's eyes;<sup>3</sup> this favor is demonstrated by the theophany which follows (Ex. 33:17,19-23). Likewise, the intercession of Ex. 5:22-23 which protests Yahweh's failure to be faithful to His promises at Moses' call is resolved with the promise of Yahweh's action for His people. In the context of the protest, however, the full significance of the resolution must include the fact that this deliverance also validates Moses' Prophetic office. Thus the promise of destruction for the men of Anathoth (Jer. 11:22-23) must be understood; it is not merely a blessing of deliverance, but of the validation of Jeremiah as Yahweh's

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<sup>3</sup>The question of favor in Yahweh's eyes is a consistent theme in Moses' ministry: cf. also Ex. 33:12,16,17; 34:9; Num. 11:11,15.

prophet, as well as of the prophetic word which he speaks.<sup>4</sup> Finally also the delegation of the leadership to the seventy elders provides Moses with the helpers which he felt he was entitled to from his call (Num. 11:16). Of course, the direct action of Yahweh for His people cannot be overlooked--Yahweh's response to Moses' protest of Ex. 34:9 leads to a covenant with the people--but the response is directed first of all to the prophet and his office.

In the second place, there appear also those instances in which Yahweh has denied the protest of the prophet. After Moses' eloquent plea of Num. 14:13-19, Yahweh did pardon the people (v. 20), although He refused to allow the Israelites involved to cross over into the promised land (vv. 20-24). Likewise, Amos' plea for the life of Judah (7:2,5) brought a repentance from Yahweh, although in the third vision (7:7-9) the destruction presented seems as complete and final as that proposed in the first two. Jeremiah also meets a direct refusal of Yahweh to heed not only his intercession, but all pleading for Judah: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my heart would still not turn to this people" (Jer. 15:1). In these three instances, the prophetic stance was that of pleading to Yahweh, almost as though judgment were expected

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. also Moses' imprecation of Num. 16:15 and Yahweh's consequent action of vv. 21 and 31.

also by the prophet. However, in at least two instances, the prophetic stance was much bolder, yet Yahweh rejects the protest. Joshua is told of Achan's sin and is told further that judgment will continue to come until the offence is gone (Josh. 7:7-9). Jeremiah, after his seeming blasphemy of 14:7-9 finds no response from Yahweh upon his intercession. If the following verses are actually to be taken together with 14:7-9, as seems not impossible, Jeremiah is not only turned down by Yahweh but forbidden any further intercession.<sup>5</sup> In these cases, the element of rejection is strong, but it is a rejection upon the people; the person of the prophet himself does not seem to be a strong feature in either these protests or in the nature of Yahweh's negative response.

In the third place, there is divine reaction to the prophetic objections in the call. As noted above, the prophetic call as prophetic protest stands distinct from ordinary protest because it centers its objections in the personal adequacy of the prophet himself. Its second and equally important distinction is that the prophetic call forms the foundation of much subsequent protest. Thus, it is important also to consider the resolution Yahweh makes of the prophetic objections

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<sup>5</sup>Because of the compilation of prophetic oracles into their present book form, context is often of no appreciable help. Thus it is difficult to determine here if vv. 10-11 were an original response to the protest of vv. 7-9.

in the call. As previously noted, the individual objections noted above may vary in detail, although they all question personal adequacy. Thus, the resolution also varies, although there are remarkable similarities in the various resolutions. In some cases the prophet's objection is met by a distinct sign from Yahweh which marks him as Yahweh's called prophet: revelation of the divine name--Ex. 3:14, signs of the rod and serpent--Ex. 4:2-9, dew on the fleece--Judg. 6:38,40, touching the lips of the prophet--Is. 6:6, Jer. 1:6. However, the identification as a prophet ordinarily does not stand alone. Yahweh further meets the prophet's objection by seemingly overruling that objection with His commission to the prophet: Ex. 6:13, 7:1ff., Judg. 6:14, Is. 6:11. Finally also Yahweh meets the objection specifically in His promises made to the prophet: "I will be with you" (Ex. 3:12, Judg. 6:23, Jer. 1:8), "I will be your mouth" (Ex. 4:11-12), I will send Aaron (Ex. 4:14-17). It is to this identification, commission, and promises that the prophets revert as they later charge Yahweh with not having fulfilled His part of the call. The actual resolutions listed are rarely amplified so that the emotional context of their expression becomes obviously clear only in Ex. 4:14 where Yahweh's anger is recorded. Otherwise, the divine resolution must be understood as one feature of the larger call and commission into the prophetic ministry.

The final manner of resolution to be considered is that

of Yahweh's direct rebuke of the prophet above His refusal to grant the prophet's wish. Again, although there are no strict formal or functional traits exclusively common to these protests, there are several features which can be traced through the resolution brought by Yahweh. The prophet's charges against Yahweh have been noted and developed above. Implicit, however, in these rebukes by Yahweh are His charges against the prophet. One such feature is the strong assertion that the prophet, despite his contrary claims, has not done his job fully at all. When Yahweh tells Moses to "go, bring the people to the place of which I have spoken to you" (Ex. 32:34), He is prompting Moses back to His first commission. So also Yahweh's dialog with Jonah leads Jonah to the realization that he has not accomplished Yahweh's will. The same is true in a developed degree in the two rebukes to Jeremiah. In Jer. 12:5-6 Yahweh meets Jeremiah's demand for vindication by warning him that he has not even begun to feel the effects of the prophetic ministry, and impels him back into that ministry. The most marked rebuke hurled to the prophet is that recorded in Jer. 15:19-21:

Therefore thus says Yahweh:  
 "If you return, I will restore you,  
 and you shall stand before me.  
 If you proclaim the precious rather than the worthless,  
 you shall be as my mouth.  
 They will turn to you,  
 but you shall not turn to them.  
 And I will set you against this people  
 a fortified wall of bronze;

they will fight against you,  
 but they will not prevail over you,  
 for I am with you,  
 to save you and to deliver you--oracle of Yahweh.  
 I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked,  
 and redeem you from the hand of the ruthless."

Obvious at first glance are the implications of Yahweh's charges against Jeremiah: he must return to Yahweh, as though he had departed; he must proclaim what is precious, as though he had been proclaiming what was worthless. A deeper glance makes apparent a more basic implication than mere failure to perform his prophetic ministry. Throughout these verses phrases appear which recall Jeremiah's first call: "you shall be as my mouth" (Jer. 15:15)--"Behold I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:9); "And I will set you against this people as a fortified wall of bronze (Jer. 1:18 and 15:20); "they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you" (Jer. 1:18 and 15:20); "for I am with you to save you and to deliver you" (Jer. 1:8,19 and 15:20). Likewise the word connotes not merely a return but a conversion, a renewal of life under Yahweh. Yahweh is here charging Jeremiah with failing to fulfill his ministry, rather than vice versa, but is at the same time offering by grace a second call to him; upon conversion, Yahweh will restore (or reinstate) Jeremiah and allow him to stand before Yahweh. Within this call context the renewed commission and promises form Yahweh's resolution



of the protest leveled by Jeremiah but turned against him.<sup>6</sup>

Implicit in the charge of failing to accomplish their ministry is also the charge by Yahweh against the arrogant pride of the prophets. When Moses seeks to direct Yahweh's keeping of the "book which you have written," Yahweh in effect warns Moses that he has overstepped himself (Ex. 32: 32-34). The climactic ending of the book of Jonah contains a similar implication.<sup>7</sup> So also Jeremiah's insistence upon vindication and his accusations against Yahweh bring a rebuke from Yahweh which implies in part that the prophets have gone too far. Although this feature is not consistently met by a rebuke (Jer. 20:7-9), yet it strongly characterizes this type of resolution from Yahweh.

As these resolutions are considered and weighed, it is difficult to draw any final conclusions from them. There are protests which lack a response from Yahweh, there seems to be

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<sup>6</sup>At first reading it seems that 1 Kings 19:9-18 can also be understood from this perspective. Although there is no direct rebuke from Yahweh, Yahweh does give Elijah upon his request a theophany (identification as prophet?) in vv. 10-12, a commission in vv. 17-18, and the promise of v. 18 that he will not stand alone. Without indicating a new form, the similarity is striking.

<sup>7</sup>The ministry of Jonah is not developed after Yahweh's rebuke as is the ministry of other prophets. One wonders if the message of Jonah is actually given through the prophet himself or in spite of him--as though his obstinance itself is the prophetic message of the book. His ministry is certainly distinct in many respects from that of other prophets.

no absolute criterion by which to expect an affirmative response, a negative response, or a rebuke from Yahweh. However, several conclusions can be made. First, the prophet stands in a living and continuing dialog with Yahweh which is not interrupted by the protest. At times, Yahweh may grant his protest, at times He may not and may rebuke the prophet; yet the prophet is neither discharged from his ministry nor does he refuse that ministry.<sup>8</sup> The prophet continues to live and work under Yahweh. Secondly, it can be surmised that the prophetic protest is not the final word to Yahweh nor the determining word for Yahweh's message and action for His people. In many cases, Yahweh grants the protest; however, the ultimate authority is that of Yahweh Himself, Who may lay down conditions of granting a protest (Josh. 7:7-12) or again may simply refuse and call the prophet himself into question. The message of the prophet to the people is Yahweh's message, unaltered by the inner protest of the prophet. Finally, the resolution of the protest must be understood on the basis of the prophetic ministry: its burdens, its offense and consequent suffering, its commissioning and promises from Yahweh, its life within and for Israel. Yahweh addressed the prophet

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<sup>8</sup>As seen in Chapter III, the prophet may ask that Yahweh terminate his prophetic service, if necessary by death; however, such refusal does not come upon Yahweh's specific rebuke of his protest, but upon his prior life as Yahweh's prophet before his people.

as His called servant with a particular commission. Whether Yahweh grants, refuses, ignores, or rebukes the prophet and his wishes, the prophet is still Yahweh's prophet, His called messenger to His people.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RELEVANCE OF PROPHETIC PROTEST

Without attempting to restate all the summaries and conclusions of the various chapters, it is useful to note those conclusions which are significant for a summary evaluation of prophetic protest. The study of the literary form has demonstrated many similarities between the protest and other Old Testament literatures: lament Gattung, wisdom literature, Rib. It would be misguided to overlook these parallels; yet it would be ambitious to press them to cover all prophetic protest. The fact that several literary styles can be detected and the fact that the majority of the protests cannot be characterized by a distinct literary form makes it impossible to identify one precise form as characteristic of all protests. Rather, the varying parallels would indicate that the prophet, as elsewhere in his message, employs many forms to embody his message; he lives and speaks in the mainstream of Israel life. The second major conclusion relevant to the literary form of the protest is that one cannot understand the prophetic protest without recognizing that the protest even on literary grounds is distinctly a prophetic utterance. The allusions and background of the protests are unmistakably prophetic. The final conclusion was developed

in detail in the study of the function of prophetic protest. Uniting the several functions (intercession, imprecation, personal verification) is the prophetic office from which the protest is uttered, and basic to both the prophetic office and the protest is the call of the prophet. It is from the call, particularly from the commission and promises made by Yahweh, that the prophet protests his various burdens. From the study of function, other conclusions and implications can be drawn. In the first place, there seems to be an assumed right by the prophet to bring his protest to Yahweh. This right, rather than stemming from the people seems to be inherent to his office as prophet, which in turn transforms his prophetic office into one of mediator--between Yahweh and people yet one with neither. The second major conclusion is a unique and dynamic view of Yahweh. The prophet assumes in His protest that Yahweh is in control of life, but that He has delayed or suspended His efficacious  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל}$ . Gemser would seem to be correct in detecting a "radical monotheism" in the protests, because not only the evil at hand but the remedy for that evil are attributed to Yahweh's power.<sup>1</sup> However, Yahweh is pictured not merely as a God who can act, but as one who can be appealed to by the prophet in full

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<sup>1</sup>B. Gemser, "The Rib- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," in Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), p. 136.

confidence that Yahweh will act. As Yahweh has called the prophet into His service, so the prophet assumes He will hear and respond to the prophet's protests. The boldness of the protests provide a measure of the intimacy of the bond between prophet and Yahweh.

Because these protests do not stand in a vacuum but are part of the continuum of the prophetic ministry, it was found helpful to study also the divine resolution of the protest. Here it becomes readily apparent that the protest stands as an integral part of prophetic life. While the divine response ranges from a lack of specific response to a rebuke and recall of the prophet, yet the protest does not negate the prophetic ministry; nor does it, on the other hand, determine the message from Yahweh. Yahweh's message to His people is His message, carried at times in spite of the prophet's inner rebellion. Thus, while the prophet is mediator, yet he is also servant, Yahweh's servant called for his specific task.

As this general summary is weighed in the mind, other considerations built upon this study can become apparent. The first major conclusion--actually the undergirding of this study--is the inseparable connection of prophetic protest by form, function, and divine resolution to the prophetic ministry. Not only is it impossible to understand the prophetic protest as the product merely of a pious, but offended Israelite, but the protest has been seen to be integral to the prophetic

ministry. Its roots lie in the call to that ministry and its content, often overriding its form, takes its shape from that call and ministry. This conclusion is also borne out by the fact that the protest is a wider phenomenon than has often been recognized within prophetic literature. It is not necessary to make a theological transfer of Jeremiah's confessions to the spirituality of the other prophets and thus to conclude that "the fact that they left us no recorded confessions of such struggles, except possible allusions to inner conflicts does not mean that they are completely exempt from them."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Weiser's comment at Jeremiah's protest of 18:21-23 that "hier spricht nicht mehr der Prophet, sondern der Mensch Jeremia" is only partially correct.<sup>3</sup> Viewed from the prophetic message brought from Yahweh to the people, Weiser's judgment may be true. However, if he is understood to mean that the protest is not integral to the prophetic ministry, Weiser's observation may be misleading. The protest is not merely the product of one individual but part of the prophetic ministry ranging from Abraham to Second Isaiah. A second consideration is a deepening of the conception of the prophetic

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<sup>2</sup>Joseph L. Mihelic, "Dialog with God," Interpretation, XIV (January 1960), 48.

<sup>3</sup>Artur Weiser, Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia: Kapitel 1-25:13 in Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1952), XX, 164.

ministry. The office of mediator, as Krinetzki also suggests, seems to be a much stronger and more important aspect of his ministry than often recognized.<sup>4</sup> The prophet's function was not merely proclamation, but mediation; he stood between Yahweh and the people and brought messages to both. Secondly, the relationship between prophet and Yahweh seems closer than ordinarily recognized. Particularly through Moses and Jeremiah, Yahweh (and His word) not only makes the prophet offensive to the people, but the prophet is so indwelled by Yahweh that the people have become offensive to him. This insight, fully developed in the New Testament, has definite roots already in the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament. Thirdly, the strong implicit themes of intercession, offense, suffering may suggest already in the prophetic ministry the roots of an incipient development of the concept of vicarious suffering as Second Isaiah and particularly the New Testament develop this aspect.

A third consideration comprises a list of suggestions for more extended study and application; yet the relevance of the questions does not lie at the fringe of theological investigation, but at the heart of the Christian proclamation. These questions concern primarily the relationship between

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<sup>4</sup>Leo Krinetzki, "Jeremia als Beter," Bibel und Kirche, XVI, 3 (September 1961), 80.



the Old and New Testaments: How does Jesus Christ fulfill the office of the prophet as developed in this paper? Is His mediation at least prophetic as well as priestly? Is His suffering by persecution related to the distinctly prophetic suffering (and offense) of the Old Testament prophets? Does His weeping over Jerusalem, His agony in Gethsemane, His experience of God-forsakenness on the cross have precedent in our relationship with the prophetic suffering of the Old Testament? Does Paul in the light of 1 Cor. 9:16-17 and 2 Cor. 12:7-9 view his ministry in the tradition of the prophets? How is the New Testament doctrine of *σκήτσάλον* related to the offense which the prophets bore and were in their person? Why was Christ considered by some to be Jeremiah? How is John in the light of Luke 1:76, 16:16 related to Old Testament prophecy? How does the New Testament office of *προφήτης* relate to Old Testament prophecy? Can the task of Mary be understood from the light of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 1:28--"the Lord is with you," v. 30--"do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God," vv. 31-33, 35--her task, v. 35--objection (?), Matt. 1:19 and Lk. 2:34-35--forebodings of sufferings undergone because of the task assigned by God? In summary, there appear many avenues of pursuing the prophetic ministry also through the New Testament, if not by actual office, then certainly as an important contribution to a larger ministry.

To this list of questions, many other unanswered questions have arisen as a result of this study: Since the protests of the Pentateuch are recorded almost without exception in the Yahwist (or Yahwist-Elohistic) source,<sup>5</sup> are there further consistent parallels between this literary source and the prophetic movement of Israel? What is the relationship between the suffering offense of the prophet, his intercession and subsequent reconciliation of Israel to Yahweh? Does the similarity of motif (although the laments are primarily communal) and style (boldness of challenge to Yahweh, Chapter 5 ends with a question) indicate any affinity between the Book of Lamentations and the prophetic ministry within Israel? How are the concepts of covenant mediation and prophetic mediation related? How do these relate to priestly mediation?

As must always be the case, unanswered questions because of their diversity and immediate relevance temper the finality of the present study. On the other hand, the writer does feel that the basic importance of the prophetic protest, often relegated to being a unique phenomenon within Jeremiah, has been demonstrated as a part of the mainstream of the prophetic ministry. The theology of the protest serves to underscore the prophetic message elsewhere, as the protest applies that

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<sup>5</sup>Moses' reaction to Yahweh's call in Ex. 6:12,30 is recognized as from the Priestly source.

theology in a personal and dynamic dialog with Yahweh. Because protest is integral to prophetic ministry, not only is the prophet better understood, but also the living revelation of Yahweh as perpetuated through the New Testament Church is given increased relevance. As the New Testament Church and ministry fulfills also the Old Testament revelation, so the protests are assumed, redeemed, and incorporated into the life and ministry of the Church built upon "the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

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