CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPOSITION

As for its character, the first part of the Book of Joel (1:2-2:17) very much resembles a psalm of lament. However, it will not be advocated here that this passage, as far as its structure is concerned, is a complete lamentation; only that most of it is composed in the style of a lament.¹ The typical introduction for a lament is missing in Joel. Such an introduction should begin with an invocation of the deity, which can sometimes take the form of a hymn.² Instead of the typical invocation of the lamentation style, Joel begins in v. 2 with an oracle formula, the so-called sim'ū oracle,³ שמעו, directed to a certain group, here, the elders, ומכה, and the inhabitants of the country.⁴ Verse 3 announces the uniqueness of what will be heard. Here, the call to listen is extended to the coming generations. Then, in verse 4, there occurs a lamentation motif—the beginning of a description of the disaster combined with a call to the people to awaken and to lament, verse 5.⁵ The picture of the disaster and the desolation of the country continues in vv. 6 ff., and the style of the lament is adhered to. Then in v. 13, the prophet summons the priests to lamentation and mourning which is to be done in the sanctuary.⁶ They have to wail and lament because the sacrifices are cut off from the temple of Yahweh. Joel also asks them to call the elders and the people together for a fast, v. 14. In v. 15, the cry for penance occurs in connection with the Leitmotiv of the book, the day of Yahweh, which has to be seen as one of the reasons for the penance. In the following verses, the motifs of destruction and loss return.

¹ For the structure of a lament, cf. W. Baumgartner, 
² Cf. Ps. 89.
³ Cf. Isa. 1:2, which, however, does not have the רית. See also Isa. 1:10, 28:3, ⁴ Wolff, “Aufruf zur Volksklage”, Joel, p. 5.
⁵ Cf. H. Gunkel and J. Bergrich, Einleitung in die Psalmen, 1933, p. 117 ff., 137, H.-J. Kraus, Psalmen p. 514, H. Reventlow, Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia, pp. 118 f.
⁶ For the parallelism שמעני, see, among others, H. W. Wolff, Hosea (BK XIV:1), p. 123.
⁷ Cf. Hos. 5:1 and Ps. 49:2.
From this, it is clear that the prophet has not followed the stylistic pattern of a lamentation exactly, but he has used much of its form and content in building up his message. As far as the section 1:2-12 is concerned, one could agree with A. S. Kapelrud that “the description of the misfortune has all the emphasis”. Therefore, the style of a lament is proper. However, this section is not a liturgy in my opinion, because of the fact that the prophet calls upon the priests to lament and mourn and asks them to call the people together, v. 13.

The lamentation style returns in 1:19-20 and is followed by a call to blow the shophar trumpet because the day of Yahweh is now coming, 2:1-11. Wolff has labeled this part, which describes the disaster in greater detail than Ch. 1, as a proclamation of the eschatological catastrophe that will come over Jerusalem. It is true that this is a description of a catastrophe, but it is not an eschatological one because it has already begun; because of this, the prophet is announcing more disaster. Perhaps one could say that it has some kind of an apocalyptic coloring, for in the apocalyptic literature, the events are to happen very soon also. The locusts of chapter one are to be seen as the portents of the imminent day of Yahweh which is presented in chapter two.

The passage which follows, 2:12-17, expresses the demand for penance and the call to Yahweh for help. This part does not end in the usual lamentation style with a promise about giving sacrifices or giving praise to Yahweh. Instead, the text relates that the prophet is calling upon the priests to take their usual position and wail, and in so doing, to ask Yahweh for help. Again, this is not a liturgy, but a prophetic text which uses liturgical style and motifs.

In summing up, one can say that 1:2-2:17 is not a lamentation but it shows an actual situation in which a lamentation should be heard and performed. Thus, instead of the promise to sacrifice or to give praise, the prophet orders the priests to liturgical actions of sorrow and fasting. The last verse of this part, v. 17, also concludes with a

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1 Joel Studies, p. 4.
4 Joel, p. 6.
6 Th. H. Robinson considers 2:12-14 to be a fragment of a penitential liturgy, HAT 14, p. 63.