

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundation Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 1A**

### 1. Introduction

#### 1A. Course Description

I want to say a few things about each of those handout sheets, and I guess the place to begin is with the single page that says “Course Description.” There’s a paragraph that describes the basic content of the course there at the top of that page. “Foundations of Biblical Prophecy has a two-fold purpose. One, to introduce to the student to the phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel.” What we will look at will be the characteristics of that prophetic phenomenon under that heading. But secondly, “to familiarize the student with the content of the prophetic books of the Old Testament.” Let’s see, four major, twelve minor prophets: what was their message? What was the historical context in which they gave that message?

#### 2A. The Phenomenon of Prophecy

So the first purpose, that is, the phenomenon of prophecy, will be accomplished by classroom discussion, of such questions as: Did all of Israel’s prophets receive a special call to their prophetic task? How is the origin of prophetism in Israel to be explained? Is this a phenomenon that was simply a creation of the genius of these ancient Israelite people? Did they borrow it from some other surrounding nations that were also alleged to have some sort of a prophetic phenomenon in existence? Those are the kinds of questions we will be asking. I will explain the origin of prophetism in Israel. Are there analogies to Israel’s prophetism among other ancient peoples? That’s a question that’s received an awful lot of attention. Of course many people come down and say, “Yes, there are.” How could the ancient Israelite distinguish between a true and a false prophet? When you read through the prophetic books, it becomes particularly clear in Jeremiah, you’ll have Jeremiah saying “Thus saith the Lord.” And then here comes Hananiah another prophet and he claims, “Thus saith the Lord.” Yet, they give two contradictory messages. Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite. Who would you listen to?

You're responsible to obey the word of the Lord coming from the mouth of God's prophets to his people. What do you do when two different prophets claim to be God's prophets with two totally contradictory messages? So how could an Israelite distinguish between a true and a false prophet?

### 3A. Were the Prophets Cultic Functionaries?

Were the prophets cultic functionaries? There's a whole school of thought that says the prophets were very much like the priests in the employ of the temple as personnel, and they were official functionaries of the sanctuary service of the temple. Well, is that the best way to understand who a prophet was? Were the prophets writers? What do we have in these prophetic books? Does this come from the hand of the prophet or is this just a much later record of oral traditions of prophetic proclamations?

### 4A. Does biblical prophecy have any apologetic value?

Does biblical prophecy have any apologetic value? Can you argue from prophecy and its subsequent fulfillment that because this body of men spoke so long in advance about such remarkable things that happened much later in time historically, this is really an evidence for genuine revelation? That is, these people were speaking from God about what no human person could ever possibly speak and therefore, the Bible is true. Can you make an apologetic argument out of prophecy and fulfillment for the truthfulness of divine revelation? People look two different ways at it; some people say "yes," some people say "no." Those things are all about the phenomenon of prophetism, and we'll spend a fair amount of time in class on those issues because this is foundational for biblical prophecy.

### 5A. Hermeneutical Principles Important in prophetic writing

Beyond these general features of the prophetic phenomena in the Old Testament, attention will be given to hermeneutical principles that are important for proper interpretation of the Old Testament prophetic writing. Interpretation of the prophetic work has involved some issues that you don't get to in some of the other genres of literature in the Old Testament such as historical narratives or

wisdom literature; each have their unique features. So we'll look at some of the hermeneutical principles that are important for interpreting the prophetic writings. Discussions will include such things as the prophetic time perspective, the conditionality of prophetic statements, as well as the idea of double-sense, double-reference and the prophet speaking with the same words while at the same time having in view two different events, as far as fulfillment is concerned separated by a long distance in time.

#### 6A. Reading Assignments

Now, again, that's still part of this phenomena of prophetism, but to get to that second purpose of content, the student will read each of the major and minor prophetic books along with C. Hasel Bullock's *Introduction to the Old Testament and Prophetic Literature*, where he takes each book and discusses the content of the book, interpretive problems, historical background and its general message, etc. So, as far as content in class, I'm not going to do a whole lot with that.

Largely you're going to read the prophetic books and Bullock's *Introduction*. In class I'm going to deal with four of the minor prophets, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, and Amos, and when I start coming to the end of the course I'll teach Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. So, that's the general description of what we will be doing.

### 2. Course Objective

#### 1A. Prophetic Phenomena

Let's go through the objectives and then on the backside of that page, when we get to methods, I'll talk about assignments. As far as objectives of the course, some of this is a repeat of what I've just said in the preceding paragraph. First, to examine the phenomenon of prophetism in ancient Israel including such things as prophetic call, inspiration of the prophets, relations of true and false prophets, symbolic acts, comparison of prophecy in Israel and prophecy outside, and apologetic value of biblical prophecy. We'll just run through that.

#### 2A. General Content of Each Prophetic Book

Second, to become familiar with the writings of the prophets of Israel

including the general content of each book, its purpose, and historical setting. So that's the content piece.

### 3A. Hermeneutical Principles for the Prophetic Writings

Third, to learn some principles of hermeneutics relative to the prophetic writings, both in theory and application. I'll lecture on that for a session or so, but when we get into the four minor prophets we'll be applying those principles and we'll see the way some of them are relevant to the text.

### 4A. Critical Theories esp. Isaiah and Daniel

#### 1B. Isaiah: Date and Authorship

Fourth, to become acquainted with critical theories concerning the authorship and character of prophetic books with particular attention given to Isaiah and Daniel. Does the message of Isaiah come from a man called Isaiah the prophet living in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah, or is this material that came from a much later time? That question arises very acutely from Isaiah 40 to the end of the book, so that if you look at the average commentary from mainstream biblical scholars, you will find a commentary on Isaiah the prophet that is chapters 1-39. Then you'll find the second volume on what's called the Deutero-Isaiah, or the second Isaiah, in chapters 40 through the end, which pretty consistently is said to be from someone other than Isaiah the prophet. Why do they say that? That second part of the book of Isaiah assumes that the Babylonian captivity has already taken place, which occurred over 150 years after the historical Isaiah. Of course, it had not taken place in the time of Isaiah, Isaiah was saying it would take place; yet chapters 40-66 seem to assume it has taken place and that now God is going to bring Israel back from captivity. Specifically, they're going to come back from captivity under the reign of Cyrus the Persian, who was mentioned by name. He lived centuries after the time of Isaiah the prophet. So the question is, how could anyone have spoken in advance so clearly and so precisely about the rise of the Persian empire and the ruler Cyrus, and that under Cyrus Israel would return from captivity? In mainstream biblical studies the conclusion is that's impossible. This

must have been written by someone much later who was living in the time of Cyrus, and therefore he would have known that Cyrus existed. So, I'm going to look at that whole question with Isaiah because it's with Isaiah and Daniel that this question is most frequently raised, and the authorship of the book is challenged.

## 2B. Daniel: Date and Authorship

In Daniel you have very similar issues. In the earlier part of the book you have visions, but in the latter part of the book you have these prophecies, which are detailed descriptions, not only of end times where the anti-christ arises, but of that period of time when the Jewish people were persecuted by a ruler who came out of the division of Alexander the Great's kingdom. For Israel, this was a time when the Seleucids up in Syria and the Ptolemies down in Egypt fought over the Holy Land, struggling over who would control that territory. There are wars between them, that's for the North and the South. In the midst of this there is a description of none other than Antiochus Epiphanes of the Seleucid Dynasty, the descriptions of his persecutions of the Jewish people, and the desecration of the temple—history that quite clearly took place in the second century B.C. How could Daniel, writing back before 500 B.C., have known in advance in such detail what was going to play out 300 years later? So the general conclusion of mainstream biblical studies has been, well, Daniel didn't write this; rather it was somebody who lived around 160 or 164 B.C., in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. We'll look at some of these arguments.

## 5A. Relevance of the Prophetic Writings

Fifth, we will explore how the message of the prophetic writings has relevance for the church of the twenty-first century. You will do an assignment on that and do some reading outside of Bullock. That's certainly an important issue, this is part of Scripture, for Paul has said, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" that clearly includes the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but how do you find meaning from these books for today?

### 3. Methods

#### 1A. Readings

So those are the general objectives of the course. If you turn over the backside of that page, “Methods employed toward securing the first objectives:” I’ve already mentioned you will read Bullock’s *Introduction to the Old Testament and the Prophetic Books*. Then in connection with its meaning for today, I want you all to read a chapter by Elizabeth Achtemeier, from a volume called *Preaching from the Old Testament*. Chapter seven of that volume is “Preaching from the prophets,” on pages 109-135 in that volume. In addition to that, I want you to read one of the following two books: Either Elizabeth Achtemeier’s *Preaching from the Minor Prophets* or Donald Leggett’s *Loving God and Disturbing Men: Preaching from the Prophets*. The purpose of each is to discuss how to find meaning for today in preaching from the prophetic books. I’ll come back in a minute to what I want you to do with that once we get to the assignment page. I also want you to read each of the prophetic books in the English Bible.

#### 2A. Lectures and Papers

Lectures will supplement readings, concentrating on various aspects of the phenomena of prophetism, and then, as I mentioned, the books of Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. I want to encourage classroom discussion, I welcome your interruption at any given point with questions or comments or whatever. There will be an exegetical paper on the book of Hosea; I’ll say more about that when we come to the assignments; there will be an exegetical analysis of a passage from Amos, Amos 9:11-13, which becomes a pretty important passage relative to establishing a hermeneutic for interpreting prophetic writings because that text in Amos 9:11-13 is picked up in the book of Acts chapter 15. It is quoted and interpreted in a certain way, but there are a host of issues around exactly how it is being used and what conclusions can be drawn. So I want you to work on that passage a bit and I will do some class discussion of that passage after you’ve already worked on it. In fact, that’ll be the last class of the course. You will need

to write a brief discussion of the readings from Achtemeier and Leggett, also. As far as testing, there is potential for a quiz each week on the assigned readings from Bullock. There's a mid-term and a final, and there is this paper on Hosea that will be a factor in your grade as well.

### 3A. Assignments

If you go over to this assignment page, and go over to page four down on the bottom you notice there's the schema on grading. One-quarter is quizzes on Bullock, the Amos exegesis and the Achtemeier report are considered the equivalent to a quiz, so all that lumped together cumulatively is a quarter of your grade. The Hosea paper is a quarter of your grade, the mid-term and final are also a quarter of your grade. So there's four factors in the grade. Now, let's go back to the first page of that assignment sheet. I again list the various readings: Bullock, chapter seven of Achtemeier, then either Achtemeier or Leggett, at the top. Those are the things you will read.

### 4A. Hosea Term Paper Instructions

The term paper. Study is to be made of the book of Hosea, the results of which are to be summarized in a paper of 15-20 pages. Now let me caution you; I don't want 25 pages, keep it 20 pages or under, and that's a challenge, because of what follows here, what I want in this paper to discipline yourself. But 15-20 pages, typewritten double-spaced, with a normal sized font, using correct form for footnotes and bibliography and so forth. I'm not so concerned what form that is, but you ought to be consistent in the form, to follow University of Chicago, MLA, or whatever. The paper is to include discussion of the following matters, and there are three topics. The first thing I want you to include is a discussion of the moral problem of Hosea's wife Gomer. The Lord tells Hosea to go out and marry a harlot. That has bothered a lot of people. How could the Lord do that? Well, is that a problem? What's going on here? I think if you start researching this you will be surprised at the amount of literature there is, out there, on this question, and the enormous variety of ways in which people have dealt with this problem, and come

to a conclusion. I've listed two articles which are also on reserve in the library as photocopies. I think they'll probably be helpful to get into this question. The first one is by a man named H. Ebers "The Matrimonial Life of Hosea," published in a volume of essays out of an Old Testament study group in South Africa. It's a good survey of the questions involved. Then H. H. Rowley's, "The Marriage of Hosea," in a volume called *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy*. If you look at those two articles, you'll get into the issue and from there go wherever you want. What I'm interested in as far as discussion in your written paper is your own conclusion and why you've come to that conclusion. You'll have to show some awareness of what all the issues are in doing that, but I really want you to do some reading and thinking on that, and then put on paper what your own conclusion is, after having gone through that. So that's the first piece of it.

Second, I want you to read through Hosea a number of times; it's not that long a book; it's rather the complex the way it's organized, but read through it, and then select some verse, section, or topic or theme, or you could even do a word study of a significant word. It's all up to you, but select something like a verse, a section, or a topic, other than the topic of Hosea's wife (I don't want you to go back to that question). Take something else in the second section, something you find interesting. Comment on it, utilizing insights derived from Hebrew translation exegesis. In other words I want you to show some evidence that you're working with some interpretive issue in the book of Hosea and using the Hebrew Bible in the process of working with that. So that's the second section.

Then the third section is the prophet's meaning for today. Make some comments on the significance of the book of Hosea for the time in which it was written, and then bridge the historical gap; we live in a totally different time, culture, place, and history of redemption than Hosea did. Comment on its significance for God's people in the twenty-first century. So there are three



sections of the paper, I'd say three mini-papers I want you to work through that you turn in as one paper, but with those three sections.

#### 5A. Bulloch Reading Assignment and Dates

Now, any questions on this? I want you to show evidence you've done some research, but I wouldn't put any specific length on it. Let me at this point just skip over to page three. You notice the way this assignment schedule works. The dates are due dates, so today is the ninth, next Tuesday is January 16<sup>th</sup> and I want you to read from Bullock his discussion of Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. I'd appreciate it if you'd more than just read it; I want you to take some notes and internalize some of it, work on it. Be ready for a potential quiz on Bullock, for the following week you have Hosea and Micah; that's only 40 pages. I have given a reading assignment from Bullock for January 30<sup>th</sup>, that's to start working on that Hosea paper, and you can work on that Hosea paper all the way through. The following week Isaiah and Zephaniah, then the week after that back to the Hosea paper research, and then you come to a mid-term. Then you're back to Bullock with Habakkuk to Jeremiah and Nahum, and then Bullock on Daniel. But, March the 6<sup>th</sup> the Hosea paper is due. In other words, you have two open assignment dates to work on it, plus whatever other time you'll be doing along the way. But by Tuesday, March 6, I want you to turn that in.

Now there is an asterisk there, which over in the middle of page four you see a one week extension will be granted without penalty. But beyond one week late, I will deduct 5/10 of a grade point per week subsequently. I'm not leaving this paper till the end of the course; I want you to have done it, 2/3 of the way through the course, so it's not piling up at the end. March 13<sup>th</sup> you're back in Bullock; March 20<sup>th</sup>, Amos exegesis. I will give you a worksheet with some questions on it that I want you to respond to in written form for that assignment. I'll give it to you in a few more weeks. Then I will discuss that Amos 9 passage as I mentioned for Tuesday, March 27, which is our last lecture time. Tuesday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>'s the final exam, I want you to turn in a two-page written summarization of the

five most significant things you have learned from reading either the two assigned readings from Achtemeier chapter seven or the book by Leggett. In other words, that's the material on preaching from the prophets, and I want you to do that reading listed there again, and then draw up the five most significant things you've learned from that reading. Then April 3<sup>rd</sup> is the final exam. Any question on assignments?

#### 6A. Extra Credit

As far as extra credit is concerned, if you want to do some extra credit work, you can do that by reading chapters one, two, six and seven in the book called *Continuity and Discontinuity, Perspectives on the Relationships Between the Testaments*, edited by John Feinberg, published by Crossway Books in 1988. This is a collection of essays by people who represent two different viewpoints; some see a very strong continuity between the Testaments and really between Israel and the Church, and others see more distant continuity between the Testaments and between Israel and the Church. When you get into what you might call the "kingdom prophecies" of the Old Testament, a lot of them talk about the future for Israel. What's it talking about? Is it a future for national or ethnic Israel in some sense, or do you spiritualize those and say it's really talking about the Church, and the Church has succeeded, you might say, Israel as the people of God; there is no future for Israel, and those prophecies then have to be understood as references to the Church. That, in very broad lines, is where the point of difference lies between the continuity people and the discontinuity people. This book was out of print for a time, but I think last year it came back in print. So if you want to purchase it you can, but if you don't want to purchase it photocopies of those four chapters: one, two, six and seven, are on reserve in the library. The articles in this book as the title suggests raise the important issue of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments which is particularly important especially when one attempts to interpret the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament prophetic books. Do these prophecies speak in figurative language about the New Testament

Church? Or, do they have reference to a future that somehow involves some sort of a reconstitution of the nation of Israel? We're going to hit this when you go to Obadiah, the first book you're going to read about, because at the end of Obadiah it talks about a future. Is it talking about a future for Israel, or is it talking about the Church? This issue is found in almost every one of the prophetic books.

#### 7A. Comments on Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos

If you turn back to page three, you notice your first reading is Obadiah , Joel, Jonah and Amos. And you notice the page numbers are toward the end of Bullock's book. Obadiah's page 254, Joel is 324, and then Jonah's back towards the beginning. The reason I've assigned Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos is I think that's the order in which these books were written. I think Obadiah was the earliest of the Old Testament prophets, but that gets into the questions of authorship and date of Obadiah and date of Joel, which some people give late dates. We're going to look at that when we discuss it. I think they're best dated earlier. That's not an issue that's necessarily between conservative interpreters and more liberal interpreters; it's not that kind of an issue. It's an issue where there's plenty of room for disagreement, and it's not altogether clear; that's why there's discussion. But I prefer the view putting Obadiah early and Joel early, which I will discuss later. So you're going to read the sections of Bullock in the order that I think is the chronological order of the appearance of the prophetic books.

#### 8A. Extra Credit: Israel and the Church Paper

Returning to page 5: Do these prophecies speak in figurative language about the New Testament Church or do they have reference to a future involving some sort of a reconstituted nation of Israel? Does the Bible see a future for Israel, or is Israel superseded by the Church? There's a word for that, "super-cessionism" which says the Church has simply replaced Israel, there is no future for Israel. You should read the above chapters, then reflect on the issues that they raise and write an 8-10 page paper describing your own conclusions on these issues. This does not necessarily mean that you have to agree with the expression of either side of the

issue as represented in the essays you have read. There may well be other alternatives. This of course, is a very large subject, and one that is very complex as well. It's possible that you may not be able to come to any firm conclusions in the short time that you'll have to work on this. I'm aware that most of you are probably in the early stages of your own theological reflections and that issues like this need to be worked out over a longer, rather than a shorter, period of time, wrestling with the issues; and I might say, this is not a simple question.

#### 9A. Extra Credit: Directions for the Millennial Positions Paper

Of course, you get into eschatological positions, the a-millennial school generally holds that there is no future for Israel; that millennial period is now; there is no millennium; these prophecies are all fulfilled in a spiritual sense. The pre-millennial, or even the post-millennial view, would see these prophecies as relating to some future for Israel, in some way. Those eschatological positions have been around for a long time, and are debated constantly. But I would hope that this project would encourage you to at least make some tentative steps toward finding your own way in these questions and then enable you to identify some of the outstanding issues that are as yet unresolved in your mind. In other words it's a goal to familiarize yourself with the debate, trying to work through it, seeing initially what tentative conclusions you may come to. These unresolved issues could also be part of the discussion for your paper. The due date is March 27<sup>th</sup>, that is the last class before the final exam; notice that it says "there is no extension." If you do the paper, an A will increase your final grade .75,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a grade. And in the grade point scale, you know, an "A" is 4, a "B" is 3, "C" is 2; so if you have an average 3 for all the other components of the course, when you get this, if you get an "A" on it you have a 3.75 instead of 3. Any question on the extra credit?

#### 4. Other Resources

These other handouts are for use as we go forward. There's a class lecture outline that I will follow in our class lectures; there's a bibliography key to that class lecture outline, and then there's that set of citations which is also key to the

class lecture outline but includes actual paragraphs taken out some of the entries in the bibliography. Then there's a set of PowerPoint slides; I don't have a lot of slides for this course, but there are a few.

#### 1A. Bibliography Comments

I might comment on the bibliography, you notice the first heading: "General Reference Volumes on the Prophetic Books." Here I've listed some other books that are similar to Bullock that survey the prophetic materials. Bullock is the first one listed there, but there are two surveys of the prophets that have come out in the last couple years that are really quite good, they're quite different, but they're both quite good. Robert Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, Baker 2002; Chisholm is at Dallas Seminary. And the last entry, O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, Presbyterian Reformed, 2004. If you want to look at two other kinds of surveys of the prophetic books, those two are both quite different. Robertson's is more theological, but both are good.

J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* is a complete guide to scriptural predictions and their fulfillment. This was written some years ago in 1973, but I think it's still available. It's a very interesting volume because what Payne does is go through all of Scripture and isolate every statement of Scripture that he considers to be a prophetic statement, referring to something in the future. Then he interprets every single one of them, and he has categories of time as far as fulfillment: fulfillment in the Old Testament, fulfillment in the inter-testamental period, fulfillment in the New Testament period, fulfillment sometime in the Age of Church, fulfillment of millennial period, and fulfillment in the eternal state. He gives numbers for all these things and charts them out. So what you find in this encyclopedia is a reference source; if you're dealing with some verse or prediction you can look at it see at least Payne's interpretation of it and where he thinks you would find fulfillment; you don't always have to agree with him. But it's useful as a reference at least to get you going on some of that. The first part of that book is a long introduction to the prophetic phenomenon, and it's sort of like what you're

doing in the introduction to this course; discussing some of the phenomena of prophetism in Israel.

The other collection, *Israel's Prophets*, edited by Robert Gordon, is a collection of very academic essays, mostly by mainstream biblical scholars, published in 1995. Then more recently Gordon McConville wrote, *The Prophets: Exploring the Old Testament*, Volume Four, Intervarsity, 2002. It's much like Bullock, Chisholm, Robertson, a survey of the prophetic books. Gordon McConville certainly would be considered an evangelical, but he's much more open to Deutero-Isaiah, a late date of Daniel, some of those kinds of things, than a more middle-of-the-road conservative or evangelical. There's some good stuff in there, but I'd give you caution using it; nevertheless, I'd pay attention to it.

Transcribed by Hope Johnson  
Initial editing by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final editing by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundation Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 1B**

### **1. Prophetism in Ancient Israel: Some General Remarks**

Let's start then with Roman numeral I in your outline. "Prophetism in Ancient Israel: Some General Remarks."

#### **A. Prophetism in Israel is a Unique Phenomenon**

A. under that is "Prophetism in Israel is a Unique Phenomenon." I think we can say that the prophetic movement of ancient Israel constitutes a unique phenomenon, not only in the history of Israel itself, but also in all human history, even though attempts are frequently made to find parallels to the prophetic movement in Israel. Here you have a stream of 400 years of prophets arising, and speaking God's word to this small group of people, Israel located in the land of Canaan. Beginning with Obadiah, which I think is probably dated around 835 B.C., that's the earliest of the prophets. Malachi is about 435, so you see that it is stretched over 400 years. Think of the history of this country which is a little over 400 years, so we're talking about an enormous span of time. Through that long span of time, one after the other, God raised up these individuals and gave them a word from himself, the message to his people.

#### **1. Various Country's Unique Aptitude**

Sometimes it is argued that various peoples or nations have a particular ability, a particular aptitude, or expertise or proficiency in some area of intellectual thought, endeavor, or artistic, creative ability or whatever that is recognized by other people and held in high esteem. Think of ancient Greece: they had their sculptors. You see that the results of their work are in some of the great museums of the world, and you can be amazed at their ability. They also had great philosophers who thought great thoughts, so Greece had a particular gift for producing philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. You think of Rome, they've had military commanders and jurists; the Roman legal system certainly had a lot of influence. You think of England as the colonizers; they sent their

administrators out all over the world and created the British Empire. You think of the United States with economists, business management principles and high-tech kind of research and development. Germany has composers Bach, Brahms, and Beethoven as well as many prominent philosophers and theologians. Germany seems to have had a particular bent or gift or frame of mind for producing people of that type. So you can look at peoples and see that certain nations seem to have particular abilities in certain endeavors.

## 2. Israel's Genius Producing Prophets

But you see what some do is look at something like that and say, in the same way that Germany produced these great composers, Israel showed genius at producing prophets. Then that phenomenon of prophetism you see is put on the same level as these products of human ability and genius that are found among other peoples. I think what that kind of approach loses sight of is the principal difference that exists between Israel's prophets and these works of genius of other peoples and other times and places. In other words, I think prophetism, by very definition of what it is, is a phenomenon that is principally distinctive and different from any other achievement of the human spirit in all of human history.

## 3. Divine Revelation

It seems to me by virtue of its character as divine revelation, prophecy in ancient Israel must be defined as a unique phenomenon. In other words, God says, and we'll look at a lot of these texts probably later this morning, "I will put my words in your mouth." He says that to Jeremiah. It wasn't Jeremiah so much that was speaking. It was God that was speaking through Jeremiah.

## 4. Prophets Endowed by God

Even someone like Ronald Clements, who wrote a book called *Old Testament Prophecy* in 1996 and is not an evangelical, makes this statement, "Nowhere else from antiquity has there been preserved such a literary collection; prophetic literature, on the scale of the Old Testament, remains a wholly unique product of ancient Israel." In other words, there weren't just have a few isolated



individuals who lived and spoke, who claimed they were speaking for God; this movement spanned a period of 400 years.

Now it's a very unique thing. I think that when you look at the Bible, what you'll see is that the prophets are presented to us as individuals endowed by God with the prophetic function. They were endowed by God with the prophetic function so that God's word might be given to Israel, and through Israel given to the rest of the world. The Bible clearly presents the words of the prophets as God's words rather than the prophets' own words. For that reason I think we can say that the prophetic message as it is presented in Scripture is not presented as the product of human creativity or human ingenuity. That's not what's going on. It's rather the product of divine disclosure. It's divine disclosure in a very special, direct sense. Now I don't think the importance of that distinction can be overemphasized. Right at the outset you have to be clear about what's going on with the prophets. Now we'll get back into the discussion of how the human element works with the divine, because these men, as human beings, also had a role in the formulation of these things. How do you unpack that? How do you describe that combination of the human spokesperson on the one hand and the divine revelation on the other. We'll get to that eventually. So that's A. "Prophetism in Israel is a Unique Phenomenon."

#### B. Prophets were Servants of the God invested with the Prophetic Function

Now let's move on to B. "Prophets were Servants of God Invested with the Prophetic Function." I have three sub-points under that. First "The Prophets were Servants of God." E. J. Young wrote a book on the prophets called *My Servants the Prophets*. The reason he used that as a title is that this is a label you will find attached to the prophets in numerous references in the Old Testament, they are God's servants. I want to run through just a few of these references with you. In 2 Kings 9:7 a prophet says to Jehu, "I anoint you king over the Lord's people of Israel. You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master. I will avenge the blood of, (notice), my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed

by Jezebel.” In 2 Kings 17:13, the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers, “Turn from your evil ways, observe my commands and decrees in accordance with the entire law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.” Jeremiah 7:25: “From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, (and that’s the end of the Old Testament period), day after day, again and again, I sent you my servants the prophets, but they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked, did more evil than their forefathers.” Jeremiah 25:4: “And though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention.” I could go on with numerous other references of this sort, describing the prophets as servants of God. God himself calls them “my servants.”

#### 1. Some of the Prophets Received a Special Call to the Prophetic Task

Now 1. under B. is “Some of the Prophets Received a Special Call to the Prophetic Task.”

##### a. Isaiah’s Call

I want to mention four of them where that is described, and the first and probably the most impressive is Isaiah 6:1-13. You read in the first verse of that chapter, “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” Then there’s a description of these seraphs saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty.” Isaiah has this vision of the Lord the same time he gets a vision of his own sinful condition before the Lord; so he says in verse three “Woe is me, I am ruined for I’m a man of unclean lips; I live among a people of unclean lips; my eyes have seen the King; the Lord Almighty.” This is a visionary experience for Isaiah. He sees this, he sees himself, and his sinful condition, and says, “Woe is me.” Then one of those seraphs takes this coal from the altar and touches his mouth with it, and says, “Your guilt is taken away; your sin is atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord say, ‘Whom shall I send, who shall go for us?’ I said, ‘Here am I, send

me.” So the Lord commissions Isaiah, Isaiah responds, and the Lord says in verse nine, “Go and tell this people.” The message he has is not one that is very pleasant, his message is largely a message of coming judgment and punishment. But it is going to fall on deaf ears. And that’s basically what happened with Isaiah’s ministry. Although the judgment will come, at the end of that chapter, you find a brief note of hope; a remnant would remain faithful to the Lord. But clearly here is Isaiah’s call and commission to be a prophet, to be this person who proclaims God’s message to a people who were unwilling to listen and obey.

#### b. Jeremiah’s call

Secondly, Jeremiah, if you look at the first chapter of Jeremiah, verses four and following, you read: “The word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ ‘Ah, sovereign, Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak, I’m only a child.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say I am only a child, you must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you, do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand, touched my mouth, and said to me (and this becomes an important text as far as the prophetic phenomenon is concerned). ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth. See today I appoint you to the nations, appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot, to tear down, to rebuild and plant.’” Here the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah; he tries to avoid the responsibility and the difficulty attached to the prophetic task, saying he feels too weak, too young, unable to do the job. But the Lord says, “Don’t say that. You go to all whom I send you, and do whatever I command you, and I will put my words in your mouth.”

#### c. Ezekiel’s call

We also have a call for Ezekiel that’s described in the first three chapters of the book. I’m not going to take time to read through all of that, but if you’ve read that, remember in the first chapter, Ezekiel sees this throne carriage of God, which

is this wheeled carriage pulled by four creatures and on that throne chariot, above it, you read in verse 26 of the first chapter, “Above the expanse over their heads is what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal as if full of fire. And that from there down he looked like fire and brilliant lights surrounded him like the appearance of a rainbow and the clouds on a radiant day so were the clouds around him.” What was it? This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, so he has this vision of God, much like Isaiah did. “When I saw it I fell face down, and I heard the voice of one speaking, he said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, I will speak to you.’” And what’s the message? Verse three, “Son of man, I’m sending you to the Israelites, the rebellious nation that has been revolting against me.” Verse four, “The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says,’” and whether they listen or fail to listen, and many times they will fail to listen, but that’s not your responsibility. Whether they listen or fail to listen for they are a rebellious house, they will know that a prophet has been in among them “I’m going to give my word to those people, through you, and you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words.” Verse seven, “you must speak (what?) my words to them.” (Whose words?) “My words, whether they listen or fail to listen for they are rebellious, but you, son of man listen to what I say to you, do not rebel like that rebellious house. Open your mouth, (and here’s the remarkable thing,) and eat what I give you.” And what’s he giving him? He gives him a scroll. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning. “He said to me, ‘Son of man, eat what is before you; eat this scroll. (Now remember this is a visionary situation.) Then go and speak to the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Now he said to me, ‘Son of man eat the scroll I am giving you, fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.” I think what’s going on there with this scroll that’s to be eaten is that symbolically that scroll is the

message that Ezekiel is to make his own by eating it. As he does that, even though it's a message of judgment, the message he says, "tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth." This was God's word.

#### d. Amos' Call

Those are three prophets with a pretty clear call; Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In Amos there's something similar to this, and there are a number of issues here and we'll come back and discuss them later in another context. But notice in Amos 7:15, Amos has gone to the northern kingdom. Amos comes out of Judah, and he goes up to Bethel in the Northern Kingdom, in the time of Jeroboam II and prophesies against Jeroboam, king in the Northern Kingdom. In verse 12, Amaziah, a priest of Bethel, says to Amos, "Get out you seer, go back to the land of Judah." I don't want you up here. Then he says, "Earn your bread there, and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary in the temple of the kingdom." Amos responds to that priest Amaziah of the Northern Kingdom and says, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me: 'Go prophesy to my people Israel.'" Now then here is the word of the Lord. So what Amos is saying was, "I wasn't originally a prophet, but the Lord called me and told me to go and give this message, and that is what I'm doing." Alright, so those are four examples of prophets who received a special call for a prophetic task.

#### 2. For some prophets, no special calling is recorded

Number 2. For some prophets, no special calling is recorded, but all the prophets demonstrate an awareness that they are endowed with the prophetic function. So, I don't think there's sufficient biblical information to conclude that every prophet received some sort of special call to the prophetic task, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos did. They may have, but there's no record of it. When you think about that whole question of call, I think there are some other things to be aware of; I think there are some examples of individuals who

performed a prophetic function very clearly, who quite clearly did not receive a call.

a. Balaam

I think a primary example of that is the heathen soothsayer Balaam, in Numbers 22-25, who had been hired by Balak king of Moab, to curse Israel. Balaam tried to do that, but he couldn't. The Lord put other words in his mouth, and instead of cursing Israel, he blessed Israel, and said all these great things are going to happen to Israel, much to the chagrin of the king of Moab who had hoped for something else. Now Balaam was a heathen soothsayer, but I think you can say at the same time he was a true prophet. God put his words in his mouth. There are some remarkable prophecies in Balaam's oracles. So he was a true prophet; he performed a prophetic function. I don't think you can say he received a call in any sense like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel did.

b. David performed other functions as well

There are other individuals who are clearly prophets, but who perform some other function in the theocracy as well; think of David. David was anointed to be king, and the Holy Spirit came upon him to equip him for that task. But he's also referred to as a prophet. Of course, there are many Psalms that are written by David, and any piece of Scripture is certainly the work of a prophet—God's word through that human individual. In 2 Samuel 23:2, David even speaks of the Holy Spirit coming upon him. In 2 Samuel 23:2, often called the last words of David, he says, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me. His word was on my tongue." That very much seems like what you have with Isaiah "I put my words in your mouth." The Lord put his words in David's mouth, but David was not, "a prophet" in the sense that he received a call in this kind of prophetic manner, and he was a king. Ezekiel was a priest. Now, Ezekiel did receive the call to be a prophet but if you look at Ezekiel 1:3, he was a priest, and he performed a dual function of both prophet and priest.

### c. Prophets Aware that They Had Been Endowed by God with the Prophetic Function

I think what's clear is when prophets speak for God, they do so in a way that indicates that they know that they have been endowed by God with that prophetic function. In other words, they know when they are speaking their own word or God's words. They're conscious of it. That's true whether they receive some sort of special call to perform that prophetic function, or whether the Lord just comes upon them. They are aware that they are endowed by that prophetic function and by the Lord himself. So, for some prophets no special calling is recorded, but all the prophets demonstrate awareness that they're endowed with the prophetic function.

### 3. The Endowment of the Prophetic Function was a Power no Prophet Could Resist

Thirdly, just a brief comment on the following point: "The Endowment of the Prophetic Function was a Power no Prophet Could Resist."

#### a. Amos

In Amos chapter three there's an interesting passage, beginning in verse four you read, "Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey?" This is a series of cause and effect relationships: if you hear a lion roaring there's probably reason for it. "Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up in the earth when there is nothing to catch? When a trumpet sounds in the city do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to the city has not the Lord caused it? Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plans to his servants the prophets." There's that phrase again "my servants the prophets." But then notice verse eight: "the lion has roared, who will not fear?" When a lion roared it's going to cause fear. "The Sovereign Lord has spoken, who can but prophecy? The Lord speaks, who can but prophesy?" That was a power a man could not resist. I think what Amos is saying here is just as a man must be fearful when a lion begins

to roar close by him and he can't do anything else but be fearful, so a man must prophesy when God tells him to. You can't withdraw from it.

#### b. Jeremiah

Jeremiah says he tried to withdraw from it. That's in Jeremiah 20 verse nine. Jeremiah says, "If I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in, indeed I cannot." He must speak. So the endowment by the prophetic function was a power that man could not resist. Balaam couldn't resist that; he did what he didn't want to do. He blessed Israel instead of cursing it.

#### C. The Function of the Prophet is the Proclamation of the Word of God

Alright, let's go to C. "The Function of the Prophet is the Proclamation of the Word of God." It's already been emphasized and I will continue to do this for a time as we're discussing this. The true prophet does not bring his own words; he does not bring his own thoughts, his own ideas. When he speaks, he brings God's words and God's thoughts. If you're going to ask what is the difference between the true prophets and the false prophets the fundamental difference between the true and the false prophets is that the true prophets, proclaim God's words and the false prophets proclaim their own words.

#### Deuteronomy 18

Let me point you just to three texts: one of them we've already looked at; but if you go back to Deuteronomy 18, you have a description by Moses about how Israel will receive revelation after Moses is gone. Moses has been a mediator from God to his people, he's been the spokesperson for God, and he's about to die at the end of the book. In Deuteronomy 18 there's a description of the rise of the prophetic movement. The Lord says, "I will raise up a prophet like unto you, and to him, you shall listen." In Deuteronomy 18:18, the Lord says, "I will raise up from them a prophet like you from among your brothers." Then notice the next few words, "I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I



command him,” and then it goes on to say that the people were accountable to listen, because when that prophet speaks, those are God’s words.

Jeremiah 1:9

That is the same thing that we already read in Jeremiah 1:9, where the Lord said to Jeremiah, “I will put my words in your mouth.” So you see the prophets speak God’s words.

Jeremiah 23:16

Next look at Jeremiah 23:16: “This is what the Lord Almighty says, ‘Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you (these are false prophets). They will fill you with false hopes, they speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.’” You see the false prophets give their own ideas. These are visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. So what’s the fundamental difference between the true and the false prophets? The true prophet speaks the word of the Lord; the false prophet speaks his own words and his own thoughts.

1. Expressions with which the Prophets Introduced Their Sermons are Indicative that the Message is God’s, not Their Own

Now, 1 under C: “Expressions with which the Prophets Introduced Their Sermons are Indicative that the Message is God’s, not Their Own.” I mentioned earlier E.J. Young’s book, *My Servants the Prophets*. On pages 171-175 of that book, you can see a list of references and then short phrases that follow. What he does is take expressions from Isaiah. For example: in 16:13 of Isaiah, “This is the Lord; the Lord hath spoken.” In 18:4: “thus has the Lord said to me.” Verse 10 of chapter 21: “That which I have heard from the Lord.” 21:17: “For the Lord has spoken.” 22:14: “The Lord has revealed himself in my ears;” 22:25: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts.” 28:22: “this I have heard from the Lord.” It goes on and on. See the variety of different expression, and Young’s book has four pages of those expressions taken just out of the book of Isaiah. The prophets make clear, that when

they were speaking, they were conscious that what they were saying was God's Word. So the expressions they used to introduce their sermons tell us quite clearly over and over again that this is God's word. It's not their own word.

## 2. The Prophet Must Declare God's Word Regardless of Whether or Not It Was Pleasant to Him

Number 2 under C. "The Prophet Must Declare God's Word Regardless of Whether or Not It Was Pleasant to Him." Very often the message that the prophets had to declare was not a pleasant message. It was a message of judgment, woe, doom, and a call to repentance.

### a. Samuel Anointing Saul

Let me give you a few illustrations: go back to 1 Samuel 15. There's a long sequence of events there, coming to a climax in chapter 8 of 1 Samuel where the people come to Samuel and say, "Give us a king." Samuel is very displeased at that request because he says, "Remember the Lord your God is your king. Why are you asking for a king?" "Well," they say, "we want to be like the nations." But Samuel says, "You're rejecting the Lord, who is your king." Then the Lord tells Samuel to give the people what they want. So we go through that whole sequence of events and God grants them a king. He defines the role of a king in a way that would be consistent with the covenant. Then he inaugurates kingship in the context of renewal of allegiance to the Lord. Saul becomes king, but very quickly turns away from his role and twice doesn't obey the word of Samuel, in chapter 13 and chapter 15. So the Lord then tells Samuel, "Go and tell Saul, 'As you've rejected me, so I've rejected you. You're not going to be king anymore.'" Look at 1 Samuel 15:10 or 11, "The word of the Lord came to Samuel." Samuel is the prophet here, and the Lord says, "I am grieved that I have made Saul king because he's turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." What's Samuel's response to

that? We read that Samuel was troubled. He cried out to the Lord all that night. It wasn't a pleasant task for Samuel to go and confront Saul and tell him that the Lord had rejected him. That's not the kind of thing that you enjoy doing. Samuel didn't enjoy doing it, but the Lord sent him to confront Saul and announce to him that the Lord had rejected him as king. If you go over to 16:1, notice what the Lord says there; "The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul? Since I have rejected him as king over Israel, fill your horn with oil, I'm sending you on your way, I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. One of his sons is to be king.'" So the prophets do declare the message of God regardless of whether that's pleasant to them. This was not a pleasant task for Samuel, but he goes and he does it. I'm going to come back to this later in another connection, under the next section.

#### b. Balaam

Think about Balaam. We've already talked about him in Numbers 22-25. The message he was proclaiming was not the message he wanted to proclaim, but he had to proclaim it. It was the word of the Lord. Think of Jonah. He didn't want to go to Nineveh and proclaim repentance for the Ninevites. He tried to avoid it, but he couldn't, and he had to go and preach that message. Even at the end of the book, he didn't like the message and the response of the Ninevites. Ezekiel had to eat that scroll that was inscribed with judgments from God. They were required to go and proclaim it even if it's not something they wanted to do. So the prophet is to declare the message of God regardless of whether or not it's something that is pleasant to him.

### 3. There is a Distinction between the Prophet's Own Word and the Word of God that

#### He Spoke; and the Prophets Were Aware of the Distinction

Then thirdly: "There is a distinction between the prophet's own word and the word of God that he spoke; and the prophets were aware of that distinction." In other words, the prophet would know in his own heart and mind

and conscience when he was speaking God's Word, and when he was speaking his own words. Next time I'm going to give you some illustrations of that because I think that's an important distinction. I'm going to look at some examples. But let's break for now.

Transcribed by: Hope Johnson

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Re-narrated by

## **Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Prophecy, Lecture 2**

### **Prophetic Awareness and History of Prophets**

C. 3. There is a Distinction between a Prophet's Own Word and the Word of God which They Spoke

I made a comment on C. 3. "There is a distinction between a prophet's own word and the word of God which they spoke." As I already have mentioned, the prophet was not to proclaim his own thoughts or ideas or insights, he was to proclaim God's word. What I am saying here is that the prophet could make the distinction between his own words and God's words. I think it's very important to be clear about that distinction as we go through this prophetic function. It's not valid to say that the prophets conveyed their own ideas and that those ideas then served as the word of God. That's quite a different construction. I think that becomes clear when we look at certain passages where a distinction is made between the prophet's own ideas and the message that God gave them. The prophet was aware of that distinction.

So, it's true that the divine word is given through the human instrument, through the prophet, and that God takes up into the proclamation of His Word the prophet's own personal characteristics, background, temperament, way of thinking, all those kinds of variation. While that is true, as part of an organic kind of view of the nature of divine inspiration that does not detract from or diminish the divine character of the message. God has so prepared these individuals with their personalities, gifts, and ways of thinking and so forth, that he takes that into the proclamation of his word, but it remains God's word.

a. Example: 2 Sam 7 – David and Nathan

Now let me give you a few illustrations of this that I think make that distinction clear. The first is in 2 Samuel 7 with some interaction between David and Nathan the prophet. In 2 Samuel 7:1, you read, "After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he

said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.’ Nathan replied to the king, ‘Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.’” Put yourself in Nathan’s shoes. David comes to you and says I’ve wanted to build a temple for the ark. Why would you object? It’s a noble desire to honor the Lord. But I think that the danger here is in linking the Lord’s will with what might be our good ideas or noble desires.

And what do you read next? “That night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan saying, ‘Go and tell my servant David, this is what the Lord says.’” Now you don’t have Nathan’s ideas, but you have the word of the Lord. “Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?” I won’t take time to read through all of this because I already read the point I want to make. What follows is the message from the Lord by Nathan, which in essence says, “David you are not to build me a house,” that is, a temple; “I am going to build you a house” and in “house” there is a sense of dynasty. But there’s kind of a play on words as you go through this passage. And the Lord says, “My word is, I will build you a house. I will build you a dynasty. It will endure forever. Your son, Solomon, will build the house of the Lord, but not you. For it is not my will for you.”

So Nathan had to go back to David and correct his own words and replace them with the divine word. Instead then of saying, “Go ahead and do it, the Lord is with you,” he had to say, “no, don’t do it. This is for Solomon to do. It’s not for you to do.” The distinction here between the prophet’s word and the word of God is quite clear. Nathan was thoroughly conscience of the distinction. So there is no real confusion in Nathan’s life about what the word of God is and how it differed from his own view.

If you look at your citation page 1, first paragraph up at the top. This is an article out of the book of *The Law and the Prophets* and the article on 2 Samuel 7:1-5. “Do all that’s in your heart, that’s what Nathan says, he gives the king complete freedom. The prophet means here that David should execute all that he

thinks of, reflects, proposes about the ark. The reason Nathan did this is that Yahweh is with the king!” You see he says, “Go ahead and do it. The Lord is with you!” “That is really evident in his whole course of life. According to Nathan, this ground is sufficient for the execution of his plan and the advice he gives. In fact, “Yahweh is with you is absolutely true. But that Nathan makes a mistake about the consequences. He will soon find out... This does not imply that the king’s intentions should be rejected, for in 1 Kings 8:18 (and this is interesting) Solomon says that the Lord said to his father David: that you had the intention to build the house in my name, you did well that you had this intention. But it’s not my will, but the prophet should first have waited for God’s revelation. His good intention was not always the same as God’s word. That Nathan too desired a temple for the God of Israel was not wrong in itself. The mistake made here was that he spoke as a man and not as a prophet, while his opinion as a prophet had been specifically asked for.” So I think here is a case where you see a clear distinction between Nathan’s word and God’s word.

b. Example: 1 Sam. 16 – Samuel’s anointing of David

I said I wanted to come back to 1 Samuel 16. In 16:1 the Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul?” He has his own private message to confront Saul with. But then the Lord says, “I’m going to send you to Jesse and I want you to anoint his son.” And Samuel, in 1 Samuel 16 goes to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse and then you see in verse 6, “When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought (here’s Samuel’s thoughts, his idea), “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.” That’s his opinion. But in verse 7 we read that, “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” Then he says, Eliab’s not the one. I have rejected the Eliab. He calls all his other sons and still they are not the Lord’s choice. You get down to verse 12 where they bring David in and you

read in the latter part of verse 12, “Then the Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him. He is the one.’” So you can see in that passage, Samuel had certain thoughts, certain feelings, but he was wrong. He doesn’t know the proper person the Lord is choosing whom Samuel is to anoint. So you see again the distinction between Samuel and the word of God.

c. Example: Jonah

I also mentioned Jonah as another illustration. If Jonah had brought his own message to Nineveh, that would have been quite a different word than the word of God that was laid upon him. Because his ideas didn’t coincide with the word of the Lord, he tried to avoid the task, but the Lord called him back and he did speak the word of the Lord.

d. Jeremiah 27-28 – Jeremiah and Hananiah Conflict

Let’s go to another illustration in Jeremiah. This is in Jeremiah 27:28. This is the controversy between the false prophet named Hananiah and the true prophet Jeremiah. In chapter 27 Jeremiah gives a word from the Lord, a prophetic word. Basically what that word is is that Judah is to serve Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler. If you look in 27:12 Jeremiah says, “I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, ‘Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?’” It’s God’s will for these nations, including Judah, to serve the king of Babylon.

Well, then he says in verse 14, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they are prophesying lies to you. ‘I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD. ‘They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.’ Then I said to the priests and all these people,



‘This is what the LORD says:’” – and here’s the Lord’s message – “Do not listen to the prophets who say, ‘Very soon now the articles from the Lord's house will be brought back from Babylon.’ They are prophesying lies to you. Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin? If they are prophets and have the word of the Lord, let them plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the LORD and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon. For this is what the LORD Almighty says.” That’s Jeremiah’s message. It’s the word from the Lord.

You get down to chapter 28 and you read about a false prophet who comes up and says they should not listen to what Jeremiah says. “In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people: ‘This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah.’” If you compare that verse 2 and 3 with verse 16 of the proceeding chapter you see it’s diametrically the opposite. As in 27:16 Jeremiah says, “Do not listen to the prophets who say, ‘Very soon now the articles from the LORD's house will be brought back from Babylon.’ They are prophesying lies.” Hananiah says he figures God will bring back all the articles, “‘Jehoiachin, king of Judah, and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’” Well that message of Hananiah was contradictory to the message of Jeremiah.

In chapter 28 verses 5 to 11, Jeremiah really doesn’t have much of a response. Look at what he says in verse 5-11. “Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in

the house of the Lord. He said, ‘Amen! May the LORD do so!’” In other words, I think at this point, what he’s saying is “Hananiah, I hope you’re right. I hope we are delivered from Nebuchadnezzar and the articles of the Lord’s temple are returned. He says “May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon.” So I hope you’re right. “Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord” – how? – “only if his prediction comes true.” In other words, what you’re saying runs counter to the grain of the messages of judgment that the prophets have been proclaiming. So he says, well I hope you’re right, but we’ll have to see what happens and it’s only if this comes true that we can recognize this as a message from the Lord. “Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it.” Jeremiah had been symbolizing the yoke of Babylonian captivity by wearing the yoke himself. “And he [Hananiah] said before all the people, ‘This is what the LORD says: “In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.”’” So there’s that flash of messages. What do you read then? At this point the prophet Jeremiah went on his way. So he says I hope you’re right. I don’t think you are. We’ll have to wait and see. That’s basically what he says.

But then what happens in verses 12 to 16? Here’s where the distinction is found. “Shortly after the prophet Hananiah” – verse 12 – “had broken the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah” – something happened – “the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah” and what’s the word of the Lord? – The Lord says, “Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the Lord says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron.’ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them

serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.'" Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die," – why? – "because you have preached rebellion against the Lord." In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died." It was now the seventh month but back in verse one it mentions that it was the fifth month of that year he gave this message. In other words, two months later he was dead. But you see, here's a false prophet. Jeremiah received the word of the Lord, and the false prophet comes, gives an opposite message. Jeremiah's response is, I don't think you're right. I hope you are but I don't think you are. But we'll have to see. Then the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and he has a new message, a new word. It's very precise. It condemns Hananiah as a false prophet and says, "I hear you're going to die," and in two months he's dead. So I think you can see, again, a distinction between Jeremiah's word, and his initial response.

The prophets were godly and pious people who just like any other human being has a certain opinion and expresses it, but it wasn't the word of the Lord, it was just an opinion. Now, there are comments about true and false prophets in other places in Jeremiah and we're going to be back to the Law of the prophets in Deuteronomy 18 that talks about the prophets who were not speaking the word of the Lord, how they were to distinguished between them. They both claim to be prophets and they both come to the people and say, "Thus saith the Lord". They claim to be doing that, so it seems to be up to the people to sort out which one was the true prophet and which one was the false prophet.

e. Example: 1 Kings 13 The Old Prophet and the Man of God out of Judah

1 Kings 13, is the story of the old prophet at Bethel. You're probably familiar with this story. This man of God out of Judah goes up to Bethel, much

like Amos against Jeroboam II, and this unnamed prophet out of Judah proclaims the message to Jeroboam I about the altar that had been built there in Bethel after the division of the kingdom. You notice in verse 2 this man of God out of Judah cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.' " That same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the LORD has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out." When the King hears about this message you see in verse 4, "He stretched out his hand from the altar and said, 'Seize him!' But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. And the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out." So the king, Jeroboam, in verse 6, says to the man of God, "'Intercede with the Lord your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored.' So the man of God interceded with the Lord, and the king's hand was restored and became as it was before.

The king said to the man of God, 'Come home with me and have something to eat, and I will give you a gift.' But the man of God out of Judah answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here." – why? – "For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.'" Those were the instructions that he received when he went up there: Don't eat bread. Don't drink water. "So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel."

But as he is on his way further, he meets this old prophet. Down in verse 18 this old prophet says, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord, 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.' " But we see that the writer of this narrative wrote a parenthetical statement – "For he was lying to him. So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house." He knew what the word of the Lord

was; the word of the Lord had been specific. He prayed. He was obedient to that word initially.

Now when this old prophet comes, he gives in and he goes in and he eats with him. Verse 20 says, “When he was sitting at the table,” what happens? “The word of the Lord came to the old prophet. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, ‘This is what the Lord says: You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.’”

And if you read further in the chapter, you can surely see the difference between the word of the Lord of that old prophet and his own word. His word was the lying word. He knew the difference between his word and the word of the Lord.

#### f. Conclusion

So the point I’m trying to make is, in the mind and conscience of the prophet, the prophet does know when he was speaking the word of the Lord and when he was speaking his own words. There’s a clear distinction there. So to say that the prophets spoke their own word in the form of God’s word, I think is in conflict with the data that we find in Scripture about the way in which this works. There’s a clear demarcation or line of difference in the mind of the prophet who formed his own words in Scripture.

### D. The Phenomenon of Israel’s Prophets is as Old as the History of Israel Itself

#### 1. History of Israel and History of Prophets are coextensive

Let’s move on to D. “The phenomenon of Israel’s prophets is as old as the history of Israel itself.”

### a. Prophets of Old

I'm not going to do much with this point other than to say the history of Israel and the history of the prophets are pretty much coextensive. Jeremiah 7:25, I think we already read that, says, "From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants." The time you left Egypt is the time of Moses until the time of Jeremiah, Jeremiah was just before the Babylonian exile of 586 B.C. But even prior to Moses, Noah is called a prophet in Genesis 9:25-27 and Abraham was called a prophet in Genesis 20:7. So there are prophets back even before and in the patriarchal period.

### b. Prophetesses

Besides male prophets, Israel also had prophetesses, that is, female prophets. These references are few, and in some cases it is not totally clear what is meant. Miriam, the sister of Moses, is called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20. Exactly what she's doing there is not so clear. You read, "then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.'" Now the context here is saying, she's praising the Lord with music. And the question is what's the meaning of the word 'prophetess'? Is it that she is leading the worship that was going on or that Miriam was speaking the word of the Lord? I'll get back to that later. But she turns up as a prophetess.

Deborah is a prophetess in Judges 4:4. "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time." She's also a judge.

Huldah is called a prophetess in 2 Kings 22:14. This was the time of the finding of the Law Book of the Temple when Josiah was the king, when the book of the law was found, as you read in verse 14, "Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of

Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. She said to them, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.’” And here’s the message; a word from the Lord. The wife of Isaiah also was a prophetess. In Isaiah 8:3, Isaiah says, “Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son,” that’s Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. The question is, is Isaiah’s wife a prophetess because she’s the wife of a prophet or because she performed prophetic functions? It’s not clear. So just a comment, there are these examples of prophetesses.

### c. Companies of the Prophets

Besides the individual prophets, there are also references to bands or companies of prophets. Such references were not numerous, but we come across them in various places particularly in Samuel and Kings. I want to look at some of those references with you.

#### 1. 1 Sam. 10 – Saul and the Company of the Prophets

The first one is 1 Samuel 10:5-6. This takes place in the process of selecting Saul as king. Saul was out looking for his father’s cattle, and he goes to Samuel to seek information and the Lord told Samuel, “The man who comes to you is the man I have chosen king, anoint him. He is to be king of all the people.” So Samuel does that. Then in 10:1 you read the book of 1 Samuel “the Lord anointed you.” But further down in chapter 10 Samuel tells Saul certain things are going to happen at this time that the Lord has chosen him to be king. In verse 5 you read, “After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets.” The Hebrew there is the word that the NIV translates “procession” of prophets. Really it means “a company” or “a band of prophets”. So “you will meet a band of prophets coming from the high court with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying.” So here’s a company of

prophets prophesying. “The Spirit of the Lord will come on you in power and you will prophesy with them and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.” So there were several of these signs. This was the last of them. You read that that’s the way it works out. You read in verse 9, “Saul turned to leave Samuel and God changed Saul’s heart and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When they arrived in Gibeah, a procession of prophets met them. The Spirit of God came on them in power and he joined in their prophesying.” So here is reference to a procession or a band of prophets prophesying.

Now at this point – we’re going to come back to this later – but at this point I want to make just a brief comment about what’s going on here with respect to the word “prophesy.” What were these prophets, this company of prophets, what were these prophets doing? *Naba*, the word for “prophesying,” the verb, has a variety of meanings. Normally we’d say that that man was a prophet, *nabi*, or the man prophesied some time ago and he died. We think of him as someone who proclaimed the word of the Lord. But if you looked at usage, there seems to be or if you looked up the root *naba* in Brown, Driver and Briggs one meaning is “prophesy in an ecstatic state.” In 1 Samuel 10:5, the last phrase, the NIV says, “They will be prophesying.” The NRSV says, “They will be in a prophetic frenzy.” The Berkley translation says, “They will be in ecstasy.” So you get into this question of what is the meaning of this root *naba* that means to speak the word of God in a normal state or so that they would go into an ecstatic condition and to say something or sing something in that kind of a frame of mind.

If you look at your citations, page 2, E. J. Young discusses this in his book *My Servants, the Prophets*. He’s talking about this 1 Samuel 10 passage. He said “you should be very careful to note, however, there’s not a hint in this text to suggest that the prophesying was brought on by the music as though the music were a stimulant. The musical instruments were carried before the prophets. The implication given is they were employed merely by way of accompanying, hence



the prophesying engaged was not a meaningless raving, but rather a devout praising of God through the accompaniment of music.” That’s Young’s interpretation. What was going on here was the devout praising of God, through the accompaniment of music, which is described by using a verbal form of this word *naba* “to prophesy.” He says that, “if we employ the word ecstasy to describe the prophets” – there are a lot of people who do, he is commenting on this – “we must use the word with care. That they were under the compelling influence of God there can be no doubt, for it is said to Saul, for when he meets the prophets the Spirit of Jehovah will rush upon him and he will prophesy with them. The fulfillment of this prediction is related as follows – when the spirit rushed upon them, he prophesied, in their midst. Then 10b, unless it appears that the acts of prophesying in this particular instance was a result of the rushing upon of the Spirit, God’s Spirit came upon the prophet, and the result was he prophesied. The source of the ecstatic condition therefore is not to be found in the presence of music, nor in voluntary association, nor in contagion, nor for that matter any self-imposed or induced stimuli, but only in a rushing upon of the Spirit of God.”

So it’s the Spirit of God coming on Saul that causes him to join in with this band or company of prophets, do what they were doing, which Young sees as an enthusiastic praising of God. Or which this word *naba* used to describe what was going on. Now for the present, my purpose in calling your attention to this passage is primarily just to show you a reference of a company of prophets, not an individual prophet, but a company of prophets. We’ll talk more later about the thing they were doing and what these companies generally did and what this idea of ecstatic phenomena associated with prophesying is, but for the present here’s a company of prophets in 1 Samuel 10.

## 2. 2 Kings 2-4 Elisha and the Company of the Prophets, Jericho, Bethel ...

In the time of Elisha, you have references to companies of prophets in various places. In 2 Kings 2:3, we read, “The company of prophets at Bethel came

out to Elisha and asked, ‘Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?’” In 2 Kings 2:5, there’s also a company at Jericho, the company of the prophets at Jericho went to Elisha. In 2 Kings 4:38, “Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, ‘Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men.’” There are three references to companies of prophets, at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:5), and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38) and there are some other references.

### 3. 1 Sam. 19: Saul and the Prophetic Companies

I should’ve mentioned before those Kings references, the reference back in 1 Samuel 19:20. This is after Saul had been rejected, David had been anointed to replace him and David was successful in battle, and Saul becomes jealous. Saul tries to kill David and David is ultimately driven from the court and becomes a refugee. But what he does first is go to Samuel as he flees from Saul. Let’s get the context first. In 1 Samuel 19:18, “When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. Word came to Saul: ‘David is in Naioth at Ramah;’ so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul’s men and they also prophesied.” So here’s a group of prophets, Samuel is their leader. They are prophesying; whatever they’re doing is not altogether clear. These agents of Saul come, trying to capture David, and what happens to them? The Spirit of God comes on them and they start prophesying. Again, whatever that means.

Saul was told that, so he sent more men and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time. “Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, ‘Where are Samuel and David?’ ‘Over in Naioth at Ramah,’ they said. So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came

even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robe and prophesied in Samuel's presence. He laid that way all day and all that night. This is why the people say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'"

I'm going to come back to this later, but here I want to note the meaning of this term *naba* and what kind of abnormal behavior may be associated with the use of the word. This is a question of the relation of ecstatic condition coming on the prophet that enabled him to speak, if that's what's going on. I think that the bottom line is clear here is that the spirit of God comes on Saul's messengers and as well as on Saul himself in a way that prevents them from doing what they set out to do, which was to capture David, and they couldn't do it. The Spirit wouldn't let them do it. Although in connection with that, it said that they were prophesying.

All right, so we have these fairly numerous references to the same things. Exactly what the functions of these bands or companies of prophets is is not ever made very clear. They may have been assistants or disciples of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. It's in the time of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha that they appear. Perhaps they were entrusted with the task of assisting a prophet in promoting true religion in the communities where they lived.

#### 4. 1 Kings 20 – A Prophet of the Company of the Prophets Speaks

There's only one passage – and that's in 1 Kings 20:35-43 – where a member of the company of prophets actually speaks a word of divine revelation. There's only one case of it. Perhaps we should look at that. You read in 20:35 "By the word of the LORD one of the sons of the prophets said to his companion, 'Strike me with your weapon.'" Now that phrase "sons of the prophets" [*bene hanebiim*] is sometimes translated in the NIV as "company of prophets", and sometimes more literally as "sons of prophets." And one of that company says to another member of the company, "Strike me with your weapon," but his companion then refused. So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the

LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you.’ And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him.

The prophet found another man and said, ‘Strike me, please.’ So the man struck him and wounded him. Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king.” And the king comes by. “As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, “Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, ‘Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.’ While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared.’ ‘That is your sentence,’ the king of Israel said. ‘You have pronounced it yourself.’ Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. He said to the king,” – and here’s the one case where you get a member of one of these companies giving a word from the Lord, – “This is what the LORD says:” – and this is the prophet speaking to Ahab – ““you have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.’ Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria.” Now that was Ben-hadad, a Syrian ruler, whom Ahab had set free, and this prophet condemns him. So you have one instance out of all the references to companies of prophets where a member of a company actually proclaims the word of the Lord. So what was the function of these companies? As I said, it’s not altogether clear.

### 5. Function of the Companies of the Prophets

If you look at your citation page 1, at the bottom of the page, in Hobart Freedman’s *Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, he makes these comments, “What then was the true function and purpose of the sons of the prophets? (‘Sons of the prophets’ is translated as ‘company of prophets.’) In attempting to answer this question, it would be well to note their function in those passages where they were mentioned in Scripture. One, they are depicted as residing together in common dwelling at religious centers like Gilgal, Bethel,

Jericho, sitting before a great prophet where perhaps spiritual instructions were imparted to them.” I’m going to come back to that. I’m not so sure that is part of it.

“Two, another spiritual function of these groups was that of prophesying together,” as in 1 Samuel 10:5 and following, which we already looked at. “Just what this prophesying was and what form it took has been the subject of much speculation. First Samuel 10 seems to indicate that part of it was singing praises to God. A band of prophets was descending from the high place where they participated in some form of religious observance and they were prophesying accompanied by musical instruments. Evidence that this was an accepted method of prophetic expression is clear from 1 Chronicles 25:1-3.” There’s another place where prophesying is associated with music. “Thus the groups would not simply prophesy as individuals, but jointly, in a procession in various places of public praise and worship.” So that’s the second purpose of prophesying together in whatever way that is understood.

“Third, they also acted as spiritual messengers in important matters pertaining to Israel. This is seen when Elisha sends one of the sons of prophets to anoint Jehu the king of Israel and again when God sent another messenger of judgment to speak his word of rebuke to king Ahab for his leniency in dealing with Ben-hadad,” the first passage we just looked at in 1 Kings 20. So, what Freeman suggests is that these groups were one, receivers of instruction from a leader, like Samuel or Elisha, two, leaders of public praise and worship, and three, messengers. So I’m not sure we can say a whole lot more than that. Even some of that can be questioned and we’ll talk a little more about that next week. Particularly number one. Did these companies of prophets have to be instructed or educated in order to perform a prophetic task?

## 2. Sons of the Prophets

All right, number two, the members of these companies came to be called

the [*bene hanebiim*]. That phrase occurs nine times in the Old Testament. All of them between 1 Kings 20 and 2 Kings 9. This was from the time of Ahab until the revelation of Jehu, or about 974 to 841 B.C. If you looked at 2 Kings 2:3 and 5, which we already looked at, but you're aware of that in the NIV text of what the Hebrew wording is. You see, in 2 Kings 2-3, where you read "the company of prophets at Bethel," the Hebrew wording there, *bene hanebiim*, the sons of prophets of Bethel and the NIV has translated that as "company of prophets." I think they did that so the reader in English would not become confused about what the intent is. Were these children of prophets, the sons of the prophets, or is this a prophet and the prophet had children and it's the children of the prophets at Bethel who come out to Elisha and ask? So pretty consistently, although not always, the NIV translates "*bene hanebiim*" as "company of prophets" rather than as "sons of the prophets." In 2 Kings 2:3, 2:5, 2:7, 2:15, 4:1, 4:38, 5:22, 6:1, the NIV has "company of prophets" and in every case it's "sons of the prophets" in Hebrew.

a. The Various meanings of the term "son" (ben) etc.

Now in biblical usage, the term "son," can mean a male child, of course, that's normally the way it's used. It can mean "descendent." The Semitic usage there, although it's not Hebrew, can be seen in Matthew 1:1, "Jesus Christ the Son of David" – "son" in the sense of "descendent." But it also can mean "member of a group." I think it's in that third sense, "member of a group," that the word is used in this expression, "sons of the prophets." It is as a member of a prophetic company that they are referred to as sons of the prophets. It does not mean something like preacher's kids or children of a prophet.

Now I see my time is up. I want to look at some illustrations of the way in which "*ben*" or "son" is used where it clearly is not used in the sense of children, but in the sense of "a member of a group." So we'll stop at this point and pick up from there and move forward next week.

Transcribed by: Miranda MacKinnon  
Initial editing by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final Editing by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3

### Companies of the Prophets

#### F. 2. Companies of Prophets called “Sons of the Prophets”

Last week we were discussing Roman numeral I and we were down to F. Roman numeral I was “General remarks about Prophetism in ancient Israel” and in section F. we were talking about “The Bands or Companies of Prophets” that are referred to in the Old Testament. We had looked at some of those references under F. 1. and I had just introduced that 2. members of these companies came to be called “sons of the prophets,” “*bene hanebiim*.” I think I mentioned right at the end of the hour that “sons” there certainly does not mean “children of the prophets.” The term “son,” *ben* in Hebrew, sometimes means “male descendant,” sometimes it means a longer term “descendant.” Jesus Christ is the son of David, the son of Abraham. But it also can mean “member of the group.” It’s under that last meaning that we should understand this expression “sons of the prophets”.

##### a. “Son” as a Member of a Group

###### 1. Example: Neh. 12:28

I want to give you a couple illustrations of that usage of the term “son.” If you looked at Nehemiah 12:28, you read there (I’m reading from the NIV), “The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites” and so on. If you look at the Hebrew text, it’s *bene*. It’s “sons of the singers”. Now it seems in the context quite clear what it is. The reference there is to members of the choir. The people that belong to a certain group, the singers. So I think the NIV has translated that correctly—“the singers,” not “the sons of the singers.”

###### 2. Example: Psalm 18:44

If you look at Psalm 18:45, verse 44 in the English translation, the NIV says for Psalm 18:44, “As soon as they hear me, they obey me;” and then the next word, “foreigners cringe before me.” Foreigners are strangers. The Hebrew is *bene*—“sons of strangers.” It’s not the “children of the strangers” or “the children



of the foreigners” who cringe before me, it’s those who belong to that category or group. “Foreigners cringe before me. They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.” See in verse 43 it said, “People I did not know are subject to me. As soon as they hear me, they obey me; foreigners cringe before me.”

### 3. Example: Ps 72:4

Look at Psalm 72:4. Now here’s an interesting situation because you get into an interpretive question. NIV here translates Psalm 72:4, “He (that is, the king) will defend the afflicted among the people.” The king would maintain justice. He would judge the people and so forth. “He will defend the afflicted among the people.” But then the next phrase in the NIV says, “and save the children of the needy.” The Hebrew there is *bene* the “children” of the needy. Now NIV here has translated it “children of the needy.” In other words, the king “will defend the afflicted among the people, he will save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.” What is the proper translation there? Is the king going to save “the children of the needy,” or is he going to save the needy? Are the children of the needy the people who belong to that category of people: the needy.

If you look at the parallelism, you see the first phrase is “he will defend the afflicted among the people.” It seems to me on the basis of parallelism it would be justified here to conclude “he will defend the afflicted among the people and save the needy.” Not the “children of the needy,” but the needy themselves. But you could debate that. The NIV, New American Standard, and King James all translate “children of the needy.” The Revised Standard Version translates it “needy.” “He will save the needy.” The Jewish Publication Society Version (JPS version) says, “Let him champion the lowly among the people, deliver the needy folk”—not “the children of the needy folk” but “the needy folk”—“and crush those who wrong them.” Now I’m inclined to take this as another illustration of that use of *bene* as a “member of a group.”

### 4. Example: 2 Chr. 25:13

I have one other reference I want to give you. It's 2 Chronicles 25:13. There you read in the NIV, "Meanwhile the troops that Amaziah had sent back and had not allowed to take part in the war raided Judean towns from Samaria to Beth Horon." The translation "troops" if you look at the Hebrew there it's *ubene*. It's "the sons of the troop," or "the sons of the band, band or troop." Now, I don't think that Amaziah sent their children or sons of the soldiers back, he sent the troops back, people that were in that category identified with that group.

So there are a fair number of examples of that kind of a use of "son," and I think then by analogy when you come across this expression "sons of the prophets," *bene hanebiim*, that we should understand the reference to be to those people who belong to the category or class of people known as prophets. Not children of the prophets; they are prophets but they're identified as a group of prophets. It's for that reason the NIV, when it comes to that expression "sons of the prophets," often translates it as "a company of prophets."

#### F. 3. The Term or Expression "School of the Prophets"

##### a. No support for "school"

Let's go on to 3. The term or expression "school of the prophets"—we're talking now about these groups of prophets. It used to be advocated—much more so than it is today, although the idea is still around today—that the groups of prophets should be understood as something like an educational institution, where you had this group of people who were identified as prophets come to be taught various subjects, probably in connection with understanding their role and how that should be interpreted and propagated. People could be instructed by one of the great teachers like Samuel, Elijah, or Elisha, and then go out and teach other people what they had learned. So you had a school of the prophets. That's a very old idea in connection with these groups of the prophets. It appears in the Targums which were Aramaic translations that were more paraphrases than translations of the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

But I don't think there's any really clear basis or evidence that these groups

were some sort of educational kind of a situation. The term itself “school of the prophets” is not a biblical expression. It occurs nowhere in the Old Testament. I don’t think there’s anything to indicate that prophets received some kind of special training or education in order to perform their task or function. Certainly that’s true with respect to the great writing prophets or canonical prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc. We never read that any kind of special instruction or education was necessary in order for those great prophets to perform their tasks.

It seems much more the case that these were people who were called out of their normal work by God—Amos was a herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore figs—called out of that normal profession and commissioned by the Lord to give His message to the people. As we noted last week the Lord said, “I will put my word in your mouth. You go; proclaim all that I give you to say to the people.”

b. Samuel as Leader – 1 Sam. 19

Now I think the closest you can get to some sort of evidence for the companies of prophets to have been some kind of an educational grouping is 1 Samuel 19:20 and 2 Kings 4:38. 1 Samuel 19:20 is the passage where Saul sent his messengers to try to capture David when he had taken refuge with Samuel in a place called Naioth of Ramah, and in verse 20 it says, “When they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they prophesied also.” Do you remember we talked about that passage last week—what’s the meaning of the word “prophesy”? It’s seen as some kind of abnormal behavior. The Holy Spirit came on those men and they were unable to capture David. But in the context of that situation it says, “Samuel was standing as their leader.” Then we wonder what exactly does that mean? What was Samuel doing—was he instructing? Well, perhaps. It doesn’t say so. It’s hard to know without further information.

c. Elisha as Leader – 2 Kgs 4

2 Kings 4:38—you have that with Elisha. In 2 Kings 4:38 you read, “Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the

company of the prophets was meeting with him”—I’m quite sure “company” there is *bene hanebiim*—“He said to his servant, ‘Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men.’” It appears that Elisha is the leader there: he’s giving the command; he is providing food for the larger group. Now again it doesn’t say anything about instruction. So Elisha actually is a leader, Samuel stands as a leader but it’s hard to know how much to make of that and exactly what that function was.

#### d. Not Ancient seminary-like training

I don’t think the prophets themselves—whether Samuel or Elisha or even these companies of prophets are some ancient equivalent to present day seminary students who need a theological education in order to perform their task. The prophets were people who received their message directly from God and proclaimed it to the people. So those comments about the school of the prophets or the companies of the prophets apparently lived in their own communities.

#### e. Places of the Companies of the Prophets

We noted last week there were groups of prophets at various places in those earliest chapters of 2 Kings—in Bethel, in Jericho and in Gilgal. If you go back to 1 Samuel 10 when Saul encountered that company of prophets with the musical instruments who were prophesying and he became one of them and he prophesied—that’s at Gibeah. Then 1 Samuel 19 we just looked at a minute ago—Naioth at Ramah—it was a company of prophets. We get these companies scattered around in different localities and some have suggested that they lived communally in some sort of a cloister. Much like a monastery in much later times. Evidence for that again is meager.

### F. 4. Companies of the Prophets Apparently Lived in Their Own Communities

#### Communal Housing & eating

But 2 Kings 4:38 says that they ate together. Now that’s that passage we looked at just a minute ago—“Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to

his servant, ‘Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men.’” They were given food there by Elisha and it seems like they were eating together. However, this is a time of famine, that doesn’t necessarily mean that was a customary way in which they ate.

The other reference that is sometimes appealed to to support the communal housing idea is 2 Kings 6:2. You read, “The company of the prophets said to Elisha, ‘Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to live.’” Now if you look at the Hebrew of that, you take that last phrase “let us make for us” a *maqom* “a place” *sham* “there”. Now you see *leshevet* can mean “to sit” or “to dwell.” Is that a place to sit and to gather or is it a place to dwell—a house, of some sort? I think you could understand the term “place” as a place where various dwellings could be built, not necessarily one dwelling. But the phrase could also be translated a place for us “to sit.” Some sort of assembly hall. You see the preceding verse said, “Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us.” So again I don’t think that this is a reference that establishes incontrovertibly that this is a communal dwelling of some sort.

If you go to 2 Kings 4—a few chapters earlier—it seems like these members of the company of the prophets had their own separate dwelling places rather than one communal dwelling place. In 2 Kings 4:1-7 you have that story of the wife of a member of the company of the prophets called on Elisha and said, “My husband is dead and these creditors are coming to take my two boys as their slaves.” She had debts to pay and nothing to pay the debts with. So in 4:2 Elisha says, “‘How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?’” Sounds like she had her own dwelling place—“What do you have in your house?” “‘Your servant has nothing there at all,’ she said, ‘except a little oil.’ Elisha said, ‘Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side’” and so forth. She does that and of course her jars

are filled and she sells them and she's able to pay her debt. But the point of bringing that up here is it doesn't look like a communal living situation for this wife of one of the members of the group or company of prophets. It seems like she may have lived in a prophetic neighborhood of some sort but had her own house.

I think that fits with a kind of incidental feature of 1 Samuel 19. If you go back to that passage that's about Naioth of Ramah. That expression "Naioth of Ramah" is in 1 Samuel 19:19 where King Saul is told that David is in Naioth at Ramah. Well Ramah's a city; what's Naioth in Ramah? The Hebrew word is "habitation" or "dwelling." Naioth appears to be a plural form of that. So it's possible that Naioth means "habitations," plural. If that's the way to understand Naioth I think you could understand it as a neighborhood you might say of Ramah where there was a complex of houses that these prophets lived in—the members of the group or company of prophets. So Samuel brought David to that section of town in Ramah where the members of the company of prophets had their dwelling places—but that's in the plural it wouldn't be a single communal dwelling.

So number 4.: "Companies of the prophets apparently lived in their own communities." I think that's to be preferred over the idea that they had some sort of abbey or cloister.

#### F. 5. The Degeneration of the Prophetic Function within the Companies

##### a. Elisha – 2 Kgs 4

Number 5.: "The degeneration of the prophetic function within the companies." When you read references to these companies of prophets it seems like over time degeneration sets in. This is reading between the lines. We don't know a whole lot about these companies, but it's possible that over time people began to associate with the companies for material advantage. In other words, for what benefits they might derive from that. We read in 2 Kings 4:42 about that. In 4:42 Elijah receives food for the company that was given for their sustenance. "A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley

bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. ‘Give it to the people to eat.’” The people here are the company of the prophets. “‘How can I set this before a hundred men?’ his servant asked. But Elisha answered, ‘Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’” It’s kind of like the 5,000 of Jesus but here on a smaller scale but a multiplication of food for the benefit of these members of the company of the prophets. It’s quite possible that the groups of prophets lived from gifts of that sort.

#### b. Royal Court Prophets

As you go further in the OT you find that a number of the kings had groups of prophets associated with the court on which they would call particularly if they wanted a favorable message. In other words, these were not necessarily true prophets—they were people who presented themselves as prophets but who told the king what he wanted to hear. Ahab had prophets of that sort associated with his court. If you look at 1 Kings 22:4 when Ahab had asked Jehoshaphat to join him in fighting against Ramah at Gilead. “Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, ‘I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.’ But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, “First seek the counsel of the Lord.” So what’s Ahab do? “The king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men—and asked them, ‘Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?’ ‘Go,’ they answered, ‘for the Lord will give it into the king's hand.’” That’s what they assumed Ahab wanted them to say. He encouraged Jehoshaphat to go with him. But what’s Jehoshaphat’s response? Jehoshaphat says, “Is there not a prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?” In other words, he did not believe that these people were speaking for the Lord. Ahab replies, “There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.” My point here in calling your attention to this is that there were companies of prophets associated with the courts of the kings and not always

speaking the word of the Lord.

If you look at Micah 3:5, Micah says, “As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim 'peace'; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him.” In other words, you know the hand that feeds you and you say what you think that person wants to hear rather than proclaiming the word from the Lord. So it seems like among the groups of the prophets gradually deterioration set in.

#### 6. The Canonical Prophets are Distinguished from these Companies

Number 6.: “The canonical prophets are distinguished from these companies.” I don’t think there’s any evidence that any of the writing prophets, that is, canonical prophets, who produced one of the prophetic books that’s contained in the canon of the Old Testament belonged to a company or a guild of prophets. We also don’t read of any of the canonical prophets receiving money or support or livelihood from performing the prophetic tasks. There’s one text where it seems like one of the canonical prophets explicitly rejects the idea that he should be considered a part of a prophetic group. In Amos 7: 14, Amos says, “I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son.” Now you see the question is what does he mean by “prophet’s son” there? Does he mean member of a group? It is quite possible he does, given the use of that expression so many times. It seems like he’s saying, “I was not a prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd.” Now I want to look at this in a little bit more detail, and to do that I think we need to go back and get the whole context. Amos had gone up from Judah to the northern kingdom to the city of Bethel. Remember King Jeroboam I had established altars at Bethel and Dan. At that time the man of God out of Judah went up and cried out against that altar at Bethel. Now at much later times under Jeroboam II Amos does the same thing and he goes to Bethel and Amaziah you read in verse 10, “The priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: ‘Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying: ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and



Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.’” That’s not something Jeroboam wanted to hear. “Then Amaziah said to Amos, ‘Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah.’” Then here is this next phrase which I think is significant and an important part of the conflict. “‘Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there.’” See he puts a connection between prophesying and livelihood. “‘Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there.’” It’s as if the two were connected. “‘Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.’” That’s what Amos responds to. He says to Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I took care of sycamore-fig trees.”

That raises a translation question. The question has to do with what Amos is saying here and how are we to understand what he is saying, which brings up an ambiguity in the Hebrew text. There’s no verb there. Amos “answered and said to Amaziah, ‘lo’ nabi anni”. Literally, “Not prophet I.” “Not prophet I and not son of a prophet I.” Now if you look at translations of that, you have to supply the verb “to be”. Do you supply the verb “to be” in the present tense or the past tense? The New American Standard is present tense. “I am no prophet, neither am I a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit.” But if you look at the King James and the NIV they translate it past tense with the verb “to be.” For the supplied verb “I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit.” The Berkley Version has both there. “I am neither a prophet nor a son of a prophet but I was a herdsman, a gatherer of a sycamore tree.” What’s the difference in meaning in what Amos is saying if you translate it with the present tense or the past tense? That may appear to be inconsequential in what they were saying. I think it makes a significant difference in meaning. Those who suggest a past tense like King James and NIV understand Amos to be saying he has not made himself a prophet, but God called him to the task. “I was not a prophet, I wasn’t a prophet’s son, I was a herdsman,” and then you go down to verse 15, “But the LORD took me from tending the flock

and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy.’” So I wasn’t a prophet but the Lord called me and I became a prophet. That’s basically what he says. So Amos is not denying he’s a prophet, he’s only saying “I wasn’t that originally. Originally I was a farmer.”

But if you translate it present tense that puts a different meaning on what Amos is saying. Remember, Amos is really responding to that statement of the priest in verse 12: “Earn your bread there. Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there.” Amos isn’t receiving anything, and he’s responding to that. If you translate it in the present tense sense, “I am not a prophet, I am not a prophet’s son” I think then what Amos is saying to Amaziah is, “I am not a prophet in the sense that you understand.” That is “I am not a prophet in the sense that I am somebody who prophesies in order to earn my livelihood.” As far as Amaziah is concerned, that’s what a prophet is: somebody who’s in it for what he can get from it. But Amos responds I think by saying, “I am not that kind of, “prophet,” and I’m not the son of a prophet. I’m not the member of one of these prophetic companies. Because I don’t need to do that for my livelihood. I am a herdsman. I’m a gatherer or grower of sycamore figs; I can sustain myself. I don’t prophesy for material advantage. But the Lord came to me and said, ‘Go take this message up there, go prophesy.’” Now if you translate it like that then in that present tense I think what is going on here is Amaziah has made this statement that clearly presupposes that prophets are in the business for money. “Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there.” And Amos responds, “I’m not that. I’m a herdsman, I don’t need to earn my living by prophesying. I don’t prophesy for monetary gain.”

Now if that’s the way you read this it suggests a couple of things. I think it suggests that in those days prophesying had come to be understood as a certain type of profession or livelihood—seems to me that’s what Amaziah understood there. Secondly, I think it’s suggesting that Amos wanted to make it very clear: “I’m not that kind of a prophet.” Amos is not denying he’s a prophet in the proper

sense of the word, but what he is saying is, “I have nothing to do with the prophets with which both he and Amaziah were familiar with: these kinds of people that prophesied what the king or somebody else wanted to hear in order to get whatever benefit they could derive from that.”

Here the NIV uses the past tense. There is what’s called the TNIV out now if any of you are familiar with that—that is a revision of the NIV. It still is past, but the TNIV reads, “I was neither a prophet, nor the disciple of a prophet.” In other words “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, the prophet’s son.” It now says, “I was neither a prophet nor the disciple of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I took care of sycamore fig trees.” So they’re still in the past tense with the TNIV.

The Jewish Publication Society version is present tense. It’s like the NASB. And I think that’s to be preferred. It says, “I am not a prophet and I am not a prophet’s disciple”—they use that same expression, “prophet’s disciple.” “I am a cattle breeder.” There is—have any of you ever come across the Oxford University Press Jewish Study Bible? There’s a Jewish Study Bible out much like the NIV Study Bible but from a Jewish perspective published by Oxford Press. The note in the Jewish Study Bible which uses the Jewish Publication Society Version for the translation says, “Amos maintains he is not a professional prophet that he may be hired for his services and thus bought.” Now I think they got it right. In verse 12 when he says, “I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet,” Amos maintains he is not a professional prophet who may be hired for his services and thus bought. So the canonical prophets are distinguished from these companies. You have no reference of any of the canonical prophets being a part of one of these companies and it seems to me that Amos is making this explicit. He does not want to be a family with the company of the prophets or with a kind of prophet who was in it for profit.

Again it seems like there were companies with Elisha, Elijah and Samuel and all of them. It seems like Samuel, Elisha, and Elijah were leaders of

companies. So whether you make them part of companies it seems to me the companies were some sort of group of—the Jewish Publication Society says “disciples”—maybe that’s a good term. I think that you would look at Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, though, as above the company, rather than part of it.

You know, some people like to use the expression “office of prophet.” I try to avoid it. I prefer the expression “the prophetic function,” because it seems to me a priest had an office, a king had an office. A king was a king and he was anointed to be that. He was a king and he had official roles and duties. Priests had official roles and duties. It seems that these prophets did something more sporadically. When the Spirit came on them they spoke and so they performed that prophetic function but I’m not sure I want to call it an office as if this was all that they ever did. We get back to that thing of the prophets themselves knowing in their own heart and mind when they were speaking the word of the Lord as compared to their own word. Somebody like Nathan, who was a prophet frequently to David where he gave him the Lord’s message and asked him where the thing he told David was his personal opinion was wrong. So every word they spoke was not an inspired word.

#### G. The Canonical Prophets were Writing Prophets

Now G.: “The canonical prophets are writing prophets.” I just want to make a couple of comments here on the labels. You’ll find both of these labels in the literature.

##### 1. Writing Prophets

“Writing prophets” is a designation for those prophets who have given us a writing bearing their name in the Old Testament canon. In other words, the writing prophets are the 4 major and 12 minor prophets of the canon of the Old Testament. So in that sense, writing prophets and canonical prophets are synonymous—we’re referring to the same people. I think those labels are useful but they can be misunderstood. With respect to “writing prophets”—we know that there were prophets who wrote whose writings have not been preserved for us in the canon of

Scripture. In other words, if you really want to push it, the expression “writing prophets” is larger than “the canonical prophets.” Chronicles speaks of the writing of a number of individuals whose writings—we’ll term prophets—whose writings have not been preserved for us and included in the canon. We’ll look at a couple of references. 2 Chronicles 9:29, where you read, “As for the other events of Solomon’s reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the records of Nathan the prophet, in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite and in the visions of Iddo the seer.” So there’s Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo, who wrote, and wrote as prophets of God, but those writings for whatever reason, were not preserved and included in the canon of the Old Testament. There are some other references—2 Chronicles 13:22 and 21:12—I won’t take the time to look at them.

## 2. “Canonical Prophets”

You can also say that even the term “canonical prophets” also is somewhat deficient because it separates the prophetic books from the historical books. In Jewish tradition, we don’t have that separation between prophetic books and historical books. In Jewish tradition we have reference to what you call the “former prophets” and the “latter prophets.” The former prophets are what we call the historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Those are the former prophets. The latter prophets are what we call the prophetic books. So I think the Jewish tradition is much more accurate. All of those books are prophetic books. Historical books are a divinely inspired record and interpretation of what was going on with those people in the Old Testament period. They are prophetic just as much as the books that we call prophetic.

Student Question: “Now would Elisha and Elijah be considered canonical prophets?”

No, because they don’t have the full canonization of Scripture. They don’t have a canonical book written by them. They wouldn’t be considered canonical prophets or writing prophets—either one of them.

## II. The Prophetic Nomenclature

Let's go on to Roman numeral II, "The prophetic nomenclature." I want to go down to some of the words and phrases used in the Old Testament to designate the prophets. I think through looking at the nomenclature we get some insight into the nature of the prophetic function. From the outset let me make this comment. Most people when they hear the word "prophet" immediately think that there was this group of people in the Old Testament who foretold the future. In other words, a prophet is someone who predicts the future. I think that really misses the point. Yes, it's true that in many of the prophetic books you do have predictions about things that would come to pass in the future, but that was not the essence of what it meant to be a prophet—predicting the future. The prophets were basically preachers. They spoke to the needs of God's people in the Old Testament period and much of what they had to say was a call to repentance, a call to return to the covenant, a call to be obedient to the Lord, and to put away false worship. So the essence of prophetic ministry lies elsewhere than in prediction. The two are not synonymous. To be a prophet is not necessarily to always tell about what will happen in the future. I think that comes out in some of the nomenclature with which the prophets are identified.

### A. Man of God

A. under II. is the most general name: "man of God." That expression is used 76 times in the Old Testament. About half of them are used in connection with Elisha, who often is just termed "the man of God." There are a number in 1 Kings 13 where you have that man of God who went out and prophesied against the altar of Jeroboam I. But a lot of the others are widely scattered. Moses is called "a man of God," so is Samuel, Elijah, and Shemiah. So, it is widely used. What it suggests is: the prophet is a person who stands in a relationship with God. If you are a man of God you are in some sort of relationship with God—exactly what the relationship is, is not defined. But here are people who are men of God.

## B. Servant of the Lord

B. is: “Servant of the Lord.” We talked last week about “My servants the prophets”. Here the relationship is more clearly indicated. These prophets were servants of God. The relationship is one of service. But again that’s still rather general. It’s used with many of the prophets but it’s also used more widely because people other than prophets are called servants of God. One interesting reference is to King Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 27:6 and 43:10. He is called “the servant of the Lord.” He wasn’t a prophet, he wasn’t even a believing child of God, but he was an instrument in the hand of God who accomplished God’s purposes and plans in connection with the punishment coming on Judah so he’s called “a servant of the Lord.”

## C. The Messenger of the Lord

C. is “The messenger of the Lord.” Now here you get more explicit. The prophet is a person who brings the message of God to men. You might think that would be used extensively because that is the essence of what the prophet does, but it’s not. Interestingly enough it’s very infrequent. It’s used only of Haggai. In Haggai 1:13 it says, “Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people.” I say it’s used only of Haggai. That is, it’s used only of Haggai unless you take Malachi 1:1 where it says, “An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.” But if you look at that in Hebrew it is “An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through *Maliachi*. *Maliachi* if you translate it is “My Messenger.” And there are some people who think we don’t know the name of this prophet—that that is just a generic designation of a messenger for the Lord. “An oracle: the word of the LORD to Israel through *Maliachi*, My Messenger.” I’m inclined to think it is a proper name because that introductory line is so very close to role of prophetic messengers. You do have the name of the prophet given in other works, so it seems to me that it’s most likely his name. But that’s C., “messenger of the Lord.”

#### D. The Hebrew Term Nabi [prophet]

D. is the Hebrew word *nabi*. That is the word that most often is used to designate a prophet. When you come across the word prophet in your English translations of the Hebrew Old Testament it is a translation of this word. In the Septuagint that Hebrew word is translated by the Greek word *prophetes*. That's where we get our English word "prophet." The English word "prophet" is taken from the Greek word *prophetes*. It is the Greek Septuagint translation of *nabi*. So then the question becomes: what did *nabi* mean to someone particularly in the Old Testament period who heard that word? What was the connotation then of this word? And that brings up a lot of questions where there's a lot of disagreement as far as origin, etymology, and so forth. But I think what is clear is, *nabi* did not mean some sort of soothsayer, diviner, reader of omens, somebody that did that sort of thing. *Prophetes* is the Greek translation of *nabi*. For the practice of divination, soothsayer, that sort of thing, Greek used the term *mantis*. So in both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Greek you have a distinction there between a soothsayer and diviner and the prophets.

In classical Greek literature, *prophetes* was understood as someone who interpreted the messages of the gods to men. One place where that becomes particularly clear is in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. There was a priestess who was called the Pythia. This priestess gave messages from the deity in a frenzied sort of trance while sitting on a golden tripod. So here is this Pythia who is giving this kind of unintelligible revelation from the deity Apollo. But then you see what happened, there was the *prophetes* who came along and interpreted those unintelligible sounds of the Pythia into understandable language. So the *prophetes* interpreted the disclosures of the gods for the people. If you look at your citations page 2 down at the bottom of the page there's a paragraph from your favorite writer on Old Testament subjects, Gerhard Vos, from his biblical theology where he's talking about *nabi*. And he says, "With this inquiry into the meaning of *nabi*, we may combine a brief discussion of its brief equivalent *prophetes*—from which



our word ‘prophet’ is come. We associate with this mostly the idea of foreteller or predictor. This is not in accord with the original Greek etymology. The preposition ‘pro-’ in the composition does not express the time sense of beforehand. It has local significance. The *prophetes* is a forth-teller. The Greek term, however, has religious associations no less than the Hebrew term. *Prophetes* is the one who speaks for the oracle. Thus it might seem that with the *pro-* correctly understood the Hebrew *nabi* and the Greek *prophetes* were practically synonyms. This however would be misleading. The Greek *prophetes* does not stand in the same direct relation to the deity as the Hebrew *nabi* does. In reality he is the interpreter of the oracular dark utterances of the Pythia, or some other inspired person whom from the depth underneath the god had a shrine inspired by it. The Pythia would thus stand at the same place near the deity as the *nabi* but the *prophetes* is separated from the deity by this intermediate person. *Prophetes* is therefore rather an interpreter than a mouthpiece of what the god speaks through the one he directly inspired. (In other words the Pythia was the one to whom the gods spoke but when the gods spoke to the Pythia it was in unintelligible sounds.) So the *prophetes* takes those unintelligible sounds and makes them understandable. So he’s the interpreter rather than the mouthpiece. He adds his own not merely the illumination of the oracle but also the form with which he clothes the human that perceives. There’s no wonder then that the word *prophetes*, taken into the service of biblical religion, had to undergo a baptism of regeneration before it could be used.” In other words, what he’s saying is if you were a Greek translator of the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and you’re looking for a word to properly represent *nabi* in Hebrew you take the Greek word that’s closest to that function, and that happens to be the word *prophetes*. But it has a different background. When it is brought into use in the biblical context you have to be aware of that difference.

#### D. 1. Etymology of Nabi

Now to get back to this word *nabi*—what does it mean? There’s been a lot

of discussion about the etymology of *nabi*. Take out your outline. I have two subpoints under D. 1. is “Etymology” and 2. is “Usage.” When you ask the question of etymology, you find very quickly you get into disputes. Some have said *nabi* is a derivative of another Hebrew root, “*nbʿ*,” the derivative of which means “bubble forth.” This suggestion was from the great Hebrew scholar Gesenius. He said the prophet was called by this name because of the impression his speaking made; the flow of words “bubble forth” from the mouth of a prophet. Others see it as derived from an Akkadian root, *nabu*. *Nabu* in Akkadian means “to speak.” The word *nabu* comes from the Babylonian deity *Nabu* which is the god of wisdom and science, the god of word and writing. You get that same component in later names like Nebuchadnezzar and Nabopolassar. So if it comes from *nabu* then the *nabi* would be a speaker, and more specifically, someone who spoke for God.

Look at your citations page 3 under T.J. Meek and the volume on *Hebrew Origins*. He says, “The third word for prophet is the one that has become the most popular of all, almost solely replaced the older term *roeh*.” I’m going to come back to *roeh* later. “It is *nabi* from a root not found in Hebrew but found in Akkadian as *nabu* ‘to call, to call out, to speak.’ It accordingly means speaker, spokesman of God and it is correctly translated in the Septuagint by the Greek *prophetes*. A noun derived from a preposition *pro*—for, in behalf of and the verb, *phemi*, ‘to speak.’” To speak for, or on behalf of. *Prophetes. Pro-phemi*. “Hence the prophet of the *nabi* type was strictly not a ‘foreteller’ as was formerly supposed, but a ‘forth-teller, preacher.’ This was the meaning of ‘prophet’ in English until after the time of Queen Elizabeth when for some reason the term came to be equated with foretelling and predicting. For example a book by Jeremy Taylor published in 1647, entitled *The Liberty of Prophesying*, is not what the present connotation of the word would lead one to think. It is a book on freedom of speech. In modern language: the freedom of preaching. Accordingly, the strict meaning of the word “prophet” in English in its meaning in the original

Greek and Hebrew is speaker or spokesman.” So that’s the idea that comes from *nabu* it means “to speak.”

There are others who say yes it comes from *nabu* but rather than being from the active voice of that Akkadian word it’s a passive one. Then it would have the meaning “someone called by God.” If you look above that paragraph by Meek on page 3 of your citations there are some statements by William F. Albright. He says, “The current explanation of the word *nabi*, prophet, as ‘speaker’ is almost certainly false. The correct etymological meaning of the word is rather ‘one who is called by God who has a vocation from God,’ as appears from the fact that this is almost always the sense.” From the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> line to the middle of the last. He discusses that further—he says, down a few lines, “The interpretation of the word suits its meaning exactly; the prophet or the man who felt himself called by God for a special mission in which his will was subordinated to the will of God.” So there are some other viewpoints under etymology. I think the etymology remains uncertain. But I think these ideas “to speak,” or “someone called by God,” are consistent with what we find in biblical usage. More important than etymology for the meaning of any word is its meaning in the context of specific passages and its meaning as derived from how it’s used.

## 2 Usage of Nabi

So that brings us to 2. “The Usage of Nabi.” Let me just get started on that. We did a little bit with the way it was used last week and I did refer you to Deuteronomy 18:18 as a key verse where the prophetic function is described in very explicit language. You have in 18:18 of Deuteronomy the statement, “I will raise up for them a prophet,” a *nabi*, “like you,” Moses, “from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.” Now as I mentioned last week that’s the same thing that is said in Jeremiah 1:9 where the Lord says, “Jeremiah, I will put my words in your mouth.”

Now interesting in connection with that is Exodus 7:1. There you read, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your

brother Aaron will be your *nabi*.” I think that verse gives us some insight into what a prophet is and what the relationship of the prophet is to God. The relationship of Aaron to Moses will be like that of the prophet to God. In other words, Moses will stand in relation to Pharaoh as God does to His people. But Moses will not speak himself to the Pharaoh. That’s going to be done by Aaron. Aaron will convey the message of Moses to Pharaoh, just as the prophet conveys the message of God to the people. So you remember Moses said, “I can’t speak” and the Lord said, “Aaron will speak for you” and here it says, “I made you like God to Pharaoh. Your brother Aaron will be your prophet.” If you go to Exodus 4:15, where that discussion took place about Moses speaking, you’ll notice God says to Moses, “You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be”—now listen—“as if he were your mouth. It will be as if he were your mouth, and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it.” Aaron is spoken of as the mouth of Moses, and a prophet is the mouth of God by the analogy. So I think when you get to usage of *nabi*, those texts give us a pretty clear insight into what the meaning of the word is.

The next designation is *roeh* often translated “seer.” We’ll look at that next time.

Transcribed by Carly Geiman  
 Rough edit by Ted Hildebrandt  
 Final edit by Katie Ells  
 Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundation of Prophecy, Lecture 4

### Terms Used to Refer to Prophets Continued

#### e. Nabi - prophet

We were just talking here about the relationship between prophecy, that is, the message of the prophets, and term *nabi*, meaning “prophet.” What I’m saying is the two are very closely connected. The words of the prophet, the prophecy, are really words of God and it may or may not be predictive. In other words, the prophecy is a word from God which fits well with the title *nabi*. As some of those citations pointed out, with the Greek *prophetes*, it’s really speaking for God. It’s not so much the essence of the human words; not so much foretelling as it is forth-telling. That forth-telling may include a few predictions but prediction is not the essence of what prophecy is.

#### f. Roeh - Seer

Let’s go on to another term and that is *ro’eh*. It’s really a participial form of *ra’ah*, to see. It’s been translated “seer”. Now as soon as you come to that term, and look at the literature on it you’ll find that there are those who attempt to argue that *nabi* and *ro’eh* were originally two different types of people. In other words, you could distinguish between the *ro’eh* and the *nabi*, and that it was only in later time that the two words became more synonymous.

#### 1. Mahu & Baru from Mesopotamia

One scholar, his name is not that important, but I’ll give it to you, Alfred Haldar, argued that you find the same difference in some Mesopotamian languages designating “prophets” as you find in the Old Testament. In Mesopotamia, you have some people who are called *Mahu* and *Baru*. What Haldar argued was that the *Mahu* was the same as the Hebrew *nabi* and the *Baru* was the same as the Hebrew *ro’eh*. So it has these two designations in Akkadian Mesopotamia texts and he said the equivalent in Israel is between the *Mahu* and the *nabi* and the *Baru* and the *ro’eh*. Now, in Mesopotamia the *Mahu* and *Baru* were similar in that both

of them had the task of discerning what the will of God was and then making that known to other people. But there was an important difference between the *Mahu* and *Baru*. The *Mahu* received the message from the gods directly and he did so in an ecstatic condition. So, the *Mahu* was an ecstatic and while he's in that ecstatic condition, he gets a message from a deity, which he then transfers on to others. He does that while he is still in an ecstatic frame of mind.

The *Baru* however was different. The *Baru* received the message indirectly through external means. In other words, the *Baru* was someone that would read astrological signs or read omens of various sorts. One of the ways in which the *Baru* determined the will of the Lord was to examine the livers of sacrificial animals and to look at the configurations of the liver. Different configurations of livers have different significances and he would in that way determine the will of God or he would pour oil out on water and see what kind of pattern developed and read something from that or cast lots – various external means of determining the will of God.

## 2. External Means of Determining God's will

Now what Halдар tries to do then is say that just as Mesopotamia had their ecstasies and their *Baru* priests, the same distinction in Israel can be found between the *nabi* and *ro'eh*. The *nabi* was the ecstatic who received this message directly from the deity. The *ro'eh* was someone who received information externally and then passed it on to others. Now that's an interesting theory. The problem is, if you look at biblical data it becomes quite clear the biblical data doesn't fit the pattern. Here you have a pattern from elsewhere that is imposed on Scripture and the specifics of scriptural data are forced into an already preconceived pattern. For example, Samuel is called "a seer" 1 Samuel 9:11, but he did not work with external means in order to determine the will of God.

Now let me just say something further about this business of determining the will of God by external means before we go further. That is not completely excluded from the Bible. Remember the high priest had the Urim and Thummim

in his robe and he could determine the will of God through use of the Urim and Thummim. When you get in the time of David and after Saul had wiped out the priests at Nob, Abiathar escaped and he brought the ephod to David and in the next few chapters you see David saying, “Bring me the ephod” and then he asks questions of the Lord. “Shall I go to this place or not?” And the Lord said, “Yes, go”. “Will I be victorious?” And the Lord said, “Yes, you will,” or “No, you won’t.” There was the use of external means in a legitimate way through the biblical material. However, the individual who can use the external means is never called a *ro’eh*. Abiathar who had the custody, you might say, of the Urim and Thummim, he was a priest; he wasn’t a *ro’eh*. So it doesn’t fit the category.

You do have reference to individuals who used external phenomena to determine the will of God. But the interesting thing is they are never called “seers”. They are never designated by the term *ro’eh*. They are called diviners, magicians, soothsayers or sorcerers. If you look at Deuteronomy 18:10, in that passage which describes what the prophet is to be and how God is going to speak through the prophet, you read there, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcrafts or casts spells, who is a medium, a spiritist, who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord.” The Lord is condemning the very thing that these *Baru* priests did in Mesopotamia, looking at omens from livers or from astrological phenomena or whatever. That was something that was forbidden to the Israelites.

### 3) 1 Sam. 9:9

Now, there’s a verse that I think is instructive although it’s also a verse that raises a lot of questions. But 1 Samuel 9:9 is instructive regarding the question of the relationship between the usage of *ro’eh* and *nabi* in the Old Testament. It reads, “Formerly in Israel if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer, *ro’eh*,’ because the prophet of today used to be called the

seer.” “The *nabi*, prophet, of today used to be called a *ro’eh*, seer.” Now that verse, if you’re looking at the NIV, you will see it’s in parentheses. It’s a parenthetical statement that is inserted after verse 8. If you look at the larger context, I think you would conclude that it really fits better after verse 11 than it does after verse 8. You see this is where Saul’s out hunting for his father’s lost cattle and he find can’t them. His servant says, “There’s a seer, why don’t we go and ask him?” He says that in verse 8. The servant said, “Look, I have a quarter shekel of silver. I’ll give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take.” Leave verse 9 out for the moment. “‘Good,’ Saul said to his servant. But they still couldn’t find the donkeys, so they set out for the town where the man of God was. As they were going up the hill to the town they met some girls coming out to draw water. They asked them, ‘is the seer here?’” Then you get the use of the word *ro’eh*. “Is the seer here?” And, you see, verse 9, then, if you put it down there after verse 11, “Formerly in Israel if a man went to inquire of God he’d say, ‘Come let us go to the seer’ because the prophet of that day used to be called the seer.” Now what many people think is verse 9 was not part of the original text. It was an explanatory gloss probably in the margin of the text. At some point in the process of transmission, it got put into the text but they put it in the wrong place. It should have been put in after verse 11 to explain what a seer is rather than after verse 8 where it really doesn’t fit so well. I think it’s reasonable to conclude that it probably is an explanatory gloss, not part of the original text. But the important thing that it is telling us is there’s not essential difference between a prophet and a seer. It’s a matter of linguistic usage. “The prophet of today used to be called the seer.” The word “seer” is older than “prophet” and in later times, the word *nabi* or “prophet” was the more common term and the word “seer” became rather archaic language, you needed an explanation so there’d be no confusion.

I think that’s probably what’s going on here, but if you think about it and put it in its larger biblical context, it raises some other questions. When do we date this remark? That question becomes rather significant because a long time after



Samuel, prophets were still called seers. You'll find it in Isaiah for example, the use of the word "seer." Also perplexing is that the term *nabi* is used long before the time of Samuel. Abraham was called a *nabi* back in Genesis 20, verse 7. And *nabi* is used in Numbers, it's used in Deuteronomy, it's used in Judges. In fact, Samuel himself is called a *nabi* in 1 Samuel 3:20. So then the question becomes, if the word "prophet" is used before the time of Samuel, how can it be said that what was later termed a prophet was in the time of Samuel called a seer? Now some people might say, "Here's a clear evidence that all the texts in the Old Testament in which the word "prophet" is used are to be dated long after the time of Samuel." Is that a legitimate conclusion?

Let's go to the Hebrew text. The Hebrew is, "For the prophet of today was called formerly the seer." Now a translation of that is a bit difficult. Notice what the NIV does—The phrase "because the prophet of today" takes it as a kind of construct: the prophet of today. "He used to be called a seer." King James and NASB repeat the verb. "For he that is now called the prophet, or the prophet of today, was called formerly a seer." You only have one verb in the Hebrew Scripture. The NASB says, "he is called now *nabi*."

Now, if you go to the Septuagint translation of 1 Samuel 9:11, there you get a different idea introduced because there you have, "For the people before time called the prophet, the seer." See, how do you tell. Where does that Greek *ha laos* [the people] come from? "The people" before time called the prophet the seer. So back to the Hebrew *ha'yom*. What the Septuagint translation presupposes from the Hebrew, instead of *ha'yom* [today], you would've had *ha'am* [the people]. Do you see how easily that could be confused? In the "*yom*" just make the substitution of an "*ayin*" for a "*waw*." I think that the Septuagint probably puts the correct light on what's going on here. The difference between the reading of the Septuagint and the Massoretic text is that the Septuagint indicates that *ro'eh* was a more popular designation of the people. Whereas *nabi* was a more technical or official word for prophet. The people formerly called the prophet, the seer. If

that's the case, the word "*ro'eh*" could continue in use in later times and the term "prophet" could have been used early as we actually find it is. And there's no essential difference between the two. It's a distinction between a more technical and a more popular usage of it, not an absolute semantic differentiation. So the prophets were seers. They were made to see by God what they should proclaim to others. So even though the words "*nabi*" and "*ro'eh*" are both used, I think we could say they speak of the same function. The people called the prophet a seer formerly.

Now if you're going to make a distinction between them, I think that to this degree it is legitimate. To say that *nabi* shows us a person who is, you might say, turned towards the people to speak God's message so that the emphasis is on what he has received from God. The *ro'eh* shows a person turned to God. In other words, in *nabi* the emphasis is more on the proclamation, in *ro'eh* the emphasis is more on receiving the message, seeing the message. So you could say the *nabi* puts more stress on the active function of proclamation while the *ro'eh* puts more stress on the passive function of receiving the message. But there's no essential difference between the prophet and the seer.

Student Question: "How would seer, the ones that are being asked by a king to come and read the writing on the wall or whatever, interpret dreams and stuff like that, how do they not get confused?" Well I think what you're getting at there is this question of how you distinguish between the two of them called "prophet" or not. Is that it? I guess if you know people – if the people are calling, you know, Isaiah or Obadiah or something, and they're just using the word "seer," then how would they distinguish the actual prophets, then, from somebody else that they call a seer? Yes, in fact if you look at Isaiah 6:1 where Isaiah says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." There you have the verbal form, *ra'ah*. So Isaiah had a visionary experience of God. He saw the Lord. He could legitimately be called as a *nabi*. I think the emphasis of that term *ra'ah/ro'eh* is on this visionary means of receiving the message. Whereas the emphasis of the term *nabi*

is more on the proclamation of the message to others. But a *ro'eh* and a *nabi* are the same thing. It's just a different designation. There seems to be a preference among the people for using the term *ro'eh* earlier and *nabi* later. It's a more popular versus technical label, for those performing this function. But there's no reason biblically to see any distinction.

#### 4) Amos 1:1

Let's look at Amos 1:1. I was looking for *ro'eh*, but it's a verb instead of a noun. "The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa. What he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake." If these are the words of Amos, you would expect in the way we talk for the following phrase to read, "The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa. What he heard concerning Israel two years before the flood." It doesn't say that it says "what he saw." The focus is on that visionary kind of reception. The verb here is *haza*. It's this next word we're looking at, which is "he saw". It's the same thing. It means "to see" or "to gaze at." I think the important thing here is this kind of attempt to separate the *nabi* from the *ro'eh* as being two different kinds of individuals is not given in the biblical text, they're the same.

Student Question: "So someone that just worked for the king wasn't considered a prophet, but was a fortune teller or one who predicted the future were they also called seers?" No, they'd be called soothsayers, diviners, or givers of omens. There were other words for those kinds of individuals.

#### G. Hozeh

Let's go on to *hozeh*. I won't say much about *haza*. It comes from the verb *haza* just like *ro'eh* comes from the verb *ra'ah*. And *haza* means "to gaze at", or "to look at". It's really a synonym for *ro'eh*, it's used in the same way. Just as with *ro'eh*, the emphasis seems to be on receiving the revelation of God. So if you look at Isaiah 1:1, "The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of

Judah.” The vision is *hazon*. It’s a noun derived from the verb *haza*. The vision that Isaiah saw, that’s *hazon*. So you could call Isaiah a *hozeh* as well as a *nabi* or a *ro’eh*. I mean, all these terms are used interchangeably.

### 3. The Origin of Prophetism in Israel

Let’s go on to three. “The origin of prophetism in Israel.” You notice the three sub-points. A. is, “Alleged analogies to Israel’s prophetism in other nations.” B. is, “Internal Israelite explanations for the origin of prophetism,” and C. is, “What I think is a biblical explanation of prophetism.” So first, we want to spend more time on A than on B and C.

#### A. Alleged analogies to Israel Prophetism in Israel

A. is, “Alleged analogies to Israel’s prophetism in other nations.” You’ll find in the literature that it’s been said that analogies can be found in prophetism in Israel among other peoples, and nations in the ancient Near East. Then what usually happens is scholars attempt to explain the phenomenon of the prophetism in Israel as being a derivative of these phenomena outside of Israel so that the origin of Israel’s prophets is attributed to or explained by analogous phenomena that are found outside of Israel.

#### Formal Similarities

Now, a few comments about this. I think that from the outset, we have to be honest, clear and open and say that we cannot deny that we may come across what I would call “formal similarities” between what we find in Israel and the phenomena of prophetism elsewhere. In fact when you think about it there are a lot of customs, religious institutions and practices in Israel that have formal analogies among other peoples. But I’m not sure saying that says a whole lot. Even if there are formal similarities, the question is: does that give a basis for saying there’s some kind of intrinsic connection or link between what we find in Israel and in the surrounding nations? It seems to me, in view of what we have

already said about the nature of the prophetic function in Israel, that if these are people chosen by God through whom he will give his word to his people by putting his word in their mouths, to speak of any kind of intrinsic link between what goes on in Israel and what we may find among other peoples, would have to be something that would be highly questionable. It would seem to me that to speak of derivation is something that would be excluded on the basis of the prophetic Scripture. But having said that, it's also very clear that God speaks to human beings, including to his people Israel in the Old Testament period, in the context of the culture, the institutions, the thought forms of the people to whom he is speaking. When you look at the Old Testament, you will find many phenomena in the Old Testament for which you can find formal analogies outside of Israel. The Old Testament is full of regulations for bringing sacrifice. Other ancient peoples used sacrifices in their religious observance. The Old Testament sign of the covenant was circumcision. Other ancient people practiced circumcision. Circumcision acquired a very specific significance or meaning in the context of the Old Testament, but it was not something unknown in the ancient world.

Think of the whole concept of covenant that seems to have been quite clearly molded upon a concept of treaty that governed international relations, those Hittite treaty forms. The biblical covenant form is molded around the Hittite treaty form. God takes an instrument of human legal relationships and utilizes it to structure the relationship which he establishes between himself and his people, that's the great thing.

Just take the idea of kingship. Israel, at a certain point in time, wasn't satisfied with God as their king; they wanted a human king like the nations around about. The Lord told Samuel, "Give them a king." So Israel had a king like the nations around about. However, with the qualification when God told Samuel to give them a king Samuel described the manner of the kingship. In 1 Samuel 10:25, the role and function of the king of Israel was quite different from that of the nations around it. So you had a similarity and difference. Israel had a king but it

wasn't a king who functioned in the same way that kings outside of Israel did.

Israel had a priest. Other ancient peoples had priests. So why should Israel not have a prophet if other ancient peoples had prophets, but what are the essential differences between them? The way in which the prophet functions in Israel and the way in which the prophet functioned outside of Israel was different. So if you can find outside of Israel a formal, I'm saying formal, analogy with what you find in Israel with respect to the prophetic function, I don't think that detracts in any way from the uniqueness of Israel's prophets. Yes, other people had prophets, but in Israel, there's something different. The most essential characteristic of prophetism in Israel is that in Israel, the prophet doesn't speak his own ideas, he doesn't give his own words. He gives a message given to him directly by the one and only true God. So when you ask the question about analogies to prophetism outside of Israel with what you find in Israel, I think you have to keep that in mind.

But even having said that, I think then the next question becomes, "what kind of evidence is there for even some kind of formal analogy to prophetism outside of Israel if it's not in it's essence this intrinsic quality where God is placing his words in the mouth of these individuals?" What kind of formal evidence do we find in the ancient world for this phenomenon of prophetism? Notice on your outline, I have Mesopotamian analogies, Egyptian analogies, Canaanite analogies, and a conclusion

#### 1) Mesopotamian Analogies

First is Mesopotamian analogies. The most important extra biblical text for Mesopotamian analogies are texts that were found at a place called Mari which is in the vicinity of Babylon in upper Mesopotamia. It was a prosperous city before the time of Hammurabi. Hammurabi lived at around 1700 B.C., so it's fairly early. The ruler there in the time just before it fell to Hammurabi was a ruler known as Zimri Lim. There have been about 5,000 cuneiform tablets found in an archive in the excavation of Mari. Among them some find traces of what they call

prophetism in Mesopotamia. If you look at letter A. on that handout, the first text there under Akkadian letters, you'll notice the heading "Divine Revelation." This material's taken out of Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* usually abbreviated ANET. It is the standard English language translation of extra-biblical texts from the ancient Near East edited by James Pritchard, published by Princeton University Press.

a) A Letter of Itorastu to Zimri Lim of Mari

The first text there is a letter of Itorastu to Zimri Lim, who was the king of Mari. Let me read the text and make some comments on it. It reads, "Speak to my Lord. Thus Itorastu your servant. The day I dispatched this tablet of mine to my lord, Malack Dagon, a man from Shotga came and spoke to me as follows, 'In a dream of mine, I was set on going in the company of another man from the fortress of Sigaricone in the upper district of Mari. On my way, I entered Turka and right after entering, I entered the Temple of Dagon and prostrated myself. As I was prostrate, Dagon opened his mouth and spoke to me as follows, "Did the kings of the Ammonites and their forces make peace with the forces of Zimri Lim?" I said, "They did not make peace." Just before I went out, he spoke to me as follows, 'Why are the messengers of Zimri Lim not in constant attendance upon me and why does he not lay his full report before me? Had this been done, I would long ago have delivered the kings of the Ammonites into the power of Zimri Lim. Now go, I send you. Thus shall you speak to Zimri Lim saying, "Send me, your messengers. Lay your full report before me and then I will have the kings of the Ammonites cooked on a fisherman's stick and I will lay them before you."'" That's the end of the quote. "This is what this man saw in his dream and then recounted to me. I now hereby write to my lord. My lord should deal with this. Furthermore, if my lord so desires, my lord shall lay his full report before Dagon and the messengers of my lord shall be constantly on the way to Dagon. The man who told me this dream was to offer a sacrifice to Dagon. And so I did not send him on. Moreover, since this man was trustworthy, I did not take any of his hair or

the fringe across his garment.”

So, Itorastu says that on the day he wrote this letter, there was this man from Shotga, a man called Malack Dagon, who came to him with the message. Malack Dagon says he had dreamed in the dream instead of going in the company of another man. In the dream, he and this other person went to Turka, that’s a place near Mari, and to a temple of a deity by the name of Dagon, probably the same as the Dagon mentioned in the Old Testament as the god of the Philistines. But the letter goes on to say when Malack Dagon went into the temple, in his dream, the god asked him a question, “Did the kings of the Ammonites make peace with the forces of Zimri Lim?” There were probably skirmishes between the soldiers of Zimri Lim and these people called the Ammonites. When Malack Dagon gives a negative answer, the god says, “Why aren’t the messengers of Zimri Lim in constant attendance upon me? Why don’t they give me a full report? Had they done that, I would have delivered these people, the Ammonites, into the power of Zimri Lim.” And then he says, “Now go, I send you, thus shall you speak to Zimri Lim saying, ‘Send me your messengers. Lay your full report before me, and I’ll have these Ammonites cooked on a fisherman’s pole.’”

So after Itorastu tells Zimri Lim what this Malack Dagon had seen in his dream, he advises him to follow the instruction of Dagon. Now, some see in Malack Dagon an analogy with the prophets of Israel and they set it up this way: Malack Dagon delivers a message from the deity that Zimri Lim was supposed to obey and the prophets of Israel often gave the message from the deity Yahweh to a king that he was to obey. However at this point, we’ll come back to this later, but at this point I think it’s worthy to notice that Malack Dagon does not do that directly. Malack Dagon gives the message to Itorastu and Itorastu passes it on to the king by means of a letter, a tablet, writes it down, sends it to him. So there’s some similarities as well as differences.

b) A Letter of Kidri Dagon to Zimri Lim of Mari



Let's go on to text B., which is a letter of Kidri Dagon to Zimri Lim. It's a brief text. It reads, "Moreover the day I sent this tablet of mine to my lord, an ecstatic of Dagon came and addressed me as follows." This is the word *Mahu* for ecstatic. That's the ecstatic of Dagon. The translation "ecstatic" is based on etymology and general usage, but the Mari material gives no evidence of extraordinary psychic condition. "This ecstatic of Dagon came and addressed me as follows, 'That God sent me to hurry right to the king that they're to offer mortuary sacrifices for the shade of Yadu Lim.' This is what the ecstatic said to me. I have, therefore, written to my lord that my lord do what pleases him." Now Kidri Dagon sent this letter to Zimri Lim. He was the governor of a place near Mari. And he says this ecstatic came to him with this message, "Write to the king that they are to offer mortuary sacrifices for the shade of Yadu Lim." Yadu Lim was the father of Zimri Lim, so the father of the king. It seems that Zimri Lim had failed to bring offerings to the spirit of his dead father. So Kidri Dagon gets this message from an ecstatic and passes the message on to the king. You notice in the last line he advises the king, "You should do this." But then he qualifies, "Let my lord do what pleases him."

#### c. Ecstatic Text to Zimri Lim of Mari

C. on your outline is G. on your handout. I won't read all of that but it's a broken tablet; there's a gap in the middle and it seems to concern the message of an ecstatic saying that Zimri Lim had to bring an offering to the deity on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the coming month – maybe the same offering referred to in the previous text. You notice how it ends. "May my lord do in accordance as his deliberation pleases."

#### D. Another Letter of Kidri Dagon

D. of your outline is F. on your handout. Another letter of Kidri Dagon with a reference to an ecstatic. So this ecstatic came here earlier. But it is difficult to understand. It seems that the message concerns the building of a city gate. Exactly what is said about the gate is not so clear. Some say instructions are given for a

gate to be built. Others say it's a warning not to build it, but it's an ecstatic who reveals a message that is to be given to the king with respect to the city gate.

#### E. Conclusion Concerning the Mesopotamian Analogies

E: "Conclusion concerning the Mesopotamian analogies." Right here there's a list of books and articles. In that literature, many have argued that there are similarities in both form and content, between the ecstasies of these texts and the prophets of the Old Testament. Let's look at some of these. As far as similarities in form, it's argued that just as a prophet in Israel received his message from the Lord, Yahweh, so in Mari the ecstatic received his message from Dagon. That's fair enough. It's a formal similarity. Secondly, as the prophet in Israel brought his message unasked with divine authority to the king, so also in Mari with this ecstatic the message was sent on to the king unasked. The king didn't ask for the message. There is no determining in advance whether the king would want to hear the message or not. He was given the message, so another parallel. Thirdly, just as the prophet in Israel is often critical of actions of the king, so here in Mari with the ecstatic there's criticism. "Why didn't you keep me informed? Why didn't you offer a sacrifice? You should have." So those are what you might call formal similarities: similarities in form.

What about similarities in content? Some have argued that in that first text you find something comparable to a prophecy of deliverance in the Old Testament. In other words, "if you had kept me informed (you'll see in 2, 4, 6 lines down), had this been done, I would have gone and delivered the kings and the Ammonites into the power of Zimri Lim." So a parallel to a prophecy of deliverance in the Old Testament. A second similarity is found also from that first text about 8 lines down. "Now go, I send you. Thus shall you speak to Zimri Lim." Similar to Jeremiah 1:7, "You must go to everyone I send you to, say whatever I command." "Now go, speak." So I think at that level you can say, "Yes, there are some similarities between the Mari material and the Old Testament in form and even some faint similarities in content." But having said that, I think it's very

important to notice this isn't done. There are also some very important differences. Let me mention a few of them.

### 1) First Text, Malack Dagon

First, in that first text, Malack Dagon, who received that message, does not go directly to the king. He goes to one of the king's officials; he goes to Itorastu. It is Itorastu who puts the message on a tablet and sends it on to the king. So there's an intermediary, you might say, between the prophet who receives the message and the person who delivers it to the king. There's a third party there. In the other three letters, the ecstatic goes to Kidri Dagon who passes the message on to the king in written form. So, in other words, in all these texts the message gets to the king indirectly through a third party. It's customary for the Old Testament prophets to deliver their message directly to the king. A classic example of this is Elijah who confronts Ahab. He just goes out and confronts him. Or Isaiah, who goes out and confronts Ahaz directly.

### 2) Two of the Tablets end with a Striking Statement

Secondly, two of the tablets end with a rather striking statement. It's E. and G. in the handout. E. ends with the statement, "Let my lord do what pleases him" after the message has been given, and G., "May my lord be well in accordance with his deliberation that pleases him." So two of those tablets ended with that kind of a statement. That type of a qualification detracts from the force and the authority of the message. Here's the message, but do whatever you want. That certainly distinguishes it from the message of the Old Testament prophets. The Old Testament prophets never gave a message from the Lord with that kind of a qualification attached to it.

### 3) The Message in the Mari Text does not concern Ethical or Spiritual Realities

Thirdly, the focus of the message in the Mari text does not concern ethical or spiritual realities, but only external cultic obligations. "Offer this sacrifice," "give me a report about what's going on." The message of the Mari text does not concern ethical or spiritual realities, only external cultic obligations. That contrasts

greatly with the message of the Old Testament prophets whose primary concern was with the moral and spiritual condition of the king and the people. I want to elaborate a bit on that, but I'm already overtime so I'm going to have to stop. But let's pick it up with that at the beginning of our next session and go forward from there.

Transcribed by Christa Walsh  
Rough edit by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy; Lecture 5

### Prophecy in the Ancient Near East

#### III. The Origin of Prophetism in Israel

##### A. Alleged Analogies to Israel's Prophecy in Other Nations

##### 1. Mesopotamian Analogy

##### a) Summary Review

Last week we were on Roman numeral III., "The origin of prophetism in Israel" and A., "Alleged Analogies to Israel's Prophecy in Other Nations." The four sub-points were: Mesopotamian analogies, Egyptian analogies, Canaanite analogies and a conclusion. We were under one, the Mesopotamian analogy. I have given you a handout from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* by Pritchard with the section that's called the Akkadian letters with the subtitle "Divine Revelations." We looked at some of those texts from Mari, where you have an example of the person who received the message from a deity, in this case from Dagon, and he takes that message to another individual who writes it up on a tablet and sends it along to the king and this we noted last week. There were some faint similarities in both form and content between this phenomenon in Mesopotamia at Mari, and what you find in the Old Testament. You do have a person who claims to have a message from the deity a messenger who passes it on to the king, although indirectly, not directly.

##### b) Differences

##### 1) Indirectly to the King

But at the end of the hour, I was discussing some of the differences. You can see some faint similarities, but there are also some very striking differences. The first one I mentioned is that it's given indirectly in Mari, while the Israelite prophets give the message directly to the king to confront him. Two of the tablets end with the statement, "Let my Lord do what pleases

him.” So here’s the message formally from a deity given to a king but with that qualification, which certainly is radically different from the message of the prophets of the Old Testament. The word of the Lord was to be obeyed. When someone heard the word of the Lord, he wasn’t to do what pleased him, he was to do what pleased the Lord. So that’s certainly a difference.

2) ...

### 3) Cultic Concerns with no ethical or spiritual concerns

Then the third thing I mentioned right at the end of the hour was that the focus of the message in the Mari text does not concern ethical or spiritual realities but rather external cultic obligations. In other words, you didn’t perform this sacrifice, you didn’t give me a report for cultic obligations. That term “cultic” is used in reference to the Old Testament work, it has to do with outward forms of worship. In other words, if you speak of Israel’s cult, you’re speaking of the outward forms of Israel’s worship: the sacrifices, the festivals, the rituals—not cultic in the sense that it is normal to our understanding. We think about Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, or something such as that. But when you speak of the cult of ancient Israel you’re talking about outward forms of worship. So, the message deals with external cultic obligations through the sacrifice used in this report, not with ethical or spiritual realities. If you look at the message in the Old Testament prophets, they might have said something about cultic observations. Isaiah, Micah, Amos, were very critical of Israel bringing sacrifices when their heart wasn’t in the sacrifices, but the focus of the message is on repentance and on “wash your hands, come to the Lord with clean hearts, come to the Lord with the desire to obey him and worship him.” So they were concerned primarily with the morals and spiritual condition both of the king and of the people, generally speaking.

4) No purposeful divine acts in history referred to

The man I studied under in the Netherlands, Ridderbos, wrote something on this question of the prophets in Israel and prophets outside of Israel, how they compare. And he says in one of his essays, "When Israel's prophets bring a message in a concrete situation, we must notice the backdrop to their pronouncements. But while making detailed statements, they also connect the particular situation with which they deal to the great subject of God's purposeful action in history. The prophets outside Israel give no indication of knowing anything about such purposeful divine acts in history."

Now you reflect on that for a minute, that is a significant difference. In other words, any individual statement of a given prophet in the Old Testament has to be put into a larger context, and that larger context is really the entire corpus of prophetic writing and the prophets, beginning with Moses and Samuel and on through the prophetic movement in the Old Testament period. These were a succession of individuals that arose over centuries of time. Their message was a redemptive message not just about immediate detailed little matters about bringing the right sacrifice, although we've already talked about that. The message sets the larger context of the movement of redemptive history all the way to the climax and consummation of history.

Now you get this eschatological vision of God's sovereign purposeful control of all nations, all people, and his purposes are going to be worked out in history. You have this leap of an enormously broad perspective of the message and, as Ridderbos points out, when you look at these kinds of tablets in Mari, there is not even any awareness that there is such a broad sweep a purposeful movement in history. So, again, a significant difference. When you look at what you find in these Mesopotamian texts, any way you see it, at best it reminds you of the false prophets in Israel. You had people in Israel claim to

be prophets, but they were giving a message of their own, out of their own hearts, their own ideas. I don't think what you find in these Mari texts is any different than the kinds of the things you see among soothsayers, and diviners, that you find among all people, and have always found there. You find them in Mari. So, to try to say that what you find in Mari is in some way analogous to what you find in Israel I think ignores the radical differences between the prophetic message as a whole and what you find there.

#### 5) Mari "prophets" distinct from Israelite Prophets

If you look at your citations, page 4, at the bottom of the page there are a couple paragraphs from an essay, "Prophecy and the prophetic literature" in a volume called *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters*. This essay is by Gene Tucker, who is not an evangelical scholar, but notice he says, "Malamat was more specific in his definition of the Mari 'diviner prophets' and more cautious about the parallels with the OT. He saw them as parallels to the prophets of the Old Testament in their consciousness of mission and their willingness to speak uninvited to the authorities in the name of the God. But, the all too obvious gap is apparent in the essence of the prophetic message and in the destiny assigned to the prophet's mission. The Mari articles address the rule of origins for representatives, and not the nation as a whole, and express material concerns of local people. "The most recent major treatment of the Mari texts, and also one of the most careful, is that of Noort, who is not at all convinced that the Mari "prophets" were the predecessors of those known from the Old Testament, or even that the two were related. In at least the last point he certainly goes too far."

Now this is Tucker speaking, "For the two are phenomenologically if not historically related." Now phenomenologically related, or periodic phenomena: you have a phenomena of somebody who claims to speak for a deity—you find it at Mari, you find it in the Old Testament, but that's just



normal, it's not material. So he says they are phenomenologically if not historically related. In other words, he's saying it's pretty hard to say there is some sort of historical connection between what's going on in Mari and what we find in Israel. "Whether or not one accepts his conclusion that the Mari oracles are basically unlike the Old Testament prophecy, he has presented a very useful analysis in the various means of revelation at Mari and of the roles of both the speakers and the addressees. The messages are quite diverse, but they have in common the communication of a word of a god in a situation of crisis." Now that's what they have in common, and that's not a whole lot. We find there is a communication of the word of God in a situation of crisis, I think it's not too significant. So I don't think we have any very convincing evidence from the Mari texts for drawing the conclusion that somehow prophetism in Israel was derived from or borrowed from what we find in Mesopotamia.

## 2. Egyptian Analogies: Egyptian Oracles and Prophecies

Let's go on to the Egyptian analogies. See the handout last week, go through a couple pages, you'll see a section titled, "Oracles and Prophecies" with the subtitle "Egyptian Oracles and Prophecies." Just as some have alleged analogies to prophetism in Israel in Mesopotamia, the same has been said in respect to Egypt. I want to call your attention, if you notice on your outline, to two Egyptian texts. The first is the Admonitions of Ipuwer and the second, the prophecy meant for Nefer-rohu. But on that first page, which is really page 441 in the *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* you see the Admonitions of Ipuwer.

### a) Admonitions of Ipuwer

#### 1. Summary

This text dates from about 1350 to 1100 B.C., but it's a copy. The original text was much older, probably going back to about 2000 B.C. The

beginning and the end of the text is missing and in the body of the text itself there are a lot of gaps, with a text like this they call the gaps, lacunae. But it's still reasonably clear what the text is about. There's a man called Ipuwer who appears before the reigning Pharaoh in Egypt. He sums up and describes the disasters that have come over the land of Egypt. There's trouble everywhere. There's robbery, revolution, foreigners have come in, the Nile's overflowed its banks, women don't conceive, everybody has dirty clothes, there's lack of water, the land is desolate, there is a lot of suffering, there is role reversal in the sense that people who had slaves now have become slaves themselves, rich people are now poor, poor people are now rich, those who had beautiful clothes are now in rags, those who didn't have any clothes now have fine linen and so on. So there is a lot of upheaval, you might say, in Egypt.

If you look at that first page, second column, right at the top, you see "robbery is everywhere. Why really the Nile is in flood. Why really women are dried up and none can conceive. Why really poor have become the possessions and treasures." Go down the page, "Why really dirt is throughout the land." Next to last paragraph, "Barbarians from the outside have come to Egypt." So he describes this situation in Egypt and after a brief section in which Ipuwer reminds the pharaoh and his audience about a much better past. In other words, things weren't always this bad, though they're pretty bad right now.

## 2. Alleged "Messianic" Prediction Text and Its Translation

Then after a break in the text where it's kind of hard to tell what the connection is, you come to a section that some would call a messianic prophecy. That's on page 443, 2 pages over. Toward the bottom of the first column, you see all of those, about the middle of the first column, you see each paragraph beginning with remember, remember, remember, remember, that's remembering a so much better past. But the last paragraph in that first

column after a gap says, “It shall come that he brings coolness upon heart. Men shall say, he is the herdsman of all men, evil is not in his heart. Those herds may be small, still he has spent the day caring for them, would that he might perceive their character from the very first generation, then he will smite down evil, he would stretch forth the arm against it, he would destroy the seed there and of their inheritors.” It seems that what Ipuwer is doing is speaking about an ideal king. The question is, in the context, and it’s not too clear in the context: is this an ideal king of the past, or is it a king of the future? That question is not easily answered because of the gaps in the text that surround the statement.

There are three major published recognized translations of this text, two in English, and one in German. In German, there is a volume that is the equivalent of the English *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, and it’s abbreviated *AOTP*, which is *Ancient Oriental Texts and Pictures*, that’s the *AOTP*. It’s the standard German translation of the text; it’s by a man named Ranke. The translation that you’re looking at is Pritchard’s by *Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)* with translations by an Egyptologist by the name of John Wilson, whose name is there at the beginning. There is a third translation in English in a volume called *Context of Scripture*. Which is a three-volume collection of ancient Near Eastern texts, published in 1997, which is really intended to be a collection of ancient texts for the *Context of Scripture*. It’s intended to be an updating of Pritchard’s *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. In other words, this is a new published collection of ancient near eastern texts, with new translations of all those texts. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* was published in the 1950’s I believe, you’ll have to look on your bibliography for the date, but this is a new collection of English texts. The translator of the “Admonitions of Ipuwer” in the *Context of Scripture*, published by Brill, is a man named Shupak.

So you have 3 recognized major translations of this text. Now if you compare the translations you will find Wilson translates this section that we looked at, the bottom of that first column, in a future tense, "It shall come that he brings coolness upon the heart." You notice in footnote 36, which is just before that paragraph begins Wilson says, "In context, of lacunae, there's a transition to a new theme. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure about the argument. Ipuwer is certainly describing the ideal rule. The alternatives are, A., that this ruler is empowered from the text, perhaps the sun god Re, or B., that the passage is truly messianic, and that Ipuwer is looking forward to the god king who will deliver Egypt from her woes." And then you see his next comment, "This translation takes the later approach." In other words, Wilson chooses to translate this as future, this is a god king of a future, a messianic kind of figure who's going to come and remove evil from the earth, smite down evil. Evil is not in his heart.

Now if you look at the German translation, by Ranke, Ranke chooses the past tense. In the note in Ranke's translation, he says the translation is not completely certain, but it is certain it should not be a future, "He had brought coolness upon the heart." It's not that he brings or will bring, he *had*. If you look at the Shupak translations in the *Context of Scripture*, he translates it in the past tense, "He has brought wholeness upon the heart" and in his note he says, "The following section is very problematic and has been discussed at length in research. Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether we are dealing here with criticism directed to Re or with a description of the ideal redeemer." So, that discussion goes on, some including Wilson and the translation you have recorded, translated this as the future and see this as a reference to the messianic deliverer of the future. Those who translate it that way, then say just as Israel's prophet describe the coming messiah, so here you find in this Egyptian text, with the idea of a coming deliverer, a messianic

prophecy.

### 3) Analysis of Ipuwer

A few comments: I think if you want to start preparing these two texts, you have to start out and recognize that it's not all very clear what's going on here in this text, because of the gaps, before and after, so it's questionable whether the so-called messianic section is even speaking of the future, as an idea from the text. Secondly, even if it is speaking of the future, there's still significant differences between the messianic concept of the Old Testament and what we've found here in Ipuwer. In the Old Testament, the coming king will bring his people into fellowship with God and restore peace and harmony in the whole the earth. That messianic vision in the Old Testament foresees a universal condition, where swords will beat into plowshares with the lion laying down with the lamb and that kind of universal eschatological vision is rooted in spiritual realities. You don't find anything of that here, nor do you find it anywhere else in extra-biblical literature.

There's one further point that sometimes is made with this text, although unfortunately Wilson's translation here doesn't even include it. If you go to the top of the second column, you'll see in footnote 38 right at the end of that first paragraph Wilson says, "In an unintelligible section, here omitted, Ipuwer uses the second person singular. As Nathan said to David, 'thou art the man,' so Ipuwer must finally be addressing the Pharaoh and pinning the responsibility of Egypt's woes directly on the king as indicated in the following context." So, someone said, "Here is an equivalent to what we find the prophets doing in the Old Testament, Nathan to David, 'thou art the man,' here you have Ipuwer saying to the pharaoh, 'you are the man.' The reason there's so much trouble in the land is because of you." But again, this is a section that is not altogether clear, and in fact Wilson says, "An unintelligible section, here omitted," so if you're going to make a whole lot of

that, it seems like it's not on a very solid basis and besides, even if he does put the responsibility on the king, there is no hint of God's purposeful and sovereign directional role through the history.

## b) Prophecy of Neferohu

### 1. Text Summary and Dating

That's the first Egyptian analogy; the second one is the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu," if you'll go over to the next page. Wilson has the title, "The prophecy of Neferti." Neferti and Nefer-rohu are the same, you notice the footnote 1, "Neferti. This translation retains the now traditional name of Nefer-rohu for the Egyptian prophet, even though Posner has produced evidence making positive whose name is to be written, there is some disagreement as to how to read his name." But this is another text in which some find analogy to Israel's prophets and that deals with what some see as a prediction of the fall of the Old Kingdom in Egypt and the desperation under Amenemhet I.

This prophecy is given by this person called Neferti or Nefer-rohu. Amenemhet I is dated at about 1910 B.C. According to this text, Snefru, you see his name in the second line, "Now it happened the majesty of the kingdom of upper lower Egypt, Snefru the triumphant was the magnificent king of this entire planet." Snefru—who was a very early Egyptian ruler, going back to, I think its 2650—asked the city council in Egypt, the capital city of Egypt, if they could find someone who could entertain him with what he calls "fine words and well chosen speeches," looking for someone to entertain him, who can speak well. He is given the name of Nefer-rohu, who was a priest of Bastet. Bastet was the calf goddess.

So, he is given the name of Nefer-rohu, he commands that Nefer-rohu will be brought to the court, and you find that if you go to the second column on page 444, "Then his majesty taught with life, prosperity, health, said 'My

people, behold, that I've called you to be called, to have you seek out for me a son of yours who is wise, or a brother of yours who is confident or a friend of yours who has performed a good deed, one who may say to me, a few fine words or choice speeches at the hearing of which my majesty may be entertained." So you see that's what he wants.

In the middle of the next paragraph, "a great lector-priest of Bastet a sovereign ruler whose name is Nefer-rohu, he's such a person." So the next paragraph, "He was ushered into him," that is the king of Egypt. "Then his majesty, life, prosperity, health,"—every time you address the king you also have to say life, prosperity health—"said, 'Come great Nefer-rohu, who, my friend, that thou mayest say to me a few fine words and choice speeches at the hearing of which my majesty may be entertained.'" Then the lector-priest, Nefer-rohu, who said "of what has already happened or of what is going to happen, Sovereign, life, prosperity, health?" Then his majesty, life, prosperity, health said, 'What is going to happen.'" So he wants some speeches about what's going to happen in the future and when Nefer-rohu begins to speak he doesn't talk about the future, he describes again conditions of the land and calamities of the land.

If you go over to page 445, you see in the second paragraph, "this land is so damaged there is no one who is concerned with it, no one who speaks, the sun disk is covered over." And then the next line at the end of that paragraph, "I shall speak of one who before my face. I cannot foretell what has not yet come." So here is this man that's brought in to entertain the king and the king says he wants to know what's going to happen in the future, and Nefer-rohu says, "I can't do that." However, he finally says at the end of the second column, on page 445, the last paragraph there, that "a king will come, belonging to the south. Many will triumph in his name, he is the son of a woman of the land of Nubia, he is one born in upper Egypt, he will take the

white crown, he will wear the red crown, he will unite the two mighty ones. He will satisfy the two lords with what they desire.” The middle of the next paragraph, “The Asiatics will fall to swords, the Libians will fall to swords and so forth.” So he speaks about this Ameni who will come, and Ameni and most understand it to be this Amenemhet empire. But he did come long after Snefru, in 1910, and unite the kingdoms of Egypt, upper and lower Egypt.

What about this text? Look at your citations page 5, middle of the page, there’s a paragraph out of E.J. Young, in *My Servants the Prophets*. He says, “One must notice the utter lack of seriousness of this text. The king is seeking merely for entertainment, and so he desires to be informed concerning the future. Nefer-Rohu makes no pretense of being a prophet; in fact, he even explicitly states he cannot foretell the future. Furthermore, the text states that it is dealing with the message of Nefer-Rohu, as he brooded over what would happen in the land. In other words, the message is not a revealed one, nor does it report to be. It is in a class with the many, “predictions” of the ancient world, and far removed from the prophecies of the Old Testament.” So Young points out the lack of seriousness of the text.

## 2. Vaticinium ex eventu

But there’s another issue involved here. That is the question of the authenticity of the text itself. If you look at that same page in your citations, what G. D. Smith says in the article on “Prophet,” in ISBE, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, he says, ““The prophecy of Nefer-rohu’ purports to tell how Pharaoh Snefru of the 4th Dynasty was entertained by a prophet who predicted that chaos would soon overtake Egypt, but that order and justice would be reestablished when Ameni of Nubia (a reference to Amen-em-hep I, the first king of the 12th Dynasty) became king. The so-called prophecy undoubtedly was written as political propaganda to support the rule of Amen-em-hep I.” In other words, the question is what about the date



of the text? It is alleged to be from the time of Snefru, 2650 B.C. It describes events from about 1900, if it is speaking about Amenemhet. The oldest copies of the text however, are from about 1450. In other words, five centuries after the time that it is allegedly speaking about, as far as prediction.

If you go up to the second paragraph on page 5 of your citations, William F. Albright's *The Stone Age to Christianity* says of this text, "Somewhat later is the prophecy of Nefer-rohu, which is extremely interesting as the oldest certain example of a *vaticinium ex eventu*." That's a Latin phrase meaning "speaking from the events." In other words, you're saying something after the time of whatever you're talking about, but allegedly speaking before the time that it happened. It purports the date for the reign of Snefru, but describes in some detail the reign of Ameni, the founder of the 12th Dynasty six centuries later. But it's speaking after the event rather than before the event. So many question the authenticity of this. Is this really a prediction of Amenemhet or is it political propaganda written after the time of Amenemhet, trying to elevate his reign? That's certainly a very legitimate question. But those are two of the most significant Egyptian texts that are alleged to have something similar to what we find in the prophetic purpose in the Old Testament.

### C. Canaanite Analogies

#### 1. Lack of Data

Let's go on to Canaanite analogies. There's been a considerable effort to find analogies for Israel's prophetism among the Canaanites. There's one small problem. None have ever been found. We don't have a lot of texts from the land of Canaan. The closest place that we do have texts of a religious sort is Ras Shamra texts from Ugarit, on the Phoenician coast. But even there you don't have anything analogous to prophetism in Israel. In spite of that, if you look

at the literature, there are numerous scholars who are convinced that the land of Canaan must be considered a cradle for prophetism in Israel, that it must have been out of contacts that the Israelites made in the land of Canaan that prophetism was given its birth.

In your citations, bottom of page 5 over to page 6, Abraham Kuenen discussed this in a volume from the late 1800s, which was recently republished within the last 15 years, so it's something still referred to a lot. Abraham Kuenen is the same Kuenen of the Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen theory previous, so you're right in that whole period of historical-critical analysis of the Bible. Kuenen says, "It would be of course very desirable that we should be able to speak with certainty upon such an important question as this. But from the want of historical account, we must rest content with probable conjectures.... They give us a satisfactory explanation of the first appearance of prophecy in Israel." So he's looking for Canaanite analogies and he doesn't find any. So he says we have to be content with the probable conjecture and that probable conjecture is to be commended because "it will provide us with a satisfactory explanation of the first appearance of prophecy in Israel." They must have come out of the Canaanites. Now to update Kuenen of the late 1800s to late 1900s, look at what Gerhard Von Rad said in his *Old Testament Theology*. "In eleventh century Syria and Palestine, there are signs of the rise of an ecstatic and mantic movement whose origins are apparently outside that area, and perhaps lie in the mantic of Thrace and Asia Minor." Notice the next line. "Canaanite religion must, then, have been the medium by which the movement came to Israel. The earliest Old Testament evidence for its appearance are the accounts of the Dervish-like enthusiasts who from time to time emerged up and down the land, probably to be eyed askance by the settled Israelite farmers." Now what he's talking about there, "the dervish like enthusiast," are these companies of prophets? Remember when Saul met

a company of prophets and they had musical instruments and they were prophesying and Saul was walking and prophesying with them. This kind of abnormal behavior, you're trying derive from the ecstasies of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, from that ecstatic movement into what Von Rad and others find as something similar in Israel and you're going to make those links, connect the dots. Canaan must have been the source from which this phenomenon was introduced to the Israelites, when they settled down in the land of Canaan.

## 2) 1 Kgs 18:19: Ahab, Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel

Now the idea that prophetism was known in Canaanite religion is strengthened for people of this position by what we know of the Phoenicians who had similar religious practices, presumably, to the Canaanites. First Kings 18:19 becomes a pretty key text for this new point. This is the time of Ahab and Jezebel. You read in 1 Kings 18:19, Elijah said, "Summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. Bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." Jezebel was that Phoenician woman who was married to Ahab, who imported prophets of Baal and Asherah into Israel. Elijah's out there challenging Ahab and the prophets of Baal in the name of Yahweh, and you're familiar with that story there of that confrontation on Mount Carmel.

If you go down further in that chapter, look at verse 27. "At noon Elijah began to taunt them. 'Shout louder,' he said. 'Surely he is a god. Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened,'" referring to Baal. "So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom until their blood flowed. Midday passed and they continued their"—the NIV says—"frantic prophesying." Now that's simply a form of the verb *naba*, to prophesy, "until the time for the evening sacrifice." So here you have these prophets of Baal

dancing around the altar in some sort of frenzied state, slashing themselves, crying out to their deity, and the word used here is they were “prophesying.” But what were they actually doing? Were they getting a message from Baal? Doesn’t appear like it. It appears like they would begin prophesying, which is descriptive of some kind of extremely abnormal behavior. Ecstatic behavior, if you want to use that word of some sort.

### 3. The Journey of Wenamen to Phoenicia

There is another Egyptian text that I gave you this last week as well. It’s called, “The Journey of Wenamen to Phoenicia.” This text tells about a journey of a man named Wenamen who was an Egyptian priest. He went from Egypt to Phoenicia to purchase lumber for the construction of a barge or boat for the Egyptian deity Amon-Re. That barge was to be the throne of the deity in the form of a ship. He gets to the king of Byblos up in Phoenicia to purchase this lumber and the price he wanted to pay was not acceptable. The king of Byblos tells him to go back to Egypt, that he couldn’t send it immediately because of the cost of the shipping. But the king of Byblos was caused to change his mind about the sale of this lumber to Wenamen when he received a message from an ecstatic. If you go over to page 18, the second page of this handout, you read, about the middle of the page, “The prince of Byblos sent to me saying, ‘Get out of my harbor.’ And I sent to him saying, ‘Where should I go to? You have a ship to carry me, have me taken in it to Egypt again.’ So I spent 29 days in his harbor. All the while he spent time sending to me every day, saying, ‘Get out of my harbor.’ Now while he was making offering to his gods, the god seized one of his youths and made him possessed, and he said to him, ‘Bring up the god. Bring the messenger who is carrying him. Amon is the one who sent him out. He is the one who made him come.’ And while the possessed youth was having his frenzy on this night, I had already found the ship headed for Egypt and had loaded everything that I had into it. While I

was watching for the darkness, thinking, “When it descends I will embark the god also, so that no other eye might see. The harbor master came to say, ‘Wait until morning, so says the prince.’ So I said to him, ‘Aren’t you the one who spent the time coming to me every day saying, “Stay out of my harbor?” While he says, “Wait till the morning.”’ Finally an agreement is worked out and the lumber is sold.”

But the point here that is made is that in this story, you have an example of what some call prophetic frenzy. Here is this youth that sees and while he is possessed he gives this message to the king of Byblos to make this deal with this priest from Egypt. So you get this reference to prophetic frenzy in this text, “The Journey of Wenamen.” You combine it with the behavior of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 and then combine that with the prophetic bands in the time of Samuel. What is concluded is prophetism that originated in Israel is this kind of ecstatic phenomena. We have evidence it existed in Phoenicia, Mesopotamia presumably in Canaan, at least with the priest of Baal and Asherah in the court of Ahab and Jezebel, and in these companies of prophets in the time of Samuel. So on that kind of a basis it is said Canaan must be the cradle of prophetism in Israel. Since Samuel was the leader of these ecstatic bands of prophets, so Samuel is the person who adapted originally this heathen phenomena to Israel. So that’s the theory.

I think what you can say is it is largely speculative, it rests on very little evidence and certainly does not fit with Samuel’s strong opposition to Canaanite religion as recorded in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. He called on Israel to get away, destroy their Baals and to worship the Lord. Certainly he was not one who fits with this description. But that is the way the case is made for finding origin for prophetism in Israel—on the basis of these influences and phenomena we find in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and allegedly

among Canaanites, although the evidence there is really nonexistent.

#### 4. Conclusions

That brings us to 4., "Conclusions." It seems to me that while we may admit that, yes, there are some formal similarities between prophecy outside Israel and what we find in Israel, there is very little that is even remotely comparable in the area of what I would call material correspondence. In terms of formal correspondence, a person who claims they have a message from a deity, you find that everywhere. As far as material correspondence, that is, correspondence between the message of the prophets of Israel and the kinds of statements you find made by these prophets outside of Israel, there's very little similarity. So the attempt to explain the origin of Israel's prophetism from analogies outside of Israel I do not think is convincing.

#### B. Internal Israelite Explanation for the Origin of Prophetism

We must look for the origin of prophetism in Israel somewhere else and that brings us to B. and C. on your outline. B. is, "Internal Israelite Explanation for the Origin of Prophetism."

##### 1. The Religious Genius of Israel

1., "The religious genius of Israel." Some argue that Israel had this particular spiritual inclination. Thus because of that, they developed a very high form of religion. They had a particular gift to do something like that. In that high form of religion, a very important part of it, was prophetism; it is an essential feature of this religious genius that certain people had. So the religious genius of Israel itself was used as an explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel. Seems to me what that explanation fails to recognize is the reality of Israel's history. If you look at the Old Testament, it seems quite clear. Historically, Israel did not show itself to be a people with a natural inclination

for the high form of religion that was embodied in the message of the prophets. The inclination of Israel, quite to the contrary, was to go after the religious beliefs and practices of the surrounding heathen nations. What the prophets do spend an enormous amount of their time on, is urging Israel to turn away from those heathen deities, and to worship the one, living and true God. So, to say that the religious genius of Israel is the explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel really lacks any basis in the history of Israel's religious attitudes and expressions. The prophets of Israel were counter-cultural, you might say. They were going across the grain, there was no inclination on the part of Israel to listen to the words of the prophets, more often they didn't than they did. So Israel itself is not an adequate explanation for the origin of prophetism.

What about just backing up and saying, "It's the religious consciousness of the prophets?" If the whole nation did not have some sort of special gift for developing this high form of religion that we find in the Old Testament, then maybe some individual Israelites did have that gift. They're the ones who are to be considered the originators of prophetism in Israel.

Now it seems to me again that you quickly run into a problem there. The problem is what we have already talked about, which is this: when the prophets speak, they indicate very clearly that what they speak is from the Lord, not their own words or ideas. They speak only what they are compelled to say by God himself. God says, "I will put my words in your mouth." It's not the prophet's words, it's God's words. The message they give is not their own message, it is God's message. So the prophets themselves in their own self-testimony clearly deny that this phenomenon called "speaking the word of God" is something that originates from what is in the prophet himself. It's something that comes to him from outside. So, internal Israelite explanations for the origin of prophetism also fail to explain why this phenomena arose in

Israel.

C. Prophetism in Israel according to the Witness of the OT finds its origin in God

That brings us to C.: “Prophetism in Israel according to the witness of the OT finds its origin in God, and must be viewed as a gift of God to his people.” It seems to me that that is what the Bible itself represents as an explanation of why prophetism arose in Israel. Now I want to elaborate on that, but we’ll have to do that next time.

Transcribed by Katie Brewster  
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt



## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Prophecy, Lecture 6**

### Prophetism in Israel according to the OT

#### C. Early Prophetism in Israel

We're down to C. under "Early prophetism in Israel." I read this just before the break, the heading "Prophetism in Israel according to the witnesses of the Old Testament finds its origin in God and must be viewed as a gift from God to his people."

##### 1. Deuteronomy 18:9-22

You notice the reference there, Deuteronomy 18:9-22. I think we need to look at that text a little more closely with respect to this proposition. Deuteronomy 18:9-42 is addressing the question of where Israel will find divine guidance after the death of Moses. The book of Deuteronomy documents the covenant renewal on the plains of Moab shortly before the death of Moses. At the end of the book, we have the record of Moses' death. Moses has been the prophet, he's been the mediator between God and his people and God has spoken to them through Moses. What's going to happen when Moses is gone? That is what is addressed here.

##### a. Deut. 18:9-14

The first thing you find is that when Israel comes into the land of Canaan, they were not to find the divine revelation by means of practicing any of the customary things done by the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. So you notice in verses 9-14 of Deuteronomy 18, "When you enter the land, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, or who practices sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these detestable practices, the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you." So you are not to follow the customs of the Canaanites. God will give

something better to Israel and that you find in verse 15. In 14 it says, “The nations you dispossess will listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet, like me [Moses] from among your brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb from the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God or see his great fire or we will die.’ The Lord said to me, ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.’” So I think it’s in context clear that verses 15-19, I didn’t read all the way to 19, but verses 15-19 tell Israel where they are to receive their guidance. It’s not from the things done by the Canaanites. It will be by a means similar to that which came through Moses.

b) Deut. 18:20-22

Verses 20-22 raise another question, and that is the danger of listening to false prophets who are not speaking for God, and in connection, giving one way to identify a false prophet. See verse 20 says, “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’” Verse 22 gives one means of determining that, “If what the prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message that the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.” I want to come back to this whole thing of false prophets. That is just one. There are other ways that the Israelites can use to distinguish between the true and false prophets. But the central section of this passage in verses 9 to 22 is that you’re not to follow the ways of the Canaanites, you are not to follow the false prophets, but you are to follow the word of the prophets that the Lord will raise up like Moses.

c) Acts 3:19-23 and Deut. 18:15

Now, that central section that runs from 15-19 has been interpreted in different ways, largely because in Acts 3:19-23 you have a reference to it that seems to apply that passage to Christ. In Acts 3:19 it says, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed to you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For as Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from his people.’ So that prophet is identified here as Christ, and that means people have done different things with this passage.

2. Interpretation of “Prophet like me” in Deut. 18:15

a) Collective Succession of the Prophets

I want to mention three different ways that it’s been interpreted. The first way is a collective interpretation when you read in Deuteronomy 18:15 “the Lord your God will raise up a prophet like me from among your brothers.” “Prophets” here is taken as a collective noun, and therefore is understood to encompass all of the succession of the prophets of the prophetic moment of the Old Testament period. The Lord will raise up a prophet as the collective noun. When you come into Canaan, don’t follow the evil methods of the different nations. You must listen to the prophets.

b) Prophet = Jesus (Acts 3 based)

The second interpretation is an individual interpretation of that passage that the word “prophet,” “The Lord will raise up for you as a prophet,” has an exclusive reference to Christ on the basis of the Acts 3’s reference to it. So those who use that interpretation would say this passage has no reference to the

prophetic moment in ancient Israel. It is a messianic prophecy, a prophecy solely of Christ.

### c) Successive Prophets Fulfilled Ultimately in Christ

There is a third view, which is a collective interpretation but says that that collective interpretation is completely fulfilled in the person of Christ in whom the idea of the prophetic order was perfectly realized. That kind of combines the two.

If you look at your citations on page 6, I have two entries there on this passage. The first is from Hobart Freeman. He's says, "Moses, in Deuteronomy 18, declares that God will establish the Hebrew prophetic institution, which as a type that would one day culminate in the ideal Prophet, the antitype Jesus Christ. The prophetic institution was to be a type of 'sign' of the God appointed prophet, Christ, after the same manner that the priesthood, or priests, were a sign of God's anointed Priest, as depicted in Zechariah 3:8." Now it seems to me what Freeman is doing here, if you were to diagram this, is here is Deuteronomy 18 and the prophet who is to be raised up like Moses. He would say that statement is talking about the prophetic movement in a collective sense of the Old Testament period. That's what is specifically in view, the prophetic movement. Here's Christ. Then he would say the prophetic movement is typologically pointing forward to Christ. In other words, all the prophets are participating, prefiguring, the great Prophet who is to come, who is Christ. He would say Deuteronomy 18 is speaking specifically about the prophetic movement but the prophetic movement itself is prefiguring the coming of the great Prophet, the fulfillment that all the prophets looked forward to, and that is, Christ. So, in that sense it would be legitimate to say Deuteronomy is speaking of Christ but in an indirect way. It's specifically speaking about the prophetic movement in the Old Testament.

Now, you see you could diagram that other ways. You could say Deuteronomy 18 is speaking about the prophetic movement and in the same words at the same time it's also speaking about Christ. Now if you do that, then it raises a matter that we are going to come back and discuss later in more detail. You are

saying Deuteronomy 18 has a double reference for the same words, but speaking of two different things. The prophetic movement and at the same time speaking about Christ. Or you could say as some do, Deuteronomy 18 is speaking only about Christ. It's not talking about the prophetic movement in Old Testament. Now I find that difficult, that is, the individual interpretation I mentioned earlier. It says this is an exclusive reference to Christ because of Acts 3's reference and that there is no reference to idea of the prophetic order in the Old Testament period. I find that difficult because of the context both before and after it is in the context that suggests, "Don't look to the methods of divination of the Canaanites and if a false prophet arises don't pay attention to them either."

So, it seems like in context the heart of that passage from Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is talking about the prophetic order of the Old Testament. So then the question is what do you do with this double reference issue? Is it talking about both, or is it a model like Freeman suggests—yes, it is talking about prophetic order, but the prophetic order then typifies or points to Christ.

Another citation on page 6 this time from E. J. Young, *My Servants of Prophets*, where he discusses this passage, "At this point it may be well to pause and summarize the results of the study thus far. Deuteronomy 18, we learned seems to contain a double reference. One, there is to be a body of prophets, an institution, which would declare the words that God commanded. Two, there was to be one great prophet, who alone would be like Moses and might be compared with him, namely the Messiah. The question now arises as to the relationship between these two emphases. Some have held that we are to understand the collection or group of prophets to which Christ would also belong, as the perfect realization of the prophetic body."

In other words, we are to understand something like this collection of prophets, a group of which Christ would belong as the perfect realization of them. But Young says, "This, however, is not a legitimate thought to derive from the words. It is far better, more faithful to the text, to regard the prophet as an ideal

person in whom are comprehended all true prophets.” Now to me that gets very abstract. “The prophetic order is an ideal unity, which is to find its focal point in the historic Christ. For the Spirit of Christ was in all the true prophets. When finally Christ appeared upon earth the promise was fulfilled on its highest and fullest sense. It is, therefore, a Messianic promise.” Now, I don’t know how you diagram that but if it is an ideal person and Christ is the focal point maybe you do something like that. It seems to me what Young is trying to do is to side step this issue of double reference. He does it by means of this ideal person that comprehends all the prophets with its focal point being Christ to avoid a double reference interpretation by the means of this construct of an ideal person. That is perhaps one way to do it. To me it’s pretty abstract. But do you see what the issue is? Is this passage speaking about the prophetic movement, or is it speaking about Christ, or about both? Seems to me both are in view.

#### d) Solution

Another question is: “How do you know what is going on here? Is it an ideal person?” I’m inclined to think this is the easiest solution with the least problems. Freeman suggests they are talking about the prophetic order; the prophetic order itself has typological significance because the prophetic order points forward to Christ the Lord who is to come. Therefore it is legitimate for Deuteronomy 18 to be connected to the coming of Christ but in an indirect way. This avoids double reference and to me there are other places in the Old Testament you see similar things going on.

### 3. Where does Prophetism come from?

But, all this aside, not to say it’s unimportant, you get back to our question: Where does prophetism come from? According to the biblical text, what this passage tells us is over all, against soothsayers, diviners, spiritists, and mediums, which God says are an abomination and you are not to do those things, God has a will to give to his people prophets like Moses and the people are responsible to

listen to those prophets. You notice I didn't read that verse 19, which says, "If anyone does not listen to my words the prophets speaks in my name, I myself will call them into account." So there is some accountability here. "I will raise up a prophet and put my words in his mouth and you are to listen to him and obey what he says and if you do not you will be held accountable." That is what God is saying. So this is the explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel. Its origin lies in God. It was God's gift through his people. God said, "This is the way I will communicate with you, I will communicate with you through individuals. I will raise up someone with the same function Moses has and you are to listen to them and be held accountable to what they say."

#### 4. 2 Peter 1:21 No origin in men

2 Peter 1:21 says, "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of men." You ask where prophecy comes from? It does not come from the will of men. "But men spoke from God, as they were carried along with the Holy Spirit." The Bible is consistent, that's the New Testament, but that is saying the same thing that was said back in Deuteronomy. Where did the word prophecy come from? It is a gift from God; he is putting his words in the mouths of certain individuals that he has raised up to be the conveyers of his word to his people.

### IV. The Ways and Means of the Revelations to the Prophets

#### Preliminary Comments

Let's go onto 4., "The ways and means of the revelations to the prophets." There are three sub-headings here. We'll get back to this thing of ecstasy and the Holy Spirit. But a. is, "The prophetic seeing and hearing of the word of God." Before I go to A., let me make some preliminary comments. When you talk about the ways and means of the revelations of the prophets, the prophets make it clear at the outset that what prophets say does not originate from themselves, but they speak God's word. They are not giving their own thoughts or ideas; the message

they give is a very word of God. I don't think exegetically there is any reason to deny that. It is so clear. The Bible says it so many times in different ways and places. If you are going to deny that God has spoken through the prophets of the Old Testament period, if you are going to deny that, that denial will not come out of the texts themselves, it is going to have to come from a presupposition brought into the text from somewhere else. The presumption is revelation that comes *ab extra*, from without, to a person from God, is something that cannot happen. Then you look for other ways to explain what is going on in the text. There is a ton of literature making this assumption. Usually if you have that presupposition and do not believe God works in that way, usually then prophetism is explained along psychological lines. In other words, what's going on here is not something that comes from outside to the individual who is a prophet, but it is something that rises from within of the interests of *ab intra* not *ab extra*, that comes from within, and comes out of the prophets, and in that you look for the psychological explanations for prophecy. But if you do that, you have to ignore the prophetic witness itself because that is not what the Bible is saying. It is not something that comes from within, it is something that comes from without.

The prophets were both receivers and transmitters of God's word. They received this message from God and then they transmitted it on to the people to whom they spoke. So at that point, we can ask, "What does the Bible say about the manner or means by which the prophets received their message?" They received this message from without. In what way did they receive it?

#### A. Prophetic Seeing and Hearing the Word of God

That brings us to A., "Prophetic seeing and hearing the word of God." Already we've looked at some illustrations; the prophets repeatedly say God spoke to them. I can give you one example, Isaiah 7:3, and this is typical of hundreds of similar expressions, "Then the Lord said to Isaiah, 'Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the



road to the Washerman's Field. Say to him,” and the message follows. “The Lord said to Isaiah.” The prophets would repeatedly say statements like that. The speaking by God to the prophets is heard by the prophets with their own ears. Look at Isaiah 22:14, “The LORD Almighty has revealed this in my hearing.” If you are looking at the Hebrew it’s “in my ears, The Lord Almighty has revealed this in my ears.” Look at Isaiah 5:9, “The Lord Almighty has declared in my ears,” NIV says “in my hearing.” 1 Samuel 9:15, “Now the day that Saul came the LORD had revealed this to Samuel,” if you look in the Hebrew the literal translation is “the Lord has uncovered the ears,” which is kind of a strange expression. But, the Lord spoke and Samuel heard. Now there are other references of the sort.

The question then is what do we understand with statements like this? If you had been standing next to Isaiah, when the Lord spoke to Isaiah, would you have heard something? In other words, did the prophet hear something that was otherwise audible, did he hear something with his ear by means of sound waves and the mechanism of the ear that interprets the sound waves as specific types of sounds? I think it’s possible, but not necessary. I don’t think we can say with certainty exactly how that worked. Many think God worked more directly without an audible voice through the hearing mechanism, but just brought this message or word into the direct consciousness of the prophet. So to the prophet it was every bit as clear and distinct as sound to him, as if he heard it with his external ears. In other words, he said, “The LORD spoke in my ear, I heard this, this is what the Lord said to me.” But I think the Lord could speak directly to the consciousness of the prophet, but the effect to the prophet was exactly as if he were spoken to by an external voice. So I do not think we can say with certainty, that it came through the ears. But was it a sound that was audible or was it a sound that the prophet alone heard as identical to the sound that was otherwise audible? I don’t think we can be sure about that. But the prophet heard a message.

But if you look at the statement of the way the prophets received their

message, they say they not only heard the word of God, they also saw it. So God revealed himself not only by the ear but also by the eye. 1 Samuel 3 is an interesting chapter, where the Lord called Samuel to be a prophet. Remember, he was working with the high priest Eli at the tabernacle. The Lord called to Samuel, and Samuel thought it was Eli calling him. In verse 4, “Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, ‘Here am I.’ And he ran to Eli and said, ‘Here I am, you called me.’” He heard something clearly. Eli did not call and he said, “Go back and lay down.” Then the Lord calls Samuel again. Samuel gets up and goes to Eli and says, “Here I am, you called me?” Eli says, “I did not call you, go back and lie down.” “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord.” Now that’s a kind of strange statement. Some people make something of that, saying the Lord was calling Samuel before he even knew him. I do not think that is the way you understand verse 7. “Samuel did not yet know the Lord,” I think is explained in the last phrase in that verse, “The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” In other words, Samuel did not know the words of the Lord in the sense of receiving messages from the Lord. This had not been revealed to him. This was something new, that he was going to be a recipient of divine revelation. “The Lord called Samuel a third time. Samuel went up to Eli and said, ‘Here I am, you called me?’ Then Eli realized the Lord was calling the boy. So he told Samuel to lie down and to say ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’ So Samuel went to lay down in his place.” Now it is at this point in this account, you get another idea introduced. Up to this point it is as if it was this sound, someone is calling “Samuel, Samuel.” Samuel hears it, but does Eli hear it? It is not all together clear, but Eli declared that when God is speaking to you say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” You notice verse 10, “the Lord came and stood there,” here it introduces something else, “Calling as if the other times,” and this really turns into a visionary thing. Samuel not only hears the Lord calling him, he sees something. You go down to verse 15, “Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors to the house of the Lord.” In the meantime, the Lord had spoken and given

this message of judgment on Eli, and you read in verse 15, “He was afraid to tell Eli the vision.” So you see there was both seeing and hearing there. The Lord was standing and the Lord was calling and the whole thing was referred to in verse 15 as “a vision.”

If you look at other prophetic books, I think I have mentioned this earlier, Amos 1:1, Micah 1:1, you get that kind of strange introductory statement. In Amos 1:1, “The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel,” not what he heard, what he saw—visionary. This is the same as Micah 1:1, “The vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.” Of course, within the books many of these prophets have specific descriptions of the visions they received. Think of Ezekiel’s visions of the temple, all the measurements, the design of the river flowing from the altar. So the prophets not only heard the word of God, they also saw it. Would you have seen it if you had been standing next to Isaiah when he saw that vision of the Lord high and lifted up in Isaiah 6, and heard the Lord speaking to him, seen the throne by the altar by the seraphim? I think if I stood next to Isaiah I don’t think I would of heard or seen anything. But, Isaiah is hearing and seeing both very clearly. So, as far as the ways and means of God’s revelations to the prophets, there is this prophetic seeing and hearing of the word of God.

## B. The Function of the Holy Spirit in the Revelation of God to the Prophets

B. is, “The function of the Holy Spirit in the revelation of God to the prophets.” There are a number of biblical passages that connect the Holy Spirit with prophesying. Now some of these passages raise questions of interpretations, but let’s look through some of them.

### 1. Numbers 11:25-29 Eldad and Medad

We’ll start with Numbers 11:25-29, where you read, “Then the Lord came down from the cloud and spoke with him,” that is Moses, “and he took the spirit

that was on him and put it on the 70 elders. When the spirit rested on them they prophesied—but they did not do so again. However, two men whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out from the tent. Yet the spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp.” So here, the Spirit comes on these elders, and they prophesy. “A young man ran and told Moses, ‘Eldad and Medad, are prophesying in the camp.’ Joshua son of Nun, who has been Moses’ aide since youth spoke up and said “Moses, my lord stop them. But Moses replied, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish all the Lord’s people were prophets and the Lord would put his Spirit on them.’” Clearly there seems to be a connection between being a prophet and the Holy Spirit coming on them. Now as I said there are some interpretive issues. What does it mean here, the prophets are an authoritative spokesman for God in some sense or is it something else? I think it is something else. But there is still a connection between the Holy Spirit coming on a person and prophesying whatever prophesying is here.

#### b) 1 Samuel 10:6-10 Saul among the Prophets

Then the text we have looked at before, 1 Samuel 10:6-10 says, “The Spirit of the Lord will come on you, [Saul], in power, and you will prophesy with them, and you will be changed into a different person.” If you read further in verse 10 that happens. “When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him, [Saul,] in power, and he joined in their prophesying.” Again, connection between the coming of the Holy Spirit and prophesying, whatever that prophesying is. The same thing happens in 1 Samuel 19, at Naioth in Ramah. In 1 Samuel 19:20 Saul sent men to capture David, “But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied.” Then in verse 23 the same thing happens to Saul, the Spirit of God came upon him, and he went along prophesying.

c) 2 Samuel 23

In 2 Samuel 23, in a passage called “The Last Words of David,” you have a reference to the Holy Spirit. In 2 Samuel 23:2, David says, “the Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his words were on my tongue.” When it says “his words were on my tongue” that is exactly what a prophet is, to go back to Deuteronomy 18, “I will put my words in your mouth,” and that here is connected with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit spoke through him, his words were on his tongue.

d) Micah 3:8

Look at Micah 3:8, “But as for me [Micah says,] I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.” So he’s filled with the Spirit of the LORD in order to declare the message that God has given to him.

e) 2 Chronicles 15:1

In 2 Chronicles 15:1, (now there are a number of these passages in the Chronicles), “The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him.’” And he gives a message, but the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he gives the message. 2 Chronicles 20:14, “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, and he said, ‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all those who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says.’” So the spirit comes on him and speaks, and this is what the Lord says. 2 Chronicles 24:20, “Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, ‘This is what God says.’” Ezekiel 11:5, “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon me, and he told me to say. This is what the Lord says.” So if you look at texts of this sort, it seems quite clear there is a connection between prophesying and the

Spirit of God. It's by God's Spirit one prophesies.

## 2. The Holy Spirit ecstasy in the Prophet

Now 2. is, "The Holy Spirit ecstasy in the prophet." You get back into this question of ecstatic prophecy. There are six sub-points here, and we will be very brief on each one.

### a) Mowinckel Says Spirit and Ecstasy Belong Together

But a. is: "Mowinckel says spirit and ecstasy belong together." Sigmund Mowinckel was a Norwegian Old Testament scholar. In his opinion the activity of the Holy Spirit always had the result that the person on whom the Holy Spirit had overcome was brought into a condition of ecstasy. So, Mowinckel said, spirit and ecstasy belong together. That kind of ecstatic activity produced by the Holy Spirit coming on a person is found in the early days of Israel, and also in the prophets of the post-exilic time, late in Israel's history. But it is not found in connection with the great writing prophets of pre-exilic Israel. So you have this in the time of Samuel, you have this in Ezekiel, but not in the time of Obadiah, Joel, Hosea, and Jeremiah. He argues that those great writing prophets of pre-exilic Israel considered possession of the Spirit something undesirable. What those great writing prophets of pre-exilic times expressed is possession of the word, in contrast with possession of the Spirit. The word and Spirit are set over against each other. If you look at the bibliography, you can see where he discusses all this. But he argues Spirit and ecstasy are inseparable. When the Spirit comes on a person it puts them in that ecstatic state, you find that in early Israel and late Israel, but not in the great writing prophets who emphasized more of the word of God.

### b) Sometimes the Holy Spirit Produces that Abnormal Behavior

b. "Sometimes the Holy Spirit produces that abnormal behavior described as prophecy." I think when we look at some statements in the biblical text, it is

difficult to deny that sometimes when the Holy Spirit comes on a person, the result is that person exhibits some sort of abnormal behavior that is described at prophesying. We have looked at examples of that—look what happened to Saul. The Spirit came on him and he prophesied. He lay down and strip his clothes off—that is not normal behavior. It was produced by the Holy Spirit coming on him, preventing him from doing what he wanted to do, which was to capture David. But I wanted to add, having said that, is that examples of this in the Old Testament are very few. They are isolated incidents. In no case do you find references of that sort of connection with a writer of a prophetic book. It seems to me these kind of references, of the Spirit coming on people producing abnormal behavior, are the exception rather than the rule.

Some of those passages we just looked at speak about the Holy Spirit coming on certain people and they prophesied. Now the question is, what are they doing? If you go back to Numbers 11 where the Spirit comes on the leaders and Eldad and Medad and they prophesized, what were they doing? I do not think they were acting as an authorized spokesman for God giving some type of message from God. It seems to me they are displaying some sort of abnormal behavior. Probably we should think of some sort of enthusiastic praising of God. Moses says he wishes they should all prophesy. It seems quite clear in the 1 Samuel 10 passage, where this company of prophets with their musical instruments was coming down from the high place and Saul encountered them and the Spirit overcame him and he prophesied, that what they were doing involved some sort of enthusiastic praising of God. There is an interesting text in 1 Chronicles 25:1, “David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men, who performed this service.” You have a list people, and at the end of verse 3, after all the people are named it says, “Who prophesied using the harp in thanking and praising the Lord.” Again you hear this kind of musical context, and a context where it seems like there has

been some kind of enthusiastic praising of God, and it's described as prophesying.

If you go back to Exodus 15, after the deliverance of the Red Sea, you have that reference to Miriam. Exodus 15:20, "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them, 'Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider, he has hurled into the sea.'" Again you are in a musical context, and Miriam is called the prophetess. So I think we can say sometimes the Holy Spirit produces abnormal behavior as prophesying. In most instances it seems to be some sort of enthusiastic praising of God. In the case of Saul, 1 Samuel 19, he was prevented from doing what he wanted to do and that was to capture David. So was that abnormal behavior? But never is this sort of reference applied to the writer of the prophetic book or any of the great prophets and these kind of references are scattered and seem to be the exception not the rule.

### c) We Must Not Exaggerate This Into More Than What The Bible Says

So I think that leads to c., "We must not exaggerate this into more than what the Bible says." When you know the literature of mainstream biblical studies, you will find article after article by biblical scholars that use these rather obscure passages to define the origin and essence of prophetism in Israel. These are the texts that come to the focus for the whole movement and then they are understood as describing these bands of ecstatic individuals that roamed about the country in a sort of semi-insane manner. These are linked with the prophets of Baal, 1 Kings 18, that we looked at, linked with that experience of Wenamon and his journey where that youth was seized and gave a message to the King of Byblos. It's linked with *mahu* of the Mari texts, with the ecstatic of the Mari text, and all together saying that the rise of prophetism in Israel comes out of this kind of ecstatic phenomenon as known in the ancient Near East. It seems to me to make conclusions of that sort is to go beyond the biblical sense. In my view when you



use that kind of methodology you impose categories that are drawn from outside scriptures put on Scripture and not letting the Scripture speak for itself about the argument. So, we should not exaggerate this into more than the words the Bible says.

d. To Admit Abnormal Behavior Does not Mean Derivation from Heathen Practices

d. “To admit abnormal behavior does not mean derivation from heathen practices.” I think it is implied that in the ancient Near East in general there were some sort of forms of ecstatic prophetism, but that does not necessary lead to the conclusion that prophetism in Israel was derived from that kind of phenomenon found in these other nations. So to admit abnormal behavior does not mean derivation of prophetism from heathen sources.

e) The Bible Does Not Indicate the Coming of the Spirit on the Person Always Brings about Abnormal Behavior

e. “The Bible does not indicate the coming of the Spirit on the person always brings about abnormal behavior.” In fact, those examples are seen as rather an exception rather than the rule. There are many other places where you have references of the Spirit of God equipping a person with a certain message which does not involve abnormal behavior. So these are exceptional cases. But I think it is clear the Holy Spirit does play an important role in prophesying. The two should be connected.

f) Mowinckel’s Contention is Not Valid

f. “Mowinckel’s contention is not valid.” His idea that the work of the Holy Spirit was present in early Israel and post-exilic times but not with the great prophets, I think is not well stated. I do not think it’s valid to say the great prophets wanted to cast aside the work of the Holy Spirit and emphasize the word

more than his Spirit. It's true that there is little reference in the great writing prophets to the work of the Holy Spirit, but I do not think that means they were not aware of the work of the Holy Spirit and instead wanted to stress word and replace the Spirit. Certainly the biblical view is that the prophets proclaim the word by means of empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Just because they don't explain that or mention that doesn't mean that's not the case. I think the difference is that the great writing prophets stressed the word that they brought rather than the means by which the word came to them.

But some of the prophets of the pre-exilic period do speak of the Spirit. We looked at Micah 3:8, which is the clearest example, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin." What does Mowinckel do with that? He says it's a later addition to the text. So you amend the text to force the text to fit a pre-conceived theory that the Spirit did not function in the time of the great writing prophets? That's an unfounded idea.

### C. In What Sense May We Speak of Ecstasy among Israelite Prophets?

Let's go on to C., "In what sense may we speak of ecstasy among Israelite prophets?"

#### 1. There Has Always Been Differences of Opinions Here

1. "There has always been differences of opinions here." If you go as far back as Philo of Alexandria—who was a Jewish scholar who died in 42 A.D.—he taught, "When a divine spirit came on a person, the mind was driven from its home because mortal and immortal may not share the same home." So when the Holy Spirit comes on a person, "The mind is driven from its home." According to Philo this is what regularly happened with the prophets. And from that time on there have been many scholars who argue for the ecstatic character of the prophets of the Old Testament period so that ecstasy belonged to the essence of prophetism. But there have been other scholars who have said the scriptural data does not lead

to that sort of conclusion and there is no necessary connection between ecstasy and prophetism.

## 2. Ecstasy is a Very Broad Concept and Very Different Things Could Be Understood by it.

2. “Ecstasy is a very broad concept and very different things could be understood by it.” A man named J. Linbolm—who wrote a book called *Prophetism in Israel*, which is listed in your bibliography—he made a distinction between two forms of ecstasy. One is what you call “absorption ecstasy,” and the other is “concentration ecstasy.” In absorption ecstasy he says the prophet is fused with God, he is absorbed into the deity. In concentration ecstasy, he says that the prophet so focuses or concentrates on a certain idea or feeling that he loses normal consciousness. The external senses are made inoperative because of that focus or concentration. Linbolm argued that absorption ecstasy is found in eastern religions and the purpose of ecstasy is to lose oneself in the infinite, to be absorbed into the deity, loosed from the earth, in one’s own consciousness to be absorbed in this otherness, the “all” of the universe. Now it seems to me, when you talk about that kind of ecstasy that is quite foreign from the Old Testament. If there is anything emphasized in the Old Testament, it is the distance between God and human beings and that distance is so great that there is no indication that the man can be absorbed into the deity. God establishes relationships with human beings and that is very important. You see in a relationship there is fellowship, there is communion, but there is not fusion. That’s quite a different concept that is nowhere found in the Old Testament. So it seems to me if you talk about absorption ecstasy that is quite foreign to the Old Testament.

Concentration ecstasy, can you find that in a prophet? You might be able to say there are some formal similarities, but in essence what this is, is another one of these psychological explanations for the origin of prophetism, saying it is something that rises from within, based on concentration. It seems like what the

biblical text says the function of a prophet is something that comes from without not from within, it's the Holy Spirit that brings something from without. It is not just something that arises from virtue or concentration or anything else from within.

### 3. Certainly Not Everything Labeled as Ecstatic Behavior on the Part of the Canonical Prophets Can Be So Considered

3. "Certainly not everything labeled as ecstatic behavior on the part of the canonical prophets can be so considered." Those who say that the prophets were ecstasies look for evidence for that in places that I think very often do not support the conclusions drawn. For example, some point to symbolic acts of the prophets as evidence that the prophets went into an ecstatic condition.

#### a) Ezek. 4

One illustration is in Ezekiel 4, you read that Ezekiel lived on bread, baked on human excrement. He lay on one side for a long time to depict the discomfort of the siege; he shaved off his hair and beard to symbolize the fate of Jerusalem. See in verse 4, "Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side." You see in verse 6, "After you finish this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the people of Judah." Verse 12 reads, "Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel." Verse 15, "I will let you bake your bread over cow manure instead of human excrement." This symbolizes that people would eat rationed food and drink rationed water because food and water was so scarce. These were symbolic acts that depict this message. Was Ezekiel in an ecstatic state of mind when he was doing these things? I would think that's not a necessary conclusion at all. He very simply was giving a very visual lesson to the people of the message that he was given. Was it done in normal consciousness? Why not?

## b) Isa. 21:3-4

There are other arguments of strong emotional expressions. For instance, in Isaiah 21:3-4, Isaiah says, “At this my body is racked with pain, pangs seize me, like those of a woman in labor; I am staggered by what I hear, I am bewildered by what I see. My heart falters, fear makes me tremble; the twilight I longed for has become a horror to me.” Obviously, Isaiah is deeply upset and so upset that it affects his body. What is the reason for it? If you look at the context the reason is the vision that God gave him over the judgment of Babylon. This was a terrible judgment that was coming. But I don’t think there is any need to say that verse 3 indicates that he was in an ecstatic condition. You can hear a devastating message that affects you physically. In Jeremiah 23:9, Jeremiah says, “My heart is broken within me; all my bones tremble. I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord and his holy words.” Again he is expressing the impression that God’s revelation has made on him. The revelation there was the proclamation of judgment on the people and on the leaders of the country. But I don’t think that is evidence to say he was in a state of ecstasy.

## c) Amos 3:1

The third thing that is appealed to is the first-person style of prophetic speech. One scholar speaks of what he calls “the divine style.” In other words, when the prophets speak in the name of God, they often speak in the first person as if they were God themselves. Look at Amos 3 just for an example. Amos 3:1 says, “Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family, I brought you out of Egypt.” There is the first-person. He is speaking for God. “You only have I chosen,” the “I” is God, “of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all the sins.” Again, the “I” is God. So using first person in speech is very common. Now some scholars say there is indication the prophets are speaking ecstatically because they identify themselves

with God. I don't think that's a necessary conclusion at all. There are many examples of messengers who give a message in the first person that doesn't mean they are in an ecstatic condition. It simply means they are representing the authority for whom they are speaking.

d) 2 Kgs. 18:28-31

If you go to 2 Kings 18:28-31, this is the time Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah and you read in verse 28, "Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, 'Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! This is what the king says: [Sennacherib,] Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you from my hand. Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, 'The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the King of Assyria says: Make peace with me.'" Notice it's the messenger speaking here not Sennacherib. The messenger of Sennacherib uses the first person, "make peace with me and come out to me. Then everyone will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink from his own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own." This is the same style the prophets are using when they speak for the Lord. So a first person style of a prophetic speech is simply a style in which the messenger makes clear that it is not his own words but the person who sent him. That does not mean he is in an ecstatic state in order to do that.

I see my time is up, I'm going to give one more illustration of this kind next time for point 3., "Certainly not everything labeled as ecstatic behavior on part of canonical prophets can be considered such."

Transcribed by Eric Wolak  
Initial editing by Ted Hildebrandt  
Major editing by Katherine Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy: Foundations of Prophecy, Lecture 7**

Last week we were under the Roman numeral IV., “The ways and means of God’s revelation to the prophets,” at point C., “In what sense may we speak of ecstasy among Israel’s prophets?” In a lot of the main stream biblical studies there’s a great deal made of this ecstatic phenomena that existed in the ancient world in nations around Israel. The theory has been given that ecstatic phenomena were the source of prophetism in Israel, and that Israel was exposed to that and that you can find similar phenomena among Israel’s prophets. In C. we were down to point 3., “Certainly not everything labeled as ecstatic behavior on the part of canonical prophets can be considered such.” Those that are looking for evidence of ecstatic phenomena among Israel’s prophets have pointed to various things in the prophetic books that were not necessarily in the prophetic books, but in historical books where prophetic phenomena occurred or were mentioned. I mentioned last time that you have to be careful of exaggeration in speaking of ecstasy among Israel’s prophets, and often the evidence that is utilized is not really convincing—such things as symbolic acts, strong emotional expressions, as we saw in Isaiah 21:3 and Jeremiah 23:9. Then the ‘I,’ or first-person style of speech where the prophets speak as if they were God themselves, speaking in the first person. I mentioned there it’s simply a style by which it’s made clear that the messenger is not really giving his own word but the word of someone who has sent him. We looked at 2 Kings 18:29 where a messenger brings the word of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, to Hezekiah—and he speaks in the first person for Sennacherib. So, again, that messenger certainly wasn’t an ecstatic, and the first person speech doesn’t give any basis for concluding that a prophet who uses it must have been in an ecstatic state.

The last point which I didn’t get to under that heading in number 3. is, “The labeling of prophets as being mad.” 2 Kings 9:11 is sometimes referred to in that connection. There you have a member of the companies of prophets, “When Jehu

went out to his fellow officers, one of them asked him, ‘Is everything all right? Why did this madman come to you?’” Now that was the messenger that Elisha had sent to anoint Jehu as king, and one of Jehu’s officers then speaks of this individual and labels him a “madman.” Some see in that evidence that these prophets were looked upon as madmen and the reason for that is that they were characterized by ecstatic behavior. The ecstatic part of that is certainly not clear there. It’s a remark made by someone making fun of this individual who came to Jehu.

If you look at Jeremiah 29:26 you have a similar reference. In Jeremiah 29:25 you have the words of a false prophet in Babylon. Jeremiah writes, “Tell Shemaiah, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You’ve sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the other priests. You said to Zephaniah, ‘The Lord has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the Lord; you should put any madman who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons. So why have you not reprimanded Jeremiah from Anathoth, who poses as a prophet among you.’” Now the “madman” there is a reference to Jeremiah as a madman, but he’s characterized as a madman by a false prophet. I don’t think that says anything about being ecstatic. It’s just someone who wants to discredit Jeremiah because of his message. So he’s called a madman.

It’s interesting if you go to the New Testament, in John 10:20, “At these words [of Jesus] the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, ‘He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to Him?’” Why was Jesus called a madman? Not because he was an ecstatic, it’s because of his message. You get the same in Jeremiah with this false prophet. It has nothing to do with ecstasy, but it has everything to do with the message. There’s another text in the New Testament in Acts 26:24 where Paul is before Agrippa and Festus and testifying to his faith. You read, “At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. ‘Your great learning is driving you insane. But to this



Paul replied, ‘I’m not insane Festus. What I’m saying is true and reasonable.’” What had he said? Well if you go back to verse 22, “I have had God’s help through this very day and so I stand here and testify. I am not saying anything beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen, that the Christ would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead would proclaim life for his own people and to the Gentiles.” Festus says, “You’re out of your mind.” That has nothing to do with being in an ecstatic condition. So, labeling the prophets as being “madmen” has been used by some as an argument for considering them to be ecstatic, but is not a strong argument.

Let’s go on to 4. under C., which is, “The form of ecstatic behavior most frequently displayed among Israel’s prophets is that of the visionary experience, not wild abnormal behavior.” If you are going say there is anything in the biblical text that points in the direction of ecstatic phenomena among Israel’s prophets, what you are going to find is the visionary situation, not wild, abnormal, or erratic behavior. The vision was a means of divine revelation that came to the prophets rather frequently. It seems to play a greater role with some prophets than with others. You find it quite often with Ezekiel for example. The whole second part of his book is this vision of a future temple and many things connected with that. You find it very little in Jeremiah. You find in Isaiah a scattering of visionary situations. So it differs from prophet to prophet. But the visionary means of communicating God’s word through the prophet to his people is something that is very common. Now, that whole visionary thing receives a fair amount of attention if you look at mainstream literature. Some say it is simply a literary device and there is no real historical reality to it; this is just the way the writer has characterized the perception of divine revelation. Others go in a psychological direction and say these are really hallucinations that come out of the psyche of the prophets themselves. If you go either of those directions then you are denying divine revelation by visionary means. It seems what the biblical text is telling us is that God did use the vision in order to communicate his message to the prophets.

Well, what's a vision? It's a hard thing to describe, I don't know if any of you have had a vision. I never have. Some say a vision is to someone in an awakened condition, what a dream is when we are sleeping. We're familiar with dreaming. Dreams can be very real—sometimes too real. But a vision is someone in an awakened condition where he's transposed into another reality. He sees things, he hears things. It's exactly as if he was there. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah sees that vision of God high and lifted up in the temple with the seraphim, and the seraphim takes the bowl from the altar. Isaiah hasn't lost consciousness because there is communication back and forth. He has not lost normal consciousness but sees another reality. Augustine said we do not have a loss of consciousness, but a making of the consciousness loose from the bodily senses, so that what "God wanted shown could be shown. The prophets feel themselves in another spiritual world, in which they hear voices and see images." That seems to be a pretty good description of what we find from that day. If you had been standing next to one of these prophets you wouldn't have seen or heard a thing—at least that's the way I would perceive it. But *they* did and God communicated to them in that way.

Now to get back to that thing of ecstasy with Israel's prophets, I think it is permissible to term this visionary form of divine revelation as "ecstasy." There is some biblical basis for that. For instance, Acts 10:10, where you have this description of Peter seeing this vision of a sheet descending down from heaven on which are clean and unclean animals. You read, "He became hungry and wanted something to eat and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance." If you look at the Greek text there, "trance" is the English translation of the word *ecstasis* in the Greek. So he was in *ecstasis*. "He saw heaven open, something like a large sheet was being let down to earth, lowered by its four corners to the ground." That visionary experience of Peter is described by the word *ecstasis*.

In Acts 22:17, we have the same thing with Paul where he sees a vision. And we read, "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance." That's *ecstasis* again. "And I saw," notice the language there it's

just like the prophet, “I saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick,’ he said to me, ‘leave Jerusalem immediately because they will not accept your testimony about me.’” That seems very similar to what we find in the Old Testament visionary experience. So it seems to me that we may call this visionary means of reception of divine revelation as “visionary ecstasy.” If there’s anything in the Old Testament that speaks through ecstatic phenomena among the Jewish prophets it seems to me it’s like a visionary experience, not wild, or erratic behavior.

Let’s go on to Roman numeral V. then, which is, “The preaching of the prophets.” I just want to make some pretty general remarks about this. We’ll look at some formal characteristics and then some characteristics of the content but all of it is pretty general. Under A., “General remarks,” 1., “The prophets were first and foremost proclaimers of God’s Word.” The prophets received divine revelation, yes, but they did not receive divine revelation to keep it to themselves. They received it in order to proclaim it to other people. They did that primarily by preaching. So the prophets to a large extent were preachers. Now some of the material may have been written down and represented in written form but for the most part you’ll find the prophets going out in public forums and preaching and giving the message of God to their contemporaries, whether that’s to a king or to the people at large. The prophetic books to a large extent are a written record of their oral proclamation. We’re going to come back to that under Roman numeral VIII., “The composition of prophetic books—were the prophetic writers?” We’ll talk about that question a bit further. But the canonical books are to a large degree a written record of their oral proclamation. The idea that they delivered their messages in some sort of an ecstatic condition is lacking evidence. They gave their message in understandable language and from the indication of the text they did say it in a very sober and normal manner of speaking or preaching. The fact that they were regarded as strange by others, sometimes because of their symbolic acts, sometimes because of their emotional expressions or whatever, isn’t sufficient evidence for saying they were ecstasies. But they were proclaimers of

God's Word first and foremost.

2. "The message of the prophets was a faithful proclamation of God's revelation." But, and here is a qualification, not to the exclusion of a personal element in the form of its presentation. So what is the relationship between the revelation and the proclamation? When you ask that question, it's very important not to place a tension or division between the revelation and the proclamation. In other words, the preaching of the prophets was a faithful representation of what God revealed to them.

However, and this is where that qualification on point 2 of your handout arises, the personal element of the individual prophet is employed in the representation of the message. In other words, if you look at the messages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel and compare the form of the proclamation you will find that there are differences in language, style, choice of words, personality traits, personal background, agricultural versus the priesthood. It's clear from the message, say of Jeremiah, that he was a very different person than Amos was. Jeremiah is obviously a very sensitive man, and that comes through in the messages that he gives. In Isaiah you see little or nothing of Isaiah's inner personality. So you see differences in the language and style of the messages of the various prophets that are related to the personalities of the prophets.

Now when you see that, there is, I think a mystery here and that is the mystery of how God takes up and employs the personal characteristics, traits, background and the different ways of affecting an individual, and uses that in the proclamation of his word. You get this intertwining of the divine and the human in the proclamation of God's word. So it's man's word but at the same time it is God's word. Wherever you get that kind of intersecting of the divine and human you come to a mystery. We can't fully explain how that functions or how it works. You have that in the inspiration of Scripture which is really the same thing as the inspiration of the prophets because the Scripture is God's word, the writer of Scripture is proclaiming God's word, yet his own personality comes through in the

writing. I think Vos discusses this point well. Page seven of your citations from an essay he wrote called, “The Idea of Biblical Theology and Sciences as a Theological Discipline.” Notice what he says, page seven. He says “For, God having chosen to reveal the truth through human instruments, it follows that these instruments must be both numerous and of varied adaptations to the common end. Individual coloring, therefore, and a peculiar manner of representation are not only not detrimental to a full statement of the truth, but directly subservient to it. God’s method of revelation includes the very shaping and chiseling of individualities for his own objective ends. To put it concretely: we must not conceive of it as if God found Paul, ‘ready-made,’ as it were, and using Paul as an organ of revelation, had to put up with the fact that the dialectic mind of Paul reflected the truth in a dialectic, dogmatic form to the detriment of the truth. The facts are these: the truth, having inherently, besides other aspects, a dialectic and dogmatic side, and God intending to give this side full expression, chose Paul from the womb, molded his character, and gave him such a training that the truth revealed through him necessarily bore the dogmatic and dialectic impress of his mind.” And then there is the next section, “The divine objectivity and the human individuality here do not collide nor exclude each other, because the man Paul, with his whole character, his gifts, and his training, is subsumed under the divine plan.” In other words, God prepared in advance precisely the kind of person and mind that he wanted in order to convey some particular message through him. And in the case of Paul, his dialectical and logical mind may produce logical sentences in some of his writings. Well, it is God’s purpose to have his word put in that kind of form that he had prepared the individual to do. “The human is but the glass through which the divine light is reflected, and all the sides and angles into which this glass has been cut serve no other purpose than to distribute to us the truth in all the riches of its prismatic colors.” Now that’s often called “the organic view of inspiration,” where this human person is taken up into this process and utilized or employed by God in the formulation of the message.

Some of you are probably familiar with the theologian from the Netherlands, G. C. Berkouwer. He wrote the theories and volumes called, *Studies of Dogmatics*, which he was writing at the time I studied in the Netherlands in the 1960s. He's a very good scholar. He says some interesting things about this question and how his view of Scripture changed over time. Some have spoken of an early Berkouwer and a later Berkouwer but the early Berkouwer spoke of this question in this way. He said, "Where do you put the mystery?" And if you ask the early Berkouwer the question, "How can a word be both God's word and man's word?" Berkouwer says that the mystery is in the nature of the working between God's spirit and the human consciousness, the intersection of the divine and human so that the human personality is taken up into the proclamation of God's word. There is the mystery. How does that actually work? I think that's where the mystery should be placed and leave it there. If you look at all the specifics of Scripture, "I will put my words in your mouth," make it seem that the proclamation is in the human personality. The result is Scripture remains the inerrant word of God in spite of its human mediation. Because it is the word of God and it remains the inerrant word of God.

The later Berkouwer answers that question again—"How can the human word be at the same time the word of God?"—but places the mystery in a different point. In the later Berkouwer, the question is, how can the human word—which, because it is human is of necessity errant—how can a human word and therefore an errant word, be at the same time the word of God? In the later Berkouwer, the mystery is, how is it possible for a fallible human word to be at the same time God's word, and to convey divine truth. Now it may sound like I'm quibbling. But the later Berkouwer would say, Scripture is not inerrant but it is God's word. To be that raises a host of problems. We start trying to sort out which word is better by saying which one is reliable and which one isn't. So it's an important question but it seems quite clear when you look at the prophetic writings there are personalities that are different. The way in which the message is formulated

reflects that, but it remains God's word.

Let's go to B., "Some formal characteristics of the prophetic proclamation." And 1. is, "The messages are direct and living—not abstract and dry." When you read through the prophetic books, you find that prophets came and they spoke in a vivid, forceful and powerful way to their audiences. They are not abstract, dry, theoretical, formal lectures. Let me give you just a couple illustrations: Jeremiah 7 is a good chapter to illustrate this. This is often called *Jeremiah's Temple Sermon*. You look at the context from Jeremiah 7 in the first verse, "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message.'" The Lord tells Jeremiah to go out and look for him at the gate of the temple and give this message, "'Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!' If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers forever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, 'We are safe—safe to do all these detestable things?' Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!' declares the Lord. Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel." This is what happened to the town of Samuel and they destroyed his tabernacle. "While you were doing all these things, declares the Lord, I spoke to you again and again but you did not listen; I called

you, but you did not answer. Therefore what I did to Shiloh, I will now do to the house that bears my name, the temple you trusted, the place I gave to you and your ancestors, I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did to all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.” So here he is standing at the gates of the temple saying, “This temple’s going to be destroyed.” The temple is what Israelites gloried in. This was God’s dwelling in their midst. They went through all these rituals, but their lives were telling a different story. They were, as it says, burning incense to Baal, following other gods. Now that’s a powerful message, and it’s characteristic of the prophets to give messages in a forceful way like that—not abstract and dry lectures.

We could look at a number of other examples, but I’m not going to take time to do that. This is the language of Joel 2 where there is a description of a locust plague. It is really descriptive and a very beautiful passage. But it’s a passage of coming judgment. The locusts were symbols of the coming judgment of the world. Look at Nahum with the description of judgment coming on Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. So the messages are direct and not abstract and dry.

2. is, “The prophets often utilized a play on words to get a point across.” There’s a lot more of this in the prophetic books than you probably would be aware of if you only looked at the English texts because plays on words are one of the most difficult things you can deal with if you’re trying to translate from one language to another. And to carry over the play on words into the receptor language is very often it is impossible.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations. This is Isaiah 5:7, which if you look at the Hebrew there, you have, “And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed.” You see the play on words with *mishpat* and *mispok*, are almost identical in sound, but how do you carry that across into a translation? But then the second phrase there, he looked for righteousness, *lesedeqah*, but behold a cry a cry of distress, *sadaq*. You get two of them in that verse. A play on words like that is a very effective manner of calling attention to the point that is being made. So it



heightens the force and effectiveness of the statement, but it is difficult to capture that in translation.

Look at Isaiah 7:9 in the NIV, “If you do not stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all.” There they have captured something of the play on words that we heard there. ‘*amen*’ means “confirm” or “support” as far as its basic meaning. In the Hiphil stem it means “trust” or “belief.” In the Niphal stem it means “confirm” or “establish.” So you get a difference between the Hiphil and the Niphal and you get the idea of believing established. But you don’t get the similarity in sound that you do when you read it in Hebrew.

I’ll give you another example. This is a textual problem that is a combination of play on words along with a textual issue. If you look at Jeremiah 23:33—following really the Septuagint and Vulgate, which I think are preferable here—from the Masoretic Text. I’ll come back to the Septuagint text in a minute. But the translation if you follow the Masoretic Text would be, “When one of these people or a prophet or a priest asks you, ‘What is the Lord’s burden?’ Then you shall say to them, ‘You are the burden.’ ‘And I will cast you off,’ says the ruler.” Now there is a play on words there and the play on words is with the word *massa* you see the last word on the Hebrew line. If you look there at the beginning there is the word *massa*. What is the Lord’s burden? *Massa* is a word that has a double meaning. It can mean “burden” or it can mean “oracle.” So, when one of the people, prophets or priests says to you, what is the Lord’s burden? What is the Lord’s oracle or message? Then you shall say unto them, you are the Lord’s burden.” Not in the sense of a message but in the sense of a weight on his back. You see, there is a play on that double meaning of the word *massa*. I think that is the way the text is to be read. That’s the Hebrew text presupposed by the Septuagint. What is the Lord’s burden? You are the burden. If you looked at the NIV and the King James, “What is the burden of the Lord? Thou shalt say unto them, what burden?” That’s the way the Masoretic Text reads. “What is the Lord’s burden? We shall say unto them. What burden?” Now you see what has

happened here? The question is where do you divide between the words? Do you divide after the *taw* and put the *mem* with the *he* interrogative or do you divide it after the *he*? Seems to me the Septuagint has kept the play on words much better. To say that “what burden” doesn't fit nearly as well as “you are the burden.”

Let me give you one other example of this play-on-words. Jeremiah 1:11 says, “The word of the Lord came to me: ‘What do you see Jeremiah?’ ‘I see the branch of an almond tree,’ I replied.” The Almond tree is *shaqed*. “I see the branch of the **almond tree**. The Lord said to me, ‘You have seen correctly for I am **watching** to see that my word is fulfilled.’” Watching is *shoqed*.

So we have *shaqed* and *shoqed*. We can't catch that in the translation but it's a play on words. *Shoqed* is a verb that means “to watch” or “to wait” and *shaqed* [almond tree] is derived from that root. It's called that because of its early waking out of winter sleep, it's an early blooming tree. But as far as etymology you get the *shaqed/shoqed* play on words and that is something that's fairly common in the prophetic discourse.

Thirdly, it's simply a literary technique, a manner or means of making the point you're making in a more effective, forceful manner. I'm not good at that kind of thing; there are writers and there are speechmakers who have the clever ability in order to do that. It's a forceful way of speaking if you can do it right. That's my next point, a lot of the prophets wrote in poetic form and poetic language often tends to play on a word. There was a philosopher at the Free University at Amsterdam where I took my doctorate who spoke in plays on words all the time to make philosophical points. He did that as a matter of course.

3. is, “The prophets often utilize poetic expression.” Great sections of the prophetic books are in Hebrew poetry. You can see that simply by opening to Isaiah, or if I open on this page you can see the typeset indicates when it is prose. But when you read through Isaiah you see that most of the book is in poetic form. In some of the older translations that did not show up in the typeset, you wouldn't know from reading those translations whether you were reading poetry or prose.

The newer translations indicate that by the way it is typeset line by line rather than in paragraphs as prose is.

Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelisms. These parallel lines can be synonymous parallelism, antithetical parallelism or synthetic parallelism. These are the three main types. In synonymous you get two lines that say pretty much the same thing with different words. In antithetic, you get two lines where the first says one thing and the second says the opposite. In synthetic, there is sometimes a building together between the two. The lines between them are sometimes difficult to draw but it's clear that Hebrew poetry is built on parallel lines.

Look at Isaiah 2:2, "In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established," and then the parallel phrase, which really builds on it, "as chief among the mountains." And then the next phrase, "It will be raised above the hills," and the parallel, "all the nations will stream to it." "Many peoples will come and say, come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." And the parallel phrase, "to the house of the God of Jacob." "He will teach us his ways," parallel phrase, "that we may walk in his paths." "The law will go out from Zion," parallel phrase, "the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." See it goes on like that. That is characteristic of much of the prophetic discourse.

Fourthly, the prophets all tend to use imagery or figurative language. Now as it has already been pointed out, imagery, figurative language is often characteristic of poetic expression. Look at Isaiah 28. In the first four verses, Isaiah says, "Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley—to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine! See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground. That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, will be like a fig ripe before harvest—as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it." Now what's that

talking about? What is this wreath that is the pride of Ephraim's drunkards that is going to be cast to the ground through this hailstorm of destruction? That's figurative language, describing Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom. Samaria is the wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards; "Set on the head of a fertile valley, to the city, the pride of those laid low by wine. See the Lord is one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour" – that's Assyria that's going to come in and destroy Samaria. Assyria is that hailstorm of destruction. Samaria will be trampled underfoot. Now the figurative language there is fairly clear, sometimes it's more difficult to understand exactly what the figure represents. Sometimes it's difficult to know whether a passage is intended to be taken figuratively or literally. We have to sort it out and look at reasons why maybe you read it literally and maybe you read it figuratively. That can be very complex.

Another clear example of figure is Isaiah 5, "The Song of the Vineyard," where you read, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." And then you get an explanation. What is this figure all about? It's an extended figure, almost an allegory. Yes, in verse 7, "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight." And then you get that verse we looked at earlier, it has that play on words, "And he looked for **justice** [Mishpat], but saw **bloodshed**

[Mishpoh]; for **righteousness** [sadaqah], but heard cries of **distress** [sa'aqah].”

So, there's a lot of imagery and figurative language in the prophetic discourse.

Let me give you one other extended one, and that's Ezekiel 27, where you have a description of the city of Tyre, which was a trade city. It's pictured in Ezekiel 27 as a merchant ship at sea. So you read in the first verse, “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Son of man, take up a lament concerning Tyre. Say to Tyre, situated at the gateway to the sea, merchant of peoples on many coasts, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: You say, O Tyre, I am perfect in beauty. Your domain was on the high seas; your builders brought your beauty to perfection. They made all your timbers of pine trees from Senir; they took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.”” So here's this picture of this city in the form of a ship. “Of oaks from Bashan they made your oars; of cypress wood from the coasts of Cyprus they made your deck, inlaid with ivory. Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail and served as your banner; your awnings were of blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah.” Now I'm going to skip way down to verse 26. “Your oarsmen take you out to the high seas. But the east wind will break you to pieces in the heart of the sea. Your wealth, merchandise and wares, your mariners, seamen and shipwrights, your merchants and all your soldiers, and everyone else on board will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of your shipwreck. The shorelands will quake when your seamen cry out. All who handle the oars will abandon their ships; the mariners and all the seamen will stand on the shore. They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you; they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in ashes.” Verse 32 continues, “As they wail and mourn over you, they will take up a lament concerning you: “Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea?” When your merchandise went out on the seas, you satisfied many nations; with your great wealth. Now you are shattered by the sea in the depths of the waters.” So, judgment is going to come on the city of Tyre. It's pictures; this imagery is both poetic and figurative of a merchant ship. Those are some formal characteristics of poetic writing.

Let's go to C., "Some characteristics of the content of Prophetic writings" I have two sub-points here. One, "The prophets do not bring a new religion or morality."

So first, something that I think is important—particularly in the viewpoints that have been advocated by many that the prophets are the great religious innovators in Israel—you have to understand from the outset; the prophets did not initiate a new religion or perform it. The prophetic message is not distinguished by new religious concepts. The primary emphasis of the prophets is to call God's people back to salvation, and back to what God has previously revealed. They called Israel back to their obligations as the covenant people of God, the covenant that was established on Mount Sinai under the leadership of Moses. That covenant was foundational to what Israel was to be as a people. So you'll find that the prophets, to a great extent, are calling Israel to be faithful to that covenant. That's not innovation, it's more reformation. Yet you do get some deepening and further development of previously revealed theological concepts, certainly the progress of redemptive history is made clearer as the prophets begin to speak God's word in the future of where and when God intends to go with His redemptive purposes. You can speak of progress of revelation but not of essential change. So the prophets were not the great religious innovators in Israel who, as many have alleged, established the idea of ethical monotheism.

Wellhausen reversed the role of the law and the prophets putting the prophets first and the law second. He thought the prophets were the religious innovators who created this idea of ethical monotheism. However, the Bible itself is exactly the reverse. Moses laid the foundation for the clarification of the covenant on Mount Sinai, and it was the prophets who called the people back to that notion.

Secondly, "The message of the prophets is centered in four areas," and I just listed four broad categories of material in a, b, c, and d: a. is religious or theological, b. is morality or social relationships, c. is political issues, and d. is

eschatology and Messianic expectation. All those things are interconnected, but I think much of what the prophets had to say could be placed under one of those as far as the primary emphasis or focus of what they were saying. So let me make just a couple comments about each of them.

“Religious or theological,” would include teaching about God and God’s relationship to his people. It would include warnings against idolatry and false worship, as well as warnings against religious formalism, going through the ritual but not living the life. There was a lot of that going on in Israel; that was a major focus of the prophets.

As far as general teaching about God, there’s stress on monotheism—there is only one God. Look at Isaiah 45:4-5, where Isaiah says, “For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name” and this is speaking of Cyrus the Persian ruler, “and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me, I am Yahweh, and there is no other. Apart from me there is no God.” This is a straightforward statement of monotheism.

If you go down to Isaiah 18:45 you read, “For this is what Yahweh says, he who created the heavens, he is God. He who fashioned and made the earth and founded it, he did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited.” He says, “I Am Yahweh and there is no other.” So there is one God, and that is emphasized.

There is a great deal of emphasis on God’s power and sovereignty. One of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible on God’s power, his creative work and sovereignty, is Isaiah 40. See verse 18, “To whom will you compare God? To what image will you compare Him?” And then he ridicules idolatry, “As an idol, a craftsman casts gold, or a goldsmith overlays it with gold and the silversmith casts silver chains. Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? He that is God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people

are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to nothing, he reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.” He is sovereign over both nature and history, he is the Creator. Verse 26, “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out the starry host by number, he calls them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and the strength of his power, not one is missing.” Here’s the powerful God who controls nature and history. Verse 27, “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: ‘My way is hidden from the Lord and my just claim is passed over by my God?’” Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” So emphasis is on divine power and sovereignty. He is the Creator of the whole earth.

There is at the same time emphasis on God’s holiness and justice. God of Israel is a God that judges sin. But there is a name for God that is characteristic of Isaiah, that is the “Holy One of Israel.” That’s the way God is often referred to. There’s a great deal of emphasis on his holiness and his justice. But at the same time there’s emphasis on his mercy. He seeks out his people. He pulls them back to himself, even in judgment there’s mercy. He desires his people to repent, and when they refused to do that, and ultimately even are driven out of the land, a remnant is brought back. So there’s emphasis on love and mercy. So those are just broad, general comments about teachings about God.

As far as teaching about God’s relationship to His people, the focus there is on the covenant relationship. But having said that, the interesting thing is you do not find the word *berit*, covenant, used extensively by the prophets. If you go through all the prophetic books, Major and Minor Prophets, there are 65 occurrences of the word “covenant.” In a number of the prophets, there’s no reference to the word at all. It doesn’t even appear. It’s not used in Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, or Habakkuk. There was a time when people would look at the prophetic books and say, “Oh, the word ‘covenant’ doesn’t appear, so these prophets didn’t know anything about the covenant.” Look



at your citations, page 7, the bottom of the page, Walter Eichrodt in *Theology of the Old Testament*, points out, “The crucial point is not – as an all too naive criticism sometimes seems to think – the occurrence or absence of the Hebrew word *b’rit*, but the fact that all crucial statements of faith in the Old Testament rest on the assumption, explicit or not, that a free act of God in history raised Israel to the unique dignity of the people of God, in whom his nature and purpose were to be made manifest. The actual term ‘covenant’ is, therefore, so to speak, only the code-word for a much more far-reaching certainty, which formed the very deepest layer of the foundations of Israel’s faith, and without which indeed Israel would not have been Israel at all.” In other words, the whole message of the prophets rests on the assumption that there was such a covenant relationship between God and his people. Whether or not they use the word “covenant” really has nothing to do with it. I think one of the clearest illustrations of that, is found into this later in the book of Amos. The word *berit* does not occur at all in the book of Amos. But the messages of Amos are using covenant language, terminology and covenant concepts constantly. So we don’t determine whether or not the word and whether or not the idea of covenant was present in the message of the prophets by looking and seeing whether or not they use the word *berit*.

But the teaching in the prophetic books about God’s relationship to his people is based on the covenant relationship, and because of that, the prophets come with these messages of warning and judgment. The covenant included blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, and the warnings about judgment to come are rooted in the covenant curses. The prophets come and call God’s people to obedience and to worship of the Lord. Where does that come from? It comes from the covenant. They were obligated to obey the stipulations of the covenant, and to love the Lord their God with their whole heart, mind and soul. So the fundamental assumption with respect to God’s relationship with his people is the covenant relationship.

Let's go on to b.: "Morality and social relationships." There's a fair amount of attention given to questions of morality and social relationships. I think the reason for that is the prophets see a very close connection between a person's morality and true religion. In other words, the Mosaic law had a lot to say about love for one's neighbor and what that implies or entails in one's daily life. True religion involves concern for and a practice of social justice. So the prophets view the social evils that existed in Israel in their days as apostasy from the Lord, turning away from their covenant obligations. So they speak out against such things. Look at Jeremiah 22:13, for example. Jeremiah says of Jehoiakim, "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness. His upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it and panels it with cedar, and decorates it in red. Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food or drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him.'" What is doing what is right and just? That's walking in the way of the covenant, doing what is right and just. So all went well with him. "He defended the cause of the poor and needy, so all went well." And then there's a very interesting next line, "Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord." What does it mean to know the Lord? That's covenantal language as well. That's to recognize Yahweh as sovereign and to recognize his stipulations as binding. That's what it means to know the Lord. Your father did that but you, Jehoiakim, are not. Verse 17, "You set your eyes and your heart on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood, and on oppression, and on extortion.' Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, 'They will not mourn for him, saying, "Alas my brother! Alas my sister!" They will not mourn for him, saying, "Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!" He will have the burial of a donkey—dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem.'" Down to verse 9, "because you have turned away from the Lord."

Look at Amos 8:4-12, “Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?— skimping the measure, boosting the price, and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.’”

The world hasn’t changed much. Some years ago somebody did a survey around Thanksgiving time, on turkeys in the supermarket. You pick up a turkey and it is marked “13 ½ lbs.” They weighed all these things and found they were consistently less weight than what was marked on the thing. Cheating with dishonest scales, not much has changed. “Selling the sweepings with the wheat.” But the prophets speak out against those kinds of things.

Then there’s corruption in the courts. Look at Micah 3:9-11, “Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, ‘Is not the Lord among us?’” That’s an abomination.

Look at the materialism of Isaiah 3:16-26. It’s a very descriptive passage. “The Lord says,” and here we get a description of the women of Jerusalem, the women of Zion. “‘The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald.’ In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery.” Here you get a description of the finery of these women of Zion. “The bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and the mirrors, and the linen garments and the tiaras

and shawls.” So that’s a picture of the women of that time yet it sounds similar to today in many ways.

But then Isaiah says, “Instead of fragrance there will be a stench, instead of sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding. Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground.” Judgment’s coming. So there is a fair amount in the prophets about moral and social relationships.

Transcribed by: Eric Turner, Dan Pfistner, Jon Alvarado, John Clancy  
Alex Barker, Jon Stephan (editor)

Transcribed by: John Stacy, Jud Abts, Allison Faber, Jeff Lane, Steve  
Capuzziello,

Cody Larkin and Kristen Ramey (editor)  
Rough editing by Ted Hildebrandt  
Edited by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 8**

### Prophetic Message and T/F Prophets

#### c) Political Issues

We're looking at the message of the prophets centering in four areas—we looked at Religious-Theological and Morality-Social Relationships, and that brings us to c., "Political issues."

#### 1. Israel

##### a) Samuel

Prophets speak very frequently on political issues. In this country, church and politics are kept apart. But there were two different focuses you might say, of the prophets when they spoke on political issues. One was internal politics and that particularly concerns the relationship of the king to the covenant and whether he was fulfilling his role as a true covenantal king. If you go back to the history of kingship particularly you will remember that kingship was established by a prophet, Samuel. He anointed first Saul, and then later after the word of the Lord rejected Saul, the Lord told Samuel to go and tell Saul "Because you've rejected me, I've rejected you." Then he sent Samuel to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, where he anointed David to replace Saul as king. So, from the very beginning the king was subject to the word of the prophet. The prophets did not hesitate to go and confront the kings when they went astray from their covenantal responsibilities.

##### b) Elijah – 1 Kings 17

So, a prophet like Elijah, in 1 Kings 17, goes out and confronts King Ahab. We're looking at 1 Kings 17:1, "Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'" That's

typical of the prophets. They're fearless when it comes to confronting the kings.

#### c) Isaiah 7

Isaiah does the same with Ahaz in Isaiah 7:3, "The Lord said to Isaiah, 'Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerwoman's Field.'" That's out in a public place, "Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, 'Let us invade Judah.''" That was when Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria threatened to replace Ahaz on the throne of Judah. In other words, the northern kingdom was allied with the Syrians, or Aram, to get rid of Ahaz on the throne of Judah. Now what's Ahaz do? He goes around behind Rezin and Pekah to the Assyrians and makes an alliance with Assyria. The Assyrians come down and relieve the pressure on Ahaz, and it looks like it might have succeeded. But that's not what the Lord wanted him to do. He says, here in verse 7, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'It will not take place, it will not happen, for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'" God is saying they are to trust in him. "I will deliver you from these people," and Ahaz refused to do that. He preferred to trust in Assyria rather than in the Lord. So, the prophets confront the kings when the kings go astray.

#### d) 2 Kings 19 & 22 Hezekiah and Josiah

Sometimes, the kings seek the word from the prophets. In 2 Kings 19, Isaiah is called by Hezekiah about the situation he faced and what he should do. In 2 Kings 22, Josiah seeks Huldah—that's when the book of law was found in the temple—and he takes it to Huldah to see what she would say from the Lord. So, there's this relationship between the king and the prophets.

If you look at page 7 in your citations, Vos says this, "To this kingdom-producing movement, the rise and development of prophetism attach themselves. The prophets were guardians of the unfolding theocracy, and the guardianship was exercised at its center, the kingdom. The purpose was to keep it a true representation of the kingdom of Jehovah. It sometimes almost appears as if the prophets were sent to the kings instead of to the people." The king was the leader. The king was responsible to give the kind of leadership that would call the people to obedience to the covenant and if they didn't, the prophets confronted the kings. So that concerns what you might call "internal issues" politically.

## 2) Foreign Relations

As far as foreign relations were concerned, the prophets also had a lot to say. Here what they did was oppose alliances with heathen nations.

### a) Ahaz Made an Alliance with Assyria

Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria, which is condemned by Isaiah. If you look at Isaiah 30 verse 1, Isaiah says, "'Woe to the obstinate children,' declares the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge.'" In other words, where was Israel to find her security? In alliances

with heathen kings and nations, whether it's Assyria or Egypt? No. You are to trust the Lord, walk in the way of the covenant and the Lord himself will be their protector. So, Isaiah says, "Woe to you who look for help from Pharaoh." It's very similar to chapter 31, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord." So, the prophets denounce foreign alliances. Often foreign alliances involved religious compromise because often the deities of these foreign rulers would be brought into relationship with Israel and that would compromise Israel's trust in the one and only true God.

#### b) 2 Chronicles 16:7-9

Look at 2 Chronicles 16:7-9, "At that time, Hananiah the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him, 'Because you relied on the King of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand.'" Then he says in verse 8, "Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand." If you rely on the Lord, there is where you will find deliverance, security, and protection—not from foreign nations. Verse 9, "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth and strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." What was Asa's reaction? Asa was angry with the seer because of it. He was so enraged he put him in prison. That was not what he wanted to hear.

#### 3) Rise and Fall of Nations

Beyond foreign alliances the prophets also often spoke about the rise and fall of many foreign nations. You get oracles about Babylon, Assyria,



Egypt, Edom and Moab, particularly in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The main point there is that the destinies of all nations are subject to God's sovereign power. So, the enemy powers of Israel, whether Babylon, Assyria, Egypt or Aram, are all regarded by the prophets as simply instruments in the hands of God to carry out his purposes—sometimes in judgment on his own people as when Assyria attacks the Northern Kingdom. It's for that reason when you get to Jeremiah that he has no sympathy for those that want to throw off the yoke of Babylon and resist the Babylonian oppression because Jeremiah says that this is God's purpose, his will for them is to be subjugated to Babylon. This is God's judgment. But then we know later that after Judah does go into captivity in Babylon, the Lord raises up Cyrus, the Persian ruler, and then Cyrus becomes the instrument of redemption in God's hand. God's going to allow his people to return and reestablish themselves. So those are brief comments about political issues.

#### d. Eschatology and Messianic Expectations

d. "Eschatology and Messianic Expectations." In very broad terms the prophets speak about a future in which, in the day of the Lord, judgment will come on all the ungodly and there will be a future of joy and peace for God's own people under the rule of the messianic king. So there's that long-term eschatological vision that ultimately all of human history will come to, a point of consummation in which the messianic king reigns over all of the earth. The curse will be removed and peace and harmony will be created, swords will be beat into plowshares and things of that sort, Isaiah says.

#### 1) Freeman: Nation and Suffering Servant

In Freeman's *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* he speaks of two streams of messianic prophecy that develop out of that promise to

Abraham way back in Genesis 12:1-3. In Genesis 12, the Lord, you remember, says to Abraham “I will make of you a great nation” and then he goes on to say, “In you and your seed all of the nations of the earth will be blessed.” Freeman says there’s these two streams of prophecy that are rooted back in that promise to Abraham. The one stream speaks of a future for the nation of Israel, “I will make of you a great nation.” That nation will be ruled over by the Davidic monarch or the messianic king who will come. The other stream of prophecy emphasizes the work of the messiah as the suffering servant; the one who will bear the sins of his people, in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed, through the work of that suffering servant. I think there’s something to that. Think about those two streams of prophecy. You see the one, the work of the suffering servant; the focus there is on the first advent of Christ and all that was involved in the first advent of Christ—in particular his atoning sacrificial death on the cross. That is clearly the message of those passages, the climax of the book of Isaiah, in chapter 53 of Isaiah, where you have an amazing description of the suffering servant bearing the sins of those who have broken God’s commandment. But the other stream of prophecy is about “I will make you a great nation.” Those prophecies are concerned with the second coming of Christ, when that great messianic king will subdue the ungodly and establish his kingdom over all the earth.

Now, at this point, I’m not going to discuss any of the issues concerning how you work out the inter-relationships between these two streams of prophecy; whether you look for that fulfillment of that second stream, Israel as a great nation; whether you look for that in some reestablishment of Israel, and the millennial kingdom here on this earth. These are difficult questions. But, certainly, the prophets did spend a fair amount of time addressing eschatological issues and the way in which God’s purpose has played out beyond the time of the Old Testament period in the first and the second

advent of Christ.

## 2) Vos

I think what Vos says is that the prophets impress their message through the heart for the center of the kingdom, which was given to the person of the king. The priest would be the one responsible for conducting the sacrifices, tradition, and the Levites for teaching the role that they had. The Levites were involved in instruction and the priests were officiating in the ceremonies. We have examples of abuse in that way and the prophets do speak about the dangers of the wicked forms and rituals without a proper heart attitude toward God. There's a clear example when Eli and his sons are judged for their abuse of the sacrificial system.

## 6. True and False Prophets

### a. The Statements of a Prophet – Thus Saith the Lord

Let's go onto 6., "True and false prophets," and a. "The statements of a prophet." We alluded to this earlier, the fact that true and false prophets exist—does that not raise the responsibility of the Israelites who pay attention to the true prophets and not the false prophets? We've also said earlier that the prophets themselves had a very immediate and certain knowledge of the fact that the message they spoke was not their own but it was God's message. They could distinguish between their own words and the words of the Lord. We can see illustrations of that. So a prophet had certitude when he spoke that this is the word of God. He could know that without any shadow of doubt what he was saying was the word of God. But that's not the case with the people to whom the prophets speak. How could the people know if what the prophet said really had divine origin, and if what the prophet claims was really true, namely that he was speaking for God? You

might ask, isn't the self-witness of the prophet sufficient because the prophets repeatedly say that their message is from God? That is important, and I don't want to minimize that. They always introduce their message, "thus saith the Lord."

b) Ezek 13:6

But the problem is there are also those who come along and say that they have a message from God and even used that language, "thus saith the Lord," when the Lord hadn't sent them. Look at Ezekiel 13:6, where Ezekiel says, "Their visions are false, their divinations a lie." Who are these people? If you go back to verse two, "Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, 'Hear the word of the Lord!' This is what the Sovereign Lord says, 'Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirits and have seen nothing.'" And in verse six, "Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. They say, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them, yet they expect their words to be fulfilled." So the false prophets come along, and the false prophets are no less definite in their claims to be a mouthpiece for God than are the true prophets. So you have to put yourself in the position of the ancient Israelites, where you can go out and you hear a prophet saying, "thus saith the Lord." He gives a message, and then another prophet comes along and says, "thus saith the Lord" and he gives an opposite message. Then you have to sort out which one's the true prophet, or are neither of them true prophets?

That raises then this question, how could the Israelites then distinguish between true and false prophets? That is not just a theoretical issue because it would affect the way in which the Israelites would live. How were they to respond to the message they heard? Then we go back to Deuteronomy 18, that passage where the whole prophetic movement is established and is

explained in advance of what it was to be. Deuteronomy 18:19 says, “If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.” So the Israelite was accountable to God to listen to the words of the prophet and to behave in the way the prophet said that he should. What was the Israelite to do when two contradictory messages that advocated opposite courses of action, and both of them are represented as the word of God?

### c) Jeremiah 27

A classic example of that, we already looked at earlier, is in Jeremiah 27 and 28, where a prophet named Hananiah is coming along saying, “Thus saith the Lord, cast off Babylon’s yoke, resist it,” and promises that the Lord will help and within two years, the vessels of the Lord’s house, will return to Jerusalem. At the same time, Jeremiah comes along and says the opposite, “Submit to Babylon, what Hananiah says is not going to happen.” Both prophets use the name of the Lord—that gives sanction to their message. So you get this issue, how do you sort out the difference between true and false prophets? That issue was already envisioned in Deuteronomy 18, in that passage where the prophetic movement is established. In verses 21 and following of Deuteronomy 18 you read, “You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when the message has not been spoken by the Lord?’” That, of course, is the question. What follows is one way to distinguish between the true and false prophet. Verse 22 says, “If what the prophet proclaims in the name of Lord does not take place or come true, that is the message the Lord has not spoken.” I think it’s quite clear that if the prophet says something’s going to happen, then it turns out that it doesn’t happen- that prophet is not delivering the word of the Lord but delivering a false word. It can’t be from the Lord. But the problem is, that only speaks of the things that will happen in

the future and then only after whatever is envisioned either happens or doesn't happen. So there needs to be some other ways in addition to that in which that question can be addressed and sorted out.

#### b. Validation Criteria for True Prophecy

Let's move on to b., "Validation criteria for true prophecy." I think when we look at the whole situation there are at least five considerations that play an important role in enabling the Israelites to distinguish between true and false prophecy. I want to look at the five that are listed there under validation criteria. I think when you look at each one of these we have to say that they do not work in isolation. In another words, these criteria functioned in combination, to provide the ancient Israelite with a means to discern between the true and false prophets. So what are some of these things that enabled the Israelites to make that distinction?

##### 1) The Moral Character of the Prophet

First, is "The moral character of the prophet as observed in his daily conduct." That's often been pointed to as something that plays a role. I think sometimes it has been over-emphasized. If you look at page eight in your citations, notice Hobart Freeman says, "False prophets were characterized by their low morality; hence, true and false prophets could be distinguished by a personal or extrinsic test. The false prophet was a mercenary who prophesied for hire (Micah 3:5, 11); he was a drunkard (Isaiah 28:7); he was profane and wicked (Jeremiah 23:11); he conspired with others to deceive and defraud (Ezekiel 22:45); he was light and treacherous (Zephaniah 3:4); he committed adultery, walked in lies and supported the evildoers (Jeremiah 23:1); and he was generally immoral in life conduct (Jeremiah 23:15)." Now you look at all those references, all those things it says; yes, they're there. You can see it does

not depict an upright godly type of individual. He goes on to say, “The false prophet was, moreover, a religious opportunist prophesying only what the degenerate people would wish to hear, he proclaimed an optimistic message of peace and prosperity; he often practiced divination, and prophesied lies out of his own heart.” See the bottom line, “The moral character of the prophet himself would attest to his authority. He who professed a divine commission from the holy God of Israel must reflect the conduct and character consistent with that claim.” Mathew 7:15-20 says, “By your fruit you shall know them.” So there is bad fruit and good fruit. So by their fruit you shall know them. We can look at the moral character of the prophet and that is an aid in distinguishing between the true and the false prophet.

Now I think that consideration is important, but I think Freeman clearly overstates the case here. The reason I say that is that even though you find these references to immorality among the false prophets, there are other false prophets depicted in the Old Testament of which nothing of that sort is said. Now we don’t know a lot, about Hananiah, for example; nothing is said about his moral character. I think it’s possible that some false prophets would live exemplary lives as far as their moral conduct was concerned. So that’s one side of the coin.

The other side is we shouldn’t exaggerate the flawlessness of the moral character of the true prophets because the true prophets were not sinless. I think what Freeman says, in general, is true—that the true prophets are depicted as godly, pious people who lived godly lives. However, what do you do with Balaam? He was true prophet, but he is not depicted as a godly individual; he was a heathen soothsayer. What do you do with the old prophet who deceived the man of God out of Judah in 1 Kings 13 who came up to prophesy against the altar of Jeroboam of Israel. This old prophet lied to that prophet to help to get him to come home and have a meal with him. But

that prophet that lied also gave a true message from the Lord. So I think the moral character of a prophet needs to be taken into consideration, but in and of itself it is not sufficient to provide a basis for discerning between a true and a false prophet. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It’s not surprising then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” So yes, moral character of a prophet, there are many texts that suggest that in general true prophets were godly people, and false prophets were not. But this is not something that is airtight; it must be connected to other things as well.

## 2) Performance of Signs and Wonders

The second consideration or criteria is, “Performance of signs and wonders.” Often signs and wonders are pointed to as an important validation criteria for distinguishing between the true and false prophet. If you look at the way signs and wonders function in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, you will find signs and wonders are given primarily to authenticate the word of prophet and to show that the prophet is truly giving the word from God. The signs and wonders attest to the authenticity of the message. In that way, the signs and wonders are an aid to belief, that what the prophet is saying is truly a word from God. In Luke 10:13 Jesus says to the inhabitants of Chorazin, “If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” See the miracles there were aids to belief. In John 20:30-31 it says, “Jesus performed many other miracles that are not written in this book, but these are written,”—why do we have some miracles described?—“in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.” The



miracles authenticate his message. John 14:11 says, “Believe me when I say I am in the father and the father is in me, or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” So signs and wonders can perform a function in authenticating the words of a prophet.

Go back to the Old Testament to Exodus chapter 4. The Lord called Moses in chapter 3 to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, but Moses objects in chapter 4, saying, “They won’t believe me or listen to me, they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’” Moses is thinking, “How can I counter that? I come saying, ‘This is what the Lord says,’ They say, ‘I don’t believe you.’” “The Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ ‘A staff,’ he replied. The Lord said, ‘Throw it down.’ Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake and he ran from it. The Lord said, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.’ So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it became a staff in his hand.” Notice in verse 5, “‘This,’ said the Lord, ‘is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, the God of Jacob—has appeared to you. Then the Lord said, ‘Put your hand in your coat. So Moses put his hand into his coat, and when he took it out the skin was leprous and it became as white as snow. ‘Now put it back in your coat,’ he said. So Moses put it back into his coat and it was restored like the rest of his flesh. Then the Lord said, ‘If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile, pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from river will become blood.’” So you see what Lord is telling Moses here is—he will enable him to perform miraculous signs and wonders that will authenticate that what he is saying is coming from him. And of course, what follows in the aftermath of that is the question in chapter 5 commanding Pharaoh to let Israel go into the wilderness to worship the Lord. And Pharaoh says, “I don’t believe in the Lord. Why should

I let you go worship the Lord?" Then you get a whole series of miraculous signs, the ten plagues. With the statement all the way through "in order that you may know that I am the Lord." So those miracles become the authenticating signs that Moses is speaking for Yahweh and that Yahweh exists and that what he is saying is indeed from Yahweh.

I think what you find is at crucial points in the history of revelation and redemption, there are turning points, at which times I would say signs and wonders are multiplied to give authentication of the word of the prophet, in this case for Moses. So signs and wonders are significant and we should not minimize their importance.

But then at the same time I think we have to recognize that a sign or wonder in itself is not sufficient to separate true and false prophets. The reason for that is Scripture also recognizes that false prophets are capable of performing signs and wonders. Even the Egyptians could duplicate the first three plagues. They couldn't go beyond that. But look at Matthew 24:23. This is speaking of the second advent of Christ, "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible." Paul, in speaking of the anti-Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says that his coming "is in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders." They have counterfeit miracles.

You go back to Deuteronomy, this time to chapter 13. In verses 1-4, Moses says, "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you miraculous signs or wonders, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and the prophet says, 'Let us follow other gods that you have not known and worship them.' You must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. For the Lord your God is testing you to

find out whether you love him with all your heart and all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere.” Then verse 5, “That prophet or dreamer must be put to death because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God.” That passage in Deuteronomy 13 is saying that false prophets can also perform signs and wonders, but you are not to be misled by them. I think what the Bible suggests is that signs and wonders play a very important role in distinguishing between true and false prophets but in isolation signs and wonders are not decisive. You need to actually look at the message as well. You see, if a sign or wonder comes in connection with a message to go serve other gods, you know that is not a word from the Lord, and that sign or wonder is not a manifestation of God’s power. So you don’t want to minimize the importance because they often are presented in Scripture as aids to belief and as means of authenticating God’s word as being truly from God. But you have to be aware at the same time that there is the possibility of signs and wonders performed by a false prophet masquerading as a true preacher.

### 3) Fulfillment of Prophecy as a Criteria to Distinguish the True and the False Prophets

#### a) Deut. 18

Let’s go onto the third, “Fulfillment of prophecy as a criteria to distinguish the true and the false prophets.” We already saw that in Deuteronomy 18 that if it does not come true then it is not from God. And that’s certainly a valid criteria. It’s only in a negative sense even though it’s not from God, and it can only be applied in the future when whatever has been predicted happens or doesn’t happen. So you don’t want to minimize the importance because they often are presented in Scripture as aids to belief and as means of authenticating God’s word as being truly from God. But you have to be aware, at the same time, that there is the

possibility of signs and wonders performed by a false prophet masquerading as a true prophet.

b) Isa. 41:22

You find that as well as in the Old Testament. Look at Isaiah 41:22, “Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Can an idol predict the future? Tell us what the former things were so that we can consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be filled with fear.” Go down to verse 26, “Who told of this from the beginning, so that we could know beforehand so we could say, ‘He was right’? No one told of this, no one foretold this, no one heard any words from you.” Look at Isaiah 48:3, “I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze. Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My idols did them, my wooden image and medal god ordained them.’ You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them?” Jesus said in John 13.19, “I am telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am he.” See there’s the positive presentation of fulfillment of prophecy as evidence of the truthfulness of what he said.

Now texts like those suggest that God alone has the necessary knowledge of the future so that he can tell in advance about things that are to come to pass with accuracy and consistency. That accuracy and consistency is important. I think that it is only God who can consistently and accurately speak about things that are to happen in the future. So I think fulfillment of prophecy is presented as an important means of validating divine revelation.

### c) Deut. 13

But it also has its limitations. It is not decisive in itself and it is not decisive in isolation. You notice in Deuteronomy 13 that we looked at under signs and wonders. Certainly predictions are to be included there “if a prophet or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder and if the sign or wonder takes place,” in other words, if what he predicts actually happens. “But he says, ‘Let’s go worship other gods,’” you can be certain that he is not one whose message is from God.” I think it is certainly possible in certain situations where even soothsayers and diviners were able to give a true prediction. Acts 16:16 says, “Once when we were going to a place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’” I think it’s possible for this satanic world of spirits being what it is, within certain limited parameters, to have knowledge of the future. You may find occasionally that a heathen soothsayer actually does predict something. So in isolation a prediction isn’t proof that the prophet who makes it is guaranteed to be a spokesperson from God.

The other thing about this is, as we talked earlier in Deuteronomy 18, if it doesn’t come to pass it doesn’t come from God. You can only apply that in the future and if the prophecy is something of a distant future then nobody that hears the original message will be around. So non-fulfillment is important but it has its limitations.

I’ve used the early chapters of Job to think about this where the Lord puts Satan on a leash but within certain parameters. Satan is permitted to do what he chooses to do. He can’t take Job’s life, so he’s on the leash. But within those parameters he can know in advance what he is going to do, so he’s not omniscient. But there is limited knowledge of the future.

In the Mari tablets the prophets were not predicting the future. Part of the problem was that the outside of the Bible you do not find any other collection of prophetic predictions that is so extensive and that is sequential over centuries of time with a coherent strain of movements from century to century. It grows and develops. There is nothing comparable and that itself is an evidence, I think, for the truth of what the Bible claims.

#### 4. The Conformity to Previous Revelation

I think here is the crucial validation criteria, and that relates to 4., “The conformity to previous revelation.” There is this progression. So new prophecy can only build on what has gone before and cannot contradict it. The prophet Hanaiah comes and says “peace,” but Israel cannot expect peace because they are not following after the Lord and should expect judgment. It’s not consistent with previous revelations. We begin to get something that, put in combination with some of these other criteria, will give the means to distinguish. But with Hananiah there is that short term prediction and with two years Hananiah would be.

#### 5. The Enlightenment by God’s Spirit Which is Also Essential

It’s the way these criteria work together that goes along with 5., “The enlightenment by God’s Spirit which is also essential.” We’ll look further at numbers 4. and 5. next time.

Transcribed by: Tessa White, Sarah Hawkins, Breanna Aurigema, Keziah Park, Hayley Pomeroy (editor)

Transcribed by: Naama Mendes, Ana Pereira, Laura Knox, Andrea Mastrangelo, Ted Hildebrandt, Serene King (editor)

Rough edit by Ted Hildebrandt

Final edit by Katie Ells

Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundation of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9**

### Validation Criteria for True Prophets

#### VI. Validation Criteria for True Prophecy

Last week we were looking at the question of true or false prophets and how the Israelites could distinguish between the two. As I emphasized, that was something of great importance to an ancient Israelite because they were held accountable to listen to the word of the prophet. So we were looking at Roman numeral VI., “Validation criteria for true prophecy” and we had discussed A., “The moral character of the prophet” as something important but something that in it of itself was probably not totally sufficient as a means for distinguishing between the true and the false prophets. The same with B., “Signs and wonders.” We don’t want to minimize the importance of signs and wonders because the Lord often chose to use signs and wonders to authenticate his spokesperson. A good illustration of that is with Moses. “Fulfillment of prophesy,” C., is another significant criterion because only God himself knows the totality of the future and has control over it so that he can speak in advance of things to come. But in isolated, limited situations there may be some prediction that a false prophet can make. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 gives an indication of that, a false prophet may say something and it happens but when he says, “let’s follow some other god,” rather than the Yahweh, they were not to listen to him. That’s where we left off.

#### 4. Conformity of the Message to Previous Revelation

That brings us to 4., “Conformity of the message to previous revelation.” I said at the end of our last session that I think this is the most important of the validation criteria. I would say the most important of the objective validation criteria, that is, something outside of the individual because if you look ahead, number 5. is, “Enlightenment by God’s Spirit,” which is more of the internal and subjective. It is the opening of the heart and mind receptively to what God is doing.

So under “Conformity to previous revelation,” if a prophet is truly a spokesperson for God, his message must be in agreement with what Israel already possessed in the area of divine revelation in both the law and the preceding prophets. The law was given by God through Moses, the preceding prophets were spokesmen for God; God is not going to contradict Himself. So a message from a true prophet must be in agreement with revelation already given. Any deviation from that is an indication of false prophesy. I’ve said that is the most important of the validation criteria. It’s a touchstone that was always available to the ancient Israelite. He didn’t have to wait for a fulfillment. The standard could be applied at the moment any prophecy was given. The assumption there is every Israelite could have a sufficient knowledge of the law and about previous prophetic revelation to make a judgment on the conformity of the message he was hearing to the message that had previously been given.

a. Deut. 13

I think that’s really the criteria of Deuteronomy 13:1-3, which we looked at last week, where we read, “If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods,’ gods you have not known, ‘And let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the word of that prophet or that diviner.” You see, what that is telling us is that the signs, wonders, and prophecies are to be judged by the teaching or the doctrine. It’s not the doctrine that is judged by the signs, wonders, and prophecies. You judge the signs, wonders, and prophecies by the teaching or the doctrine. That’s not to say that signs, wonders, and prophecies have no function—they do. I don’t want to dismiss them because they do have a significant function, but in and of themselves they’re not sufficient.

b. Jer. 28



I think that's basically the same thing Jeremiah appeals to in that confrontation with Hananiah in Jeremiah 28. As you look at Jeremiah 28:8, where Hananiah was saying, "In two years you will return from Babylon," and Jeremiah is saying, "No, submit to the Babylonians at the time of captivity." In chapter 28, verse 8 Jeremiah says, "From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster, and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true." In other words, Hananiah had been given this message of deliverance and peace and Jeremiah in essence at this point in his discussion with Hananiah is saying, "Well, I hope you're right." You see in verse 6 he says, "Amen! May the Lord do so." But you see in verse 7, "Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say. What you are saying is not consistent with what former prophets have said. Any prophets who have preceded you prophesied war, disaster, and plague against many countries, but the prophet who prophesies peace..."—particularly peace to a country and to a people were are not walking in the word of the Lord or are disobeying the word of the Lord and on whom there has consistently been a number of prophets speaking about the time of judgment.

If you go back to Jeremiah 6:13 and following, Jeremiah says, "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for great gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say when there is no peace." That's what Hananiah was doing. "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they're not ashamed at all. They don't even know how to blush." So, Jeremiah appeals to earlier prophets who indicate that his prophecy is in agreement with the words of earlier prophets while Hananiah's prophecy has a different character and that is what marks his prophecy as not the word of a true prophet. That's why Jeremiah is very skeptical of what he says. The prophets have consistently proclaimed judgment on a sinful generation. So when Hananiah comes with this message that differs from the

message of previous prophets, that means he cannot have been sent by God.

c. Isa 8:19-20

In Isaiah 8:19 and 20 the Lord says is the next statement, “When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the Law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” We go through the law and the testimony and see if there is conformity to the previously given revelations.

d) Objections to this Criterion

1)

Now, what about some objections to this criterion? Some might say, “revelation by its nature is the unveiling of new things. If they are new things, how can they then be tested by revelation that has already been given? If it’s new, how do you find some equivalent in an already given revelation?” That’s a possible objection. I don’t think it’s as serious as it might sound initially. The reason I don’t think it’s that serious is something I think I said last time, revelation in the Old Testament is never totally separate from what precedes it. Revelation in the Old Testament rose in organic development. It’s a development that builds on an already laid foundation. Progression, yes, but it’s progression from the same roots, the same trunk, as it branches out and it expands and enlarges. So there is a consistency to it as it moves forward. So, it seems to me that that objection is not as strong as it might appear.

2)

The second objection that you might raise is that it’s not something that is adequate for testing specific details of particular prophecies. For instance, Isaiah says that Sennacherib would not take Jerusalem. That’s a specific event. Sennacherib’s siege. Isaiah said, “It’s not going to be successful.” Of course,

Sennacherib is forced to retreat from Jerusalem. In fact, in one of Sennacherib's annals he says he "shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage," but he doesn't say he conquered him because he didn't defeat him. Or the prophecy that the captivity would last for 70 years, that's what Jeremiah said. How can you test a specific detail like that by previously given revelation? Especially if nobody previously had said anything about how long captivity would last. I think with that, it is correct that you can't establish specific details like these as true or false, prior to their fulfillment, by comparing it with previous revelation because there wasn't previous revelation on those specific details. However, again, those details don't appear in isolation. You'll find details like that in the context of a larger prophecy. In the broader context I think they find their validation.

You will find that not infrequently, a longer-term prediction is validated by a short-term prediction. The hearers could observe the fulfillment of the short-term prediction and get validation through that for the longer-term prediction. You remember in 1 Kings 13 where that man who got out of Judah goes up to the altar at Bethel and prophesies against the altar. In the context of that prophecy he says, at this time of the divided kingdom period, that Josiah will burn the bones of false priests on that altar. This is 900s B.C. and you're talking about three centuries later. He mentioned Josiah by name. How can you validate that by previous revelation? Well, you can't. But in that same chapter, he says that some other things are going to happen. If you look at verse 3, he says, "That same day the man of God gave a sign, the Lord has declared the altar will be split apart, and these ashes on it will be poured out" and that happened, on that very day. "When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel he stretched out his hand and said, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man was shriveled, so he could not pull it back. And the altar was split apart and the ashes poured out." So Jeroboam appeals to this man of God, and the man of God out of Judah interceded for him and his hand was restored and became as it was before. There are two signs performed there that were fulfilled on the very

day that this longer-term prediction was made. The authentication of the longer-term prediction is made by the observance of the fulfillment of the shorter term prediction. So yes, to a certain extent you can't test all the specifics of the given prophecy by previous revelation. But generally those specifics are in a context that, in one way or another, provides sufficient validation to accept the whole as the word of the Lord.

3)

When you get into Biblical Studies, there's a spectrum of people, whether Jewish, Protestant, Catholic or whatever. I didn't mention this earlier, but for example, if you look at Walter Brueggemann—who is Protestant, but not evangelical—he wrote a *Theology of the Old Testament* in 1999 but in that theology he says of Old Testament prophets, “They make a claim of authority that is impossible to verify.” He says, “Scholars are agreed that there are no objective criteria for such an issue.” I'm sure that among Jewish scholars, some would say something like that, yet some would say these kinds of criteria provide an adequate basis for that. It seems clear to me that God himself is saying to Israel in the passage Deuteronomy 18 that “you have sufficient basis to be held accountable for your behavior in response to the word of the prophet.”

Student Question: Ezek 18:1-4 Sins of the Parents on the Children (cf. Ex. 20)

Student Question: Can you comment on Ezekiel 18 where it says the sins of the fathers will not be visited on the children, in contrast to Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments?

You know, that goes back to the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20 verses 4 and 5. “You shall not make for yourself an idol ... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.” Then as you said in Ezekiel 18:1-4, the implication is that you are responsible for your own sins, but you are not going to be punished for the sins of

your fathers. For example, in verse 3, “‘As surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.’ The word of the Lord came to me: ‘What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: “The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”?’” In another words, the fathers do something and it’s the children that suffer. Why are you quoting this proverb?

I’m not sure if I can resolve this, but I think, that part of it is this: when you go back to Exodus 20, until the third and fourth generation that is really one household in that culture. Great-grandfathers, grandfathers, and fathers and children were living in a household, so that the sin of the one affects all. It seems to me that’s involved in the Exodus 20 concept. Whereas in Ezekiel 18, I think what’s being addressed here is people who are trying to use this as an excuse for their own misbehavior. In other words, why do we suffer? We didn’t do anything wrong. Someone else did something wrong and we’re getting punished for it. I think what Ezekiel is saying is, take responsibility for yourself. Don’t try to say, “The reason things are the way they are is because of what someone else did. Take your own responsibility.” So I’m not sure that this contrast is as sharp as, “Here is one revelation, and here’s another one that contradicts it.”

#### 4. Short Term Prophecy Verifies Long Term – Jer 26-28

Let’s go back to the examples that we were looking for, of short-term predictions that might validate longer-term predictions as far as specifics of the prophecy are concerned. If you go back to Hananiah and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 27 and 28, how could an Israelite know that the prophecy of Hananiah predicting the breaking the Babylon’s yoke was false and that prophecy of Jeremiah that predicted the continuation of Babylon’s yoke was true? I think in general you can do what Jeremiah himself did before he got additional revelation, and that is

Hananiah is predicting peace on an unrepentant people, so his message is suspect. Jeremiah, on the other hand, is predicting judgment on a rebellious people which is more in line with biblical revelation generally. The listeners only needed to be convinced that the prophecy was in agreement in its basic features with what God had already said. This message fits with what previous prophets have been telling them. In that sense, details that might be unverifiable in themselves are validated by finding their place in larger context. But even in this instance, when the Lord does speak to Jeremiah by giving an additional message in the end of the chapter 28, Jeremiah said in verse 15, “Listen Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die’” and 2 months later he was dead. There was a validation of short-term prediction—you might see in the longer prophecies.

In Jeremiah 26 the message is similar to Jeremiah’s message in chapter 7, the Temple Sermon. But in 26:4-6, Jeremiah is in the courtyard of the temple, “Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again though you have not listened, then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.’” There is that message of the destruction of the temple that would be almost blasphemous to many Israelites who gloried in the temple even though they did not follow the Lord. So what’s the response? In verses 7-11 you read, “the priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the Lord. But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, ‘You must die! Why do you prophesy in the Lord’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?’ And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. When the officials of Judah heard about these

things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the Lord and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the Lord's house. Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, 'This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You heard it with your own ears.'" So there's the response. The Lord gave Jeremiah the message. He gave the message to the people who were ready to kill him.

How does Jeremiah respond? In verses 12 to 15 you get Jeremiah's response, he defends himself, "Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and the people, 'The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent.'" Verse 13 talks about, "If the people relent then I will relent." So he says, "Repent, mend your ways, your actions. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he's pronounced against you." Verse 14, "As for me, I'm in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right." But then the warning, "Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." Well, that kind of takes the officials back a bit. You read then in verse 16, "Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and prophets, 'This man should not be put to death, he has spoken in the Name of the Lord our God.'" But then what follows is what I want to call your attention to. "Some of the elders of the land stepped forward and said to the entire assembly of the people, 'Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: Zion will be ploughed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets. Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the Lord and seek his favor? And did not the Lord relent, so that he did not bring the disaster that he pronounced? We are about to bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!'" So you see

what happened there was they compared Jeremiah's message with Micah's message and there was consistency between what Micah had said a long time earlier and what Jeremiah was saying. Micah lived in about 735 B.C., Jeremiah about 609. So over a hundred years before there was a prophet who had the same message and that tended to validate then Jeremiah's message because it was consistent with what they had heard earlier. So that concludes number 4., "The conformity of the message of previous revelation."

#### 5. Enlightenment by God's Spirit

Let's go on to 5. and that is, "Enlightenment by God's Spirit." Up to this point, we had been talking about what we might term "objective criteria of validation." But I think with all those objective criteria, you do not have an automatic or mechanical stamp of absolute certainty in distinguishing true and false prophecy. They don't provide that, because to those objective criteria there must be added the internal enlightenment of God's Spirit. There must be the eye to see the truth.

##### a) Deut. 29:2-4

Moses says in Deuteronomy 29:2-4 something that's interesting. To people who had witnessed God's mighty acts at the time of deliverance out of Egypt he says, "Your eyes have seen all that the Lord did in Egypt to pharaoh, to his officials, to all his land, with your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders." And here's the point, "to this day, the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." You've seen it with your own eyes but the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. They had witnessed God's mighty power in the plagues and Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea. But it didn't result in bowing before Yahweh as their Creator and Redeemer. So they saw, but they didn't see. I think that also functions with these validation criteria, whether



its conformity with previous revelation or signs and wonders, fulfillment of prophecy, or the moral character of the prophet. It was necessary to have their eyes opened by God's Holy Spirit in order to make the correct use of the revelation that had been given. In order to make the correct use of the revelation that had been given, enlightenment by God's Spirit's is indispensable. It seems to me where enlightenment by God's Spirit is present, the Israelites could distinguish, by means of the objective validation criteria, between true and false prophets with confidence and certainty. Where enlightenment by God's Spirit was lacking, then that kind of certitude and insight were also lacking.

I think that in the objective divine revelation there is sufficient light to remove every excuse for being misled. But, and this is true every bit as much today as it was in the Old Testament period, because of man's sinful nature and because of man's willful desire to suppress the truth. What you find is this: without God's Spirit human beings deliberately turn aside from what is clearly presented to them. So there was sufficient light to remove every excuse but the enlightenment by God's Spirit was important so that use could be made of the revelation that had been given in a proper way. And for that reason, people were condemned and held accountable if they followed false prophets. They were responsible for responding to the light that had been given to them, which was adequate but which also required the opening of the heart and the mind by God's Spirit to receive the revelation that had been given.

#### b) Present Application

Just a couple comments on how this might relate to the present time. Of course, this becomes a theological issue. It seems to me that in the present time, the place where we find ourselves in the progression of redemptive history—the issue that the ancient Israelite faced of distinguishing between the true and the false prophets—I don't think that continues to exist for us in the sense that it did for the ancient Israelite. I say that because it seems to me that since the

completion of God's revelation and its fixation in the canon of Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, everything that now would be regarded as prophecy in the sense that it was given in the Old Testament period, is something that is already stamped or marked as being true, because the revelation is complete, it's not ongoing. I don't look for continuing revelation today with the completion of the canon of Scripture. It seems to me the problem in our time appears in a different form and that is, how can we distinguish biblical truth from other claims to truth. Now we know that the revelation of God contained in Scripture is really the revelation of God, and that gets you into the whole issue of the question of apologetics, and how you can make arguments for the truthfulness of Christianity and the truthfulness of biblical revelation and what arguments can be appealed to for that. You see, that's a different issue than the one specifically that was faced in the Old Testament period.

### 1. Vos: Objective and Subjective Aspects

I follow in this, pretty much in the model of Geerhardus Vos, if you look in your citations, page 10, there's a paragraph there on that, I'm not going to read through it. But if you know, in his model of revelation and redemption, he speaks of revelation in what he calls his objective-central aspect as well as in the subjective-individual aspect. He says that as God moves his plan of redemption forward, revelation moves along with it, as really the commentary on or explanation of what God is doing redemptively. Revelation accompanies that objective-central movement of redemptive history. So you get revelation with the Exodus, you get revelation with the first advent of Christ in enormous amounts. But when Christ is come, and that objective-central movement aspect of revelation comes to a conclusion, revelation ceases. It moves over into this subjective-individual kind of application of revelation. Now he words that much better than I just have, if you look at page 9 and 10 in your citations. From his model, the point where revelation might continue would be with the second advent of Christ. There

you get another major movement in the progress of redemptive history. It may be accompanied by revelation, and that certainly is possible. You might notice about two thirds of the way down page 10, in that paragraph, “Now revelation accompanies the process of objective-central redemption only, and this explains why redemption extends further than revelation.” And then this last paragraph. “There lies only one epoch in the future when we would expect objective-central redemption to be resumed, that’s the Second Coming of Christ. At that time there will take place great redemptive acts.”

## 2. Bavinck Revelation Reached its End in Christ

If you go back to page 8 in your citations, I have a couple paragraphs from Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*, which is currently interesting. That was published in the early 1900s in Dutch and had never been translated until the last couple years. It’s in the process of being translated and published right now. Of the four volumes, I think two or three have been translated. But this is my own translation from Volume 1 of a few of his comments on this question. He says, “Revelation, taken as a whole, first reached its end and purpose in the coming of Christ. But it falls in two great periods, in two distinguishable dispensations. The first period served to ingraft the full revelation of God into the history of humanity. The entire economy can be considered as a coming of God to his people, as a seeking of a tabernacle for Christ. It is thus predominantly a revelation of God in Christ. It bears an objective character. It is characterized by extraordinary acts, theophanies, prophecy and miracles are the ways by which God comes to his people. Christ is the content and the point of it. He is the Logos, that shines in the darkness, comes to his own and becomes flesh in Jesus. The Holy Spirit was not yet, because Christ was not yet glorified. In this period the inscripturating (this is the same concept as Vos) was in step with the revelation. Both grew from century to century. To the degree that the revelation progressed the Scripture increased in scope. When in Christ the full revelation of God is

given, theophany, prophecy and wonder have reached their high point in him and the grace of God in Christ has appeared to all men, then, at the same time, there is also the completion of the Scripture. Christ in his person and work has fully revealed the Father to us, therefore that revelation is fully described for us in the Scripture. The economy of the Son gives way to the economy of the Spirit. The objective revelation goes over into the subjective application.” Again that is very similar, some different words, same concept, as Vos, “In Christ an organic center is created by God in the midst of history, from out of this center the light of revelation shines in constantly wider circles... The Holy Spirit takes all from Christ, he adds nothing new to the revelation. This is complete and therefore not capable of enlarging. Christ is the Word, full of grace and truth; his work is complete, the Father himself rests in his work, not added to or enlarged by the good works of the saints a word, not by tradition, but by his person, not by the pope. In Christ, God has fully revealed himself and given himself wholly, therefore the Scripture is also complete. It is the complete Word of God. Even though revelation is complete.” The work does not cease. “The Reformation confessed the perfection and sufficiency of the Scripture over against Roman doctrine.” Go down 2/3 of the way of that last paragraph. “The sufficiency of the Holy Scripture flows also out of the nature of the New Testament dispensation. Christ became flesh and completed his work. He is the last and highest revelation of God. He declared the Father to us. By him has God in the last days spoken to us. He is the highest, the only prophet. When Jesus completed his work he sent the Holy Spirit who does not add something new to the revelation, but leads the people of God in the truth till they come to the unity of the faith in the knowledge of the Son of God.”

### 3. Modern Application

Now I said this is theological. I don't look for the same kind of issue facing us today where we're hearing of people trying to be prophets and have the

same problem that the ancient Israelite did in distinguishing between the true and the false prophets. Since there are such people today and since there is a closing of revelation, they are automatically stamped as false. Now if you don't accept that kind of theological construct and have an open view as far as the continuation of revelation well then you might go back to the same model the Old Testament people used: you look at signs and wonders, you look at the moral character of the prophet, you look for prophecy and fulfillment, and conformity to previous revelation. Is it consistent with what the Scripture has said? You look at the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. You work like that. I'm not inclined to say we are in the same situation today.

No, I wouldn't say that. I'd say that in the New Testament you're in the transition period. When the early church was working out how to take this revelation that had been given and apply it in the new economy that was taking of hold, there was an enormous change from God's people being identified with this national entity Israel and now being a spiritual body, and in that transition period prophecy was still going on. But it seems to me when you get past the apostolic era that that function is no longer necessary. That might come back. Then you have to question when do we enter that period. That maybe something difficult to discern. But at that point yes, there is the possibility of additional revelation accompanying that objective-central feature movement of revelation.

## VII. The Prophet and the Cult in Ancient Israel

Let's go on to our next topic here, Roman numeral VII., "The prophet and the cult in ancient Israel." Before we say anything about this topic we should probably define "cult." Cult here is used in a rather technical sense for the outward forms of Israel's worship. How did the prophets relate to the ritual functions of the Old Testament religious observance? Were they official functionaries of the temple and their rituals that were carried on in the temple, the sacrifices and the festivals? There has been a lot of discussion over the last

century of how the prophet related to the outward forms of Israel's worship. Were they official cult functionaries or were they opposed to the cult? What was their attitude toward the cult? Cult is used in the sense of the outward forms of Israel's worship not in the sense of Jehovah Witnesses or Mormons or things like that.

#### A. The View That the Prophets were Anti-Cultic

You notice on your outline there are three headings: a., "The view that the prophets were anti-cultic," that is, they were opposed to ritual observance and external kinds of worship; b. is the opposite, "The prophets were cultic functionaries that were in the employ of the temple much like the priests were"; and c., which I think is the depiction that we get from the Old Testament, "They were neither anti-cultic as such nor cult functionaries but simply proclaimers of divine revelation." Let's look at those 3 headings.

##### 1. The View that Prophets were Anti-Cultic

First, the view that prophets were anti-cultic. 1. The explication of the view. Through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century especially in mainstream biblical scholarship there was the view advocated that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult. It's not that they were against some misuse of the cult or particular form of the cult but they were against the cult as such. The advocates of this view said the prophets promoted a worship of God that consisted in loving your neighbor, concern for social justice, and practice of high ethical standards. So the prophets, according to this view, didn't just place morality above the cult but in place of the cult. What God wanted was not ritual. What God wanted was people who did justly, loved their neighbor, and opposed the oppression of the poor. One of the advocates of that view was the German scholar Paul Bolz who wrote a book *Moses and His Work*. The basic thesis of that book is that the prophets told Israel to return to, get this, Mosaic religion, which he said was "cult-less." He said the rise of cultic activity in Israel came through Canaanite influence. Adaptation of Canaanite of religious practices into Israelite worship

had constituted a decline of Mosaic heights of true religion. Now how could Bolz say something like that. When you read through the Pentateuch there is all kinds of legislation about all kinds of sacrifices that are to be brought, the duties of the priests, and what festivals are to be observed. All that is cultic material. How could he say that Mosaic religion was cult-less? Well he was a follower of Wellhausen and those who said that all the priestly material in the Pentateuch was late, post-exilic. They claim that it was the prophets who were the great promoters of ethical monotheism. It was only after the prophets that all this kind of ritual material became so prominent and that was attributed back to Moses. But in the time of Moses, according to him, the Israelites' religion was cult-less. So the idea was Israel took over their cult from the Canaanites, from heathen people and therefore the prophets opposed it. They didn't want just a purified system put in its place but they wanted the practice of social justice that was true religion.

Look at your citations page 10. There's a paragraph from Ludwig Kohler who was of this view as well. He says, "This cult however is no new thing and not of Israel's creation; less still is it a revelation of Yahweh. It is an annexation of the traditional cult of the conquered land. Just because the cult is a bit of ethnic life the prophets are always setting question marks against it, doubting its propriety, and rejecting it. Amos 5:25, "'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness 40 years.'" This question expects a "no" for an answer, which historically is wrong but which is correct to this extent—that it was not God but men who instituted the cult. We say the cult, for in the Old Testament the cult is almost identical with the sacrifice; there is little more to it than that, above all there is hardly any proclamation of the word. 'I spoke not unto your fathers nor commanded them the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.' Jeremiah 7:22. The statement is unambiguous and unconditional. The sacrificial system does not owe its origin to God. His will is only in the regulation of it, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams. When you come before my face who has

required this from your hand?’ Isaiah 1:11-12. Now many more passages of this sort might be quoted and they are important.”

## 2. Scripture Adduced for Support of the View that the Prophets were Fundamentally Opposed to the Cult

Let’s go on to 2., because the quotes go right over into 2., “Scripture adduced for support of the view that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult.” Some of those texts Ludwig Kohler mentions I will mention again but let me give you several key passages. The first one is Isaiah 1:11-17. Isaiah says, “‘The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong, learn to do right; seek justice, defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.’” So confessions like that of Isaiah are used to show that the prophets were opposed to the cult. What they wanted was social justice—away with all these rituals.

Amos 5:21-27 says, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Then a rhetorical question and this one is often used to support this anti-



cultic position. “‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,’ says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.” “But did you bring me sacrifices in the desert?” A rhetorical question seemingly requiring an answer “No.” Why are you bringing them now?

Hosea 6:6 “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, an acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Micah 6:6-8: “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Jeremiah 7:21-23 “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,” That “just” in there is not in the Hebrew. In the Hebrew it says. “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings. But I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.”

So those are some of the stronger texts upon which this idea that the prophets opposed the cult and not just some abuse of the cult or wrong form or practice of the cult but the cult itself. They were fundamentally opposed to the cult and wanted to see it replaced.

Back in 1 Samuel 15 when Saul is trying to justify his actions of saving the animals, God said “to obey is better than to sacrifice.” So it’s not a new idea with the prophets.

Let’s go on to “Assessment.” But maybe we better take a break first.

Transcription: Kelly Sandwick, Ashley Bussive, Eunbin Cho,  
Daniel Shafer and Peter Kang (editor)  
Edited by: Ted Hildebrandt and Bill Gates  
Re-narrated by Bill Gates

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10**

### **Prophets and the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?**

#### **A. Prophets Opposed to Cult Review**

We were looking at Scripture and the views for support of the idea that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult. We referenced some texts in Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, and I might say, some of those statements made by the prophets were pretty powerful statements and were a strong condemnation of the cult. Whether you then jump to the conclusion that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult, I think is another question. But one cannot deny that there are some strong negative statements about cultic observance in Israel that were found in a number of the prophetic books.

#### **1. Some Statements Not Opposing the Cult**

##### **a. Isaiah**

What you immediately have to be aware of also, however, is that there are also some pronouncements by the prophets in which they appear to not be fundamentally opposed to the cult; they were not promoters of a cult-less religion as some have alleged. Isaiah, as we saw in chapter 1:11-17, speaks very strongly against what was going on in Jerusalem with respect to the bringing of sacrifices. He also, in his prophecy, proclaims that the temple is the house of Yahweh. He speaks of the Lord dwelling on Mount Zion. For him the temple is a place of God's special presence. He sees that vision of the Lord in the temple, high and lifted up, sitting on the throne. So, it doesn't seem like he's fundamentally opposed to the cult.

##### **b. Jeremiah**

Similarly, Jeremiah frequently calls the temple "the house which is called by my name," speaking in the name of the Lord in Jeremiah 7:10, 32:34, 34:15, and various other places. In Jeremiah 17:26, Jeremiah says, "People will come from the towns of Judah and the villages around Jerusalem, from the territory of Benjamin and the western foothills, from hill country, and the Negev, bringing

burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense, and thank offerings to the Lord.” He speaks of that in a very positive way. God instructed David to build an altar in 2 Samuel 24:18, “In that day, Gad the prophet went to David and said to him, ‘Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of the Araunah the Jebusite.’ So David went up as the Lord had commanded him.” So, here’s a prophet in 2 Samuel 24:18 telling David to build an altar. In Jeremiah 27:18—it’s interesting, Jeremiah had those sermons where he said the Lord was going to destroy the temple—but look at Jeremiah 27:18, “Plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon.” He’s praying for the preservation of the temple. So there are a lot of expressions scattered through the prophetic books in which it is clear that the prophets were not anti-cultic in the sense that they desired a religion without the cult. They had positive things to say about the temple and the temple worship.

#### c. Is There a Cultless Religion in the OT?

In fact, it seems to me the idea of religion without a cult is a rather strange idea. Certainly it’s in conflict with the data of Scripture. Enormous sections of the Pentateuch are given over to describing the regulations that God gave to Israel through Moses for the bringing of sacrifices and offerings. It is only by ascribing all that to some much later time and saying that it’s not Mosaic and not a part of the data that you say that the Bible doesn’t require sacrifice.

Besides, you might ask, what is religion without cult? Is morality alone religion? That gets to be a rather philosophical question. Many Anglicans accept this view that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult, and see the prophets as simply preachers of ethics. But what that does is reduce religion to moralism. In one sense, as far as true biblical religion is concerned, moralism is really the destroyer of true religion. I think you could argue true religion without cult really doesn’t exist.

#### d) Christianity and the Cult

In our own context of the New Testament era, certainly Christianity cannot exist without the cult. What is religion without prayer, without offering, and without religious gathering? I think in its essence, true religion is fellowship with God, and if that's the case it must express itself in religious acts, not just in moral acts. This gets into the question of the horizontal and the vertical relationship. Yes, true religion requires that we love our neighbor as ourselves, that we preach against injustice on the horizontal level. But true religion also requires that we have fellowship with God and a relationship with God which expresses itself in prayer, praise, fellowship and consecration, et cetera. Such expressions are not just individual and private. They should be communal and public, that certainly is a clear teaching of Scripture.

##### 1. Cult Prescribed in the Pentateuch

So, it seems to me contradictory both to the Bible, particularly the Pentateuch and to the nature of true religion itself, to say that there was a time when Israel's religion was cult-less. In fact, Leviticus tells us that the cult was a gift of God to his people. Look in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of a creature is in the blood and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." In this sacrifice of the Old Testament period, blood was shed. And God says, "I have given that to you on the altar, because it's the blood that makes atonement." So if you take the Old Testament as it presents itself, certainly you cannot conclude that cultic observances were assimilations of heathen practices taken over from the Canaanites. The Old Testament says these regulations were given to Israel by God through Moses. They were given as a means of atonement for sin ultimately pointing forward to the sacrificial work of Christ, who is the lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world. So I think that when you get the whole picture. It's unthinkable that the prophets could have been fundamentally opposed to the cult. It just is totally inconsistent with the whole of Old Testament revelation.

## 2. Prophets Condemned Heathenism in the Cult: Opus Operatum

What the prophets did condemn were the heathenisms that entered the Israelite cult where Yahweh came to be worshipped, much like a Baal or any other heathen deity, as well as a formalistic mechanical idea of the ritual system. There's a Latin phrase that's often used for that *opus operatum*, which means "by the work it is worked." In other words, you go through the ritual and that automatically produces the desired result. They would just go through these religious rites and think that by that alone they gained a certain favor with God. Then they'd live their life as they pleased.

### a) Hosea & Heathen Cultic Practices

In the time of Hosea, you've been working through the book of Hosea, and I think you're aware from that, Baal worship was prevalent in the Northern Kingdom. The fruit of the land was ascribed to Baal in Hosea 2:5 and 8. The people followed many heathen practices, including temple prostitution, that's in Hosea 4:11 and following. They were doing all these things, yet still bringing their sacrifices to the Lord. It's because of that that Hosea speaks out against the cult. They've made idols in Hosea 8:4-6. They had sacred pillars in Hosea 10:1, but they're still going through the rituals of Yahweh. It seems clear that what was in their mind, the Israelites' minds, was that there was safety in the outward form, just going through these forms, that's all that's required of them. Whereas Hosea realizes that that kind of cultic observance is absolutely worthless. It's an abomination to the Lord. God asked for more. As he says in Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

### b) Ban Empty Rituals

If you go back to Isaiah 1 the people are bringing their sacrifices verse 11, they're bringing many of them and the Lord says, "What are they to me?" The reason he says that is at the end of verse 15, "your hands are full of blood." You're not living a life that shows any consecration or dedication to God or desire to walk

in the ways of the Lord, you're just going through these rituals. So they turned away from the Lord, they're just going through the forms, and the Lord says that's an abomination.

### 3. Amos 5:21-25 and the Cult

Now, I think the two passages that are probably the most difficult are the Amos 5 and Jeremiah 7, which we looked at before the break. Amos 5:21-25 is certainly one that's often appealed to. Particularly the rhetorical question of verse 25. "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the desert, O house of Israel?" It seems that the question is asked with the intended response of "No." Some understand the implication of that to be that Israel was disobedient already in the wilderness period and did not bring sacrifices to the Lord during the wilderness period.

#### a) McComiskey

If you look at your citations, page 12, there are a few paragraphs there from Tom McComiskey's commentary on Amos in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, where he says, "Verses 25 and 26 are difficult. Many commentators hold that because of the question of v. 25 expects that negative answer, Amos was affirming that sacrifice was unknown during the wilderness period, or that it was not regarded as necessary for a proper relationship with Yahweh, obedience being the sole requirement. But this interpretation does not do justice to the continuity of vv. 25-26 called for by the Hebrew particle *waw* (untranslated in the NIV) that begins verse 26." The NIV doesn't begin with a *waw* in the translation of 26; there's no "and" or "but" there, it just says, "You lifted up the shrine of your king." "Nor does it adequately explain why a statement denying the efficacy of sacrifice was placed in the judgment section of the oracle. The question (of verse 25) calls for a negative answer: "no," the Israelites did not sacrifice then. Evidently the forty-year period was a time when obedience to the Lord or obedience to the Levitical institutions had declined. This period began with the defection of the Israelites at Kadesh. The defection to idolatry in this wilderness period is emphasized in the

prophetic tradition.” So, as McComiskey reads this passage he’s saying verse 25 is a rhetorical question—the response is “no,” because Israel didn’t observe sacrifices during the wilderness period, but they did do something else.

He translates that *waw* introducing verse 26 as a *waw* adversative; his next line there is verse 26 begins with the *waw* best understood as adversative, “but you have lifted up the shrine of your king the house of your idols.” So Israel disobeyed God by neglect of sacrifice and turned to idolatry. That’s why he reads 25 and 26 referring to the wilderness time. The words “shrine” and “pedestal” need not be altered.

There’s a lot of discussion of how to interpret and translate verse 26. But his conclusion is, “The verse refers to the implements of idolatrous worship of an unknown astral deity. Seen in this way, v. 26 fits the formal structure well, for Amos, like Ezekiel and Hosea, traced the disobedience of God’s people into their history.” So that’s the way McComiskey views that rhetorical question and of course that rhetorical question is the one that people say implies a negative answer towards a cult-less religion. Well, McComiskey says it’s not really intended to be a cult-less religion because Israel was disobedient in the wilderness period and didn’t observe sacrifices and instead turned to idolatry.

#### b. Ridderbos on Amos 5

There’s a Dutch Old Testament scholar J. Ridderbos who wrote a commentary on Amos and questions an interpretation like that of McComiskey and asks whether that is really the best way to go about verse 25 and 26. In Ridderbos’ discussion of Amos 5 he suggests that in the preceding context the issue is the Lord’s rejection of presently brought offerings. Go back up to Amos 5:21, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts. Even though you bring me burnt offerings, I will not accept them.” The issue was presently brought offerings and he thinks it’s hard to argue the Lord would reject present offerings on the basis that they had neglected to bring offerings in the wilderness period. What’s the connection there between verse 21 and 22 and what apparently is being addressed



in verse 25? What he suggests is that 25 really continues the thought of 22 in the sense that the bringing of sacrifices is not the primary and only thing that the Lord asks of Israel. If you look at the Pentateuch, it seems that the sacrificial system was instituted in the wilderness period, and that Israel, at least partially, did observe the ritual system during the time of the wilderness journeys. In Numbers 16:46, the fire of the altar is mentioned, and that presupposes daily sacrifices were being brought, but apart from Numbers 16:46, you don't get any explicit references to observance of the sacrificial system during the wilderness wanderings.

But Ridderbos, his view is "offerings undoubtedly were brought, but there probably was not a complete and regular observance of all of the sacrificial system during the wilderness period because of the conditions under which the Israelites were living." So his suggestion is that the purpose of that rhetorical question in verse 25 is less absolute than it might appear. He's not suggesting that no sacrifices whatever were brought in the wilderness, but rather that in that wilderness time there was much lacking.

The line of argument, then, that Amos is advancing is that sacrifices don't have the heightened significance that the Israelites were attaching to them—namely, that ritual observances by themselves were the essence of true religion. "Did you bring me sacrifices in the wilderness?" The complete ritual system wasn't observed in total. Sacrifices are not the essence of true religion. True religion is a heart desire to be obedient to the Lord. That goes back to the statement in 1 Samuel 15, "to obey is better than sacrifice;" that's what the Lord desires. So, whether you take McComiskey's view or a view like that of Ridderbos, certainly what verse 25 is saying is not that Mosaic religion was intentionally cult-less or that true religion is simply a matter of ethics.

#### 4. Jer 7:21-23 and the Cult

The other text that I think is difficult is Jeremiah 7:21-23. Some have argued that from this anti-cultic viewpoint this is the most critical passage,

because in verse 22, you have the statement, “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices.” What do we do with that statement?

a. Rawls Response with Exod 19:5

There are two suggestions that I might give. One is that of Rawls, who says, “At the very first approach of Jehovah to Israel with the offer of the covenant,” that’s in Exodus 19, “even before the Decalogue had been promulgated, it was at this earliest coming together of Jehovah and Israel God refrained from saying anything about sacrifices, simply saying the entire agreement between the people and himself was based on their loyalty and obedience.” See that’s Exodus 19:5. “‘Now if you obey me fully, keep my covenants, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to Israel.” That first presentation of the covenant says nothing about sacrifice. So, “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,” may refer to that initial presentation. So that’s one way you might deal with verse 21.

b. OT Allis’ Response: Concerning → for the sake of

O. T. Allis has a different suggestion. I have his in your citations, page 11, “The reason for the startling words we have just considered is given in words almost equally surprising: ‘For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.’ These words seem at first glance to bear out fully the claim of the critics that Jeremiah knew nothing about a sacrificial system introduced by Moses at the time of the Exodus. But such a conclusion rests on the failure of the English translation to do justice to the ambiguity of the Hebrew word rendered ‘concerning’; and particularly to the fact that, as is made clear by studies of the usage, they may also be rendered by ‘because of’ or ‘for the sake of.’ It is

obvious that if in Jeremiah 7:22 we employ the stronger rendering ‘because of’ or ‘for the sake of,’ this verse not merely ceases to support the inference which the critics base upon it, but it becomes exceedingly appropriate in the context.” I think the strength of Allis’ argument here is his suggestion of how well it fits the context. “The Lord does not say to Israel that he gave no commands to their fathers **concerning** sacrifice. At first the people listening to Jeremiah might think that was his meaning, but a moment’s reflection would convince them that could not be the true meaning of his words. What Jehovah meant was that he did not speak to their fathers **for the sake of** sacrifices, as if He needed them and would suffer hunger unless he were fed by the grudging offerings of sinful men who had no conception of the real relation in which they stood to Him.

The language appears to be intentionally ambiguous, even startlingly so. But the words “Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and you eat the flesh” are intended to give a clue to their meaning.” You see, go back up to verse 21, “This is what the Lord Almighty, God of Israel says, ‘Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves.’”

You see what Allis is saying here is, “Then after pointing out in a striking way that God has no need of sacrifices of His creatures, the prophet goes on to declare that obedience was the real aim and requirement of the Sinaitic legislation.” No part of the burnt offering was to be eaten. So when it says in 21, “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves,” The Lord is saying, in effect, that those who grudged him that part of their offerings, which he has claimed as his own, are welcome to keep the whole of it for themselves. He doesn’t want or need that kind of a sacrifice. So, “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves, for when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands.”

The NIV says “about burnt offerings.” But you see what Allis’ translation does. The King James says “concerning” and the NIV says “about,” but that’s the

'*al* preposition, you look up the Hebrew text there, '*al*. How do you translate that '*al*? Is it "about" or "concerning" as the NIV and King James say? Allis says "no;" it should be "because of" or "for the sake of." In other words, "When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands 'for the sake of' burnt offerings and sacrifices," because I don't need them. You can keep them for yourself. That suggestion I think, fits better with verse 21. "Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves," I don't need your sacrifices. What I want is your obedience. So, again, I think what Jeremiah's doing is not saying that sacrifices are something that the Lord fundamentally opposes. It is the manner in which the Israelites were bringing the sacrifices that the Lord was opposing.

### 3. The Place of Ritual in Religion

Probably in an evangelical community this is not an issue, not a question people are addressing. You go to a university campus where students take a course in the "Bible as Literature" this is the kind of material they'll be talking about. It's in all these textbooks that are used in that kind of a treatment of the Old Testament. So, I'm sure there are a lot of people out there who think it's opposed to these kinds of ideas. If nothing else it does call our attention to the question of why the prophets do speak so strongly to Israel about their ritual obedience. Because then it brings up the question, what is the place of ritual in worship? That's an ongoing continual issue even today. What's the place of ritual in our worship? In different forms you can fall into the same kinds of abuse of ritual today as the Israelites did in the Old Testament period. You think by simply going to a church, reciting certain creeds, offering certain prayers, you gain favor with God. Not if your life is not at the same time giving some evidence that you are desirous of living in the way that the Lord intends you to live. The rituals do not automatically bring God's blessing and benefit. That's not to say they're unimportant either and that we should cast them aside, because their use is real.

## B. The Prophets Were Cultic Functionaries

### 1. Explication of the View

Let's go on to B., the other extreme of this position, that is, "The prophets were cultic functionaries." 1. under that is, "Explication of the view." I would say today there is greater recognition than there was 30 or 40 years ago that the prophets were not fundamentally opposed to the cult, but the pendulum has swung. In the last 50 years or so there's been a movement among a certain segment of Old Testament scholars to tie the prophet and the cult so closely together that the prophets as well as the priests are viewed as official cult functionaries.

#### a. Aubrey R. Johnson advocates

One of the advocates of this view whose work has been translated into English is Aubrey R. Johnson. If you look at the bottom of page 12, you have citations from his volume *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel*, he says, "As a result the intercessory acts of the prophet's role has been more or less overlooked. Yet it is undoubtedly true that the *nabi* or prophet, as a professional figure, was as much the representative of the people as the spokesman of Yahweh; it was part of his function to offer prayer as well as to give the divine response or oracle. This being the case, the question again arises as to what exactly was the status of these consultative specialists. Had they, like the early prophets, a standing within the cultus akin to that of the priest? In particular, should we think of the Jerusalem prophets as being the members of the temple personnel?" Of course that's a question, but his conclusion is "yes."

#### b. Sigmund Mowinckel and Cultic Prophets

There is a lot of the movement towards including the prophets as part of the cult in the sense that they were cultic functionaries, which comes from the influence of a Norwegian Old Testament scholar by the name of Sigmund Mowinckel. You'll find his name in your bibliography. He published several volumes on the Psalms, and in one of those volumes, he argued that in the Psalms, God sometimes speaks directly. For example, Psalm 75:2 and following says, "We

give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds. You say, ‘I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm.’” You see there in the first verse, God is speaking much like the form of prophetic speaking. Mowinckel argued from examples of that sort that you get a prophetic speech sort of style embedded in many of these psalms. From that he concluded that most of the Psalms originated in the cult and that the words of many parts of the psalms were spoken by prophets who were connected with cultic observances. He called them “cult prophets.” So the first person singular he regarded as an oracular response of the prophet who was bringing God’s word to the worshiping people as they were gathered. So in addition to the priest, who brought offerings at the temple you had a person who gave an oracle there. He brought the word of God in the context of religious worship. So, his conclusion was prophets and priests were two different offices of the temple service, or the worship at various other sanctuaries. Sometimes they might be united in one person—Ezekiel was a prophet and a priest—but generally, he felt they were two separate individuals, both cultic functionaries.

## 2. Scriptural Support is Weak

You may ask, “Where is the scriptural support for this?” In the writings of these people there’s very little direct scriptural support for the theory. Some argue Samuel was attached to the tabernacle at Shiloh. He was attached to the place of sacrifice at Ramah. You have scattered references to prophets and priests being mentioned together. For example, Isaiah 28:7 where you get this statement, “Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine.” So priests and prophets are mentioned in the same sentence as if they are somehow connected with each other. Jeremiah 4:9, you have a similar reference “‘In that day,’ declares the Lord, ‘the king and the officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled.’” It lists priests and prophets together. You have Elijah connected with sacrificial rites or ceremonies there on

Mount Carmel, when he confronts the priests of Baal. You have prophets appearing in the temple, Jeremiah, for example. In the book of Jeremiah chapter 7 he is at the temple court. See these are all indirect kind of references. There's little explicit evidence on which to base the theory.

### C. The View the Prophets Were Neither Anti-Cultic as such, nor Cultic Functionaries, but Simply Proclaimers of Divine Revelation

Let's go on to 3., "Assessment of the view." If you look at the article on prophecy in the *New Bible Dictionary*, J. Motyer writes, "the basis for the cult prophet position is largely inferential. It is difficult to see how any theory could be stable when it rests on such slight foundations." I think he's right in that there's very little direct evidence that supports the conclusion that the prophets were cultic functionaries. E. J. Young in his volume *My Servants the Prophets* says, "We would leave the question as to the precise relation between the prophets and the temple unanswered. We do not think sufficient evidence has been given in the Scripture to enable one to pronounce with certainty on the matter." Johnson's monograph, that's one we looked at on *The Cult Prophet in Ancient Israel*, serves as a wholesome corrective to the attitudes that became prevalent under the schools of Wellhausen that would be anti-cultic. So it's a corrective to that. It does cause us to see that there was indeed some connection between the prophets and the place of sacrifice. What this connection was, however, we, for our part, are unable to say. We're unable to follow Johnson's contention that the prophets were cultic specialists. I think Motyer is correct in that it largely rests on unsolid evidence.

So let's go on to C., "The view the prophets were neither anti-cultic as such, nor cultic functionaries, but simply proclaimers of divine revelation." It seems to me this is where the bottom line is. We have talked from the beginning that the prophetic function rests on divine calling. God could call a priest to function as a prophet. Ezekiel was an example of that. He could call a farmer as Elisha and Amos were. Whoever it was, that person was called by God to proclaim his word; God put his word in their mouth and they gave God's message to God's

people. It seems to me that when you look at the whole of the Old Testament, and the writings of the prophets, the conclusion is: the prophets were neither against the cult as such, nor professional cultic officials. We have very little evidence for either of those positions. Sometimes the prophets denounced the cult, but they did so when it deviated from its intended purpose; they weren't fundamentally opposed to it. I think what the prophets promoted was what I would call a "covenantal unity" of the inward disposition of the heart to love the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul, and the outward expression of that love in both ethical and moral uprightness, doing justice, loving one's neighbor, et cetera, as well as in the performance of worship according to divinely prescribed standards. So you need all of those components, you just don't go through rituals and expect to gain God's favor. Those rituals must be combined with a love for the Lord and a desire to live in a way for the Lord's purposes. That's done both by ethics and by ritual observance.

Cultic acts have no value in themselves. I think that's something that the prophets are telling ancient Israel, it's something they can tell us as well. Cultic acts are meaningful only when they are performed as an expression of undivided love for God and a desire to walk in his ways. When a person loves God and desires to walk in his ways, that will come to expression in ritual acts. But ritual acts separated from that love for God and desire to walk in his ways are an abomination to the Lord. I think that's what the prophets are saying when they condemn what's going on in Israel with respect to the multiplication of the burning of offerings but living lives that were completely contrary to what God's desires were.

#### VIII. The Composition of the Prophetic Books – Were the Prophets Writers?

Let's go on. Roman numeral VIII. is, "The Composition of the Prophetic Books—Were the Prophets Writers?" There are 3 or 4 sub-points. A. is, "Traditional View." B. is, "Literary Critical School." C. is, "History and Traditional School, that's the oral tradition school."



## A. The Traditional View

The writing prophets are so-called because they put their message in writing in order that it might be preserved in permanent form. According to that view the prophets were writers. Perhaps passages such as Jeremiah 36:1-28 and Isaiah 30 verse 8 can cast some light on the method in which things were written down.

### 1. Jeremiah 36:1-28

Jeremiah 36:1-28 is quite interesting. Let's look at that. It is the most explicit description of putting a prophetic message in written form. You read "In the fourth year of Jehoiakim king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.'" So the Lord tells Jeremiah to get a scribe put this message down in writing.

So what's Jeremiah do? Verse 4, he "called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll." Then that scroll was taken to the court and read to the king. What'd the king do? You read in verse 21, "The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire." In verse 26 you read "The king commanded Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them," so they didn't get arrested.

“After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ‘Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up. Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, “This is what the Lord says: You burned that scroll and said, ‘Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it?’” Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: ‘He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed.’”

So, the Lord tells Jeremiah put this message on a scroll and Jeremiah dictates the message and the scribe copies it down, it's sent to the king, he burns it, then the Lord gives him the message again and he writes it down again.

## 2. Isaiah 30:8

Isaiah 30 verse 8 is another text that has a reference to writing, where it says, “Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for days to come it may be an everlasting witness.” So the message had been given and the Lord said, “Write it, on a scroll.” Now those two passages are probably the clearest passages that address the issue of “Were the prophets writers?” And they cast some light on the methods by which prophetic books that came down to us. We don't know a lot more than these few sorts of comments. There's not a great deal of internal evidence to establish the method followed in each case but it seems clear that at least in some cases, the prophets wrote the messages themselves perhaps others took down the message and preserved the message if it was delivered orally, but it does appear that the prophets were writers, not merely speakers. We don't know clearly if in every case, the prophet himself wrote the material that was contained in the book that bears his name, whether it was written down by scribes or edited and put together by someone else. But the traditional view is that the prophets were writers.

## b. The Literary Critical School

B. is, “The Literary Critical School.” In the literary critical school, the prophets were also looked at as writers. However, the big task that the literary critics set themselves out to perform was to sort out and separate what was original from what was added later. So, they tried to distinguish the original from the secondary accretions of later times to determine what was authentic and the truth, attributable to the prophet whose name the book bore, as compared to what had been added later. Very quickly, rationalistic ideas that exclude genuine predictions began to play a role. You come across prophetic statements, in particular of Isaiah, talking about Cyrus, that was not possible and must have come from someone else, not Isaiah the prophet. There are many illustrations of this.

So what I want to do under the literary critical school is speak about two books that are particularly under attack as not being the very words of the prophet whose name the book bears. Those two books are Isaiah and Daniel.

Not so much Isaiah 1-39, where and there’s a lot of variation here. Even among critical scholars there’s a general willingness to attribute at least much of 1-39 to Isaiah the prophet in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah. But when you get to chapters 40-66, there’s a pretty broad consensus that that’s not Isaiah speaking, but rather Second Isaiah in the time of Cyrus, at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Similar things are done with Daniel. So let’s look at Isaiah and Daniel under the Literary Critical School.

### 1. Isaiah 40-66 – or “Second Isaiah”

It’s frequently asserted by mainstream literary critics that Isaiah is not the author of chapters 40-66 of the book of Isaiah. It’s usually referred to as Deutero-Isaiah by scholars who move in the mainstream of contemporary biblical studies. You will find that in the titles of commentaries. You’ll find it in mainstream commentaries, a commentary on Isaiah and a commentary on Deutero-Isaiah. You get one volume on Isaiah 1-39, another volume on chapter 40 and following.

### 1. Rachel Margalioth

You look at your citations, page 14, there's a very interesting study on Isaiah by a woman, Rachel Margalioth, a Jewish scholar, arguing for unity of the book of Isaiah. Notice what she says there at the top of the page, "The assumption that the book of Isaiah is not the work of one author, but that chapters 40 to 66 belong to an anonymous prophet who lived during the Return to Zion, is regarded as one of the most important achievements of biblical criticism. This judgment has gone beyond scholarly circles and has been generally accepted by all classes, and become part of biblical schooling. One rarely encounters an enlightened person who does not accept it as an unquestionable truth."

Interesting statement. "The division of the book was first expressed by the critical school of Doederlein (1775). His system was developed and expanded by the Christian critics", and she has a whole host of them there. "Many Jewish scholars followed in their wake," among these mentioned is Kraus and his "scientific commentary on Isaiah." "It is an accepted fact among modern commentators that chapters 40 to the end are not by Isaiah.' He continues: 'According to our present state of knowledge, it would be a fruitless effort on the part of anyone to try to prove the authenticity of these chapters, since it is shown by internal evidence that they cannot be ascribed to the true Isaiah.'" Now that's the typical kind of statement that you find in the literature.

### 2. R. N. Whybray

She wrote that book in 1964, if you come up to a more recent discussion of this, look at page 15A under R. N. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*. I don't know if you're aware of that series of volumes called the Old Testament Guides. They're little books, usually hundred and fifty pages at most, and there's one for each book of the Old Testament. What it does is introduce you to authorship, date, it's much like Freeman, except a book on each canonical book with major interpretive issues, critical analysis of the authorship, date, and historical background. When you come to Isaiah in the Old Testament Series, there's not just one volume for

Isaiah, see there's a volume for Isaiah, and then there's this volume, *The Second Isaiah*, for chapters 40 to 66. Whybray writes this saying, "This volume, like my commentary on Isaiah 40-66 in the New Century Bible, my two monographs... is the outcome of constant preoccupation with the second half of the Book of Isaiah since I first prepared lectures on it in 1965. I believe that the view which has for many years been almost universally held, that chapters 40 to 55 are substantially the work of a single anonymous 'prophet of the Exile,' remains valid and is likely to remain the view of the majority of scholars." So, when you ask who was the author of Isaiah 40 to 66? It's an anonymous prophet, living at the time of the exile. We don't know who it was. Pretty much a consensus that Isaiah himself did not write the second part of the book.

### 3. Basis for Second Isaiah Argument

Now, what's the basis for coming to that kind of a conclusion? When you look at the arguments that you find in those who advocate this Deutero-Isaiah view, the grounds usually advanced are basically three arguments. I've tried to reduce the essence of this down to three fundamental arguments.

a. The Concepts and Ideas found in Isaiah 40 to 66 are said to differ significantly from Isa. 1-39

a. "The concepts and ideas found in Isaiah 40 to 66 are said to differ significantly from the concepts and ideas that appear in the uncontested sections of the first part of the book," that is, the first part of the book ascribed to Isaiah. In other words, there's some hedging there, because some scholars will say not all of first Isaiah belongs to Isaiah, there seems to be some secondary material there. But in general, the argument is that if you look at the concepts and ideas presented in Isaiah 1-39, and compare them with the concepts and ideas you find in 40-66, there's a significant enough difference in concepts and ideas to draw the conclusion that this is not the work of a single author, because of difference in concepts and ideas. We'll come back and look at responses to these arguments and fill out the arguments a bit more fully in a minute.

b. A Noticeable Difference in Language and Style Between the Two Parts of the Book of Isaiah

The second argument alleges that there's a noticeable difference in language and style between the two parts of the book. That gets more technical, looking at word use, grammatical constructions, that kind of thing. From that they attempt to argue two parts of this book could not have been written by the same person, because its language and style differs.

c. The Historical Background of Chapters 40-66 is not the Historical Background of Isaiah's time

The third argument says that the historical background of chapters 40-66 is not the historical background of Isaiah's time. Isaiah lived in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah on into the time of Manasseh. In chapters 40-66 Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed, the people are in exile in Babylon and they are about to be released from exile by means of this Persian ruler, Cyrus, who was mentioned by name. So the conclusion is Cyrus must have already arrived on the world scene by the time this was written. But most of the scholars who take this view would argue that it'd be impossible for anyone to know the name of Cyrus in the time of Isaiah the prophet from Ahaz and Hezekiah's time. So those are the three general arguments: concepts and ideas, language and style, and historical background; they are different in chapters 40-66 from what preceded. If you read the people who discuss it and then distill down what they say, as far as support for Deutero-Isaiah, you would find that these are where the arguments center.

## 2. Evaluation: Counter Arguments

a) Concepts and Ideas Differ from the second Part of the Book

Let's look at the first argument, "Concepts and ideas differ from the second part of the book to the uncontested first part of the book." I would argue that this argument is not conclusive and cannot be conclusive because it depends on a person's judgment as to what extent differences in concept and ideas indicates or requires a difference in authorship. I think ultimately that's a subjective of

determination. Differences in concepts and ideas does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that a different author is required. Notice, advocates of the position do not claim there are contradictions in concepts and ideas between the two portions of the book. If there were contradictions this would be a much stronger argument, but that's not the argument. I think that it's difficult to argue that differences in concepts and ideas require a difference in authorship. All the more so when you've considered that the book, if you accept what it claims to be, is not just human words, but a divine word; it's divine revelation. Isn't it possible that God could communicate different ideas, and truths and concepts in different periods of the prophetic life of one individual, namely, Isaiah? Isaiah lived and ministered for a long period of time. It appears that his ministry went from about 740 to 681 B.C. That would be 60 years approximately. Now over a period of 60 years is it possible that there could be development in concepts and ideas? You would hope so. Does that mean you have to conclude there's a different author? As I go on and say here, why, for example, should this special revelation concerning the service of Yahweh not be given for the first time in the latter portion of Isaiah's life? Now that's a new concept that's in the second half of the book, the servant of the Lord theme is a theme we don't have in the first part of the book that develops in the second part of the book. Would that require a different author?

There's a citation on page 13 where Driver says, for example, that the God concept in Isaiah 40 to 66 is "larger and fuller," those are his words, Is that something to be considered impossible in the writing by the same prophet? When Driver says, "The divine purpose in relation to the nations, especially in connection with the prophetic mission of Israel, is more comprehensibly developed." Does that require a different author? Or is that just progression in thought over time? Driver argues for the difference in concepts and ideas as being a basis for difference in authorship. However, he admits there's no essential distinction between the two sections when he says, "Truths which are merely affirmed in Isaiah," that's the first part of the book, "being here made the subject

of reflection and argument.”

So, it seems to me this argument rests to a large extent on that subjective judgment. How much does difference—and particularly differences which are not contradictory, show development, and perhaps introduction of new ideas and themes—how much does that, in and of itself, force you to the conclusion that you must have had a different author? That’s a judgment call. It’s not a necessary conclusion.

In fact, A. Comica, in a study in French, made an argument for the unity of the book on the basis of agreements in concepts and ideas between the two sections. There are a lot of features of Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66, where you do find agreement in concepts and ideas. So it’s not as radical at this junction as might be suggested by some of the advocates of the Deutero-Isaiah theory. I guess we’d better stop here and pick it up on page 3, “Argument from language and style,” which I think is a more important argument than concepts and ideas.

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Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt



## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Prophecy, Lecture 11**

### **Prophets and the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?**

Review: Were the Prophets Writers?

#### **b. The Literary Critical School Continued**

In the handout about the composition of prophetic books asking, “Were the prophets writers?” we looked at the traditional view that the prophets were writers. We started on b., “The Literary Critical School,” which also would view the prophets as writers, but then attempt to sort out in the prophetic books what was authentic, what was from the hand of the prophet whose name is given to the book, and to sort that out from later additions. I mentioned last time the two books that are most often focused on as far as critical scholarship is concerned are Isaiah and Daniel. I think part of the reason for the attention given to Isaiah and Daniel are the remarkable long-term predictions that are found in the second part of Isaiah as well as the multitude of the visions of Daniel. Those that have a historical-critical kind of mindset with an enlightenment worldview that does not accept the existence of the supernatural and divine intervention in human affairs and certainly do not see the divine revelation the way the Bible represents it. They have a problem, with a reference to Cyrus, for example in the second part of Isaiah, who lived long after Isaiah the prophet, or the long term predictions that you have in the book of Daniel as well as the long term prophecies of Daniel with respect to eschatological material specific to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes who lived in the second century B.C. How could Daniel have known about that? So, the conclusion was drawn that the second part of Isaiah was not written by the same writer as the first part of Isaiah and that the book of Daniel was written later and not by the original prophet Daniel.

## 1. Isaiah 40-66 Continued

b. "There are differences in language and in style in the two parts of the book."

We started looking at some of the arguments that people of that viewpoint use to assert that Isaiah 40 is not from Isaiah. In that handout on the bottom of page one I summarize three arguments. First, "The Concepts and Ideas in Isaiah 40-66 are different from concepts and ideas in the first part of the book (1-39)." Second, "There are differences in language and in style in the two parts of the book." Third, "There are differences in historical background and fact." We had worked through the responses in the arguments for the first one that the concepts and ideas in Isaiah 40-66 differ from the concepts in the uncontested sections in the first section of the book. I don't think we did much with the second argument which is over on page three, that is, the argument derived from the difference in language and in style. I think that is a more important argument than the first one because the first argument involves the subjective judgment of how much different the concept and ideas have to be to require a different author. As I mentioned I see no reason why God could not have revealed material about the servant of the Lord theme to Isaiah in the later part of his very long ministry rather than early on. It's a new concept but that does not necessarily require a new author.

When you get to language and style the argument is more important. Driver lists many words occurring in 40-66 but not in 1-39 or words that occur frequently in 40-66 but rarely in 1-39. So from that particular perspective you start looking at word usage and you see the difference. In response it can be said that it shouldn't be too surprising that you find different words or expressions in the second part of the book as compared to the first because there is a difference of subject matter. If you have a

difference of subject matter you would expect a difference in the use of words. So I don't think that argument is convincing either.

The strongest argument from style is the certain linguistic oddities that go along with the later time are said to be found in Isaiah 40-66. Driver argues this on page 240 in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*. To look at this in detail would require an enormous amount of time, so I don't want to spend that much time on it but let me give you a couple examples. In Aalders' work on *An Introduction to the Old Testament* in which he discusses Driver's arguments and others, he notes that one stylistic argument they make is the preference in second Isaiah for the first singular *'ani* instead of *'anoki*, as you are aware both are first person pronouns. This is said to indicate, then, the linguistic usage at a later time. In Isaiah 40-66 *'ani* occurs 79 times *'anoki* occurs 29 times. So, yes, there is a preference for *'ani* in Isaiah 40-66. But then what Aalders points out if you look at Haggai and Zechariah, which are clearly post-exilic as far as Haggai is concerned, *'anoki* doesn't occur at all; *'ani* is 5 times and *'anoki* 0 times. In Zechariah *'ani* occurs 9 times and *'anoki* 0 times. If you go back to Ezekiel—a bit earlier than Haggai and Zechariah—you find *'ani* 162 times and *'anoki* 1 time. There is an occurrence there. What Aalders notes is the tendency not to use *'anoki* in the time of Isaiah 40-66 had not progressed as far as the time of Ezekiel. That tends to say that Isaiah is earlier than Ezekiel. In other words, that the second part of Isaiah has a usage pattern that does not fit in post-exilic times. So Isaiah must be earlier than Ezekiel. So you can look at some of these linguistic usage things and raise questions about them.

I think on the other side of the coin, that is on page 4, you can also find points of linguistic agreements on what you might call linguistic oddities in the book between the two sections. For example, the frequent expression used by the prophets, "Thus saith the Lord," has a variant in Isaiah and that

variant occurs only in Isaiah. That variant replaces the perfect “*amar*” with the imperfect “*yomer*” thus indicating durative action, “thus the Lord is saying.” That variant is unique to Isaiah. It’s used in 1-39 as well as in 40-66 in variant references, and there are more references that expand to the whole of the book. So the fact that that expression is common in all the prophets but it occurs in a variant in Isaiah and the variant occurs in both sections of Isaiah certainly is a pointer toward unity of authorship rather than multiple authors.

### 1) Rachel Margalioth Refuting the Argument from Style in Isaiah

Now I give those two illustrations of the use of ‘*anoki* and the imperfect of *yomer* because when you get into this form of linguistic usage it can get very complicated very quickly. I think that if you’re interested in it and take time to do it and look at some of the literature that discusses it, you’ll find that the arguments go both ways. It is not as clear as it seems to be. Language and styles are different in the first part of the book than the second part of the book. There’s a study done by a woman named Rachel Margalioth called *The Indivisible Isaiah*. It’s out of print but a very useful volume. She argues effectively for the unity of the book based on agreement in language and style. In other words, the argument is turned on its head. If you look at your citations on page 14 go down to the middle of the page in that large paragraph that begins at the middle of page 14 Margalioth says, “Kraus enumerates eighteen words and expressions ‘peculiar’ to Isaiah ‘the second.’ Several of them, as he admits, are to be found also in Isaiah ‘the first,’ but in chapters that Kraus ascribes to Isaiah ‘the second.’” Now that’s an indication for some of the critical scholars that the model they’re imposing on the text doesn’t fit that section of the Isaiah. “But even if such expressions were to be found in far greater number, what proof can be deduced therefrom? Do special words or expressions in or another chapter prove anything? Does that

fact give ground to separating this chapter or any other from the body of the book? In the prophets it is not unusual for one word or more to appear several times in certain chapters although they are not found even once in preceding chapters. Take the expression “the vengeance of the Lord,” which appears several times in Jeremiah 50 and 51, but is not to be found again in the whole of the book. Is that sufficient reason for separating these two chapters from the book?” What she is saying is just because you have two words that appear there that don’t occur anywhere else, does that give you a reason to question whether Jeremiah wrote those two chapters?

“Or again the expression ‘slain by the sword’ is found no fewer than ten times in Ezekiel 31 and 32, but does not appear even once in the preceding chapters. Does Ezekiel 31 start a second Ezekiel? In every prophetic book it is possible to point to numerous words, phrases, expressions appearing several times in only one chapter or in a group of chapters and not elsewhere in the book. We are left to conclude then, that such words and phrases are favored in terms of the context.”

## 2) Margalioth’s Arguments for the Unity of Isaiah

You see, if you have different language it may be more connected to whatever of the topic of discussion is or the specific message the prophet is giving in those particular chapters. “As regards the arguments that the two sections of the book of Isaiah differ in language and style, which occur to Ben Zeev is a thing that can not be proven by example, we shall demonstrate in this book, by hundreds of examples, that the opposite is true. Not only are the two sections similar both in language and style, but they are remarkable for their unity in that the similarities between them cannot be ascribed to any influence whatever... The system here is going to demonstrate the unity of both parts,” and this next paragraph is on that handout on page 4 where

Margalioth describes the systems she uses, “After classifying the book of Isaiah by subject we have shown that in regard to each subject both parts employ innumerable like expressions which are peculiar only to this book. It has also been proved that the specific expressions reveal the same vigor in both parts as well as the same usage. Even common expressions are distinguished by a particular use identical in both. The second section inverts the words of the first. You’ll find on page 4 and onto page 5 and page 6 are subjects she uses to classify the book of Isaiah by subject content.

I’m not going to read through all that material but let’s look at just a few of her subject classifications. Number 1, “Designations of God” and what she lists there are divine titles used exclusively in Isaiah found common in both parts. In other words, designations for God not found anywhere else—“the Holy one of Israel,” for example, is found in both parts of the book. Or “Designations of Peoples of Israel,” there are eleven specific epithets regarding the Jewish people that are found in the two sections. Look at number 9 “Words of Admonition;” twenty-one different wordings of rebuke peculiar to Isaiah and common to both parts. Number 10, “Words of Chastisement;” twenty-nine words specific descriptions of degradation, identical in style in both sections of Isaiah. So there are fifteen topics like that are expressed in both parts of the book of Isaiah, and in many cases are unique to the book of Isaiah. So I think that Margalioth has taken this style and language argument and made a pretty good case for the unity of the book and a single author. We’re going to come back to this in a few minutes.

### 3) Redactional Unity

For a long time these critical arguments dominated the field and convinced the majority of biblical scholars that there were multiple authors to the book of Isaiah and based it on the kinds of arguments of Driver and

others. These arguments like those of Margalioth for the unity of language and style in both parts of book are now being accepted even by critical scholars. But that doesn't lead them to the conclusion that Isaiah was the author of the book. They will speak now of a redactional unity. In other words, these other writers imitated the style of Isaiah so you get a compositional unity but not a single author. I said I would come back to that later. But in response to this argument that Margalioth has made and others, look at the middle of page six.

#### 4) Mark Rooker

For a more recent discussion of linguistic usage and the theme of Isaiah see Mark Rooker, "Dating Isaiah 40-66: What does the linguistic evidence say?" That was in the Westminster Theological Journal vol. 58 in 1996—a very useful article if you're interested in this sort of thing. In this article Rooker gives a number of examples of how linguistic usage in Ezekiel and post-exilic Hebrew consistently reflects later linguistic features than those we find in Isaiah 40-66. Again it gets somewhat technical but he makes a very good case and gives very convincing illustrations. His conclusion is that if "critical scholars continue to insist that Isaiah should be dated in the exile or post-exilic period, they must do so in the face of contrary evidence from diachronic analysis," that is, analysis that uses the history of development of the Hebrew language and linguistic usage through time.

My conclusion to the argument of language and style is that it cannot provide final proof for either of these positions, although diachronic studies provide the strongest argument for authenticity and unity. In any case it is certainly true that consideration of language and style do not require two or more authors in Isaiah—this is my point.

## 5) Computer Analysis of Linguistic Data

Now one other issue that sometimes comes into this particular discussion is computer analysis of linguistic usage that is beginning to appear in biblical studies. If you look at page 15 of your citation at John Oswalt's NICOT commentary on the book of Isaiah where he's discussing this issue. He says, "The nearest thing to objective proof of a lack of unity in the composition appears in Y. Radday's impressive investigation, *The Unity of Isaiah in Light of Statistical Linguistics*. Radday did a computerized study of numerous linguistic features of the book of Isaiah and compared these in the various sections of the book. As a control he studied other pieces of literature, both biblical and extrabiblical, which were reputed to have come from one author. As a result of these researches he concluded that the linguistic variations were so severe that one author could not have produced the whole book of Isaiah. As might be expected these conclusions were greeted with approbation by critical scholars who saw their position as being vindicated...

A number of questions may be raised by Radday's methodology. The very infancy of the field of statistical linguistics raises some questions." Here's a pretty important point. "Do we yet know enough to speak with confidence about the possible limits of variation in a given person's usage?" If you look at a lifetime spanning sixty years how much does a person's linguistic usage change over time? "None of this is to question the integrity with which Radday's study was undertaken and performed, but it is to point out that the evidence is still not as objective as a manuscript in which chapters 1-39 would appear.

Now there are two footnotes. You notice that right after that question about the "limits of variation in a person's linguistic usage," there's a number 5 footnote. Five follows here, "Note that another sort of computerized study of the book's characteristics led to the conclusion that it is a unitary



composition.” In other words, computer analysis and the conclusions drawn from it are divergent. A study by R. Posner concluded that the composition is not a unity, but his results pointed to different divisions of the book than Radday’s. Now you see there are multiple outcomes of any kind of computer analysis, depending on how you set up the program to do the analysis—there are a lot of factors there.

The other footnote is interesting. Number six, “It is ironic that those who lauded the reliability of Radday’s methodology as it applied to Isaiah were much less convinced of its reliability when he recently reported that the same methodology established the unity of Genesis.” So that argument for critical theories cuts both ways. One way with Genesis, another way with Isaiah. Undoubtedly the next decade will have a lot more use of computer analysis of the biblical writings with conclusions drawn. It will be interesting to see how it develops, but at this point even that is not something with which conclusive conclusions can be drawn. I don’t think arguments based on language and style are conclusive either way. But I think what you can say is that the arguments say that you can’t conclusively *deny* that Isaiah could have been responsible for the second part of the book.

### 3. The argument from Historical Background

The third argument is, “The argument from Historical Background.” It is probably the most important argument. I think it’s undeniable that chapters 40-66 reflect a different historical background than 1-39. In the early part of Isaiah there’s a lot of rebuke of the people of Israel and the prediction that God will send the nation into exile for their sin. When we get to the second part of the book you don’t find that kind of material. The assumption is that they are already in exile and that the judgment has already happened. The emphasis in the second part of the book is God’s promise that

they will be delivered from their captivity. In the first part of the book you have many references to the Assyrians. They were a great enemy of Israel at this time. Ahaz has died. But in the second part of the book it is not the Assyrians in view but the Babylonians and the rise of Cyrus the Persian. Of course, Cyrus is mentioned by name. The people of the second part of the book are in bondage to the Babylonians but are to be delivered. So there's a clear historical difference in historical standpoint between the first and second books.

#### a. Explanations

Now given that that is in dispute you can explain it in two ways. The way the critic suggest is that the second part of the book is written by a different author who lived after the exile which had already begun and was about to be terminated. Israel was about to be released to return to their homeland. The second way you can explain that is that Isaiah wrote both parts of the book but in the second part of the book his purpose was to give comfort to Israel after Israel had gone into exile with the declaration that God would deliver them.

If you take that view that Isaiah was the author, then you must answer the question found frequently in the literature: Is there any reason why Isaiah would write something that would have reference to a situation more than a century after his time?

### 3. Second Isaiah Historically Divergent

Some say, "No, that doesn't make any sense." They use that to argue that someone else wrote the second part of the book. Look at page 16 of your citations from Whybray's *Libraries Old Testament Guide to Isaiah* paragraph b, where he says, "It is clearly addressed to a group of people who have been

exiled from their homeland by a conquering power, which is also referred to by name: Babylon. In four passages Babylon is spoken of by name in these terms and this historical situation is confirmed in numerous other passages. Chapters 40-55 then, would have made no sense in the eighth century, when the people of Jerusalem and Judah were still living at home under the rule of their own kings; when Babylon, far from being a great power, was—and remained until the fall of Assyria in the late seventh century B.C., long after the death of Isaiah—merely one of the cities of the Assyrian Empire; [Babylon was part of the Assyrian Empire at the time of Isaiah the prophet.] and when Cyrus had not yet been born and the Persian empire did not yet exist.” That’s the historical background argument. “On the other hand, everything in these chapters makes good sense as the message of a sixth-century prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. In other words, the argument is if Isaiah wrote this it would be meaningless to the people of his time who lived under totally different circumstances. What would have been the point? So you ask the question: Is there any relevance for Isaiah 40-66 for Isaiah’s own contemporaries? Go to page 13 of your citations to Hobart Freeman who discusses that in his *Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*. His comment is, “Not every prophecy needs to be traced to a definite contemporary historical situation, nor directly applicable to the generation to whom it is spoken. It cannot be maintained, as Driver contends, that ‘the prophet speaks always, in the first instance to his own contemporaries: the message which he brings is intimately related with the circumstances of his time: his promises and predictions... correspond to the needs which are then felt.’”

#### b. Problems with that View – Need for Words of Comfort

Obvious contradictions to this concept of prophecy are Zechariah 9-14, which is future, Daniel 11-12 is obviously future, and Isaiah 24-27 in the first

part of Isaiah, which is often called the “Little Apocalypse.” There Isaiah speaks about the day of the Lord and the end times. This is not to overlook of course a general relationship of prophecy to the historical situation, which both record the prophetic utterance. So Freeman’s response is that not every prophecy must be directly applicable to the generation to whom it is spoken. Most often it is, but there also time when that eschatological kind of prophecy comes which is obviously spoken to address a situation that will come to pass long after everybody to the whom the prophet spoke is long gone.

My comment here is getting back to page 7 of the handout while Freeman is correct as far as he goes, it seems to me chapters 40-66 do have a purpose in relation to the people of Isaiah’s own day. The early chapters of the book Isaiah had two objectives: to declare to the nation its sin and the need to repent; then secondly he told them that God would punish them by sending them into exile. All of those emphases are very clear in the first part of the book. There were some who listened and supported Isaiah, although in general his message was not well received. He had been told that at the time of his call, as recorded in Isaiah 6, that his message would fall on deaf ears. I think more and more it was becoming apparent that the people were turning away from God. The prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10 was being fulfilled and it was clear that the exile predicted in 6:11-12 would inevitably follow.

After the death of Hezekiah, his son, Manasseh became king. Under Manasseh’s rule the nation fell into terrible apostasy. 2 Kings 21 describes the evil of the time of Manasseh, the most wicked of the kings of the southern kingdom. According to Jewish tradition Isaiah was sawn asunder during the time of Manasseh’s rule. There’s a statement in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews about being sawn asunder and some think that’s an allusion to Isaiah who was fleeing from Manasseh’s agents in a hollow of a tree. The tree was cut down and consequently, he was sawn asunder. Now it may be

apocryphal, but it is clear that Isaiah still lived in the time of Manasseh, even though, if you look at the heading of the book, it says in Isaiah 1:1, “The vision of Isaiah during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.” It doesn’t mention Manasseh.

But if you look at Isaiah 37:38 in one of those historical narratives you read, “One day while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisrok. [This is Sennacherib the Assyrian king], his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.” Esarhaddon began to reign in 681 B.C. Manasseh began to reign in 687 B.C. So in 681, Manasseh was already on the throne. So it seems clear that Isaiah’s ministry extended on into the period of Manasseh. Now why wasn’t Manasseh mentioned in the heading? Some think that Isaiah turned from a public ministry to a more private kind of ministry with a more godly remnant of Israel during the time of Manasseh when everything was so bad and that the second part of the book comes from that period of time.

But to get back to our handout here, when Manasseh became king, Judah turned away from the Lord. So after the death of the good king Hezekiah it must have been clear to Isaiah that the nation as a whole was not going to repent. Exile was inevitable. This would have been obvious as well to the true people of God, the godly remnant, and under those circumstances there would no longer be the need to continue to bring this message of rebuke and condemnation. There was a new need. The new need was to bring words of comfort and hope for the true people of God, those who were following Isaiah, that small minority of people that were true followers of God. As those people saw that judgment and exile were coming and was inevitable just as Isaiah had, it seems to me, there is relevance for a message of comfort and hope. Yes, you will go into exile, but the exile will not be

forever. You will be able to return. So a message that God was going to deliver his people would be a comfort to the true people of God even during the time of Isaiah, as well as comfort for those people who would later experience that exile and would know that God had not abandoned them.

I might say that the Northern Kingdom went into exile at the hands of the Assyrians during the lifetime of Isaiah. Uzziah's reign was from 729 to 715. The northern kingdom fell in 721 to the Assyrians, so that was during Isaiah's lifetime. So the people of Judah knew of an exile. They knew the same judgment had been pronounced on them. It's interesting that in Sennacherib's annals he claims not only to have taken people into exile from the northern kingdom but also to have taken captives from the land of Judah. So there were even people from Judah, if you accept Sennacherib's annals, that went into exile during the lifetime of Isaiah. So I think the message does have relevance for that time. Exile is not the end. God is still with his people. There is still a future ahead. They will return from exile. Go over to the top of page nine: Thus, while admitting that the historical background of Isaiah 40-66 is that of people already in exile, with their city destroyed and the temple in ruins, I don't see any reason why the passage might not have been written by Isaiah a himself century before the exile to Babylon. There's no reason it could not be of significant for his own contemporaries.

### c. Summary Conclusion

So I think those are the three main arguments for concluding that the second part of Isaiah was not written by Isaiah the prophet. The difference in concepts and ideas, the difference in language and style, or the difference in historical background—I don't think any of those arguments are conclusive that there must be a second Isaiah to write chapters 40-66. So those primary arguments fail to prove multiplicity of authorship.

#### d) Some Final Arguments for the Unity of Isaiah – NT quotations

I think, to the contrary, there are some strong reasons for maintaining Isaiah's authorship. First, there's no manuscript evidence that the book ever existed in anything but its present unified form. Of course, the interesting thing there is that among the Dead Sea Scrolls we have a manuscript of the entire book of Isaiah from the second century B.C., which witnesses to its unity. That's pretty old. The Septuagint doesn't separate them either, which came from 250-200 B.C. So, some very early manuscript evidence support unity.

Secondly, and I think most important, is that you have New Testament witness to Isaianic authorship. Isaiah is quoted some 21 times in the New Testament. Those quotations are taken from both parts of the book from chapters 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 29, 40, 42, 53, 61, and 65. Note particularly John 12:38-40 where you read "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet. 'Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" That's from Isaiah 53:1 that's the second part of the book. "For this reason they could not believe because as Isaiah said elsewhere, 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts so they could neither see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts or turn I would heal them.'" That's from Isaiah 6:10. So right there in that one quotation you have one quotation from the second part of the book and one quotation from the first part of the book. Both of which are said to be from Isaiah the prophet. In v. 41, John adds Isaiah said this "because he saw Jesus glory and spoke about him." In Luke 4:17 you read that the book of the prophet Isaiah was given to Jesus and that he read from chapter 61 and that's quoted there. That's in the second part of the book. In Acts 8:30 the Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah the prophet and what he's reading from is chapter 53. So those are several

examples of that kind of New Testament quotation that clearly attributes material from the second part of the book to Isaiah the prophet.

e) Longman and Dillard, Intro to the OT

Now I just distributed before the class a single page handout of pages 274-275 from *The Introduction to the Old Testament* by Ray Dillard and Tremper Longman, which is a fairly recent Old Testament introduction by two very competent evangelical scholars. I want to look through this with you because of what they do with this question. About the middle of the first paragraph on the top page 274 Longman and Dillard say, “In some respects the debate about the unity of Isaiah has come full circle, with one crucial difference:” (this is what was alluded to earlier) “rather than a unity resulting from the hand of a single author, the book is now widely viewed as a redactional unity. Instead of viewing Isaiah 40-66 as an independent work accidentally appended to the work of the eighth-century prophet, some scholars now argue that Isaiah 40-66 never existed apart from the first half of the book and that it was composed (through what could yet be a complex redactional process) in light of the earlier material.” So you look at the literature today you have often references to one book but not references to one author. There’s multiple authorship and a sometimes very highly complex process of the book coming to the present form in which we find it. So there’s a unity in the book but not unity of authorship.

Dillard and Longman’s next section here is called “An Assessment” and this is where they assess the current state of the situation and problem, “In many respects contemporary critical thinking about Isaiah has recovered from the excesses that characterized scholarship in the late eighteenth through early nineteenth centuries. The consensus among critical scholars has moved in the direction of acknowledging much of what was dear to



conservatives: that Isaiah is not the result of a haphazard accident and internally contradictory, but rather that the book as a whole shows a unity of things and motifs,”—that was what Margalioth was talking about. These themes and the language in the two parts of the book are consistent. “The tenor of much of the debate has shifted from the focus on dissecting the text to recover sources and settings, to efforts to expound the coherence and unity of the text as it exists.”

That reflects a shift from diachronic to a synchronic kind of analysis of the text in its final form. Now the focus in the last 20 years or so is that they look at the final form of the text, and not so how much on how it came to that final form. Instead they look synchronically at what holds the text together. Arguments from conservatives for unity of authorship based on common themes and vocabulary have been now to a large part taken over and pressed into service of arguments not proving its unity but a redactional unity in the book. I want to come back to that later with that other handout but let’s go further.

“To be sure, critical and conservative thinking remain divided on the issue of authorship. Although there is a growing consensus about the overall unity of Isaiah, for critical scholarship it is a unity forged through a history of redaction rather than a unity that derives from a single individual author.” In the next two paragraphs he discusses the conservative view and then the critical view. He says conservative thinking is anchored in its theological conviction of two things. First, about the reality of prophetic revelation that the spirit of God did give to ancient writers a look into the future. Secondly, about the integrity and the trustworthiness of the Scripture as a whole, that is, statements and superscriptions and New Testament citations require acceptance.

### 1) God and Prediction of the Future

The sustained polemic of Isaiah 40-66 is that Isaiah announces the future and God is able to bring it to pass. In other words that reference to Cyrus is not just a kind of isolated reference to some future ruler but that's integrated into a sustained argument that goes through the book, that God is able to predict the future. One example is the servant theme of the Messiah that will come. It is another long-term prediction which is sustained the servant sequence that is more remarkable, some may say, than the Cyrus prediction. "Already in Isaiah 1-39, the Exile and restoration are anticipated in passages almost universally considered generally Isaianic. In his call the prophet anticipates the day when Jerusalem would be destroyed and depopulated and he names a son in light of the anticipated restoration ('Shear-jashub' means 'a remnant will return'). The prophet's pervasive use of the remnant motif in Isaiah 1-39 anticipates the threat that will come from Babylon. The prophet made clear his own understanding of that aspect of his prophecy were not related to the immediate, but the distant future." So he says those things about the conservative view.

"Critical opinion is anchored most particularly in the fact that Isaiah 40-66 presumes a historical setting other than that of Isaiah in Jerusalem in the eighth century." That's the third argument we talked about under the heading "Historical background." Now he says both positions need scrutiny and that's what he does on page 275, "On the one hand, if one accepts the reality of a sovereign God and prophetic inspiration, he cannot say, 'God could not have revealed himself to Isaiah this way.' Such naïve confidence in the historical critical is every bit as much a theological statement as insisting that he did.

### 2) Comparison to Deut. 34

Yet, on the other hand, when critical scholars conclude from the setting of Isaiah 40-66 that the author of these chapters lived fairly late in the Babylonian exile, this is not in principle a different argument,” (This is the crux of the position going along in this book that is not in principle a different argument) “from that which conservatives are ready to make, for example, about Deuteronomy 34.” Deuteronomy 34 is a passage about the death of Moses. See why he argued it, “Whatever one concludes about the historical relationship between the Moses and Deuteronomy, it is clear that Moses did not write the account of his own death (Deuteronomy 34:1-8); the person who wrote this final section of this book lived at a time when a number of prophets had come and gone, but none like Moses. This is to say that the setting presumed by this chapter (a time after the death of Moses) precludes Moses’ having written it. Although the New Testament cites Deuteronomy and attributes it to Moses, no one would seriously argue that this included Deuteronomy 34. Recognizing that the setting of Deuteronomy 34 requires an author living later than Moses, the author traditionally assigned to the book, is not materially different from recognizing that the background of Isaiah 40-66 presumes an author living during the Exile.” Now you see the way the argument is made. Deuteronomy’s generally attributed to Moses but it’s very clear because of historical background that Moses did not write chapter 34. The book of Isaiah is generally attributed to Isaiah but because of historical background with chapters 40-66, it’s not necessarily the case that Isaiah must have written them. Their argument is that there is an analogy between Deuteronomy 34 and Isaiah 40-66.

### 3) Contra Deut. 34 Comparison

It seems to me that that analogy is questionable. I am not ready to concede the authorship of Isaiah 40-66 is proved to be someone other than

Isaiah on the basis of that argument. I'll just make a couple points.

Deuteronomy 34 is twelve verses. It is historical material. It really gives the conclusion to the book in the sense of what's leading up to 34 is this transition of leadership between Moses and Joshua—that transition with Moses and Joshua really takes affect with the death of Moses. If you move into Joshua, Joshua has replaced Moses as the leader of Israel. It seems to me there is a quantitative and qualitative difference between Deuteronomy 34 and Isaiah 40-66. As I said, Deuteronomy is twelve verses and a historical narrative. Isaiah 40-66 is 27 chapters of enormously significant and important prophetic discourse. Dillard and Longman say that the New Testament cites Deuteronomy and attributes it to Moses. Yes, but it doesn't cite anything from chapter 34 and attribute it to Moses. In other words, that's quite a difference. When we looked in John 12:38-40 where the second part of the book is quoted and that is attributed to Isaiah, there's nothing comparable to that for Deuteronomy. We do have references that attribute Deuteronomy to Moses which are important because today Deuteronomy is also questioned, but there's nothing from chapter 34 quoted in the New Testament. So, I'm not so sure that that analogy is really adequate to prove the possibility that Isaiah 40-66 is not from Isaiah the prophet.

#### 4) Longman/Dillard – Isaiah Not Mentioned in Isa. 40-66

Notice what they say further, "Isaiah is not mentioned in the second half of the book. However the reality of prophetic inspiration is not thereby eliminated: an author living later in the exile foresaw through divine inspiration what God was about to do through Cyrus, just as Isaiah saw what God would soon do with Tiglath-pileser III. This later author saw Isaiah's prophecies of exile and remnant events that were transpiring in his own day, and he wrote to develop and apply Isaiah's preaching to his fellow exiles.

Although the anonymity of this great prophet is a problem, it is no more unusual than the anonymity of the historical books or the book of Hebrews.” I’d say that the anonymity of this is a problem and particularly because, contrary to the historical books, you don’t have a verse like Isaiah 1:1. Isaiah 1:1 introduces the book, “The vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw.” That heading seems to be a heading for the entire book attributed to Isaiah. We don’t have any records like that in the historic books. So the last paragraph says, “It should not be made a theological *shibboleth* or test for orthodoxy. In some respects the end results of the debate are somewhat moot whether written by Isaiah in the eight century or others who applied his written insights in a later time, Isaiah 40-66, clearly was addressed in large measure to the needs of the exilic community.”

#### 5) Richard Schultz’s Response on Isaiah

That other handout that I gave you is an article taken from the book *Evangelicals and Scripture* published in 2004, and the article that I’ve given you there is by Richard Schultz titled, “How many Isaiah’s were there and what does it matter? Prophetic inspiration in recent evangelical scholarship.” I think this is a good article. Let me just call you attention to a couple pages. Notice what he says on page 158, bottom of the page, where he talks about evangelic scholars open to additions and revisions in the biblical text. He says, “Then, maintaining their evangelical view of Scripture, they simply stretch the doctrine of inspiration to cover what they have just proposed.” In other words, what he’s saying is a lot of evangelical scholars take over the methodologies of many of the critical scholars but then enlarge their view of inspiration to say that all of these editors and later editions are also assumed under a doctrine of inspiration. “One wonders, however, whether any and every historical-critical theory of the origin of biblical literature can be made

evangelically acceptable as long as one affirms the ‘substantial participation’ of the traditional author in process.”

He goes on to say, “I remain unconvinced that intellectual honesty and the textual evidence demand that the evangelical acknowledge what most Old Testament scholars today claim about the complex compositional history of the book of Isaiah.”

Over on page 161 at the middle of the page he says, “The issue is whether can we legitimately posit a series of inspired authors or editors when the involvement of multiple prophets is *not* acknowledged in the text and when one of the reasons for positing such a complex compositional process is the claim that the Spirit of God *could not* (or at least probably *did not*) reveal the diversity of contents identified in the book of Isaiah to just one individual.” Good question.

Go over to page 162 second paragraph, “Childs [of Yale] accuses conservatives of turning Isaiah into ‘a clairvoyant of the future,’” in that particular conservative style. And in the next paragraph Schultz says, “The troublesome reference to Cyrus is probably a primary reason why many evangelical scholars have abandoned, or at least are questioning, the one-author interpretation. However, in Isaiah 41-42, the presentation of Cyrus is juxtaposed with that of the servant, both portraits used in similar expressions. If Cyrus is already on the scene, must the servant also be a contemporary of the posited prophet Second Isaiah?” Go down a few lines, “However, if it was possible for a prophet to speak at that time of the coming of the spiritual deliverer, Jesus, seven centuries in the future, is it problematic to conceive of Isaiah of Jerusalem’s speaking of Cyrus, his political precursor, merely two centuries in the future?”

## 6) Vannoy’s Response to Longman/Dillard

Now go over to the last page second paragraph page 170, where we are returning to our initial question, “How many Isaiah’s were there and what does it matter.” “Dillard and Longman assert that ‘in some respects the end results of the debate are somewhat moot.’ On the contrary, I have sought to demonstrate that there are significant consequences of adopting historical-critical conclusions regarding the nature of prophetic inspiration, predictive prophecy, rhetorical coherence and theological development in the prophetic books—consequences that are ignored, downplayed or denied in the recent evangelical (and non-evangelical) literature that we have surveyed.” So this is a debate that is ongoing. You may be interested in reading further on it, but we’re not reading that whole article; I’ve just highlighted a couple things.

## 2. Daniel – There’s a General Consensus among Mainstream Critical Scholars that the Book of Daniel’s Fictional

Number 2., “There’s a general consensus among mainstream critical scholars that the book of Daniel’s fictional.” They posit it was written when Israel was suffering under Antiochus Epiphanes shortly before 165 B.C. The book itself however represents Daniel as the giver of this prophecy both before and shortly after the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539. So there is the issue. To whom are we to attribute the prophecies of the book of Daniel—to Daniel himself at about 539, or to some anonymous figure living in the Maccabean period during the second century B.C., around 165 B.C.

There are three primary reasons for the lengthy conclusion of mainstream critical scholars, I think. One is what I call the fundamental underlying issue; it is the wide spread assumption that generally predictive prophecy does not happen. Secondly, alleged historical errors in the book are said to reflect its origin long after the events described when whoever was writing it either didn’t know or had forgotten what had actually happened

historically. Third are alleged late linguistic indicators.

a. "Predictive prophecy does not happen."

So let us look at the those three arguments. Assumption a. that "Predictive prophecy does not happen." That's essentially a philosophical worldview issue. If the universe is a closed continuum of cause and effect relationships in which there is no room for divine intervention, then of course you don't have divine revelation. It would be impossible for Daniel to narrate events that occurred so long after the time we attribute it to. If you conclude that that kind of genuine prediction does not and cannot happen that immediately raises a question that is pretty significant because of its prominence in the book of Daniel.

1) Daniel 2 & 7 and Critical Theories

For example, is Daniel in chapter 2 and chapter 7 a sequence of empires? In Daniel 2 you have that vision of the image with the head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and legs and feet of iron, which was depicting the succession of four empires that were to come to power in the Near East. That same succession of empires is found in Daniel 7 but there depicted with four different types of animals. Now instead of a head of gold, breast and arms, belly and thighs and feet, in chapter 7 you have a lion, a bear, a leopard and some unnamed dreadful beast. The traditional interpretation of the symbolism of those animals, as well as those parts of the image are the head of gold in the image, is the Babylonian kingdom. The breast and arms is the Medo-Persian kingdom. The belly and thighs are the Greek kingdom, Alexander the Great and his successors. The legs and feet are the Roman kingdom. Now that sequence does not fit with the mainstream critical approach because the Roman Empire did not rise historically until



after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes who was part of the Greek period. That in turn means that the mainstream critical scholars who date the book in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, have to find a succession of empires that existed prior to the time the book was alleged to be written or you're back to prediction. If you have the Roman kingdom, that wasn't yet in existence even in the time of Antiochus.

So, the proposal critical scholars generally accepted the head of gold is the Babylonian kingdom. The breast and the arms are an apocryphal Median kingdom—I say “apocryphal” because there was no Median kingdom in independent existence between the Babylonian and the Persian empires. Media became part of Persia before the Persians conquered Babylon, so the critical scholars who get a sequence of four kingdoms have to create this Median kingdom between the Babylonian and Persian when it is historically inaccurate. But then the belly and thighs must be Persian and then the legs and feet would be the Greeks so that would conclude in the time which it allegedly was written.

If then the prophecies of Daniel depict this particular succession of kingdoms they are erroneous historically. For critical scholars that's no problem since they simply claim the writer of these prophecies lived centuries later, during the Maccabean period. He might have been simply confused about the earlier course of history and mistakenly thought there was an independent existence for the Median between the Persian and Babylonian period. The conclusion is, “We know better than Daniel, the author, whoever he was, who was simply mistaken about that sequence of kingdoms.”

## 2) Response to Critical Theory Accusations of Historical Errors in Dan. 2 & 7

So you have this assumption that genuinely predictive prophecy

doesn't happen. These historical errors, as we just noted one of the major alleged historical errors is the existence of this apocryphal Median kingdom, but their other errors include—I'll mention three here, none of which are terribly significant: The reference to Belshazzar instead of Nabonidus at the time when the Babylonians fell to the Persians (Daniel 5:30-31) is said to be a historical mistake. "That very night Belshazzar the king of the Babylonians was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62." We'll come back to that in a minute, but it's been often argued that Belshazzar was not the ruler, it was Nabonidus.

Secondly, that a person named Darius the Mede never existed in the historical context in which he is placed in Daniel. That same verse speaks of Darius the Mede taking over the kingdom. Thirdly, the records to Nebuchadnezzar as the father of Belshazzar in Daniel 5:2 and 22 would simply be inaccurate because Belshazzar would be the grandson rather than a son. There are reasonable responses to all those allegations.

#### a) Nabonidas and Belshazzar

First, Babylonian historical sources show that Nabonidus named his son Belshazzar co-regent while he left Babylon for Assyria and northern Arabia. Daniel 5:29 says they ruled as one. It's quite possible that Nabonidus wasn't around that night and his co-regent Belshazzar was in charge at that time of transition from Babylonian to Persian rule.

#### b) Who is Darius the Mede

Second, while it's true that Darius the Mede is not referred to outside the Bible and that there's no interval between Belshazzar and Nabonidus in the succession to Cyrus of Persia—it was Cyrus who took over the Babylonian kingdom—this does not necessarily mean that Daniel is in error. Several

reasonable suggestions have been made that try to identify Darius the Mede. It is possible that this is another name for Cyrus himself, perhaps a throne name. In 1 Chronicles 5:26 you have the reference to king Tiglath-pileser as Pul. Was Cyrus also known as Darius the Mede? It's possible. Some look at 6:28 where it says, "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian" some translate that as just narrowing it down—even the reign of Cyrus the first. So that Darius and Cyrus are the same. It's possible. Others have suggested it was another person named Gubaru, which is a name that occurs in Babylonian texts who Cyrus appointed as governor of Babylon. His name was Gubaru also known as Darius. You see while it is true we don't have sufficient evidence to solve the identity of the Darius the Mede—and we don't—I don't think that's reason to conclude that the book was written in the Maccabean period or that the book is necessarily at fault in historical reference.

#### c) Nebuchadnezzar as Father or Grandfather?

Third, the reference to Nebuchadnezzar as the father instead of grandfather is common Semitic usage. It's surprising that that is even used as an argument. It's simply that he was ancestor and that Belshazzar was a descendant. If you look at page 17 and 18 in your citation D. R. Davies, not an evangelical, in his *Old Testament Guide to Daniel* says, "Critical commentaries, especially around the turn of the century, made much of the fact that Belshazzar was neither the son of Nebuchadnezzar nor king of Babylon. This is still sometimes repeated as a charge against the historicity of Daniel, and resisted by conservative scholars. But it has been clear since 1924 that although Nabonidus was the last king of the neo-Babylonian dynasty, Belshazzar was effectively ruling Babylon. In this respect, then, Daniel is correct. The literal meaning of 'son' should not be pressed; even if it might

betray a misunderstanding on the part of Daniel, a strong case against Daniel's historical reliability is not enhanced by the inclusion of weak arguments such as this." So those are the kind of historical errors that are alleged to exist that show to some that Daniel was not the author. Let's take a break at this point.

Transcribed by: Ben Hale  
Rough edit by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture**

### **12**

Date of Daniel, History of Traditions School, Oral Tradition and Writing

#### **C. There are Alleged Late Linguistic Features for Daniel**

##### **1. Greek Loan Words**

We are looking at the arguments for the late date of Daniel. We've looked at the assumption that predictive prophecy doesn't happen. We've looked at the historical errors and now C., "There are alleged late linguistic features." This argument centers over the use of several Greek loan words found in Daniel 3:5 for musical instruments, as well as the use of Aramaic that is said to be of a late type of Aramaic. As you are aware, Daniel 2:4 through the end of chapter 7 was written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. The Aramaic of that section is said to be a late form of Aramaic. Again, I don't think either of those arguments is convincing. There's an abundant evidence of contacts between the Greeks and the ancient Near East long prior to the time of Alexander the Great. In other words, the assumption is that if you have Greek loan words it would have to be after the time of the development of the Greek empire under Alexander and the spread of the Greek language in connection with his conquest. The argument can really be turned around. It is surprising there are not more Greek words than there are if the book were actually written in the second century B.C. There are only three, and these are technical kinds of words for musical instruments, so it doesn't appear to be something fairly significant.

##### **2. Late Aramaic**

Those who study the Aramaic question will find this gets rather technical and complex. An article stated that 90 percent of the vocabulary in the Aramaic vocabulary of Daniel is attested from documents of the 5th century BC or earlier. If you look at page 16 of your citations, there's some material there at the bottom

of the page and over onto page 17 from Joyce Baldwin's, *Daniel* commentary in the Tyndale series. You'll notice she is speaking about the Aramaic argument and says, "The Aramaic of Daniel is shown to be Imperial Aramaic, or 'in itself, practically undatable with any conviction within c. 600 to 330 B.C.' It is therefore irrelevant to make distinctions between 'Eastern' and 'Western' Aramaic, which developed later. The only indication of a place of origin arises out of the word order, which betrays Akkadian influence, and proves 'that the Aramaic of Daniel belongs to the early tradition of Imperial Aramaic as opposed to later local, Palestinian derivatives of imperial Aramaic.'" If you look at your bibliography on page 8, you'll notice there is an essay by K. A. Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," and then there are three articles by Edwin Yamauchi, "The Archaeological Background of Daniel," "Daniel and Contacts between the Aegean and the Near East Before Alexander," and "The Greek words in Daniel in Light of Greek Influence in the Near East." Those articles are particularly useful on this question of what kind of Aramaic we have, as well as these Greek loan words. I think that both Baldwin's and Yamauchi's conclusions that these are not strong arguments are very well argued. I won't take the time to read further from Baldwin in your citations.

### 3. Argument from Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls)

But let's go to the handout. We read there that evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls attests to the existence of Daniel in copies in Qumran in 150 to 100 B.C., at the latest, or perhaps even earlier. There is a strong argument for dating them both prior to 165 B.C. There is not sufficient time to copy the composition and it having achieved canonical status with the Qumran community if the late date for its composition is accepted. In other words, if we're going to say it was written in about 165, well by 150, at the latest, it's already recognized in the Qumran community as a canonical part of Scripture. It seems like that is very improbable if it had only been recently written.

#### 4. Conclusion

Conclusion. There are no compelling reasons for dating Daniel late. There are adequate answers for each of the historical and linguistic arguments for the late date. The underlying question is whether or not one is prepared to accept the possibility of general predictive prophecy. If one is convinced that Daniel could not have spoken so clearly about the future, especially the time of the Antiochus Epiphanes, then one must seek to date it subsequent to this time. For those who accept the possibility of genuine predictions, this material, along with many other predictive sections of Scripture, are used as evidence that there is a God who controls all of history, who has spoken to his people about future events through his servants the prophets.

#### Student Question

Student Question: Why did Daniel write in both Hebrew and Aramaic?

I don't think that anybody has ever clearly answered that. Some try to argue that the part in Hebrew is directed more to the Jewish people, and the other section to the world at large. Aramaic was more universally understood. But I'm not exactly sure you can explain that. I can't give you more than that. I don't think anyone ever has given a good sound explanation for that.

#### C. The History of Traditions School

##### 1. Oral Tradition -- H.S. Nyberg

Section C., as far as our general topic is concerned, "Were of the Prophets writers" is "The history of traditions school." That is something that has developed in the last half century. One of the early promoters of the view was a man named H.S. Nyberg, from Uppsala in Sweden. He wrote a book *Studies of Hosea*. According to Nyberg, the normal manner of transmission of various types of information in the Ancient Near East was oral rather than written. So this

history of traditions attempted to argue that the means and manner of transmission of these bodies of material that he found in the Old Testament recorded by the prophets was an oral means of transmission rather than written. He said that stories, songs, legends and myths were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, rather than as written literature. He claimed that this is true of the Old Testament so that pre-exilic Palestine writing was limited to practical matters such as contracts, monuments, official lists, letters—those things that were more technical things. But transmission of history, epic tales, folk legends, etc. were done orally.

Nyberg then proposes that if that's the case, then the conclusion is that the written Old Testament comes along much later. It was the creation the Jewish community between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the Maccabean period (c. 165 B.C.). So in that period when Israel went to Babylon until second century B.C. was the period when all this oral material was put into the written form. What is in written form prior that time must be considered very slight. Transmission was almost entirely oral.

Thirdly, the prophetic preaching was also transmitted orally and was only written down after the Babylonian captivity. The prophets were not writers. See that's the question we started this discussion with: were the prophets writers? He said, no they were preachers. The concepts that they're proclaimed were best done orally until after the exile. There's a quotation there from Nyberg, found in an article by Eissfeldt in *The Old Testament in Modern Study*, it's in your bibliography where Nyberg says, "The written Old Testament is a creation of the Jewish community after the Exile; what preceded it was certainly only in small measure in fixed written form. Only with the greatest reserve can we reckon with writers among the prophets. We must reckon with circles, sometimes centers, of tradition that preserved and handed down the material. It is self-evident that such a process of transmission could not continue without some change in the material handed on, but we have, not textual corruptions, but an active transformation. For



the rest, Old Testament scholarship would do well to consider earnestly what possibility it can ever have of regaining the *ippissima verba*, the very words of Old Testament personalities. We have nothing but the tradition of their sayings, and it is in the highest degree unlikely that any but the oral form of transmission ever existed for them.” It pulls your thinking out of the categories of written literature into the categories of an oral transferal of tradition down through the circles of disciples from generation to generation in which process the material is transformed. You can’t really get back to the very words of the prophets because of the nature in which this material was handed down.

## 2. Harris Birkeland

Number 2, Harris Birkeland was a student of Nyberg and he took his views and applied them to individual prophetic books. He said the prophetic books were most likely the literary representation of an already petrified oral tradition. The prophet was surrounded by a circle, small at first, but then ever growing which continued his work after his death. It’s among these circles of disciples that the living transmission of prophetic utterance found their home. Birkeland conjectured that the prophets were kept alive or combined into ever growing larger “tradition complexes,” combinations of prophetic renouncements and tradition complexes. Besides the words of prophets other information about them was fused together. Thus through the generations the prophetic sayings were handed down and in process were constantly remolded. What was finally retained depended on what proved itself to be relevant and active in the life of the people, so that in the process there was a choice made, which Birkeland compared to the survival of the fittest in natural life. What proved itself significant and relevant was preserved. The whole transmission process took place in the so called “tradition circles.” Because of the means of transmission one can no longer say what originally belonged to the prophet and what should be ascribed to the tradition. So he says in most cases we must give up the attempt “to get back to the prophets and the great

Genius himself.” Where are the very words of the prophet? Well this whole idea about the method of transmission tells us you can’t really know exactly. In consequence we must banish from our study of the prophetic books such ideas as “notes,” “larger literary pieces,” expressions which have been shaped according to literary patterns. We must rather substitute for these such expressions as are suitable for the oral process of transmission, such as “tradition,” “complex,” “circles,” etc. Further, we must fully recognize the fact that “questions about the *ippissima verba* of the prophets can only be solved, if at all, not on literary-critical but on traditio-historical grounds.” In other words, you move out of literary kinds of concerns into concerns of oral tradition.

### 3. Eduard Nielsen, *Oral Tradition and the Modern Problem Old Testament*

#### Introduction

The third important thing here in this approach is Eduard Nielsen, his volume *Oral Tradition and The Modern Problem Old Testament Introduction*, which was published in English and he goes along the same lines as Nyberg and Birkeland. I want to give A. “A synopsis of this thesis.” Pull your attention to some of the material that he brings out in his book, not so much for the argument that he’s making, although that is certainly important, but just for the evidence he gives of the role that memorization of enormous amounts of material that was handed down orally played in ancient near eastern culture. Some of this is interesting.

#### 1. Memorization in Babylon

On your handout, “The first chapter of this book deals with the use of oral tradition in the Ancient Near East. Nielsen shows that the modern contempt for learning by heart is not characteristic of the ancient Semites. I think that contempt is still significant for the 21<sup>st</sup> century America. We don’t like memorizing things. He calls attention to some Babylonian texts that indicated that memorization of old

texts that form the basis of oral tradition was not strange in Babylon. Look at your citation on page 17, Section A, “The modern contempt for learning texts by heart is the necessary basis for oral tradition... The ancient Mesopotamian culture seems to have been enthusiastic about writing; but we have some contexts that stress the importance attached to learning by heart. From the often quoted conclusion of that Irra myth we cite: ‘The scribe who learns this text by heart escapes the enemy is honored. In the congregation of the learned where my name is constantly spoken I will open his ears.’ In Ashurbanipal’s prayer to Shamash, notable because it concludes with a curse and a benediction, somewhat similar to ancient oriental royal inscription, in which we read in the benediction: ‘Whosoever shall learn this text by heart and glorify the judge of the gods, Shamash may he make his precious, may the words of his mouth please the people.’” This is a reference to learning these texts committing them to memory.

## 2. Memorization of the Koran

Back to the handout. In Arabia, the Koran especially in the early time of existence was transmitted orally. Anyone who desired to be admitted to the mosque of Al Azhar in Cairo must be able to recite the whole Koran without hesitation. That mosque is still a very important mosque in Cairo. Look at paragraph B. on page 18 of your citation, “Turning to West-Semitic culture we will remark that it is quite apparent that the written word is not highly valued. It is not considered an independent mode of expression. Even if the Quran has given rise to a ‘theology of Scripture’ which may well be comparable with that of Judaism and Protestantism, the written copies of the Koran play an astonishingly unobtrusive role in Islam. The Koran has constantly—as in the first days of its existence—has been handed down orally; everyone wants to be admitted to the mosque Al Azhar (in Cairo) must be able to recite the whole Koran without hesitation, and their holy writ is learned by heart by one of the initiated reciting it and the younger disciples repeating it, until they know it by heart.” Now that is a

different world than we live. To commit to memory the whole book of the Koran by hearing it orally, cite it, and then committing it to your memory so you can then recite it as a group of initiates to the mosque.

### 3. Johanan ben Zakkai and the Mishnah Memorization

Back to your outline. In Judaism, Johanan ben Zakkai, a prisoner in the camp of Vespasian, could recite the entire Mishnah from memory and thereby know exactly what time of a day it was, because he knew exactly how long it would take to recite each part of the Mishnah. Go to paragraph C., at the bottom of page 18 of your citations. The story tells of Johanan ben Zakkai in the camp of Vespasian. After he had been received in an audience by Vespasian for the first time ‘they seized him and locked him up with seven locks, and asked him what time it was at night. And he told them. And what time it was during the day, and he told them, and how did our master Johanan ben Zakkai know? From the recitation of the Mishnah. In other words Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, not only knew his Mishnah by heart, but he knew just how long it took to recite each paragraph, and how much time he needed to get through it all.’” So somebody asked him what time it was and he’d know because of his recitation of the Mishnah. Now that’s probably a little over exaggerated, but you see what Nielsen here is establishing, is that in the ancient Near East, people committed enormous amounts of material to their memories.

### 4. Plato and Oral Memory

Paragraph D at the top of page 19, which is from Nielsen again, “As an explicit reaction against the spread of the art of writing we may cite the following words of Plato (from the *Phadreaus*). They are remarkable as the reaction which does not originate with the common people, the ignorant crude masses—as an illiterate people are not characterized by contempt, but by respect for the written word. These words represent rather an attitude Plato had in common with the

intellectual aristocracy of his day.” And here Plato quotes Socrates. Plato was a pupil of Socrates. “Socrates: I heard, then, that at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of that ancient gods of the country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis and the name of the god himself was Theuth. He it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, and also draughts and dice, and, most important of all, letters. Now the king of all Egypt at that time was Thamus, who lived in the great city of the upper region, which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon. To him came Theuth to show his inventions, saying they ought to be imparted to the other Egyptians. But Thamus asks what use there was in each, and as Theuth enumerated their uses, expressed praise or blame, according as he approved or disapproved. The story goes that Thamus said many things to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts, which would take too long to repeat; but when they came to letters, ‘This invention, O king,’ said Theuth, ‘will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is in the elixir of memory and wisdom that I have discovered.’ But Thamus replied, ‘Most ingenious Theuth, one has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom but not true wisdom,’” Why? ““for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise but only appear wise.””

## 5. Modern Reflections

I find that quite interesting and if that point is made by Socrates many, many centuries ago, and then you come up to our technological age where we not only have the printed word but now there's all this information that we are drowned in and we look at all this stuff all the time and 90% of it we forget right away because we haven't internalized it. It's just kind of floating out there. We may have lost a lot by turning away from committing things to memory—particularly in the realm of Scripture and the words of Scripture and things of that sort. So, I find this fascinating, not so much because it really supports the argument that Nielsen is trying to make with it, but just because of the issues and questions that it raises.

Back to page 16 of the handout. Thousands of Brahmans still learned their books by heart, and it is 153,826 words long. Hindus transmitted their Vedas from generation to generation orally. The same was true in ancient Greece.

## 6. Israel and Memory and Writing

Back on page 19 of the citation there's a paragraph on that. We won't take time to look at that. But Nielsen cites all these examples and then what he says is that in Israel, religious texts were transmitted in the same fashion. And only after the exile did they find great fixation. And he agrees with Nyberg that the introduction of writing was due to a crisis of confidence, and that crisis of confidence was caused by going into exile. They were going to lose stuff so they needed to write it down.

He attempts to establish this contention in a two-fold manner, one negatively by establishing this subordinate role of writing in Israel and then second positively by establishing the significance of oral transmission. I wanted to take time to go through his arguments of that discussion, but according to him, prior to the exile of Israel writing was primarily only for practical purposes such as

contracts, governments, monuments, official register's lists, letters, and not used for purely literary purposes. The tradition of history, epic tales, folk legends, even laws were to him handed down orally. In his conclusion, he says, "Writers should not be reckoned among the prophets and poets except with the greatest caution." That's the traditions-history approach.

## B. Assessment of Nielsen's Thesis

### 1. OT Oral Tradition Examples: Exod. 10 :1-2

B. "Assessment of Nielsen's thesis." It's certainly true that oral tradition existed in ancient Israel, but we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. There's a Dutch scholar, W.H. Gispen that wrote a monograph on oral tradition in the Old Testament. In that monograph, he discusses twenty-eight different texts in the Old Testament that speak of oral tradition. Outstanding among them are Exodus 10:1, 2, Deuteronomy 6:20-25, Judges 6:13, Psalm 44:1-3 and Psalm 78. Let's look at a couple of these. Exodus 10:1 and 2, that's in the context of the plagues and you read there, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Go to pharaoh for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials, so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them.'" Then in verse two, "That you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, that you may know I am the Lord." Part of the Lord's purpose here was that the parents would tell these things to their children orally and their children would pass it on down to their children, and that story of what God did would be transmitted through the generations.

### 2. Deuteronomy 6:20-25

Deuteronomy 6:20-25, "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?' Tell him:" and here's this story of what God has done for his people, "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a

mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders, great and terrible, upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and gave us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us that will be our righteousness.’ So, tell that to your children when they ask, what do these things mean.”

### 3. Psalms 44 & 78

Let’s go to Psalm 44:1-3, “We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in the days long ago. With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.”

Then Psalm 78, let’s start at verse 1, “O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old. What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done” and so on. Verse 6, “So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.”

### 4. Summary

So, there are clear references to an oral tradition functioning in the Old Testament period, but what we should notice is, one, this oral transmission is



found in a *sitz im Leben* in the family circle. What is its situation in life? It's the fathers telling the children, the children telling their children. The persons who passed on their tradition were fathers to their children. There is no evidence of professional bards or troubadours such as existed in other lines and places. Two, it has its purpose in the words of Psalm 78:6 that the generation to come might know the works of God. Three, the tradition passed on consisted at least from what we can tell from references in summarizations of the basic facts of redemptive history. A brief resume, you might say, of what God had done for his people. Four, which I think quite important, that tradition was never isolated from the written fixation.

In Exodus 17:14, for example, we're back to the Mosaic here—this is where Israel is attacked by the Amalekites on the way from Egypt to Sinai. Then Lord says to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Sure, that could be told with children but it was also written down so that the tradition was not isolated from a written fixation. This was also the case outside of Israel for the most part, even in those countries Nielsen mentioned, Egypt and Babylon, and also with the Koran. You see the examples that Nielsen uses really don't establish his point. Because those legends learned in ancient Mesopotamian were texts that were memorized; the Koran was a text that was memorized and passed on. So, yes there was an oral tradition but the oral tradition doesn't operate outside or apart from a written fixation of the text even in his examples. The oral recitation follows the written original.

## 5. Written or Oral Law Codes

Five, I don't think it can be denied Israel had written laws at an early time. He tries to argue that even the laws were passed down orally. There are numerous law codes in written form that have been uncovered in the Middle East that long predate the time of Moses. For example, the Hammurabi code, and the Lipit-Ishtar code. They are all in an earlier time than Moses and all in written form on clay

tablets.

#### 6. Written History -- Numbers 33:2

And finally, there's also explicit mention of written history. Numbers 33:2 speaks of the record Moses kept of the journey from place to place. Numbers 21:14 speaks of the Book of the Wars of the Lord, called a book or a scroll. It must have been a written source. Yet Nielsen maintains it existed only in oral form as a poetic composition until the time of the fall of Samaria. In 1 Kings 11:41 the book where the history of Solomon is mentioned. First Kings 14:19 and 29 mentions the book that chronicles the kings of Judah.

#### 7. Writing Prophets Texts: 1 & 2 Chronicles

Further, there is mention of the writings of prophets. Our concern here is primarily who the prophets were. Were the prophets writers? Look at 1 Chronicles 29:29, "As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer, together with details of his reign and power, and the circumstances that surrounded him and Israel and the kingdoms of all the other lands." It sounds pretty comprehensive. It says these were written by these prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. Then in 2 Chronicles 12:15, "As for the events of Rehoboam's reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the records of Shemiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer that deal with genealogies?" And then there are three more references there to Iddo the seer. Interestingly enough, 2 Chronicles 32:32 refers to Isaiah. Let's look at that one, "The other events of Hezekiah's reign and his acts of devotion are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the books of the kings of Judah and Israel."

So it seems to me that even though it's an interesting idea and even though Nielsen appeals to a lot of these examples of enormous amounts of material committed to memory that was transmitted in oral form, it doesn't make the case

that that oral tradition existed apart from a written fixation. So I don't think he established his point.

#### 8. Ps. 77 – Example of Oral Tradition

I might just insert here that there are some places the evidence of an oral tradition in ancient Israel supplements the written material of the Old Testament. And what I mean by that is if you look at Psalm 77, it talks about the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Go to verse 15, “With your mighty arm, you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” In that reference to the Red Sea; it mentions here “thunder and lightning.” If you go back through the text in Exodus 14, there's no reference to thunder and lightning or storm events. Where did that come from? It may have come out of the oral tradition from the Psalmists being aware that is using it in his description of what happened at that time.

#### 9. Joshua 24 as an Example of Oral Tradition

In Joshua 24:2 there is a covenant renewal ceremony at the end of Joshua's life that he held at Shechem. And Joshua says in 24:2, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.’” Where's Joshua get that? There's no reference to Terah and Nahor worshiping other gods in Genesis. There may well have been oral information that came down through the generations.

## 10. 2 Tim. 3:8 as an Example of Oral Tradition

In 2 Timothy 3:8, you have a reference to the magicians of the time of the exodus in Egypt, Jannes and Jambres. Where do those names come from? There is no reference in the book of Exodus to the names of the magicians. It may have come down through oral tradition. There are a lot of examples of that kind of information in the later points of the Old Testament that were in the New Testament included that's not in earlier written material of the canonical books of the Old Testament. So I don't think we need to be defensive about a role that oral tradition may have played in ancient Israel. It may have been a very prominent thing. But the point is that it didn't function in the way Nielsen is trying to say that it did—that it was the means of transmission of these great bodies of prophetic material down through centuries of time until ultimately it came to a written fixation.

## 11. Conclusion

So, in conclusion: One, even though oral tradition existed in ancient Israel it did not play the role that Nielsen ascribes to it. And two, I don't think there's any convincing evidence that writing was not used for literary purposes prior to the exile. That's contrary to all we know about ancient areas of the world, as well as the Old Testament. Recent extra-biblical archaeological findings at Ebla, for example, established the use of writing for, "literary purposes" in the time prior to Abraham. You're going way back to about 2300 B.C. in Ebla, and according to what is said about those texts, even though the texts themselves haven't been published, there's a lot of epic kind of story material there. And three, the sources referred to by the chronicler indicate the prophets did write. The chronicler specifically names a number of prophets who wrote. Now Isaiah was the only one mentioned who was one of the writers of the canonical prophets. The other's material wasn't preserved, but they were prophets who wrote. There is no reason to conclude that the prophets were not writers. One should not overlook the

detailed description of the writing process of the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 36.

## IX. Some Hermeneutical Principles for the Interpretation of Prophetic Writings

That brings us to Roman numeral IX, “Some hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of prophetic writings,” and A., “Some general characteristics of predictive prophecy.” I want to look at those general characteristics first, and then under B. “Some guidelines for interpretation.”

### 1. The Purpose of Predictive Prophecy

So first some general characteristics of predictive prophecy. 1. “The purpose of predictive prophecy.” We’ve already referred to two aspects, you might say, of biblical prophecy that sometimes have been labeled with the terms “forth-telling” and “foretelling.” By forth-telling I mean exhortation, reproof, correction, and instruction. By foretelling I mean prediction of things to come to pass in the future, some in the more immediate future and some in the distant future. I think that quite commonly the forth-telling aspect of a prophetic message is neglected in favor of the foretelling aspect in a way that often obscures the fundamental purpose of the prophetic message.

We’re going to talk here about the purpose of predictive prophecy. What is it? I think its purpose is not to cater to the appetite of people who are curious about the future and predictive prophecy should not be used in that way today. The predictive element in prophecy—which is what most people think of when you talk about prophets—should never be separated or isolated from its paranetic function, that is, from its instructional nature. The prophetic message is meant to exhort, to reprove, to reflect, to encourage, and to call to repentance.

Look at your citations page 20. There are I think 3 different writers here. First is from William Dyrness and notice what he said, “It is no coincidence that the publication of Hal Lindsey’s first book on prophecy [the *Late Great Planet*

*Earth*, an enormously popular book 25 years ago] coincided with the greatest revival of astrology in three hundred years. (It is interesting to note how often his book appears in bookstores alongside astrology manuals.) Man can escape as easily into prophecy as into astrology. In either case he is a pawn and thus relieved of moral responsibility. That this was no part of Lindsey's purposes from the final pages of the book.... But, we must be careful that our longing for Christ's return is not motivated by our desire to escape responsibility."

And then Ross in the next paragraph, "If the prophecies are indeed being motivated by a basic ethical concern, as I am convinced a detailed study will demonstrate, then it is our response that is the most crucial issue. If we should become experts in prophetic interpretation, if we have all knowledge of things future, yes, even if we know the day and hour of Jesus' coming, but if our lives are not transformed by the expectation of what God will do, then we've turned prophetic study into a parlor game and our knowledge becomes a curse rather than a blessing."

Then lastly Dwight Wilson now puts here something that has often been, I think, a weak feature about premillennial eschatological thought. I would identify myself as premillennial, but there has been a lot of abuses of prophetic interpretation for premillennialists. He says, "The premillenarian's history, is strewn with a mass of erroneous speculations which have undermined their credibility. Sometimes false indentifications have been made dogmatically, at other times only as probabilities or possibilities, but the result has always been the same—the increased skepticism toward premillennialism. The persons confronted with a premillenarian's presentation need to be conscious of the composite past of prophetic interpretation, which has included in the following phenomena. The current crisis is usually identified as a sign of the end, whether it was the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Palestine War, the Suez Crisis, the June War, and the Yom Kippur War. The revival of the Roman Empire has been identified variously as Mussolini's empire, the League of

Nations, the United Nations, the European defense community, the Common Market, and NATO. Speculation on the Antichrist included Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, and Henry Kissinger.” There’s a history of that kind of identification with the fulfillment of certain prophetic sections in the Old Testament of the current events that have proven themselves erroneous time after time. Some people get caught up in that kind of thing, kind of lost and fascinated by it.

## 2. Functions of Predictive Prophecy in Scripture

Let’s turn to the Bible itself as far as the function of the predictive prophecy, what is its purpose? Look at 1 John 3:3. After speaking about the second coming of Christ in verse 2, “We know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.” In other words, the second coming of Christ is not something just for speculation. It will affect the way you live now.

Look at 1 Peter 4:7 as well, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded, self-controlled so that you may pray because Christ is going to return.” That’s to affect the way you live now, “Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks he shall speak as he is speaking the very words of God. If one serves you should do it with strength.” Why? “Because the end of all things is near, it’s coming.”

Look at 2 Peter 3:11. In verse 10 he spoke about the heavens disappearing, destroyed by fire, earth and everything in it lay bare. “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You all ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God.” Look at verse 14, “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him.” 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, “Now dear brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you for you

know very well that the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” And he goes on in verse 6 about our response, “So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert, self-controlled.” Down to verse 8, “Let us be self-controlled putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” Verse 11, “Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

### 3. Purpose of Predictive Prophecy

We look at a text like that where the predictive element in prophecy is given to God’s people to show them that his program of redemption is moving forward according to his divine purpose, plan and schedule. History of all peoples and nations are subject to this sovereign ordering of the historical process as it moves forward through his purposes. That fact is intended to affect the manner of life of those who hear that message. The prophets spoke to induce holy living and obedience to God among God’s people, in their time, as well as in the time of those who live long after the time in which they preached. We should not lose sight of that because that to me is the most important part of the reason for the initial delivery of the message. Yes, God does have a purpose and a plan, there are these things that are going to happen in times in the future to us. But that should shape the way in which we live now. So that forth-telling aspect of the prophetic message shouldn’t be swallowed up by interest in the foretelling aspect of the prophetic message. Okay, we’ll have to stop there.

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 Olivia Gray, Kayla Schwanke, Joshua Alvera (editor)  
 Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
 Final edit by Katie Ells  
 Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt



## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 13a,**

### **IX, Hermeneutical principles for interpretation of prophetic writings**

#### **A. 1. Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings**

Last week we were beginning our discussion of Roman numeral IX., “Hermeneutical principles for interpretation of prophetic writings.” We had discussed A. 1. which is: “The purpose of predictive prophecy.” I think that’s important not only for the time in which the prophets proclaimed the message but for us as well. Prophecy is not simply meant to satisfy the appetite that almost everyone has for learning about what’s going to happen in the future. It is something that’s given in the context of God’s purposeful movement in history ultimately pointing to the period of consummation when Christ returns and how that is to affect how we live today; that is the primary thing.

#### **2. Predictive prophecy and history writing**

Number 2. is “Predictive prophecy and history writing.” I think there are two common but erroneous ideas about the nature of the relationship between predictive prophecy and history writing, and I’m speaking there of predictive prophecy and history writing as genres of literature. Those erroneous views arise because the distinction in literary form between prophetic discourse and historical discourse is not often discerned. Some people look at predictive prophecy as a captivating form of historical writing and this is the usual view of the critical school of thought that doesn’t really accept that there is such a thing as genuine predictive prophecy but rather see it as a captivating form of historical writing that was produced subsequent to the events that it describes. In other words, it’s history written after the event.

#### **a. Prophecy’s Not History: More Enigmatic Character**

If you look in your citations page 21, Mickelsen in his volume on

*Interpreting the Bible* speaks about this and says, “but prophecy is not history written after the event. Ordinary historical writing in the Bible lacks the enigmatic character of prophecy. It is characterized by a treatment of the details and their subordination to basic events in some type of chronological pattern. This is in contrast to the prophetic narratives which deal with future realities. These realities are set forth as important particulars but subordinate details are not presented in developed time sequences or consistent trains of thought. Any man who could write history in the form of Hebrew prophecy would have to forget half of what he knew in order to give the appearance of being a prophet. But the artificiality of such a tactic would surely show through.”

I think what Mickelsen is getting at is if you compare biblical historical discourse and prophetic discourse you will find an enigmatic character in prophecy. In historical discourse you have all these details that are put together in an ordered synchronous kind of way. In prophecy you don’t get all the details, you get a few of them. But you don’t get enough to get the whole picture, and there’s that difference between prophetic discourse and historical discourse. You see the point Mickelsen is making is the character of prophetic discourse is different from the character of historical discourse. There’s a certain enigmatic character to it. All the details are not there. So it’s not history written after the event, as he says somebody would have to forget half of what he knew in order to write history in the form of predictive prophecy.

#### b. Predictive Prophecy is History Written Beforehand

So that’s one rather common erroneous idea that’s out there, but another one is that predictive prophecy is history written beforehand. Now what I mean by that is not that I’m challenging the legitimacy of predictive prophecy as actually speaking of what is to happen in the future, but we’re looking at the character of discourse. Prophetic discourse does not normally give as complete a picture of an event as historical discourse does. In historical discourse you have

all the particulars and in prophetic discourse you do not; instead you get that enigmatic character. That enigmatic character does not negate the recognizability of fulfillment. When it comes to pass there's enough there that when what is spoken about in advance happens it can be recognized. You have enough information to see fulfillment when it happens. However, and here is a caution, fulfillment may come in ways not completely foreseen or anticipated. In other words, when the fulfillment comes there may be some twists and turns and characteristics of it that are surprising.

### c. Example Isaiah 9 and Matthew 4

Let me give you just one illustration: if you look at Isaiah 9 and then Matthew 4. In the first verses of Isaiah chapter 9, you read, "Nevertheless there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress; in the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles by the way of the sea along the Jordan. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." Now there's a prophetic statement. Now turn to Matt 4:12-16 where you read, "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah." Then you get a quotation from Isaiah 9:1 and 4. "'In the land of Zebulun, the land of Naphtali, by the way of the Sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.' From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'"

Now if you go back to that Isaiah 9 it appears in the context of the section of Isaiah often called, "the Book of the Immanuel." It begins in chapter 7 and runs through chapter 12. The historical context for the message that Isaiah was bringing in Isaiah chapter 7 through 12 is that the king of Judah, at that time, Ahaz, had

been threatened by an attack from a coalition of kings from the Northern Kingdom and from Rezin of Damascus. And in view of that threat in chapter 7, Isaiah goes out and confronts Ahaz and says, “Don’t be afraid of these people. It’s really not going to happen. Put your trust in the Lord.” Ahaz has no interest in putting his trust in the Lord. What he does instead is make an alliance with the Assyrians. And if you think about that you have the Northern Kingdom just to the north of Judah, Damascus a little further north, but further to the North and West and behind them is Assyria. So, he goes around and behind them and makes an alliance with Assyria, who provides protection from the threat from Pekah of Samaria and Rezin of Damascus.

Of course, that alliance with Assyria will eventually lead to Assyria coming down, taking Damascus, then taking Samaria, and threatening Judah. It led to a lot of problems, for both Israel and Judah. In chapter 9 of Isaiah, a very dark picture is drawn, for the region north of the Sea of Galilee. That is precisely the region devastated by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser. If you look at 2 Kings 15:29 you have a description of the advance of Tiglath-pileser and it says, “In the time of Pekah king of Israel,” who was the one threatening Ahaz, “Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali.” It is the very area that Isaiah is describing in 9:1. “And deported the people to Assyria.”

So, a dark picture is drawn of that area north of the Sea of Galilee, but Isaiah then goes on to say in chapter 9, at some future time in that very area that darkness is going to be dispelled by a great light. In Isaiah 9 you might wonder, what is that great light?

Verse 2, “The people walking in darkness in that area of Zebulon and Naphtali have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” I might say in this whole passage, you get into an interpretive issue related to the use of Hebrew verbal tenses. The tenses are all perfect tenses. If you go down, for example, where this unfolds further in verse 6, where “unto us

a child is born,” a very familiar verse, “unto us a son is given.” Those are perfect tenses. “Unto us a child *has been* born, a son *has been* given.” But it’s prophetic perfect. It really should be translated as the future and all through this passage should really be translated as the future. So the great light that was to dispel the darkness in that region was invaded by the Assyrian king in the aftermath of Ahaz’s alliance with the Assyrians, but Jesus’ Galilean ministry is centered in that very region.

But you see, Isaiah’s prophecy doesn’t have all the particulars. It doesn’t fill in all the details. When Christ comes you can say, yes, it fits, this is a wonderful view of the long-range future, and a picture of the first advent of Christ. But you see that “enigmatic character,” you might say, that is characteristic of prophetic discourse. There’s usually an enigmatic character of prophecies and predictive statements prior to their fulfillment. That is what distinguishes, prophetic discourse from historical discourse. So predictive prophecy is not history written beforehand.

But there you’re not dealing with historical discourse in a prophetic voice. It’s not predictive prophecy. My comments are about predictive prophecy. There are sections of Isaiah like chapters 36-39 where you have historical discourse which is really discourse like Kings. In sections in Jeremiah you have a discourse that is like Kings.

### 3. The Progressive Character of Predictive Prophecy

All right, let’s go on to 3., “The progressive character of predictive prophecy.” I think just as with revelation in general, so with predictive prophecy, you have a gradual unfolding and development. So, on certain prophetic themes you get, with the progress of revelation, increasingly more information, more of the details filled in. That progressive character of predictive prophecy gives us more information. But, the ambiguity and enigmatic character of prophecy, is not totally eliminated by the greater amount of material.

An example of this might be the antichrist. The picture of the antichrist, develops slowly. As you get more information about this person, the picture gets fuller, but not to the extent that you have a complete picture. Thus you have all these mistaken identifications, I think, in the history of interpretation. In Daniel 7, there's a little horn that is spoken of. In the context of the succession of kingdoms, they are pictured as 4 beasts, and that little horn makes war with the saints. It seems to be representative of a leader opposed to God and to God's people. But you don't get any real clear detailed description of who this individual is. In Daniel 9, you get a little bit more information, where there's reference to the abomination of desolation, and in chapter 12, a little more. But, then when you go to the New Testament, in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, you have reference to a man of sin, who represents himself as God and sits in the temple. Revelation 13, there's a beast that seems to be similar to the little horn in Daniel 7, so you start linking biblical passages. You get more and more information, but not enough to dispel all the enigmatic character. The progressive character of predicted prophecy is an important feature of it. But, it doesn't totally eradicate the enigmatic character of predictive prophecy.

#### 4. Predictive Prophecy Has its Own Peculiar Time Perspective

Number 4., "Predictive prophecy has its own peculiar time perspective." For the most part you do not have a great deal of emphasis on precise chronological information in predictive prophecies. There are a few exceptions, but in general you don't. In addition to that, often it seems that a number of events are presented in a way that seems to compress them into what appears to be a rather short period of time. Some people speak of that as the prophetic time perspective. Look at your citations, page 21, under Louis Berkhof's *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. He says, "The element of time is a rather negligible quantity in the prophets. While designations of time are not altogether wanting, their numbers are exceptionally small. The prophets compressed great events into a brief space of

time, brought momentous movements close together in a temporal sense, and took them in at a single glance. This is called ‘the prophetic perspective,’ or as Delitzsch calls it, ‘the foreshortening of the prophet’s horizon.’” You’ve perhaps heard of that descriptive phrase. “They looked upon the future as a traveler does upon a mountain range in the distance. He fancies that one mountain-top rises up right behind the other, when in reality they are miles apart.” You see that referenced in “the prophetic perspective of the day of the Lord, and the twofold coming to Christ.” I think that picture is helpful. I’m sure you’ve seen that, where you’re traveling and you see a mountain range, and it looks like they’re close together. You get to the top of one, and the next one is a long way forward.

a. Example: Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4

Look at Isaiah 61:1 and 2, and its New Testament quotation in Luke 4. In Isaiah, 61: 1 and 2, Isaiah says, “The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God.” It is to the second verse that I want to call your attention. When in Luke 4, Jesus reads from that, in the synagogue. Luke 4:16, “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found a place where it is written,” (and this is Isaiah 61:1 and 2) “‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, and release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,’” And he stops. You notice he stops in the middle of verse 2. Then it says, “He rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” But you notice he didn’t read 2b of Isaiah 61, “and the day of

vengeance of our God.” The day of vengeance of our God was not fulfilled in his day. That would be fulfilled at his second advent. So, in other words, 61:1 and 2a were fulfilled in his first advent. But 61: 2b was not to be fulfilled until his second advent. But if you read Isaiah 61:1 and 2, it looks like those two things are going to happen in close proximity in time. Between Isaiah 61:2a, and 61:2b, there is a time gap. So that foreshortening of the prophetic horizon, is something that you have to keep in mind, when dealing with prophets. There may be time gaps between even, phrases that make up one sentence. You can hardly know that in advance, unless you have information that makes it clear. Like here, you can compare Scripture with Scripture and I think it makes it clearer.

Keil says, now I don’t have this in your citations, “The prophets in the Spirit behold the future as if it were present; that to their spirit the images and configurations of the future appear as present, as already actual realities. This explains not only the predominant use of the so-called prophetic perfect in the prophetic discourse.” They can speak of things, as in the perfect tense as if it was completed action, yet it is future, because they see that present reality of the future fulfillment. “But also the fact that the chronological order of the predicted events retires into the background, prophecy assuming the so-called perspective character.” So that’s another characteristic you have to keep in mind with predictive prophecy, that the time perspective is different than the time perspective you will have in historical records.

##### 5. The Message of Predictive Prophecy May Be Couched in Culturally Dated Terminology.

Let’s go on to 5., “The message of predictive prophecy may be couched in culturally dated terminology.” This is an interesting issue because it brings up a host of interpretive questions when you’re dealing with actual prophecy. I think when you read predictive prophecy you realize that the prophets spoke with their own contemporaries, in the language, thought patterns, and in the cultural setting



of their own time. As is to be expected they used language and terminology that was appropriate for their own time. If they talk about transportation, they're going to talk about horses and chariots and camels and small ships—things of that sort, the kinds of modes of transportation that were typical of that day. If they speak about weapons and armaments, they're going to talk about swords, shields, bows and arrows and slingshots. If they talk about the means and manner of worship they're going to talk in language that reflects the temple services or the sacrifices. If they talk about world events that involve other nations and peoples, they're going to speak in terms of the nations that surrounded Israel at the time in which they lived: Moab, Edom, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and so on.

#### a. Culturally Dated Terminology – Literal Approach

Now having said that, when you come to any given predictive prophecy that uses culturally dated terminology it raises the question of how to understand that culturally dated terminology. What do you do with it? I think that there are three basic ways in which the interpreters have dealt with that particular feature of predictive prophecy. I want to mention them and then go back and look at each of them in more detail. The first way is to insist on a literal fulfillment, even on culturally dated terminology, right down to the details. If a prophet in some predictive passage speaks of horses and chariots, then at the time of fulfillment there are going to be horses and chariots involved. If he speaks of bow and arrows, those exact weapons will be used at the time of fulfillment. If he speaks of Moab and Edom, Moab and Edom are going to be involved at the time of fulfillment.

Now, let me make just a brief comment here. It seems to me to do that doesn't take into account sufficiently the cultural milieu of the prophet and the people to whom he spoke. If he had been speaking to his contemporaries and using 20th century language most of what he said would've been incomprehensible. Certainly the weapons of war we know were unthought-of and

unheard of in the time of Isaiah or to whomever you're speaking. It would make his message meaningless to the people to whom he spoke. So it seems to me, the prophet spoke in ways that would be understandable to his audience. The question is: What do we do with that kind of culturally dated terminology, when we look to the time of fulfillment?

#### b. Symbolic Meaning – Spiritualization of Prophecy

A second approach some interpreters have taken, in contrast to insisting on literal fulfillment, is to say there is a symbolic meaning to the entire prophecy. I don't like to use the following word but I think it probably captures this method better than any other word, and that is the word "spiritualization." In other words, you spiritualize the prophecy. The words are not then understood in a physical or material sense at all. But they're viewed as symbolic of spiritual realities and spiritual forces. Now that's kind of vague. I think we have to look at a passage and see how it works to understand exactly what that means, but keep that second category in mind. Spiritualization; it's symbolic of spiritual realities, described by culturally dated terminology.

#### c. Looking for Equivalents or Correspondences

The third category is that some interpreters deal with culturally dated terminology by looking for equivalents or correspondence. In other words, interpreters of this approach would accept that there's an element of figurative language in the prophet's discourse, but they do not spiritualize. They still view the language as referring to tangible material realities. If bows and arrows are talked of in terms of weapons we look for an equivalence or correspondence at the time of fulfillment. We look for tanks and rockets or something equivalent. One looks for counterparts for the weapons of the time in which the prophets spoke. The enemies of the God's people in the time of the prophet will be replaced by later enemies who occupy the corresponding territory. So we look at Moab and

Edom. Moab and Edom are gone. Who lives in those territories at the time of fulfillment? Assyria is gone. Who lives there? What nation is that that corresponds to the people of the time of which the prophet spoke? So I think there are those basic three approaches to culturally dated terminology: literal fulfillment, spiritualization and speaking of spiritual realities, and looking for analogy, correspondence or equivalents.

These lines are hard to draw. And there is always a question of how do you really apply these to a given passage. It is hard to generalize. You have to look at specific passages and wrestle with the language and content of individual passages. So it does seem theoretically like these are tight categories. They are probably not that tight but it depends on how they are implemented.

#### d. Example: Isaiah 11 and the Spiritualizing Approach

Let's look at Isaiah 11 the last part of the chapter. The first part of the chapter you're probably familiar with because the first part has that section with verse 6, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox." Verse 9, "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." This is speaking of that future time when there's absence of external danger. Everyone is living in peace and harmony. But when you get down to the second half of that chapter, we read in verse 10, "In that day the root of Jesse will stand for the banner of the people. The people will rally to him and his resting place will be glorious." Then 11 to the end, "In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of

Judah from the four quarters of the earth. Ephraim's jealousy will vanish, and Judah's enemies will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim. They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west; together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them. The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals. There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt."

Look at your citations page 23. I want to use E. J. Young's commentary on Isaiah as an example of that second category. In other words, you have culturally dated terminology; how do you deal with it? Young suggests you spiritualize it and you say the language is symbolic of spiritual realities. I think Young gives a good illustration of that second category. You notice in verse 12, "He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth." His comment on 12 is, "The Messiah will be a drawing point for the heathen, and through the work of Christian preaching and Christian missionaries He will draw them unto Himself. How important, particularly in this day and age, therefore that the church send forth to the four corners of the earth missionaries who are aflame with the truth that apart from true Messiah, Jesus, there is no salvation." Isaiah 11:13, "Ephraim's jealousy will vanish, and Judah's enemies will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim." What's that talking about? Young says, "In Christ all national, sectional and regional distinctions will be abolished, and through the figure employed in this verse we learn that in Christ there is a true unity and place for all men of whatever race and color. In Christ alone can they be one." Then verse 14, "They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west; together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them."

Young says, “Here is the true unity of the faith in opposition to the hostility of the world. This true unity does not hide itself in cringing self-defense expecting attack. It takes the offensive; the enemies of the Messiah must be destroyed, and in the strength of the unity that the Messiah gives, the people fly upon the Philistines, representatives of the enemies of God and His Church.” Now notice the next comment, “What Isaiah is here describing cannot, of course, be understood in a literal sense. Rather, here is a beautiful picture of the unity that is the possession of the saints of God, obtained for them not through their own works, but through the blood of Christ, and of the vigorous, active participation in the work of conquering the enemy world, a conquering which is brought about through the sending of missionaries and the constant, active, vigorous, faithful proclamation of the whole counsel of God to every creature.” So this is the spread of the gospel, worldwide evangelization.

Young continues, “The glorious hope here held for God’s people does not consist in the despoliation of nomad Arabs of the desert. It rather consists in the blessed task of making the saving power of God known even to those who, like the apostle Paul, had once been persecutors of the church... The picture is a complete reversal of condition, not to take place in Palestine, but in the great field of the world, a reversal which will consist in the people of God reaching out to bring all men and make them captive to Christ.” So that’s the spiritualizing approach. Now is that what Isaiah’s talking about? That’s a tough question.

Transcribed by Diane Tarr, Grace Wood, Barry Soucy, and Rachel Thomas, Ted Hildebrandt,

Abigail Aldrich (editor)

Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Final edit by Katie Ells

Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy: Lecture 13b**

### Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings

#### 5. e. Isaiah 11:10-12 Oswalt's Approach

Let's look at John Oswalt's NICOT commentary on Isaiah, page 286 and following. He says of this larger section, "While the general sense of these verses is clear, the specifics are not so clear. Is the prophet speaking of the return from Babylon in 539 B.C.?" See, it starts out, "The Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people." Then he speaks in verse 12, of gathering the exiles of Israel, bringing them back to their land. Oswalt says, "Is this speaking of the return from Babylon in 539? If so, the Messiah had not yet been revealed and could hardly be the ensign around which the people rallied." We see in verse 10, "In that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him." It didn't seem to happen in the time of the return from exile. Is Isaiah in fact speaking of the new Israel, the church, as the reformers maintain? For example, Calvin says, "Certainly, believers were gathered to the Messiah from every part of the world [that is E. J. Young's position as well]." And verse 10, in a fashion reminiscent of Isaiah 2:2-4, makes a reference to the nations apart. Nevertheless, here appears Oswalt's comment, "The primary focus of the passage seems to be upon the historical nation of Israel, so that one is led to believe it points to some great final ingathering of the Jewish people such as that referred to by Paul in Romans 11. If that has begun in the Zionist movement, as many believe, we may look forward with anticipation to its ultimate completion in a turning to God in Christ by the Jewish nation." It seems that Oswalt, as he discusses that further, would really fit into that third category that you have here; some form of description of the return of exiled Israel to their land in connection with it their coming to Christ. There's where that line may be fuzzy that was brought up a minute ago.

#### f. J. A. Alexander's Approach

In J.A. Alexander's commentary on Isaiah, page 257, he says, "The prophecy was not fulfilled in the return of the refugees after Sennacherib's discomfiture, nor in the return from Babylon, and but partially in the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews. The complete fulfillment is to be expected when all Israel shall be saved. The prediction must be figuratively understood, because the nations mentioned in this verse have long ceased to exist." See there, you get that culturally invaded terminology. The event prefigured is, according to Keil, the return of the Jews to Palestine; but according to Calvin their admission to Christ's kingdom on repentance and reception of the Christian faith."

So you get that divergence of viewpoint. Verse 14, where Palestine, Edom, Moab and the Moabites are mentioned, Alexander says, "All the names are those of neighboring nations with whom the Hebrews were accustomed to wage war. Edom, Moab, and Ammon, may be specially named for an additional reason, viz. that they were nearly related to Israel, and yet among his most inveterate enemies. The Jews explain this as a literal prediction having respect to the countries formerly possessed by the races here enumerated. Most Christian writers understand it spiritually of the conquests to be achieved by the true religion, and suppose the nations here named to be simply put for enemies in general, or for the heathen world." Note that this is Young's view as well. "This method of description being rendered more emphatic by the historical associations which the names awaken." Later on, he says, "The fulfillment has been sought by different interpreters, in the return from Babylon, in the general progress of the gospel, and in the future restoration of the Jews."

#### g. Vannoy's Approach

I don't see how you can argue with the details of the return from Babylon, but what do you do with this? Is this the general progress of the gospel? Do you

spiritualize this? Or do you say it has something to do with the future restoration of Jewish people to their homeland?

I'm more pre-millennial in my eschatology. I'm more inclined to take that latter viewpoint and to look for, with these names, some kind of equivalents, for the places. If they're going to return from Assyria—from Mesopotamia in the area, look for equivalents that correspond. There are, I don't think many, but some who argue that at the end time there's going to be the reconstitution of all these nations, that in the end time there's going to be an Assyria. I think that's pushing it, you see that'd be that first category, those who insist on a literal fulfillment. I think you're down to a second or the third category. The question is, are you comfortable with the spiritualization hermeneutic? Is that the way this was intended to be understood?

There's a good commentary on Isaiah by J.A. Motyer. Some of you may be familiar with that. His brief comment on this passage is, "it's a metaphor: the force to which the nations fall is the gospel." So, he would agree with Young. I'm just trying to use this to illustrate the kinds of interpretive questions that arise when you start looking more closely and seeing this predictive prophecy.

## 6. Predictive prophecy may be conditional

### a. Jer. 18:5-10

Let's go on to 6., "Predictive prophecy may be conditional." Now, to say that means that some prophecies may be dependent on conditions. The condition may be expressed and then it's not problematic. But I think there are examples where it's not expressed, yet may still be a vital part of the prophecy. The text that I think is enormously important in understanding this is Jeremiah 18:5-10. In Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah goes down to the house of the potter, watches him throw some pots, and in verse five, "The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and said, 'O, House of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter does? Like clay in the hands of the potter, so you are in my hand, O, House of Israel. If...' and here are



the important statements, “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. If at another time, I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.” So, God can make a statement, but if the conduct of the person or the group to which that statement is directed is modified, that may affect the carrying out of what God initially stated he will do.

b. 1 Kings 11 - Jeroboam

When you get to prophetic statements, sometimes you find conditions attached. Look at 1 Kings 11 with Jeroboam I. Look at verse 38. Ahijah the prophet, speaking for the Lord, says to him in verse 38, “If you do whatever I command you, and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. I will humble David’s descendants because of this, but not forever.”

But there is a condition: if you do all that I command you, I will build Jeroboam a sure house as I did for David. There is a condition with that, and since Jeroboam did not fulfill the conditions, that prediction was also not fulfilled. Instead of being given a sure house, his house was destroyed.

You go to 1 Kings 15:29 and you read there, “As soon as he began to reign [that is, Baasha], he killed Jeroboam’s whole family. He did not leave Jeroboam anyone that breathed but destroyed them all according to the Word of the Lord given to his servant Ahijah the Shilonite because of the sins Jeroboam had committed and had caused Israel to commit because he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel.” So Jeroboam did not meet the condition and he experienced judgment rather than the establishment of a sure dynasty. But that’s pretty straightforward, that’s a stated condition.

### c. 1 Kings 21:19-27 Ahab

Let's look at an unstated condition but which still seems to be involved in the prediction. Look at 1 Kings 21:19. This is in the context of Ahab's taking of Naboth's vineyard. The Lord tells Elijah to tell Ahab, "This is what the Lord says, 'Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him this is what the Lord says, 'In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood. Yes, yours.'" So there's a prediction but Ahab repented, at least to some degree.

Look at verse 27, "When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted. He lay in sackcloth, went around meekly. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 'Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day. But I will bring it in his house in the days of his son.'" So the judgment is modified. It's not totally removed, but the time element of its enactment is changed to the time of his son.

You read that in 2 Kings 9:25 and 26, in the time of Joram, Ahab's son. He was killed by Jehu. 2 Kings 9:25, "Jehu said to Bidkar, his chariot officer, 'pick [Joram] up and throw him on the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I would ride together in chariots behind Ahab his father when the Lord made this prophecy about him. 'Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the Lord.' Now then, pick him up and throw him on that plot, in accordance with the word of the Lord.'" So here's a prediction about the judgment to come on Ahab that was modified because of Ahab's repentance but was enforced in the time of his son Joram exactly as it had been predicted. There was an unstated condition.

### d. Jonah

You probably have a similar situation in Jonah. Jonah comes to Nineveh, and in chapter 3 verse 4 he makes the statement, “In 40 days, Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Nineveh repented, and responded to his message. Nineveh was not overthrown in 40 days. Eventually, Nineveh was destroyed, but it was long after the time of Jonah.

e. Isaiah 38 – Hezekiah

Look at Isaiah 38:1-5. You read there, “In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, ‘This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order because you are going to die; you will not recover.’ Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: ‘Go and tell Hezekiah, “This is what the Lord, God of your father David, says: I’ve heard your prayers and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of king of Assyria. I will defend this city.”’” So at the announcement made to Hezekiah, “You’re going to die, you’re not going to recover,” Hezekiah prays to the Lord and the Lord responds and gives him an additional 15 years. So it does seem that in many instances there may be this conditional nature from predictive prophecy.

I think those are the two things that stand out. I cannot think of others besides repentance and prayer, which reinforces again the repentance part of it. Jeremiah 18:5-10 speaks explicitly about the prayer, and you have other examples of when Moses interceded for Israel. When the Lord says he’s going to do one thing, Moses prays and the Lord relents.

f. J. Barton Payne on Conditionality

J. B. Payne in his *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, in a large

introductory section, discusses a lot of issues of interpretation of prophetic material. He discusses this issue of conditionality of the biblical prophecy. In that discussion, he suggests that some limits should be put on conditionality lest all prophecy be rendered uncertain of fulfillment. We see there's the hermeneutical danger behind it. If everything's conditional, then you can't be sure that anything's going to happen, particularly those things that stand at the heart of God's redemptive program. I think certainly there's a sense in which, and this is my addition to what Payne is suggesting, God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "In your seed all the nations will be blessed," is not explicitly conditional on what any human being would do to ensure its fulfillment. That's going to happen with certainty. All nations of the earth will be blessed through the seed of Abraham because that is at the heart of God's redemptive purpose. There's nothing, I think, that any human being can do to alter that.

What Payne suggests is, and this is his own formulation, that for a prophecy to remain conditional it must meet two qualifications. One, it must be of near application. If you look at the examples, it fits. Jonah preaches to Nineveh, Isaiah's tell Hezekiah when he's going to die, Elijah tells Ahab how he will die. It must be a near application. Second, it must possess elements capable of satisfaction by the prophet's contemporary. In other words, these conditionals are not long-range prophecies that are part of the movement of God's redemptive program forward in accordance to the fulfillment of his plan and purpose.

So, I think that's probably helpful. I think we should recognize there is a potentially conditional aspect through any given prophecy, but as has been suggested those conditions are prayer and repentance. There is a contemporariness of the prophecy that could be fulfilled by the contemporaries of the prophet. It is a near application rather than long-term prophecy.

## 7. Kinds of Predictive Prophecy

### a. Direct Prediction

Let's go on to 7., "Kinds of predictive prophecy." What I have in mind under that heading is the distinction between what you might call direct prediction and typological prediction. Direct prediction consists of a prophetic statement that has its fulfillment solely in the future. In other words, it's a verbal assertion of something that will happen in the future. You might look at Micah 5:2, which says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you were small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." Then that's quoted in Matthew 2:5-6, as being fulfilled with Christ, who comes out of Bethlehem and becomes ruler of Israel. That's a statement, a verbal assertion.

#### b. Typological Prediction

A typological prediction is distinguished from direct prediction. A typological prediction is an institution, person or an event that finds its highest application of meaning in an institution, person or event of a later period in redemptive history. I'll repeat that. A typological prediction is an institution, person, or an event that finds its highest application of meaning in an institution, person or an event of a later period in redemptive history. For example, the Passover lamb finds its highest application of meaning in Christ himself. Or the serpent on the pole in the wilderness. In other words, typological prediction is accomplished by pre-figuring or imaging.

#### 1. John Stek's on Typology

Look at your citations page 24 under John Stek. In that first paragraph under John Stek's "Biblical Typology Yesterday and Today," he says, "In other words, a type is a historical reality which served a significant historical purpose within its own historical horizon (not merely a symbolic one), but it was also fashioned by Providence in such a way as to contribute to the larger purpose of God, namely, to reveal in successive stages and operations the very truths and

principles which were to find in the realities of the gospel their move to complete manifestation.” So in that sense, the type takes on the function of prophecy. It differs from direct prophecy, that is, a verbal assertion, in that it images or pre-figures, while the direct prophecy asserts. It’s verbal.

But I think when you reflect on the content of the Old Testament you will find there is a fair amount of typological significance in the Old Testament. There are things in the Old Testament that look forward to a fuller realization of the truth embodied in that Old Testament institution or event. The history of interpretation tells us that it's difficult to keep a proper perspective on the use of typological interpretation because there have been a lot of excesses and misuses of it. How far do we go with it? Some Old Testament realities are explicitly identified as being typological by statements in the New Testament, and there you have a very firm basis. But when you start going beyond that, how far can you go?

#### b. Mickelsen on Typology

If you look at page 24 under Mickelsen's *Interpreting the Bible* paragraph A, it says, “Often typology becomes an excuse for sensationalism in interpretation. Such sensationalism must be firmly repudiated by every honest interpreter. But if an interpreter, fully aware of the unity of the people of God, can show historical correlations while being aware of the differences between the type and the antitype, he certainly may observe such historical parallels. In such an activity the interpreter must discipline himself severely.” In other words, Mickelsen and others I think correctly are saying you need not limit yourself only to those examples that are explicitly identified as typological by later biblical statements. You can go further than that, but you have to be careful lest you abuse this hermeneutical procedure.

The danger lies in the tendency toward allegory, and I think the way to avoid allegorical interpretation, where you can take almost anything and give it a spiritual significance, is to be certain that the correspondence between type and

antitype retains oneness of meaning. In other words, it's the same truth that reappears at a later stage of the redemptive history but to a higher level. It's fuller revelation progresses where you have a truth embodied in some symbolical form in the earlier stage of redemption, and it reappears in later history. Who can draw that line legitimately?

### c. Vos on Typology

With that let me point you to page 25 because what I just is said really Vos' concept of typological interpretation where he establishes the connection between symbol and type and says that what is symbolized, that truth is the same truth that is typified. But notice he says, "In determining the function of the ceremonial law, we must take into consideration its two large aspects, the symbolic and the typical and the relation between the two. The same things were, looked at from the point of view, symbols, and from another point of view, types. A symbol is important in its religious significance something that profoundly portrays a certain fact, principle or relationship of a spiritual nature in a visible form. The things it pictures are of present existence and present application." In the next paragraph, "A typical thing is prospective." And then the following paragraph, "The things symbolized and the things typified are not different sets of things. They are in reality the same things, only different in this respect that they come first on a lower stage of development in redemption, and then again, in the later period, is on a higher stage." The middle of the next paragraph, "Only after having discovered what a thing symbolizes, can we legitimately proceed to put the question what it typifies, for the latter can never be aught else or else than the former lifted to a higher plane. The bond that holds type and antitype together must be a bond of vital continuity in the progress of redemption." So I think that is the issue—the correspondence between type and antitype. You might have the same truth in the symbol that reappears in the type of the later type.

Go back to page 23. Notice what Stek says there in that second paragraph.

He is pointing out that God has so sovereignly ordered history that this correspondence between type and antitype is something that is by design. He says, “As the architect's models and sketches are controlled by his clear vision of the building which will someday serve his client's purpose, so the Lord of redemption history ordains certain matters in the earlier dispensation which had their archetypes in the later.” I think that metaphor of the architect is a good metaphor. You might say that God is the architect of history. He sees the whole building and so he can build into the history these realities that are anticipating the reappearance of the same truth in other realities at a later stage of redemptive history. But you see type then becomes an important part of prophecy. It is to be looked at as a prophetic function every bit as much as direct prediction is, or direct verbal assertion.

#### d. Danger of Falling into Allegory

Now I said the danger is falling into allegory that loses the correspondence between type and anti-type being the same truth. Let me give you an illustration. Some of the old church fathers were heavy on allegory. Chrysostom said of Herod's slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Christ, “The fact that only the children of two years old and under were murdered while those of three presumably escaped is meant to teach us that those who hold the Trinitarian faith will be saved whereas Binitarians and Unitarians will undoubtedly perish.” Now you see there you get, in my opinion, an abuse—you're falling into allegory. You're bringing meaning to a text that has absolutely nothing to do with the text itself. And it's that line that you don't want to cross, but it's that line that Vos protects against with the system that he suggests for abuse with typological interpretations.

Student Question:



Question: So with type we're speaking of situations, for instance, when the blood that was slain of the lamb in the Old Testament is the type pointing to Christ as his blood was slain?

Response: Yes, I think that's perfectly valid here—it's the same truth in the blood of a sacrifice, which is precisely what Christ's blood did. And as Hebrews points out, the blood of bulls and goats could not ultimately make the atonement. It was pointing forward to the blood of Christ that made it effective.

Transcribed by Jason Noto-Moniz (ed.), Katie Tomlinson, Cristin Gordon, Amnoni Myers,  
Melissa Stevens, Eric Hilker  
Rough edit by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14**

### Guidelines for the interpretation of prophecy

#### Guidelines for the interpretation of prophecy

##### 1. Make a careful grammatical historical contextual analysis of the passage

We have been discussing “Guidelines for the interpretation of prophecy.” 1. under that is, “Make a careful grammatical historical contextual analysis of the passage.” That’s not something that is exclusive to the prophetic discourses nor to the exegetical task. I think that’s the basic fundamental task of the interpreter. You first have to understand the meaning of words, the language used, studying usage of words elsewhere, and then the relationship that the words have with each other. At that point you get into grammatical constructions. But beyond that, you should look to the historical background of the prophet and the people to whom the prophet spoke. We should look at the context of what proceeds as well as the context of what follows and the flow of thought in the book in which the prophecy is a part. I think it works out like ripples in a pond. You look at the whole canon of Scripture, where you look at the narrow near context and then you work your way out into the larger context up to the whole entire context of the Bible. Any parallel passages should be consulted if there are such. So that’s pretty basic stuff that you’re all familiar with. “Make a careful grammatical, historical, contextual, analysis of the passage.”

##### 2. State explicitly to whom or what the passage refers.

2. “State explicitly to whom or what the passage refers.” We might ask questions such as, “Is the message about the hearer or reader to whom it is addressed, or does it proclaim to them about someone else?” By asking that question we can determine whether a passage is basically predictive or didactic. If it’s didactic and the prophet is simply teaching those to whom he speaks, some important truth that is addressed to them that may have application to us. Is he

saying something to them or is it about someone else? If that's the case it may be predictive or infused in some way with predictive elements. We need to sort that out. Is the passage predictive? If it is predictive are there any conditions attached? That may be important in the way in which one looks for its fulfillment. There may be a condition that's not stated but you must ask that question. If it is predictive, is it fulfilled or unfulfilled? There I think you answer that question initially by looking elsewhere in Scripture for fulfillment. You have quite a few prophecies in the Old Testament that are fulfilled already in the Old Testament period. You have other prophecies in the Old Testament that you find fulfilled in the New Testament period. Of course, you have prophecies that are fulfilled in the time in which we are living, in the time of the church, or you may have prophecies that are not yet fulfilled but look forward to the time of the Day of the Lord. So, you need to sort that out. If it is predictive, is it fulfilled or unfulfilled?

### 3. Pay attention to fulfillment citations

That brings us to 3., "Pay attention to fulfillment citations." What I mean by that is there are certain phrases that occur in the New Testament that may be pointers or helpers to saying that this is a prophecy that specifically finds its fulfillment. What I have in mind there are phrases such as "that it might be fulfilled." You have undoubtedly come across that fulfillment citation. When you see that, I think normally if you look at all the usages, it's quite specific with the fulfillment in view. There is a prophecy that here finds its fulfillment. However, a qualification; in some cases that phrase may be taken as noting the relationship of illustration or similarity in words or ideas where an Old Testament statement in itself was not predictive.

#### a. Matthew 1:22 – Isa. 7:14

I think that becomes clear if you look at some examples. If you look at Matthew 1:22, there you get the statement, "All this took place to fulfill what the

Lord said through the prophet, ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.’” This is the statement from Isaiah 7:14, that’s applied here to Mary who conceived by means of the Holy Spirit and she is the virgin who conceived and gave birth to a son. Here you find the fulfillment of the prediction of Isaiah 7:14. That’s quite specific.

b. Matthew 8:17 – Isa. 53:4

In Matthew 8:17, you read after Jesus healed some people, “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’” Isaiah 53:4. It finds fulfillment, being the climax passage of that series of passages on the Servant of the Lord.

c. Matthew 12:17 – Isa. 42:1-4

Matthew 12:17, reads, “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, ‘Here is my servant whom I have chosen in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice on the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out till he leads justice to victory, and in his name the nations will put their hope.’” That is a quotation of another of those servant passages like earlier, from Isaiah 42:1-4.

d. Matthew 21:4 – Zech 9:9

In Matthew 21:4, “This took place to fulfill the what was spoken of through the prophet” and the quotation is from Zechariah 9:9, “Say to the daughter of Zion, see your King comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” So normally you’ll find that it is quite a specific indicator that this is the fulfillment of a previously given prediction.

e. James 2:21-23 – Gen. 15:6

However, sometimes it's more like a relationship or illustration of similar words or ideas of an Old Testament statement that was not a predictive statement. Look at James 2:21-23 where you get that phrase, "Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says," and here it quotes Genesis 15:6; "'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend.'" If you go to Genesis 15:6, this is after the Lord said to Abraham that Eliezer would not be his heir but the son of his own would be his heir and said, "Look up to the heavens to count the stars if indeed you can count them." And then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Then verse 6 says, "Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness." It's hard to predict that statement but there's simply an assertion of Abraham's faith and what the significance of that was.

So when you come to the use of "*fulfill*" in James 2:23, referencing that verse in Genesis 15:6, I think you'd have to say that this is more a formula of citation at this point, than it is indicating prophecy and fulfillment. There's an article in your bibliography under this heading by R. Laird Harris. The article is on page 11 of your bibliography called, "Prophecy, Illustration, and Typology" in the *Interpretation of History*, a volume published honoring Dr. Allan MacRae, founder of this school, published in 1986. He uses that phrase I just used, "The formula of citation," for references like this.

f. Matthew 2:17-18 – Jer 31:15

A similar one is Matthew 2:17-18, where you read, "Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more'" and that's Jeremiah 31:15. If you go back to Jeremiah 31:15, you read, "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping; Rachel

weeping for her children; and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.” In the context, that is referring to weeping concerning the exiles of the Babylonian captivity.

#### g. Plerono Citation Formula

It’s not a predictive statement, but both James 2:21-23 and Matthew 2:17-18 in referring to these two Old Testament texts that were not “predictive” texts, use this verb *plerono* to reference them. Does that mean they were wrongly cited as predictions? Or does it mean that Matthew’s method of interpretation was illegitimate? This is what Harris suggests, he suggests that the problem is caused by the translation of *plerow* as “fulfilled.” Certainly it has that meaning in many contexts. But what Harris argues is that it always means “fulfill” is not so certain and sometimes that it seems to be used as a formula of citation, rather than a formula of fulfilled prediction. That broader usage should be kept in mind, but then generally comes in some form *hina plerow* when is predictive prophecy, but you have to be careful.

#### h. Gegrapti Citation Formula

The second formula is *gegraptai*, “it has been written.” Again, it, too shows fulfillment often. However, sometimes it’s simply the reference. There’s fulfillment in Mark 1:2, “It is written in Isaiah the prophet” and then a quotation from Isaiah 40:3, “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.’” So John came, so, there is a fulfillment in that verse. A reference in Matthew 4:4; “Jesus answered, ‘*It is written*: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’” That is a quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3, which is not a predictive statement, but that is giving a citation.

### i. Lego

Let's go on to forms of *lego* (I say). When it stands by itself, it's usually indicative of a historical reference, not prophecy and fulfillment. Look at Matthew 22:31, "But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God *said* to you?" And then there's the quotation of Exodus 3:6, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." It's simply a reference to an Old Testament text. Act 7:48, "However, the Most High doesn't live in houses made by men, as the prophet *says*." Then the quotation is Isaiah 66:1, "'Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me?' says the Lord. 'Where will my resting place be?'" That is not a predictive statement. So this is all under 3., "Pay attention to fulfillment citation." They certainly will help with pointers and identifying predictive passages, a point of fulfillment but you have to be careful of that.

### 4. Avoid the idea of double fulfillment or double reference

4, "Avoid the idea of double fulfillment or double reference." I think that when you are looking for fulfillment of a prophecy, it is not good to adopt the idea of double reference or double sense as an underlying hermeneutical principle. In other words, we should not go around looking for double reference. You should not assume that the given prophecy may refer to two or more different events at the same time with the same words. If you do that it means that you are assuming the same words in the same context may have multiple meanings. I think that's hermeneutically a dangerous thing, to say the same words and the same context have multiple meanings unless there is some kind of double entendre, but that's not a general rule of hermeneutics. We don't use language that way. Usually when a statement is made there is an intent of a specific meaning that is carried by that statement and that's the meaning to be understood by the person who hears it. That concept I think applies to all biblical statements not just predictive, but it

certainly applies to predictive forms as well. You look for the single sense or meaning of any given statement, you don't look for multiple meaning or senses of biblical statements.

a. Dwight Pentecost - Double Reference

Look at page 28 in your citations under Dwight Pentecost who wrote a volume on eschatology called *Things to Come* in which he speaks of "the law of double reference." From his view point, "Few laws are more important to observe in the interpretation of prophetic Scripture than the law of double reference. Two events, widely separated by the time of their fulfillment, may be brought together into the scope of one prophecy. This was done because the prophet had a message for his own day as well as for a future time. By bringing two widely separated events into the scope of prophecy both purposes could be fulfilled." Then he quotes another man here by the name of Horne, "The same prophecies frequently have a double meaning, and refer to different events, the one near, the other remote; the one temporal, the other spiritual or perhaps eternal. The prophets thus having several events in view, their expressions may be partly applicable to one and partly to another. It is not always easy to make the transition. What has not been fulfilled in the first we must apply to the second and what has already been fulfilled may often be considered typical of what remains to be accomplished."

Now how you work that out you need to look at specific passages but that's the concept. If you go to Eric Sauer the next entry on p. 29. Sauer says, "Everything is historically conditioned and yet at the same time interpenetrated with eternity. All is at once human and divine, temporal and super-temporal." And, speaking about the prophets, "They speak of the return from Babylon and simultaneously promise a gathering of Israel at the still future inaugurating a kingdom of peace (Isaiah 11:11-16)." We just spoke about Isaiah 11:11-16. You see what he is saying is that prophecy is talking about the return from exile. But at the same time and in the same words it is also talking of a kingdom of peace in the



future—eschatological. It has double meaning, double reference, for the same words.

In the volume called *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, published by Word in 1993, they say, “We must add a second characteristic of prophecy: it may have two fulfillments, one near the prophet’s lifetime and one long past it.” When you look at a prophecy and you ask for its fulfillment, there is one in the more near future and one in the more distant future. All of them are referenced in the same statement. There are quite a few people out there who argue that this principle, or as Pentecost calls it, “the law of double reference” is a principle that should be utilized in the interpretation of prophetic statements—looking for multiple references.

#### b. Vannoy’s Response

What I’m suggesting is, I don’t think that’s valid. It gets back to this thing of how language works. Do we use language to have the same words and the same context but say two different things? You go back in the history of interpretation, Luther and Calvin argue forcefully against it but, of course they’re arguing against the background of allegorical interpretation where you have multiple meanings. They insisted that the first obligation of an interpreter is to arrive at the sense of the text intended by its author. Luther said, “Only the single, proper, original sense, the sense in which it is written, makes good theologians. The Holy Spirit is the simplest writer and speaker in heaven and on earth. Therefore his words can have no more than a singular and simple sense, which we call the written or literally spoken sense.”

There’s an interesting statement in the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 1 section 9 about Scripture and its interpretation and I want to read you some brief statements, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and false sense of any Scripture” and then there is a parenthetical statement which is what I

wanted to get at, “(which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” So you see the point that is being made here is that interpretations of some passages are more clear. You use the more clear to help with the less clear. But in the context of making that statement there is that parenthetical statement, “When there is a question of the true and false sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) it may be searched and known by other places of which speak more clearly.” I think it’s an important hermeneutical principle.

### c. John Bright’s Many Levels of Meaning

Look at your citations page 25. This is taken from John Bright’s book, *The Authority of the Old Testament*. He says, “It was generally believed that Scripture had various levels of meaning. Origen had a threefold sense corresponding to the supposed trichotomy of man’s nature: body, soul and spirit. There was a literal or corporeal sense (that is, what the words in their plain meaning say), a moral or tropological sense, (that is, a sense figurative of the Christian soul, which thus gives edification and a guidance for conduct), and a spiritual or mystical sense. Later, still a fourth sense was added.” This is what the reformers and Westminster Confession are responding to, the fourth sense, “the anagogic or eschatological sense. Thus, to give the classical example, the word ‘Jerusalem’ was understood in the middle ages as having four senses: literally it referred to that city of the name in Judah, tropologically, to the faithful Christian soul, allegorically (mystically), to the church of Christ, and analogically to the heavenly city of God which is our eternal home. It was possible, albeit not necessary, to understand the word in all four of these senses in a single text.”

So there you don’t have a double reference, you have a fourfold reference. “But the tendency was to care far less for the literal meaning than for the spiritual one, for the true meaning of the text is spiritual. Indeed, some Scriptures—so it was held—cannot be interpreted literally, for it tells of things that are immoral and

thus unworthy of God (adultery, incest, murder, etc.), and much Scripture is too primitive or too trivial, if taken literally, to be a fit vehicle of divine revelation (lengthy genealogies, rules for animal sacrifice, the dimensions of a tabernacle, etc.) Such passages yield their true meaning only when interpreted spiritually.” When you allegorize you put spiritual meanings on these kinds of passages. “The result was a wholesale uncontrolled allegorizing of Scripture, specifically the Old Testament...But the spate of fanciful interpretations continued to flow unchecked from pulpit and lecturer’s desk alike. The meanings that could be got from Scripture were limited, one might justifiably feel, only by the interpreter’s ingenuity.” If you have a very clever person you can find all kinds of meaning in any statement. “Whatever their inconsistencies may have been (and they were on occasion inconsistent), both the great reformers [Luther and Calvin] rejected allegory in principle—repeatedly and in the strongest language. In the preceding chapter both Luther and Calvin were quoted in their insistence that it is the duty of the interpreter to arrive at the plain sense of the text intended by its author.”

#### d. Authorial Intent and Single Meaning

Now that has come to be referred to as “authorial intent” and has become a controversial issue. How far do you go? Walter Kaiser has written a lot about it and he thinks the only interpretation that is legitimate is what the author intended. Now I’m in agreement with what he’s trying to do there and certainly it’s in order. I think what he doesn’t take into account is in Scripture there’s more than one author. In the sense there’s a human author but there’s also the Holy Spirit superintending what the human author wrote and said. I think it’s possible that the human author could speak “better than he knew,” so to speak. In other words, he could say things that he himself did not believe or comprehend and therefore wasn’t his intent; yet it was superintended by the Holy Spirit who was addressing issues that transcended the prophet’s whole understanding. So I put a qualification there, but that doesn’t open the door to wholesale looking for multiple meanings in

any statement of Scripture. Bright was saying, “It’s the duty of the interpreter to arrive at the plain sense of the text intended by its author. Similar quotations, in which they expressed their contempt of the allegory, could be induced almost at will. Luther, whose vocabulary was by no means impoverished, is especially vivid. He declares that Origen’s allegories ‘are not worth so much dirt;’ he calls allegory variously ‘the scum on Scripture,’ a ‘harlot’ to seduce us, ‘a monkey game,’ something that turns Scripture into ‘a nose of wax’ (i.e. that could be twisted into any shape desired), the means by which the Devil gets on his pitchfork. He declares (in expounding Psalm 22) that Scripture is the garment of Christ and that allegory rends it into ‘rags and tatters.’ ‘How,’ he cries, ‘will you teach faith with certainty when you make the sense of Scripture uncertain?’ Calvin is equally stern. More than once, he calls allegorical interpretations an invention of the devil to undermine the authority of Scripture. Elsewhere, he describes them as ‘puerile,’ ‘farfetched,’ and he declares that one would do better to confess ignorance than to indulge in such ‘frivolous guesses.’ The interpreter, he declares, must take the plain sense and that is uncertain he should adopt the interpretation that best suits the context.”

### 1. Reformers and Single Sense

So, the reformers are pretty strong in their opinions on this question of multiple senses or meanings in statements of Scripture that they reject. But the issue hasn’t disappeared. Bernard Ramm and his book on interpretation says, “One of the most persistent hermeneutical sins is to put two interpretations on one passage of Scripture, breaking the force of the literal meaning and obscuring the Word of God.” If we are to understand this, we’re looking at page 27 under J. Barton Payne again from his *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. In his introductory section he says, “Two modern movements have in particular been characterized by an appeal to the hermeneutic of double sense. On one hand stands liberalism, with its overall denial of an authentic prediction... On the other hand

stands dispensationalism, with its presupposition that the church cannot be predicted with the Old Testament writings. Three basic reasons appear for maintaining the concept of one (New Testament) meaning as opposed to that of the so-called dual fulfillment. The first arises from the very nature of hermeneutics. John Owen, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan, long ago laid down the dictum, 'If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all;' and most of the more recent writers have agreed that dual fulfillment is incompatible with objective interpretation." In other words, what Owen is saying is that if the scriptures have more than one meaning, they have no meaning at all. That makes hermeneutics indeterminable. If you've got multiple senses, the meaning of the text becomes indeterminable.

Fairbairn says what Christ really means is one thing and if there are many things, hermeneutics would be indeterminable. "Fairbairn himself observes that such an approach causes uncertainty of application and makes the meaning too general for practical employment." That's his first reason for arguing that we should look for one sense, not multiple senses.

## 2. NT and Single Meaning

The second reason is the evidence from the New Testament. "As Lockhart described, the decisive attitude of Acts 2:29-31 toward Psalm 16, 'The apostle Peter argues that David could not refer to himself, for he died and saw corruption, but that he was a prophet, and foresaw that Jesus should be raised without corruption... It seems not easy to mistake the apostle's meaning.' Terry thus concludes, 'The words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and our first object should be to discover that sense and adhere rigidly to it... We reject as unsound and misleading the theory that such Messianic psalms... have a double sense, and refer first to David or some other ruler, and secondly to Christ.' In fact from reading the New Testament it is safe to say that one would never suspect the possibility of dual fulfillment."

### 3. OT and Single Meaning

“The third reason for single fulfillment is the evidence from Old Testament context. Fairbairn, for example, grants that his principle multiple sense not infrequently fails to work out in the concrete cases where its presence is attempted to be shown. Terry says flatly, ‘The language of Psalm 2 is not applicable to David or Solomon, or any other earthly ruler... Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:22), and no expositor has ever been able to prove a previous fulfillment.’”

#### a. Isaiah 7:14

Now Isaiah 7:14 is one of the texts where people often conclude that there’s a double reference. The reference to a child born in the time of Ahaz and Isaiah, and at the same time a reference to Christ. But Payne here is arguing Isaiah 7:14 has a single reference. There’s only one woman who the writer can refer to. There has been brought forth a child who was God with us. Now, admittedly, if you go back into the full context and discuss that in Isaiah 7:14, there’s some problems with it. That is one of the more difficult passages. I don’t want to take time to do it today, but we’ll look at a couple examples of some other passages.

#### b. Deuteronomy 18

I think one really tough passage is Deuteronomy 18. We already looked at that. Now is that a reference to the prophetic movement or to Christ, or in some way to both? Of course, there is typological indirect reference which pertains to singleness of meaning but yet includes Christ. But Deuteronomy 18, Isaiah 7:14, and the last verses of Malachi—those are tough ones. Some of the songs of messianic psalms are in reference to David or Solomon and in reference to Christ. But there are not a lot of them that are really difficult.

#### 4. Terry – Single Sense

Look at page 28 in your citations, bottom of the page and over on page 29. Then I want to look at a couple examples of texts. This is from Milton Terry's *Biblical Hermeneutics*. It's fairly long and somewhat complex, but I think that he draws out the issues here. So I wanted to take time to read from it directly. He says, "The hermeneutical principles which we have now set forth necessarily exclude the doctrine that the prophecies of Scripture contain an occult or double sense. It has been alleged by some that as these oracles are heavenly and divine we should expect to find in them manifold meanings. They must needs differ from other books. Hence has arisen not only the doctrine of a double sense, but of a threefold and fourfold sense, and the rabbis went so far as to insist there are "mountains of sense in every word of Scripture."

We may readily admit that the scriptures are capable of manifold practical *applications*; otherwise they would not be so useful for doctrine, correction, and instruction in righteousness. But the moment we admit the principle that portions of Scripture contain an occult or double sense we introduce an element of uncertainty in the sacred volume, and unsettle all scientific interpretation. 'If the Scripture has more than one meaning,' says Dr. Owen, 'it has no meaning at all.' 'I hold,' says Ryle, 'that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and that our first object should be to discover that sense, and adhere rigidly to it... To say that words *do* mean a thing merely because they *can* be tortured into meaning it is a most dishonorable and dangerous way of handling Scripture.'

'This scheme of interpretation,' says Stuart, 'forsakes and sets aside the common laws of language. The Bible excepted, in no book, treatise, epistle, discourse, or conversation, ever written, published, or addressed by any one man to his fellow beings (unless in the way of sport, or with an intention to deceive), can a double sense be found. There are, indeed, charades, enigmas, phrases with a *double entente*, and the like, perhaps, in all languages; there have been abundance of heathen oracles which were susceptible of two interpretations but even among

all these there never has been, and there never was a design that there should be, more than one sense or meaning in reality. Ambiguity of language may be, and has been, designedly resorted to in order to mislead the reader or hearer, or in order to conceal the ignorance of soothsayers, or to provide for their credit amid future exigencies; but this is quite foreign to the matter of a serious and *bona fide* double meaning of words. Nor can we for a moment, without violating the dignity and sacredness of the scriptures, suppose the inspired writers are to be compared to the authors of riddles, conundrums, enigmas, and ambiguous heathen oracles.’

### 5. Type and Anti-Type Approach

Some writers have confused this subject by connecting it with the doctrine of type and antitype.” Now notice what he does here. “As many persons and events of the Old Testament were types of greater ones to come, so the language respecting them is supposed to be capable of a double sense.” In other words, instead of type and antitype being institutions, persons, or events—concrete entities or realities as symbols that prefigure the truth that will symbolize those institutions, events, or persons—what some interpreters do is really speak of a typological language. That’s an important distinction. See what he’s saying here. “Some writers have confused this subject by connecting it with the doctrine of type and antitype. As many persons, events of the Old Testament were types of greater ones to come, so the language respecting them is supposed to be capable of a double sense.” So in other words, language is typological language. “The second Psalm has been supposed to refer both to David and Christ, and Isaiah 7:14-16 to a child born in the time the prophet and also the Messiah. In the Psalms 45 and 72, that’s supposed to have a double reference for Solomon and Christ, and the prophecy against Edom in Isaiah 34:5-10, to comprehend also the general judgment of the last day. But it should be seen that in the case of types the language of Scripture has no double sense. The types themselves are such because they prefigure things to come and this fact must be kept distinct from the question



of the sense of language use in any particular passage.”

#### 6. Deuteronomy 18 as a Model

Do you get the point there? If you go back to that Deuteronomy 18 passage, what’s the language there talking about? You know what my conclusion was. The language is talking about the prophetic institution in Old Testament times because in the context both before and after it’s talking about that you shouldn’t go to heathen soothsayers. It’s saying that they’re given a test for distinguishing true and false prophets. How are we going to have God’s revelation with Moses gone? So the language is talking about the prophetic order. The prophetic order itself can be typological because these are human instruments speaking God’s word. Christ is both God and man bringing us God’s word. So typologically, the prophetic institution can point to Christ, but that’s not the language you see, that’s not typological language. It’s the prophetic institution.

#### 7. Terry on Psalm 2 et al.

If you accept typological language, then you have really accepted this principle of spiritualization, and then you can do with Isaiah 11 what Young does. It’s not talking about exile, Jewish people coming back to their homeland, it’s not talking about physical realities, he thinks it’s talking about spiritual realities. It’s typological language. Terry doesn’t accept it, but there is such a legitimate thing as typological language. He says, “We have shown that the language in Psalm 2 is not applicable to David or Solomon or any other ruler. The same may be said of Psalms 45 and 72. Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled at the birth of Christ, and no expositor has ever been able to prove a previous fulfillment. The oracle against Edom, like that against Babylon, is clothed in the highly wrought of the apocalyptic prophecy, and gives no warrant to the theory of a double sense. The twenty-fourth of Matthew, so commonly relied on to support this theory, has been already shown to furnish no valid evidence of either an occult or a double sense... The first

prophecy is a good example. The enmity between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent has been exhibited in a thousand forms. The precious words of promise to God's people find more or less fulfillment in every individual experience. But these facts do not sustain the theory of a double sense. The sense in every case is direct and simple; the applications and the illustrations are many." That's the promise of Genesis 3:15, "The seed of the woman will crush the serpent. I put enmity between your seed and his seed." "The sense in every case is direct and simple; the applications and illustrations are many. Such facts give no authority for us to go into apocalyptic prophecies with the expectation of finding two or more meanings in each specific statement, and then to declare: This verse refers to an event long past... this had partial fulfillment in the ruin of Babylon, or Edom, but it awaits a grander fulfillment then in the future. The judgment of Babylon, or Nineveh, or Jerusalem, may indeed be a type," that is perfectly legitimate, "of every other similar judgment, and is a warning to all nations and ages; but this is very different from saying that the language in which that judgment was predicted was fulfilled only partially when Babylon, or Nineveh, or Jerusalem fell, and is yet awaiting its complete fulfillment." There's a distinction. Do you follow the line of argument there?

#### 8. Illustration: Daniel 8

Let me give you one illustration. I wanted to give you two illustrations but we're not going to have time to do all that today, but one illustration from Daniel 8. Are any of you familiar with the old original Scofield Bible? If you read Daniel chapter 8—which I think is a chapter talking about the types—Daniel 8:9 reads, "Out of one of them came forth a little horn which waxed exceedingly great toward the south toward the east and toward the pleasant land." The note in the Scofield Bible there about that little horn says, "Here's a prophecy fulfilled in 175 B.C." So that's a reference to this little horn in verse 9. When you go further along in the chapter you notice in verse 15 it says "I, Daniel, had seen the vision,

sought for the meaning, then behold there stood before me the appearance of a man.” Then he explained the meaning. When you get to the meaning of this little horn, that’s down in verses 24 and 25, it says “He will become strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper. He shall magnify himself when they feel secure, but he shall destroy many. He shall also stand up against the Prince of princes but he shall be broken without mending.” And the comment in these notes is that verses 24 and 25 go beyond Antiochus Epiphanes and evidently refer to the little horn of Daniel 7. And then the statement both Antiochus and the beast, but the beast preeminently is in view in verses 24 and 25. So in the interpretation of the little horn of Daniel chapter 8, which I think if you look at all the details is a reference to Antiochus, when you get to the interpretation to the little horn, the note here is saying verses 24 and 25 are speaking at the same time and in the same words both to Antiochus and to the antichrist—a double reference. Of verses 10-14, where in first section of the chapter you have more detail about that little horn, the notes say of 10-14, “Historically this was fulfilled in and by Antiochus, but in a more intense and final sense Antiochus adumbrates the awful blasphemy of the little horn of Daniel 7.” I don’t have a problem with that as I think Antiochus is a type of the anti-christ but the words here tell you about Antiochus. But the next statement in the notes is, “In Daniel 8:10-14 the actions of both little horns blend.” So you see in the detailed description of the little horn in 10-14 the words apply to Antiochus and at the same time and in the same words apply to the antichrist. “The words blend, both are in view.”

In the end of verse 19 it says, “At the time of the end shall be” and the note says, “Two ends are in view. One, historically. The end of a third of Grecian empire of Alexander out the divisions of which the little horn of verse 9 arose.” This is the end of that Grecian period. “But two, prophetically, the end of the times of the Gentiles. Both ends are in view.” The time of the end is the Grecian empire

and the end of the time of the Gentiles—a double reference. So that’s one illustration of the way in which some interpreters use this principle of double reference to find meaning from prophetic statements.

#### 9. Illustration: Malachi 4:5-6

I want to look in more detail at Malachi 4:5-6 and we’ll do that at the beginning of our session next time. But Malachi 4:5-6 let’s just look at it for a minute. It says, “See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers or else I will come and strike the earth with a curse.” The interesting thing here is you have New Testament references to this passage and some of the New Testament references apply this prophecy to John the Baptist. Then the question becomes, what do you do with this prophecy? Has it been fulfilled or is it yet to be fulfilled? Is it speaking of John the Baptist? Is it speaking of Elijah? Is it a double sense? What do you do with it? I want to look at it in more detail next time and give you some of the ways interpreters have dealt with it. It is one of the more difficult passages dealing with the double sense.

#### 10. Vannoy’s Conclusion on Double Sense

Now one clarifying statement and I’ll finish. I’m not saying it is impossible to find double sense. I don’t think you should bring rules of interpretation from outside and force them on Scripture to fit some formula of interpretation. It seems to me, if there are clear passages that lead you to this as the intended way the Scripture is to be interpreted, well, so be it. The Scripture has to be our guide. I’m not convinced that there are passages that force you to do that. So I’m saying you shouldn’t come to the text looking for multiple senses. If you are forced to do that by Scripture itself, so be it, but you must demonstrate from Scripture that that is the way you must understand the statement, which bears a high burden of proof.

Transcribed by: Katie Wholley, Matt Gobson, William Mahoney, Sarah Owsinski, Grace  
Cunningham, Becca Brule and Stephen Davalos (ed.).  
Initial edit by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

**Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy,  
Lecture 15**

**Guidelines for Interpreting Prophecy**

**IX. Guidelines for Interpreting Prophecy**

**4. Avoid the Idea of Double Fulfillment or Double Reference**

Last week we were in Roman numeral IX., “Guidelines for the interpretation of prophecy.” We were discussing, “Avoid the idea of double fulfillment or double reference.” As a result we concluded that as a hermeneutical rule we shouldn’t set out looking for multiple fulfillments of predictive prophecy. That’s something that in the prophetic literature you will find is quite commonly done, where some predictive statement will be interpreted as having a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. We looked at the example of Daniel 8 last week where some would suggest that chapter refers to Antiochus Epiphanies, was the persecutor of God’s people during that Greek period in approximately 164 B.C., but then say at the same time, it’s talking about the antichrist. This gives the same words a double reference. The same words and same phrases are both talking about Antiochus and the antichrist.

We talked about some of the theoretical issues there, how if words have more than one meaning, do they have any meaning? Does this make the hermeneutics indeterminate? It seems that we should look for the single sense rather than look for multiple senses. It seems to me that this is an important hermeneutical principle not just with predictive prophecy but with statements of Scripture in general. We could go back to the early centuries of the church with the allegorical method where you looked for 3, 4, 5, or 6 different meanings of any given statement with moral meanings, historical meanings, and spiritual meanings. When you have multiple layers of meaning of the text, you wonder what the text is actually saying.

a. Malachi 4:5-6

Now I said at the end of our session last time that I did want to look at one additional passage and that was Malachi 4:5 and 6—which happens to be the last two verses of the Old Testament—because this is also a prophecy in which many have found multiple reference. It’s also a prophetic statement that presents some difficult problems in terms of interpretation. So let’s look at it. Malachi 4:5 and 6 says, “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” The question that arises is, has that been fulfilled or is it yet to be fulfilled? Remember we talked earlier when you look for fulfillment, initially start looking in the Old Testament see if a prediction is fulfilled within the Old testament period. If not, look in the New Testament and see if it has been fulfilled in the New Testament period. If it is beyond the New Testament then maybe in the time of the church age or even eschatologically in the age to come. These are the last two verses of the Old Testament so you can’t do much with looking for fulfillment in the Old Testament. So you move beyond that—you go to the New Testament and look for fulfillment, and you find that there are New Testament references to Elijah. But then you can say well maybe it is fulfilled in Elijah and also has a future fulfillment. So is there a multiple sense here?

b. NT References to Mal 4:5-6

If you look at New Testament references to Elijah, there’s a reference to the appearance of Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:3. We are going to come back to this chapter later, because later in the chapter Elijah appears again. But you read in verse 3, “There

appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus.” There is no indication that this is a fulfillment of Malachi 4:5 and 6.

There are other New Testament references that seem to indicate that Malachi 4:5 and 6 is to be understood as fulfilled in the life and ministry of John the Baptist. There are several references. Look at Luke 1:13 where you read, “The angel said to Zechariah, ‘Do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to give him the name John.’” In verse 15, “He will be great in the sight of the Lord.” Verse 16, “Many of the people of Israel he will bring back to the Lord their God.” And in verse 17, “He will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.” Then you’ll notice the next phrase which is a quotation of Malachi 4:6, “He will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” So there’s at least a partial quotation of Malachi 4:6 in that phrase of “turning the hearts of the fathers to their children.” So it is certainly an allusion to 4:6 of Malachi, “He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children.”

Look at Matthew 11:2 and following, “When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, ‘Are you the one we were expecting to come or should we be expecting someone else?’ And Jesus said, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receiving sight...’” and so on. In verse 7 it says, “As John’s disciples were leaving Jesus, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John, ‘What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in king’s palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your



way before you.” I tell you the truth, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.”” That’s verse 10, which is a quotation not of Malachi 4:5 and 6, but of Malachi 3:1 where you read, “See I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me.” But when you go down further in that passage, you read in Matthew 11:12, “From the days of John until now the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” Then notice verse 14, “And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” That seems to be a reference to Malachi 4:5 and 6, that Elijah is to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. He, John, is Elijah who is to come “if you are willing to accept it.”

Then go to Matthew 17:10-12. This is after the prayer with Elijah up on the Mount Transfiguration and you read in verse 10, “The disciples asked him, ‘Why, then do the teachers of the law say Elijah must come first?’ Jesus replied ‘To be sure, Elijah is coming, and will restore all things. But I tell you Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.” Elijah has already come, and he was talking about John the Baptist.

So you get those texts, and then just to throw a little curveball in the mix, you look at John 1:19 and following, “This was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Christ’. And they asked him ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’ He said ‘I am not’, ‘Are you the prophet?’” The prophet there probably referenced the text that we looked at earlier Deuteronomy 18, “The prophet who was to come like Moses.” “‘Are you the prophet?’ ‘No.’”

### c. Interpreting Approaches

So I think those are the most important references that relate to this prophecy at the end of Malachi. What do interpreters do with these texts? The question is how is Malachi 4:5 and 6 fulfilled? Has it been fulfilled in John? Is it yet to be fulfilled? Let me give you three different views.

#### 1) Double Reference

The first one is “Double Reference.” What some interpreters say about Malachi’s prophecy is that that prophecy tells us that Elijah will return to earth before the Day of the Lord, and that will happen in the literal sense. That was the view of the Rabbis found in John 1:21, “Are you Elijah?” They were looking for the return of Elijah. So double reference advocates see Malachi’s prophecy as having an initial or partial fulfillment in John the Baptist on the basis of those texts, particularly Matthew’s. But they argue that its complete and final fulfillment awaits the second coming of Christ and the coming of the day of the Lord at that time, where Elijah, the prophet, will appear.

Look at your citations on page 26; this is a short paragraph from Henry Alford’s *The Greek New Testament*. I should say Alford here is commenting on Matthew 11:13 and 14. He says, “Neither this nor the testimony of our Lord in Matthew 17:12 is inconsistent with John’s own denial that he was Elijah in John 1:21. For, one, the question there was evidently asked as assuming a reappearance of the actual Elijah upon earth; and, two, our Lord cannot be understood in either of these passages [in Matthew] as meaning that the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 received its full completion in John. For as in other prophecies, so in this one, we have,” and here’s the view, “a partial fulfillment both in the coming of the Lord and of His forerunner, while the great and complete fulfillment is yet

future—at the great day of the Lord.” So that’s not an uncommon view that Malachi 4:5 and 6 has a double reference, a reference to John the Baptist and a future reference to a literal Elijah reappearing.

## 2) Generic or Successive Fulfillment – Walter Kaiser

Second view, is one advocated by Walter Kaiser in connection with his concept of what he calls a generic use of prophecy. We might call this the “generic view.” If you look at your citations page 27 there are a few paragraphs there from Kaiser’s commentary on Malachi called *God’s Unchanging Love*, and these paragraphs are discussing Malachi 4:5 and 6. Kaiser says of these verses, “Perhaps the best way to describe this phenomenon is to call it a ‘generic prediction,’ which Willis J. Beecher defined.” Here is what he means by the term, “one which regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter parts, or to the whole—in other words, a prediction, where in applying to the whole of a complex event, also applies to some of its parts.” Now that’s kind of a complex concept but you can diagram it like this and label this is a whole “generic prophecy.” The prophecy would speak of the whole complex of particulars, you might say. But certain parts of the prophecy may speak of this one or of that one within the complex of particulars.

Now I think what Kaiser was really trying to do here is have it both ways. In other words, I think he wants to avoid the concept of double reference and double fulfillment, and, in fact, if you read his writings—and he has written in numerous books and articles—he often talks about how the only legitimate meaning for any biblical statement is the single truth intended by the author. So you have to get to the authorial intent. What was the true intention of the author when he writes? It seems to me if you’re

going to talk about a single truth intention, this gets very complicated and abstract to say a prophecy like Malachi 4:5 and 6 is a “generic prediction” that has a number of particulars. The whole is the single truth intention but parts of it may refer to one particular within the whole and other parts to another particular. Let me come back to this in a minute but let’s go back to Kaiser’s own words because I don’t want to misrepresent him here. After that completion of the definition of Beecher’s “generic prediction,” here is what Kaiser says, “In keeping with the characteristics of generic, or successive fulfillment, of prophecy, Malachi closes with a promise that God would send that messenger introduced in 3:1 as the forerunner of the Messiah. However, he does not say that he will be Elijah the Tishbite, but ‘Elijah the prophet’ and he thereby opens the door for a succession of announcers all the way up to the second advent of Messiah when the first and last Elijah would step forth as the beginning and the end of the prophets. Elijah, has been selected since he was the head of the prophetic order.” So you can question, was he or was Samuel the head of the prophetic order? But “all other prophets followed him. He was also a reformer whom God raised up in ‘a remarkably corrupt age,’ and whose rejection was followed by a particularly terrible day of the Lord, namely, first with the inflictions of the Syrians and the captivity of Israel. But Elijah’s spirit and power were passed onto his successor, Elisha (2 Kings 2:15), just as the spirit of Moses came to rest on the 70 elders.

Thus,” and here’s his conclusion, “John the Baptist came in that same line of reformers, prophets and forerunners of the Messiah, for he too came ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah.’ And from Elijah’s day to ours, a long line of foretellers, has stood in the succession; men like Augustine, Calvin, Meno Simons, Luther, Zwingli, Moody, and Graham.” So it seems to me what he’s saying is this is a generic prophecy. It is going to begin with Elijah, John the Baptist is here standing in that succession, and end

with Elijah and in between you have all of these other people who are also a part of the fulfillment of it because they come also in the spirit and power of Elijah. So that whole thing is encompassed as this generic prediction in the words of Malachi.

Now my question there is how do you keep this single truth intention, and find the application through all these particulars within the single truth intention? Theoretically you might say it is possible. Does this avoid multiple fulfillments? I'm not so sure it does. I think Kaiser would argue that it does because you have this generic prediction. But it seems to me that it becomes a very abstract conception, and I wonder if that was the intent of this statement at the end of Malachi. The question is how do you establish what this abstract single truth intention might have been? Where do you get this kind of a model? I think you can only look at the words of Malachi 4:5 and 6. Do the words of Malachi 4:5 and 6 bring up this sort of an intent as far as meaning is concerned? It seems to me it is more of a construction that is brought to the text and it is brought with the intent to avoid multiple fulfillment. But I am not sure it's totally satisfying, it is pretty theoretical. So you have the more straightforward kind of multiple fulfillments like Alford, and you get this generic prophecy which tries to avoid it but I am not sure it does.

### 3) Prophecy is Fulfilled in John the Baptist

A third position is that the prophecy is fulfilled in John the Baptist. This conclusion would be based on the New Testament references that apply the prophecy explicitly to John, and those are pretty strong statements. In Matthew 11:14, "If you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." That's a pretty strong statement. In chapter 17 Jesus says, "Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him." Remember when we talked about the enigmatic character of the prophecy

and how it can take the fulfillment and twist it, and you might not have expected it. “He has already come, but you did not recognize him,” the disciples understood He was talking about John. So advocates of this view would say it is fulfilled in John the Baptist, saying that we don’t need to look for an additional fulfillment. There is the single intended sense.

This is not the only place in the Old Testament where you find a twist that you might not expect. There are prophecies that speak of a future reign of David, for example, where, if you really look closely at the prophecies, it is clearly intended as a reference to Christ. Here is a reference to the coming of Elijah but is fulfilled in John. Look at Jeremiah 30 verse 9. This verse is an example of that. You read, “They will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.” You go down further, “I will save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security and no one will make him afraid. Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice.” So there is going to be a future time when in verse 17 “I will restore you to health, heal your wounds and they will serve the Lord their God and David their king.” Well, it seems to be messianic and fulfilled in Christ.

Look at Ezekiel 34:23, “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them.” And verse 25, “I will make a covenant of peace with them.” Verse 27, “The people will be secure in their land.” Verse 28, “They will no longer be plundered by the nations, they will live in safety and no one will make them afraid.” That is much like the Isaiah passages of Isaiah 2 and 11. But, “I will place one shepherd over them, my servant David,” yet here is the reference to Christ. So it seems to me that there are some pretty solid grounds for understanding the prophet’s intent. Malachi 4:5 and 6 have a reference to it, what interests me is a

reference to John and that the coming of Elijah is fulfilled in John. But if you do that then John 1:21—where you get John’s denial that he is Elijah, “The Jews, the priests and the Levites asked him, ‘Who are you? Are you Elijah?’ And he said, ‘I am not.’”—that would be a denial of the conception of the Rabbis who were looking for a literal fulfillment. He is not literally Elijah. He is not denying that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 4. At least, that is a possible way to understand it.

#### d. Vannoy’s Analysis and Conclusion on Double Reference

Maybe it depends on what they do with the Matthew text. Then what do you do with this “if you will accept it.” Jesus’ statements in Matthew that John “is the Elijah who was to come and if you accept that Elijah has already come.” What do you do with that? Those are pretty strong statements; I don’t think you can just jump over them and say there is no fulfillment in those statements at all. So you can almost be forced into a double fulfillment if you go to the Revelation 11:3. Revelation 11:3 says, “I will give power to my two witnesses they will prophesy in sackcloth to everyone. If anyone tries to harm them, fire will come to support them.” These two witnesses are not identified. There are a lot of people who say that those two witnesses are Moses and Elijah, but that’s an open question. There is no clear indication who those two witnesses are. So it seems to me you are on firmer ground, as far as biblical statements, to say it is fulfilled in John, than to say there is some human fulfillment in those two witnesses.

What my purpose in bringing this up is we have been talking about this thing that you go and look for a double reference. I am not saying it is impossible to find a double reference but I am saying it is a dangerous hermeneutical principle to be going and looking for multiple senses. My own conclusion is with these difficult texts—and we have looked at two of them in some detail—that Deuteronomy 18 refers to the prophetic

institution, or that is Christ. I don't think that you are forced into double reference there. The context is clearly the prophetic institution which I think psychologically points forward to Christ. So it is legitimate to say Deuteronomy 18 speaks of Christ but not with the same words. The words themselves refer to the prophetic institution. It seems to me in Malachi 4:5 and 6 you are not forced into a double reference because there is an unexpected twist of the prophecy in the fulfillment of John, but the New Testament's statements are pretty strong and finding fulfillment in John is adequate. You don't need another fulfillment. The Daniel passage that we looked at told us you don't need to look for another reference to the fulfillment of Christ.

I'd say the other tough one is Isaiah 7:14, "the virgin shall conceive and bear a son." But when you look in the context, it's tied in tightly to the war against Judah, and yet if you see it as a single meaning, that is referring to Christ as Matthew does. "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son," is there a reference to the birth in the time of Christ? I think it is just a reference to Christ. I don't think there was any virgin in the time of Isaiah. It seems to me in the context you can bring something to the text itself if the child was born in the immediate future before he was old enough to know and distinguish between good and evil these two kings would be gone. So that's kind of a hypothetical thing. You can use it for a measure of time if the child would be born. It seems to me that it points to the child in the future, coming through a virgin. As far as I am concerned there was only one virgin birth.

##### 5. Interpretive Analysis Must Precede a Decision on the Exact Relationship between the Literal and the Figurative in any passage

Let's go on to 5., "Interpretive Analysis must precede a decision on the exact relationship between the literal and the figurative in any passage."



This question of literal versus figurative interpretation is an extremely complex and difficult one. When you look at and hear about predictive prophecy—and of course the issue is wider than just predictive prophecy—but if you are looking at a biblical statement or any kind of literature, if you are going to move from a literal understanding of what was said, to a figurative understanding, there should be reasons within the context that arises and reasons that lead you to conclude this statement was not intended to be taken literally.

Look at your citations on page 30; this is from Berkeley Mickelsen *Interpreting the Bible*, “Remember that interpretive analysis must precede a decision on the exact relationship between the literal and the figurative in any passage.” So you look at a passage and you wrestle with what this passage saying. Where do you come to a relationship between the literal and the figurative? “Deciding what is literal and what is figurative must be based upon grammar, (meanings of words and the relationship of words), history, culture, context, and convictions of the original writer himself. The literal meaning—the customary and socially acknowledged meaning which carries with it the ideas of actual and earthly—must become the base for figurative meanings. Upon this base they depend. If a given interpreter declares that a certain expression is figurative, he must give reasons for assigning a figurative meaning.” It’s a valid point. You just don’t come to a text and think figurative unless there is something in that text that suggests this is the way this is intended to be read. “These reasons must arise from an objective study of all factors and must show why the figurative meaning is needed. Sometimes interpreters insist that elements are figurative because their system of eschatology requires it, not because the Scriptures and objective factors demand it.” In other words, here you get into the issue, when we come to a biblical text what takes priority in reading that text? Do you start reading the text itself, or do you start reading the text from some

preconceived system and read the text in light of that system? How do you relate the text to the system? What is the controlling principle?

a. Avoid Simplistic Labels

Sometimes interpreters insist that elements are figurative because their system of eschatology requires it, not because the Scriptures and objective factors demand it. Where there are compelling reasons for figurative meanings, they should be adopted. A careful interpreter will interpret both literally and figuratively because the passage he is interpreting demands these procedures. I think these labels “I interpret literally” or “I interpret figuratively”—those things are not helpful at all. You need to come to the text on this issue with an open mind, and be open to where the text leads you. “Labels suggesting a man is either a completely literal interpreter or a completely figurative interpreter are foolish. If they were true, they would indicate that the individual thus designated would be totally unable to grapple with meanings and ideas. Such people do not usually try to interpret. Therefore, a careless tossing around of labels should be avoided at all costs. The well balanced interpreter has objective reasons for both literal and figurative meanings.”

b. Figurative is not Something Negative

Interpreting figuratively is not to be viewed as something negative, misguided or misdirected. If it's the intent of the passage to read it in the figurative sense, then you can say that the literal meaning of the passage is to be read in a figurative way. It is the intended meaning of the passage. But that raises questions of how theological systems relate to the individual passages. Do you interpret the passage on the basis of the system or do you build the system on the basis of the exegesis of individual passages? You look at a host of individual passages and see what they're saying. If you

come to your conclusions on that then you try to see what the relationships are by connecting passages and you gradually build a system. I think that is the best way to start, work with the individual passages. But having said that, it is awfully difficult with some passages to interpret them in total isolation of other passages. Usually what you find is there is a kind of a working in both directions, out of the passage to build the system but also from the system back to help interpret individual passages. It seems to me that it is not an either-or situation here. But having said that, I think the danger is letting the system determine the meaning. You have to be careful of preconceived systems overcoming the individual passage. The reason I say that is meaning needs to come out of the text and not brought to the text, at least not in an unwarranted way.

#### c. Boettner: Literal unless Absurd Approach

Look at your citations page 30. Loraine Boettner has some interesting statements here about this issue of a literal versus figurative interpretation. He says, “The general the principle of interpretation has been expressed as ‘literal wherever possible’ or ‘literal unless absurd.’ One does not have to read far in the Bible to know that not everything can be taken literally. Jesse F. Silver refers to ‘certain places,’ where some ‘other meaning’ is designated. But he gives no rule by which those certain places are to be recognized.” And I would say I don’t know any formula for that either; it is not something you can reduce to a set of three rules or something like that. “We find no labels in Scripture itself telling us, ‘Take this literally,’ or ‘Take this figuratively.’ Evidently the individual reader must use his own judgment, backed by as much experience and common sense as he can muster. And that, of course, will vary endlessly from individual to individual. It is admittedly difficult in many instances to determine whether statements in Scripture should be taken literally or

figuratively. As regards prophecy, that often cannot be determined until after the fulfillment.”

#### d. Malachi 4:5-6 Once Again

Now you go back to Malachi 4:5 and 6 and see that that could be an example of a prophecy with literal and figurative language in it, the element being if not literally Elijah’s return, it is fulfilled in John the Baptist. “Most of the Bible, however, particularly historical and the more didactic portions, clearly is to be understood literally, although some figurative expressions are found in these. But it is also clearly evident that many other portions must be understood figuratively. Even the premillennialists must take many expressions figuratively, or they become nonsense.”

Generally premillennialists tend to read more literally where amillennialists are more symbolical. “Since the Bible gives no hard and fast rule for determining what is literal and what is figurative,” here is where we lie, he says, “we must study the nature of the material, the historical setting, the style and purpose of the writer, and then fall back on what, for lack of a better term, we may call ‘sanctified common sense.’ Naturally the conclusions will vary somewhat from individual to individual for we do not all think alike or see alike.” You want to sort out the figurative from the literal particularly in predictive prophecy. You have to just wrestle with the text and see what it is by looking at the most common syntax, grammar, purpose of the prophecy, and what is being addressed here.

#### e. Illustration: Isa 2:4 Amillennial and Premillennial Interpretations

Let me give you just a couple of illustrations. Look at Isaiah 2:4 that says, “They will beat their swords into plowshares,” in this coming period of time when there will be peace on earth. “Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” that’s verse 4. Let’s go

back to Isaiah 2:1, which says, “This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” Verse 2, “In the last days.” We must ask the question “What are the last days?” But “In the last days,” something is going to happen, “the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains. It will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations, and will settle many disputes for many people. They will beat their swords into plowshares.’” So this is predictive it seems like it is talking about the Messianic kingdom in which the Messiah will judge between the nations and establish peace on earth.

In connection with that in verse 2 it says, “The mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains and will be raised above the hills.” What is that talking about? Amillennialists interpret this passage as being fulfilled right now. And the “mountain of the Lord’s temple” is the church. So it’s a symbolic prophecy. The beating of swords into plowshares is the peace that has come about as a result of the working of the Gospel in the hearts of the regenerate individuals. This is presently being fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the church.

Premillennialists will generally say, “No, this is not figurative or symbolical. This is referring to a future time of peace here on earth in which the Messiah will rule and establish his kingdom, as Isaiah 11 describes it as well as in other passages.” But then you get gradations I would say. What’s “the mountain of the Lord’s temple being established chief among the mountains and being raised among the hills”? What is that talking about? I think most premillennialists today would say that’s talking about the prominence of Jerusalem in the end times. It will be the center, as

the following verse says, “where people will come and say, ‘Let us go to the mountain of the Lord and he will teach us his ways’” through the prominence of Jerusalem, not taking the “raising” as literal. But there are those who will say “No this is literal ‘the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be raised among the hills’—this is speaking about the geographical elevation of Jerusalem to be the highest mountain on earth.” In other words, Jerusalem, if you really force it, literally will be higher than Mount Everest. It is going to be higher than that. It’s going to be raised above the hills, chief among the mountains. So see you have a kind of spectrum of views that move from strictly literal to having a degree of figurative language to making the whole prophecy figurative or symbolic. You have to wrestle with that. Then you get your eschatological system and feeding back into this, influencing the way in which you are going to read it. So it becomes very complex.

f. Isaiah 4:2

Look at Isaiah 4:2. This is another passage that generally is used as Messianic, and I am inclined to think that 4:2-5 is speaking of the present time of the church. I think this is different than chapter 2 because chapter 2 seems to speak like Isaiah 11 does about the absence of danger. It is a time of external peace and safety. Here in Isaiah 4:2-5, you notice verses 5 and 6 say, “The Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there and a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night, over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, a refuge and a hiding place from the storm and the rain.” In other words, it seems like a figurative picture of a time in which there is external danger. The Lord is going to provide protection for his people and he is using the language of the Old Testament period of the tabernacle to describe it.

But you notice the way that passage begins in verse 2, “In that day the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.” What is the branch of the Lord? Most all interpreters will take that as Messianic, as reference to the Messiah. It’s a person, you notice verse 4, “The Lord will wash away the filth on the remnant of Zion. He will cleanse the blood stains in Jerusalem by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of fire.” So I don’t think there’s much debate that verse 2 is figurative and the branch of the Lord is figurative language describing the Messiah.

Some people push the figurative further, and maybe legitimately, by saying that in verse 2 you not only have a reference to the Messiah, you also have a reference to the divine/human nature of Christ. In that in the first half of the verse “The branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious” and the second half of the verse, “The fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.” The branch of the Lord, and the fruit of the land, paralleling the Lord is divine, but the Lord is also human. Fruit of the land is figurative for that human nature of Christ. How far do you push this literal versus figurative language here? It’s obviously figurative language but how far can you push it? That’s where you see what Boettner was saying. We’ve got to make judgments, common sense judgments and people are going to differ on how they come down to the conclusion and there are no rules for this. There are not mechanical steps—1, 2, 3, do this and here is your answer. That makes passages like this very interesting, fascinating but it also makes them a challenge to work in responsible ways to come up with conclusions about exactly what the passage is talking about.

#### g. Turner and Gundry

There is one final citation that’s on page 31. I think the point Turner

makes here is correct. He says, “Writers of various eschatological stripes have commonly expressed the view that differences in eschatological systems arise ‘primarily out of the distinctive method employed by each interpretation of the Scripture.’ Though there is a degree of truth in such a statement it is simplistic. One’s consistency in taking biblical language literally will have an obvious influence upon one’s theology, but the reverse is also true—one’s theology will obviously have an influence upon his hermeneutics. It is mistaken to speak of either a ‘literal’ or ‘spiritualizing’ hermeneutic as a purely inductive, overall approach to Scripture. To speak in such generalities obscures the real issue: the interpretation of specific biblical passages.” And that becomes his emphasis here. “Any study of Scripture involves a certain degree of exegetical, theological, and hermeneutical preunderstanding.

Even the cultural and historical circumstances of the interpreter tend to sway his understanding of Scripture, as Gundry has appropriately warned: ‘We as Christians exegetes and theologians are susceptible to influences from the moods and conditions of our times, and especially so in our eschatology.’ All of this is not to say that hermeneutics is unimportant, or that a consistent literal hermeneutic is unattainable. Indeed, such a hermeneutic is essential in handling the whole Bible, including poetry, prophecy, and figurative language.

Properly used, the result of a literal hermeneutic is not ‘wooden literalism,’ but sensitivity to figures of speech.” It is a literal hermeneutic that is sensitive to figures of speech. “However, in the exegesis of specific biblical passages the exegete must realize that his use of a literal hermeneutic is preconditioned by his theological presuppositions. The same thing will hold true for the practitioner of a ‘spiritualizing’ hermeneutic. It is common for dispensationalists to accuse nondispensationalists of spiritualizing or allegorizing the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and



for covenant theologians to charge dispensationalists with hyperliteralism. As long as the debate is carried on in such vague generalities there will be no progress whatsoever. It is time to heed the advice from [Greg] Bahnsen:”

#### h. Bahnsen’s Advice: Get out of Systems and Look at Specific Texts

It is his exegetical works but I don’t agree with his views on theonomy. But what he says here I think is right. He says, “‘The charge of subjective spiritualization or hyperliteralism against any of the three eschatological positions cannot be settled in general; rather, the opponents must get down to hand-to-hand exegetical combat on *particular* passages and phrasing.’”

In other words, what he is saying is, get out of the systems and start looking at specific texts. What does Isaiah 2 talk about? What does Isaiah 4 talk about? What does Isaiah 11 talk about? Those are some key passages in this whole discussion. Turner says, “It would appear that vague generalities about theoretical hermeneutics accomplish very little. The cavalier dismissal of eschatological systems on the sole ground of hermeneutical theory serves only to obscure the more pertinent issues. Advocates of a ‘dual hermeneutic’ cannot be dismissed with the charge of ‘allegorizing’ and neither can dispensationalists be shouted down with the rebuke of being ‘hyperliteral.’”

However, hermeneutical *conclusions* on specific issues may be viewed as being inconsistent with one’s professed hermeneutical *method*. When there is a discrepancy between the two, both dispensationalists and covenant theologians should take heed. The main burden of these thoughts on the hermeneutical question is that any profitable debate must focus upon concrete issues, such as NT use of the OT and the nature of progressive revelation. Here specific passages may be exegeted and profitably debated.”

It seems to me what is probably helpful with this larger topic is trying to wrestle with these problems at the level of individual passages rather than from the outside bringing your system to bear on one of those passages.

That finishes our study of Roman numeral IX. I gave you a handout last week but I didn't bring any extras of Roman numeral X, "The apologetic value of biblical prophecy." But we'll look at that next time.

Transcribed by Jessica Skidmore  
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Renarrated by Ted Hildebrandt

**Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 16**  
 Apologetic Value of Prophecy, Introduction to Obadiah

X. Apologetic Value of Prophecy

Last week I gave you Roman numeral X. I hope you were able to look through that because what I intended by handing that out was to save time in going through that. Let me just run through this and then if you have questions perhaps we can discuss it further. But I'm not going to read through the entirety of that handout but highlight a few things.

A. Does biblical prophecy have apologetic value?

A. is, "Does biblical prophecy have apologetic value? Preliminary considerations." Historically, there are many people who feel there is apologetic value in predictive prophecy, and therefore it is an apologetic tool that can be used effectively to argue for the truthfulness of the Bible, and the existence of God who has spoken through Scripture. Because you can look at the prophecies, given centuries ago, and see fulfillment in much later times, and that provides a good apologetic tool for arguing for the truthfulness of Scripture and God's existence.

1. Aalders: Little Value

So my first statement there is that there's good reason to answer that question affirmatively. Is there apologetic value? I think there is. But there are some evangelicals among us who would answer negatively. Now, when you get outside the evangelical world there are a lot of critical scholars who say there is no value whatsoever. I use for purposes of illustration, a Dutch scholar G.C. Aalders, an Old Testament professor at University of Amsterdam where I did my work. The volume he wrote, you can see it under there in the second paragraph is called *The False Prophet in Israel*. He discusses in that

book this issue of apologetic value. He notes some positive factors such as the use of prophecy fulfillment in a positive way and those positive factors are numbered 1-5 on page 1 of your outline. I won't review all of them, but you get over to page 2 Aalders has some serious objections to appealing to the fulfillment of prophecies as a criterion for demonstrating the truth of Scripture. In his view, when you look at those objections, the objections show that the apologetic value for the argument is not as great as you might initially be inclined to think. Then what follows is a list of his objections. There are three of them.

#### a. Disputes on Fulfillment

The first one is a "Disputes on fulfillment." He quotes for example Abraham Keunen in his book *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, and it gives a list of unfulfilled prophecies. He says Keunen has turned the apologetic argument around and on the basis of non-fulfilled prophecies and has argued against fulfilled prophecies.

#### b. Disputes on Dating and Subjective Factors

Secondly, "Disputes on dating and subjective factors in assessing the connections between prophesy and its fulfillment." In other words, you get into disputes with Daniel and the second part of Isaiah. Is Daniel dated in the time that it claims to be or is that some anonymous person writing around 165 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes had already appeared on the scene?

He quotes a man named Davidson who says that if the argument of fulfillment will really have evidential value it must adhere to the following conditions, "First the *known promulgation* must be prior to the event. Secondly, there must be a *clear and palpable fulfillment* of it. Lastly the *nature of the event itself* if, when the prediction of it was given it lay *remote* from

human view, and was such as could not be foreseen by any supposable *effort of reason*, or be *deduced* upon principles of *calculation* derived from *probability* or *experience*.” Now in that statement all of those italicized words are what Aalders would call subjective judgments. Things like known promulgation, nature of the event could not be foreseen by effort of reason, could not be seen or produced by deduction. Then Aalders says that with respect to those subjective value judgments, it’s clear that people will differ in their conclusions so that a real convincing truth can never be found. But then you see what he does, he turns that around and says that the reverse is also true, so that no convincing proof against the divine origin of prophecy can be made by her non-fulfillment as Keunen attempts. In other words, the whole business can fall because it is subjectively determined. So that’s his second objection.

### c. Symbolic Language Nullifies Apologetic Value

The third one is “symbolic language nullifies apologetic value.” I might say from the outset that Aalders is an amillennialist. He is inclined to take the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament for Christ in a spiritual or figurative kind of sense and apply them to the church. So several lines down in that paragraph under symbolic and apologetic value he says that this creates a particular difficulty for appealing to prophecy and fulfillment as the apologetic tool. Aalders argues that the literal approach of men like Keith does not do justice to the symbolic nature of many prophecies. It is Aalders’ view that the prophecies often speak of Jerusalem, Zion, and the temple in order to indicate spiritual realities of the new covenant.

Take the Isaiah 2 passage, “Everyone will come to the mountain of the Lord it will be high and exalted.” That’s the coming of the Church! Assyria and Babylon typify sinful and destructive directions. He is not talking about a

series of Babylons, but the enemies of God's kingdom, in a spiritual sense. He adds that he cannot see how, notice this, "one who adopts a more literal method of interpretation such as Keith, can keep himself free from the chiliast error."

Do you know what the chiliast error is? Chiliast is a thousand! It is premillennial eschatology, where you take these prophecies that speak of the future thousand-year reign of Christ here on earth in which swords will be beat into plowshares. So you see what he is saying is, if you're doing interpretation taking it literally, you're going to become a premillennialist. That's unthinkable for somebody like Aalders. He says that were the prophecies concerning Babylon to be fulfilled literally down to the details, one cannot propose a different manner of fulfillment for the prophecies with regard to Jerusalem and Israel. One should then also expect the detailed literal fulfillment of these prophecies. It is thus clear, according to Aalders, that appeal to the literal fulfillment of prophecies entangles apologetics in a great difficulty.

But, and here's where all the good points, if one abandons the literal method of interpretation in favor of a spiritual fulfillment then one loses his weapon. Why? The spiritual fulfillment is difficult to explain to those who oppose the Christian faith. In other words, if you're going to use prophecy and fulfillment as an apologetic tool and you're going to interpret it symbolically, it cuts the force of the apologetic argument.

#### d. Observation: Amillennialists—Presuppositional Apologetics, Premillennialists - Evidentialists

I remember reading this some years ago now, and something dawned on me but I never put it together before. I think this is true, and that is: If you look out at evangelical interpreters, you will find that amillennialist

interpreters are normally presuppositionalists in apologetics. Amillennialists tend to interpret more symbolically and figuratively, and they do not normally use prophecy and fulfillment as an evidence for the truthfulness of the Bible. Whereas premillennialists, who tend to interpret more literally, generally are not presuppositionalists in apologetics. They are usually evidentialists, and this is one of the evidences of truthfulness of Scripture. So, you might not think there's any connection between apologetic systems and eschatological systems, but I think there's a pretty tight one when you really reflect it. In general, those who are amillennialists are also going to be presuppositionalists apologetics and those who are premillennialists, in general, are going to be evidentialists in apologetics. I am sure there are exceptions, but in general it certainly fits with Aalders, and he makes a point of it.

#### e. Aalders Conclusion

Notice this next statement. Aalders then concludes that it's not the fulfillment of prophecy that brings the conviction of the divine truth of scripture, but the reverse—the conviction of divine truth of scripture leads to belief in the fulfillment of prophecy. And of course there again, the eschatological view is pretty tight with the apologetic view. He argues that the certainty of the revealed truth of God does not rest in any outward evidences, but rather in itself. God does not force men to believe. It is also his will that fulfillment of prophecy should not stand outside of all doubt as something incontrovertible but rather that it should render only such certainty that the believer can find in it support for his faith. In other words, someone who has come to faith and believes, and then looks at prophecies, can find support for his faith, but someone who has not come to faith may now look and find little or no value in them.

He says that for the one who recognizes the Bible as the word of God the fulfillment of prophecies is clear as day and therefore it can serve to confirm his faith. That's certainly legitimate. My favorite question is: does it also have some role for the unbeliever, to bring him the place of being open, to listening to the Bible? So he says that the fulfillment of prophecy is not without value in a secondary sense, but for the one who does not believe in the Scripture, it does not speak so clearly that he is forced to see divine origin of Scripture.

Aalders says it therefore comes down to what he calls the internal principle, which is at the heart of his position—one believes Scripture to be God's word or one does not believe Scripture to be God's word. This belief is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit. The final ground for the certainty of Christian truth is to be sought in the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

So his conclusion is that apologetics is better off not to involve itself with seeking for objective evidence for the truth of Scripture, but rather it should retreat to this subjective standpoint and then demonstrate that the non-Christian world view, in spite of arguments to the contrary, also cannot justify itself with any ground of evidence, and it has its own starting point in the subjective just as much as does the Christian position. So, that's the heart of what his view is on "the apologetic value of prophecy." In his view, you either believe the Bible and the scripture or you don't! And whether you believe or not that the Bible is the word of God, it is the work of the Holy Spirit! It's subjective. But then you turn that around and you tell those who are not believers that their position is also subjective. Now I think that in that you encounter the difference between presuppositional and evidential approaches to apologetics which is another huge subject.

#### 4. Machen's Comments



I have a paragraph there from J. G. Machen from the “Christianity and Culture” publication. Details are found in your bibliography. You notice the underlined statement at the bottom of the page from Machen. He says, “It would be a great mistake to assume that all men are equally well prepared to receive the gospel. It is true that the decisive issue then is the regenerative power of God.” It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings people to the knowledge of Christ. He says, “That can overcome all lack of preparation, and the absence of that, makes even the best preparation useless.” And here’s the underlined statement, “But, as a matter of fact, God usually exerts that power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel... I do not mean that the removal of intellectual objections will make a man a Christian. No, conversion was never wrought simply by argument. A change of heart is also necessary. And that can be wrought only by the immediate exercise of the power of God.”

But notice the next statement, “But because intellectual labor is insufficient it does not follow, as it so often is assumed, that it is unnecessary. God may, it is true, overcome all intellectual obstacles by an immediate exercise of His regenerative power. Sometimes he does. But he does so very seldom. Usually He exerts His power in connection with certain conditions of the human mind.” The mind looks at, and assesses, whatever claims are being made for the truthfulness of the Bible, and the truthfulness of the Gospel. “Usually he does not bring into the Kingdom, entirely without preparation, those whose minds and fancy are completely dominated by the ideas of which make the acceptance of the gospel logically impossible.”

Francis Schaeffer often would talk about people as pre-evangelists and he means dealing with questions, trying to answer objections to listening to

the Scripture, or to the message of the Gospel. I think that's what Machen is talking about here.

I listed next another essay by Machen that's in your citations pages 32-33. He says some of the same things in that discussion. Let's look at a couple of these paragraphs. Machen says, "A man hears some true preacher of the gospel. The preacher speaks on the authority of a book which lies open there on the pulpit. As the words of that book are expounded, the man who listens finds the secrets of his heart are revealed. It is though a cloak had been pulled away. The man suddenly sees himself as God sees him. He suddenly comes to see that he is a sinner under the just wrath and curse of God. Then from the same strange book comes another part of sovereign authority. The preacher, as he expounds the book, seems to be an ambassador of the king, a messenger of the living God. The man who hears needs no further reflection, no further argument. The Holy Spirit has opened the doors of his heart. 'That book is the word of the living God,' he says; 'God has found me out, I have heard his voice, I am His forever.'"

Then Machen comments, "Yes, it is this way sometimes, and not by elaborate argument, that a man becomes convinced that the Bible is the word of God." But then you notice he repeats what he said in the other quotation, "Yet that does mean that argument is unnecessary...I may be convinced with my whole soul that the Bible is the word of God; but if my neighbor adduces considerations to show that it is really full of error, I cannot be indifferent to those considerations. I can indeed say to him 'your considerations are wrong, and because they are wrong I can with good conscience hold onto my convictions.' Or I can say to him, 'What you say is true enough in itself but it is irrelevant to the question whether the Bible is the word of God.' But I do not see how in the world I can say to him, 'Your considerations may be contrary to my conviction that the Bible is the word of God, but I am not interested in

them; go on holding to them if you want to do so, but do please agree with me also in holding that the Bible is the word of God.” It is a very real situation. He says, “No, I cannot possibly say that.” That last attitude is surely quite absurd. Two contradictory things cannot both be true. We cannot go on holding to the Bible as the word of God and at the same time admit the truth of considerations that are contrary to that conviction of ours.

I believe with all of my soul, in other words, in the necessity of Christian apologetics, the necessity of a reasoned defense of the Christian faith, and in particular a reasoned defense of the Christian conviction that the Bible is the word of God.”

And then he says, he was at a student conference where methods of evangelism were being discussed. He says someone got up and said (in the middle of that next paragraph), “You never win a man to Christ until you quit arguing with him.” You’ve probably heard that before. He says, “Well you know my friends, when he said that I was not impressed one little bit. Of course a man never was won to Christ *merely* by argument. That is perfectly clear. There must be the mysterious work of the Spirit of God in the new birth. Without that, all of those arguments are quite useless. But because arguments are insufficient, it does not follow that they are unnecessary. What the Holy Spirit does in a new birth, is not to make a man a Christian regardless of the evidence, but on the contrary to clear away the mists from his eyes and enable him to attend to the evidence.

So I believe in the reasoned defense of the inspiration of the Bible. Sometimes it is immediately useful in bringing a man to Christ... But its chief use is of a somewhat different kind. Its chief use is in enabling Christian people to answer legitimate questions, not by vigorous opponents of Christianity, but of people who are seeking the truth and are troubled by the hostile voices that are heard on every hand.” So, there are those comments by

Machen.

## 5. Faith & Reason – 1 Peter 3:15 – St. Augustine

My next comment on that handout is that it's the Holy Spirit's work to open the heart. It's our responsibility to present the evidence. It seems to me there is a place for reasoning and defense of the Gospel. 1 Peter 3:15 says that it's our responsibility to give reasons for the faith that is within us.

There are two other articles referenced in the next paragraph. First, A. J. Neuhaus, "Why We Can Get Along," in *First Things*. Go to page 33 of your citations. He's talking in this article about connections between faith and reason. And he says, "In thinking about connections between faith, reason and discourse, St. Augustine is particularly helpful. It is possible to find snippets, especially from his devotional and homiletical writings, that can be used to show that Augustine a fideist, someone who sacrifices reason for faith." You know, to me it seems like that's someone who holds Aalders' position when he says that it's all internal principle. We either believe or we don't believe. Evidence has nothing to do with it. That's fideism. It "can be used to suggest that Augustine is a fideist, someone who sacrifices reason to faith. But that would be a grave misunderstanding." You often see that. He believed in order to know.

"Augustine addressed in great sophistication why it is that faith is reasonable and why it is that reason without faith is incomplete. There is, for instance, the very engaging essay, *The Usefulness of Believing*. The very title reflects Augustine's assumption that Christian and non-Christian are able to consider together what would be useful for understanding the truth. Augustine makes the case that belief is necessary for understanding. He explains in great detail to his unbelieving interlocutor the reasonable case for believing. It is clear that Augustine and his interlocutor who shared a

common *a priori*... that belief is necessary to understanding—in everyday life, in science, in friendship and in matters religious and why belief is necessary as itself rationally explicable. ‘Understand my word in order to believe,’ says Augustine, “but believe God’s word in order to understand.’ As Eptham Gillson writes...‘[In Augustine] the very possibility of faith depends on reason... because only reason is capable of belief.’

Again, ‘The Augustinian doctrine concerning the relations between reason and faith comprises three steps: preparation for faith by reason, act of Faith, understanding the content of faith.’ But Augustine himself said it best, ‘No one believes anything unless he first thought it to be believable.’ Everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded. Not everyone who thinks believes, since many think in order to not believe; but everyone who believes thinks.’

Augustine was a firm opponent of what would later come to be called fideism. The claim that faith is utterly arbitrary—that it is not supported by and cannot appeal to an *a priori* about what is reasonable—finds no support in Augustine, or for that matter in the mainstream of the Great Tradition of Christian thought.”

#### 6. Historically Amerstadam – presuppositional; Princeton – Evidentialists

So, there’s that little second paragraph out of Neuhaus’ article. And then the next article mentioned on your outline is a fairly lengthy article by Donald Fuller and Richard Gardiner titled, “Reformed Theology at Princeton and Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Re-appraisal.” It was published at Covenant Theological Seminary in 1995. I think that is extremely helpful to explain the situation of the schools of thought generated at places like Princeton in the early 1900s. There was a period when the school of thought generated at Amsterdam University was presuppositionalists

apologetics and the Princeton school of thought was evidentialists, as far as apologetics was concerned.

It's a rather lengthy article. You'll notice I have a fair amount excerpted from it starting on page 34 in your citations going over to page 37. I don't want to take time to go through that, but I encourage you to read it. I think you'll find it gets rather complex, but I think you'll find it helpful in sorting out these issues.

Just turn to page 37 and we'll look at the last 2 paragraphs where Fuller and Gardiner say, "Warfield and the old Princeton theologians believed that reason and faith *cooperated* in order to provide a knowledge of God coordinate with a *true* human knowing, even if knowledge was incomplete. This *coordinate* notion of faith and reason is rooted in Augustinianism," as Neuhaus was saying, "is deeply at odds with nineteenth century positivism,"—enlightenment kind of thinking—and "means that speaking about God to the un-regenerate really matters. Warfield's vision for Christian engagement with secular intellectual perspectives is, therefore, quite different than the retreatist orientation of Kuyper." It was a retreat to that subjective position, the internal principle. "Warfield writes, 'Let us, then, cultivate an attitude of courage as over against the investigations of the day. None should be more zealous of them than we. None should be more quick to discern truth in every field, more hospitable to receive it, more loyal to follow it wherever it leads. It is not for Christians to be lukewarm in regard to the investigations and discoveries of the time. But it is for us therefore as Christians to push investigations at the utmost, to be leaders in every science, to stand in the vein of criticism, to be the first to catch in every field the truth of faith in our redeemer. The curse of the church has been her apathy to truth...she has nothing to fear from truth; but she has everything to fear, and she has already suffered nearly everything, from ignorance. All truth belongs

to us as followers of Christ, the Truth; let us at length enter into our own inheritance." So, those are some comments on this larger question, "Is there apologetic value to prophecy-fulfillment?" Those are some of the positions that have been taken.

## B. The Revelatory Claim of the Bible

B. on page 5 is the heading, "The revelatory claim of the Bible." The Bible presents itself as the Word of God, not simply as a product of human thought or reflection. Much of the Bible concerns itself with human history, and in its prophetic sections the Bible claims to sketch broad lines of future history that are determined by the sovereign will of a God who speaks through it. This unique claim calls for, and is certainly open to, verification and testing. Whether one believes the Bible or not, its historical statements (both predictive and non-predictive) are something that to a great extent can be submitted for verification. The Bible indicates that much of its revealed plan for history has already been realized in the history of Israel and in the appearance of Jesus Christ. It is our contention that in the connection between prophecy and fulfillment, particularly in that between the Old Testament and in Christ, there is to be found an objective prophecy/fulfillment structure that is clearly visible or recognizable. The existence of this prophecy/fulfillment structure points to the existence and veracity of the God who has spoken in biblical revelation.

This prophecy/fulfillment structure is not characterized by what might be termed a religious or pistical quality. It's not something subjective or internal. Rather, it is something that breaks through religious subjectivism by its very nature, because it stands as a recognizable entity that points to the reality and veracity of the God of biblical revelation apart from the necessity

of religious commitment to that God. In other words, you can look at a prophecy and look at history to see if it was fulfilled, and that's something that can be submitted to verification; that's something outside of oneself.

In the Old Testament and New Testaments we notice the demonstration of the existence of God is based primarily on clearly recognizable signs and the coherence of prophecy and fulfillment. In other words, if you took the Bible itself, how does God make himself known? Think of the Exodus events and go through the plagues where the statement is explicit. "These things are done so that you may know that I am the Yahweh." You can see them. You can see that Moses speaks in advance and then it happens. That's also true in Joshua where the same thing happens with crossing the Jordan River and the taking of Jericho. So, demonstrating the existence of God is based primarily on recognizable signs, and on the coherence of prophecy and fulfillment. While this is true that intellectual recognition of the "existence" of God is not belief in an existential sense only because belief is possible by the work of the Holy Spirit developing a relationship between man and God. It is, nevertheless, a corollary to and prerequisite for genuine faith. Genuine faith is a response to what God has demonstrated in history, in his power and existence. In all of this it is necessary to remember that there is an objective revelation that is there. This objective revelation exists apart from the response of faith that is worked in the individual given by the Holy Spirit when that individual submits himself to the God of the biblical revelation. This distinction might be termed as an internal revelation and an external revelation. In order to avoid misunderstanding, we must make it clear that objective prophecy exists and is recognized by an identifiable character, the external revelation.

Seems to me that's what people like Aalders miss. They talk about that internal principle. Well fine. Yes, there is that internal principle but that's the



Holy Spirit regenerating inside us and opening the mind. No one is ever going to come to the knowledge of the truth without it. But that doesn't mean there isn't an external principal or external revelation—something that's actually out there that evidences that God is who he claims to be. That's the way God made himself known through Scripture, signs and wonders, and prophecy/fulfillment.

### C. Prophecy and Fulfillment

So that brings us to C., "Prophecy and fulfillment." In the Old Testament we are confronted with a unique and surprising form of the divine revelation. This revelation entails components that are adequate to demonstrate in an objective and recognizable way the reality of the God of Israel. They include:

1. God makes his existence and power recognizable among many witnesses in many ways, including signs, wonders, and theophanies. That is something that's out there. It can and has been seen by multiple witnesses.
2. God makes known a plan for future history through his spokesmen the prophets.
3. This plan for future history is brought into fruition as it had been professed and predicted by the prophets.

Note that in the first component—signs, wonders and theophanies—is the sense perceptible presentation of something in which Yahweh claims to reveal himself. The second two components are intended to confirm the evidence of that claim, that is, prophecy and fulfillment, plan and execution.

Here it can be said that the Old Testament distinguishes itself from all other "religious revelations" by not promoting belief simply on the basis of what certain persons claim to have received by divine revelation. Anybody can go out there and say God's spoken to me. That's what Muhammad did. Anybody can do that. But it's not promoting belief on the basis of what people

claimed they received by divine revelation. Rather, belief is founded in revelation that is connected with external signs and the progression of the history according to a previously announced plan. On the outline I gave some biblical examples of that.

Now I want to make a distinction here. Those signs and wonders perform the function of authentication of the existence and power of God to the people who observed them in that time. We're no longer there. All we can do is read the reports of what God did at that time and how he revealed himself to his people, at the time of the exodus to the time of the conquest or the first advent of Christ.

In the next paragraph there, I mention the Old Testament gives no mythological or metaphysical arguments for the existence of God. That's not the way God demonstrates his existence.

### 1. Prophets Self-Authentication

Then the next paragraph. The signs that God gave to authenticate the words of prophets and make his own presence visible to his people served an immediate and direct authenticating purpose in connection with the historical progress of revelation and redemption. With the completion of revelation we should not look for the continuation of such signs. We've talked about that before in connection with Vos's conception of the progress of revelation and redemption. Revelation has that objective side as well as the subjective individual side. Revelation is really the interpretation of redemption and revelation moves along with it. But when the redemption reaches its climax in Christ, then revelation ceases to exist. But that's another issue. We don't look for a continuation of such signs. Signs, therefore do not play the *same direct authenticating purpose* for us today as they did for those to whom the signs were originally given. The connection between prophecy

and fulfillment, however, is of such a character that *its value* as an evidence of the existence and veracity of the God of biblical revelation *continues to function in a direct way*, even amongst succeeding generations. In other words, signs and wonders function in the time at which they were given. Now we read reports of it. Prophecy and fulfillment continue to function even for succeeding generations because these generations can look at that prophecy/fulfillment structure. If you can establish that the prophecy was given at a certain point and time and it was not fulfilled until centuries later. There are many examples of these kinds of prophecies—there you have something that I think has apologetic value.

## 2. Bloom, Gaugh, and Newman: Testable Miracles

J. A. Bloom and H.G. Gaugh and R.C. Newman, who was a New Testament professor here for many years, argue that fulfilled prophecy is an accessible kind of miracle, a testable miracle rather than a reported miracle. You see the distinction there? They argue that since fulfilled prophecy is an accessible kind of miracle, a testable miracle rather than a reported miracle, this character of prophecy serves to bypass the difficulty of the reported miracle such as the observation or interpretation of what happened. Prophecy is different than a private experience of the miracle because its fulfillment is often testable by any interested person, whether that person is sympathetic to the Bible's theistic worldview or not. Israel's God is, then, one who claims belief on the basis of the things that the people have seen and experienced of him. Logically or rationally speaking, it can be said that the Old Testament demonstrates Israel could hardly do anything other than believe because she could know from objective facts that Yahweh is. How could you not come to that conclusion if you were among those who were sent out of Egypt? And that none of his words return to him empty or void. Israel could

and did willfully turn their back on things that were clearly idolatry. The Lord gave his people many infallible, the NIV has “convincing,” proofs, to use the wording of Acts 1 where he claims the veracity of his existence and power. In our witnessing we should do nothing less, and simply adopt the ways that God himself employed to demonstrate to his people that he exists. That’s how he brought about the redemption of his people.

So, it seems to me in that context, given certain qualifications that are mentioned in the conclusion, that prophecy and fulfillment is something that is verifiable and testable, and it is an objective structure that stands outside the individual. It does have a legitimate function in an apologetic sense of pointing to the truth claims of the Bible and of Christ as the redeemer of mankind. I won't read through the conclusion, you can do that on your own. So that’s Roman numeral X.

## XI. Obadiah

Page 6 of your class lecture outline we come to the new section of the course, “Survey of prophetic books.” As I had told you before, I want to go through the minor prophets of Hosea, Obadiah, Joel, and Amos for the remainder of our course.

### 1. Introductory Remarks

Point 1 is, “Introductory remarks.” So before going to Obadiah, let me just make some general comments. We talked earlier about classification of the prophetic books and in Jewish tradition there is that of the former prophets and later prophets. The former prophets being what we normally today in our tradition are historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuels and Kings.

The later prophets are what we call the prophetic books. They are

divided into two groups. You're familiar with that classification I am sure: the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. The terms major and minor have nothing to do with significance or importance, but simply with length. The Major prophets are the larger ones: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The Minor prophets are the 12. I think you should know the names of them, I won't go through the list.

But I do want to say something about the arrangement of the list of the Minor Prophets. You have been reading in Bullock, actually you have been reading in a different order than Bullock has put them in and the reason for that is simply that Bullock's dating some of the prophets was different from the way I would date them. For example, the first one is Obadiah.

## 2. Order of the Minor Prophets

But you get to that question of why are the Minor Prophets in our Bibles today in the order which they presently appear? When you look in our English Bible, and that's true in the Hebrew Bible as well, at the Minor Prophets, you have: Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah as the first four, and then Jonah and Micah. But if you go the Septuagint, the first 6 are in this order: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. It's quite a different order. The order we are familiar with is taken from the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint has a different order. If you look at the two lists, there appears to be little discernable criteria for either list as far as the order in which the books occur. I think what is noticeable is that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are last and they are all post-exilic. So it seems like there's a chronological element at least in those last books. Amos is placed after Hosea in order. Hosea, Amos Obadiah. Yet Amos was earlier than Hosea. So you have that question, and I don't think anyone has ever come up with a convincing explanation for the order of the books in either the Septuagint or the Hebrew Bible. But I think

we should be aware of that.

### 3. Dating Minor Prophets

We're going to discuss dating issues with Obadiah and Joel. They are both very difficult to date. But I think you can divide the prophets into three periods if you use the nations that were the prominent power that affected the history of Israel and Judah: the Assyrian period, the neo-Babylonian period and the Persian period. This is the order that you have been following in your reading in Bullock. So the Assyrian period has nine prophets, the Babylonian period—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah and Habakkuk, and the Persian period—Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. So just those general comments looking at the first four of those books: Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah.

#### A. Obadiah

Let's go to Obadiah. I gave you that handout. You'll notice that A. under Roman numeral II is, "Obadiah's date and author." I think that we had mentioned that Obadiah is one of the most difficult to date. Differences on date are not based on liberal or conservative viewpoints and they range from about 840 B.C., which makes it the earliest, to shortly around the destruction of Jerusalem around 586 B.C., and then some as late as 450. So you can see that there is a wide range of conclusions.

At the crux of the dating question lies the identification of plundering of Jerusalem that's mentioned in verses 10 and 11. If you turn to Obadiah, which is a one chapter book, you will notice, it is an oracle against the Edomites. Judgment is being pronounced upon the Edomites. In verses 10 and 11, Obadiah says, "Because of the violence against your brother Jacob," (Edomites are descendants of Esau), "you will be covered with shame, you

will be destroyed forever on the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem. You were like one of them.” So there is a reference here to the Edomites having some sort of association with the plundering of Jerusalem. Strangers carried off wealth, cast lots for Jerusalem. You notice I say there that the crux is on the plundering of Jerusalem by the Edomites in 10 and 11 and possibly on to 14. That becomes an interpretive issue and it does have a bearing on the date. Do verses 12-14 speak of some future similar kind of plundering of Jerusalem or are they a continuation of verses 10 and 11? I will come back to that and we will discuss it in more detail later. But first, what are the positions that have been argued for the identification of the plundering of Jerusalem mentioned in verses 10 and 11? I have listed 3 of them here.

#### 1. A Plundering in the Reign of Jehoram of Judah by a Coalition of Philistines and Arabians

A. is, “A plundering in the reign of Jehoram of Judah by a coalition of Philistines and Arabians.” In 2 Chronicles 21:8 you read that in the time of Jehoram, “Edom rebelled against Judah, set up his own king.” Verse 10, “To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah.” Go down to verse 16. It is the same time, during the reign of Jehoram, “The Lord aroused against Jehoram the hostility of the Philistines and the Arabs who lived near the Cushites. They attacked Judah, invaded it, and carried off all of the goods they found in the king’s palace along with the sons and wives. Not a son was left.” So there are our records on a pillaging of Jerusalem connected to the rebellion of the Edomites. In 2 Kings 8:20 you have no reference to the rebellion of the Edomites against Jehoram. So, it’s possible that the Edomites cooperated in that invasion and shared in the spoils. That may be what provoked the judgment on Edom in Obadiah. That’s the early view.

## 2. Babylonian Plundering of Jerusalem in 586 BC

A second view is that in verses 10 and 11 of Obadiah what you have is a reference to the Babylonian plundering of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, some say, is supported by Ezekiel 35:5 but the reference is not conclusive. Ezekiel 35:5 says (this is a prophecy directed to Edom, a prophecy of judgment), "Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over at the time of the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax," (clearly the time of the Babylon destruction of Jerusalem is in view), "Therefore as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I give you the bloodshed, and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you." So, I think it's clear that, yes, the Edomites did have some participation in the plundering of Jerusalem in 586, but that doesn't mean that they hadn't done it earlier! Because Edom later took a similar position at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem is not to say that they had not done something similar at an earlier time. Objections to the 586 date are that there's no mention of deportation of the whole population, there's no mention of the destruction of the city and the temple, neither is there any mention of Nebuchadnezzar from verse 10, "because violence against your brother you will be covered with iniquity."

Then on top of page 2, the interpretation of 10-11 and 12-14 as having two points of reference, must be considered. There is similar phraseology in Jeremiah 49:1 and its relation to Obadiah 1-6. Some try and use that for dating. There are allusions in language between Jeremiah 49:1-7 and Obadiah 1-6. Question is: Which prophet has priority? Things are divided on which is the original or whether both reflect an earlier source of some unknown prophecy. How do you explain these similarities in language? Is Obadiah reflecting the language of Jeremiah? Or is it the other way around, is Jeremiah



reflecting the language of Obadiah? It could be either. So I don't think that that's a way of coming to a conclusion about dating.

3. J. B. Payne verses 10-11 of Obadiah talk about an attack on Israel by Syria in the time of Ahaz

But then a third suggestion comes from J. Barton Payne is that verses 10-11 of Obadiah talk about an attack on Israel by Syria going at the time of Ahaz and that was accompanied by the simultaneous attack by the Edomites. That's 2 Chronicles 28:16-18, where you read, "At that time King Ahaz went to the king of Assyria for help. The Edomites had again come and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners, while the Philistines attacked down in the foothills and then they gave to Judah. They captured and occupied [its places]." So that's another possibility, although there is no specific reference to Jerusalem.

Now what follows are just some names. There are some advocates of the date after 586 B.C., after the plundering of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar. R. K. Harrison believes a later date of about 450 B.C.

So that's the question about dating, and as I mentioned this question arises further when you get into looking more closely at verses 10-11 and 12-14 and what you conclude is the relationship between them. I want to hold off on that discussion for a few minutes yet. But we will come back to this. But which plundering of Jerusalem you see referenced in 10-11 it is going to affect your conclusion on dating.

#### 4. Author of Obadiah

The author is Obadiah, which means, "Servant of the Lord." He is a prophet about whom we know nothing. All we have is his prophecy and there is not much in the book of Obadiah itself that says anything about this

individual. There are several other Obadiah's mentioned in the Old Testament but no others mentioned that connect to the time of Ahab.

#### B. The Theme of the Book of Obadiah

B. is, "The theme of the Book." We've already related that a little bit here. It's a pronouncement of judgment on Edom. I have already mentioned Edomites were descendants of Esau. Go back into Genesis and see the relationship of the Edomites to Esau. Genesis 36:8 tells us that Esau lived in the Seir mountain range of Edom, often used as a synonym for the homeland, directly south of the Dead Sea and to the east with a mountainous country, east of the Rift Valley depression, connecting the Dead Sea and Aqabah gulf of the Red Sea. The principle cities were Bozrah and perhaps Sela, which means "private rock," some think that is a reference to the city of Petra which is a famous archeological site in the Edomite territory. From Eziongeber, which is at the very tip of the gulf of Aqaba, is a road called the King's highway, which ran north through Edom. That was the route Moses wanted to lead the Israelites on at the time of the Exodus but if you remember at that time the Edomites refused to let the Israelites go and therefore they had to go around. From that point forth, there were conflicts between the Edomites and the Israelites. I think this is the outworking of what you might call the Jacob/Esau controversy if you remember that whole situation when there was a struggle with the two brothers for the blessing from Isaac and so on.

Look at page 38 of your citations. Keil made some comments on this relationship and we will conclude with this. He said, "Wrong, or violence, is all the more reprehensible when it is committed against a brother. The fraternal relations in which Edom stood towards Judah is still more sharply defined by the name Jacob, since Esau and Jacob were twin brothers. The consciousness that the Israelites were their brethren, ought to have impelled the Edomites

to render helpful support to the oppressed Judeans. Instead of this, they not only reveled with scornful and malignant pleasure in the misfortune of the brother nation, but endeavored to increase it still further by rendering active support to the enemy. This hostile behavior of Edom arose from the envy at the election of Israel, like the hatred of Esau for Jacob, which was transmitted to his descendants, and came out openly around the time of Moses, in the unbrotherly refusal to let the Israelites pass in a peaceful manner through the land. On the other hand, the Israelites are always commanded in the law to preserve a friendly and brotherly attitude toward Edom." In Deuteronomy 2:4-5 and 23:7 it is enjoined upon them not to abhor the Edomites, because he is their brother. So you have the outworking you might say of that Jacob/Esau controversy that is still ongoing at whatever date this is...840...586 and so on.

All right we will stop here and pick up with C which is, "Some comments on the content" next time.

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Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical prophecy, Lecture 17

### Obadiah Continued, Joel

#### C. Content of Obadiah

##### 1. Outline

For our time this morning in Obadiah we will look at some features of the content, and then get on into Joel. As you're aware, Obadiah is only one chapter, and only 21 verses. So it's a short book. I have what I think is the best way to break that up into sections. In the first nine verses you have "the pronouncement of judgment on Edom." Verses 10 and 11 explain "the reason for that judgment." We looked at 10 and 11 last week in connection with the discussion of the date of Obadiah, and you'll remember that discussion centers around which destruction or plundering of Jerusalem is involved in those verses, because 10 and 11 says, "Because of violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame, you will be destroyed forever. On the day you stood aloof, while strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them." So, it's for that reason that Edom will be judged.

I mentioned last week, that there is debate over whether you should follow 10 and 11, with 12 to 14. In other words, is 10 through 14 a unit, or, do verses 12 to 14 constitute a warning for the future? In other words, you've done this, now don't do it again. I'm inclined to think the latter. We're going to come back to that and look at it in more detail. Verse 12 says, "You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, or rejoice over the people of Judah," and that goes on down to 14. We'll come back and look at that in more detail, but it seems to me, verses 12 to 14 are a warning for the future.

Verses 15-16 is another transition, with the message of Obadiah, it moves from a judgment on Edom to "a judgment on all nations," all the ungodly. That's 15 and 16. And then the last section, verses 17 to 21, "restoration and blessing for Israel."

Now, let's go into some more detail on each of these sections. You read in verse one, "The vision of Obadiah. This is what the sovereign Lord says about Edom." Remember Edom is the nation that traces its ancestry back to Esau. So it's the brother nation to Israel. "We have heard a message from the Lord, an envoy was sent to the nations to say, 'Rise and let us go against her in battle.' See I will make you small among the nations. You will be utterly despised." I'm taking the NIV translation. How do you translate that? You notice the verbal form is in the perfect tense. Is it a prophetic perfect? That's the way the NIV translates it, "I **will** make you small." The King James says, "I **have** made you small." Now that's an interpretative point. The question is: Is it a reference to a coming judgment or to a past historical reality, namely that Edom was a small insignificant people and never a great empire. Seems to me in the context it should be taken as a prophetic perfect, as something in the future. That is the flow of the passage as it is a judgment that will come on Edom. The NIV has translated it correctly as a prophetic perfect.

#### Petra / Sela

When you get to verse 3 you read, "The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground? Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,'" again I'm reading from the NIV in 3b, "you who live in the clefts of the rocks." There is an alternate text in the notes, "Clefts of the rocks" or "Sela." Is it, "You who live in the clefts of the rock" or "in Sela," taken as a proper name? Sela means "rock." The city of Petra means "rock." Is this a reference to the ancient city of Petra? I don't know if any of you have visited or seen pictures of that site. It is an amazing site. Many years ago on our honeymoon my wife and I visited Petra. We had to go in there on horseback. It was a city that was forgotten about until the Swiss explorer Burkhart rediscovered it in 1812. The entrance is

through a winding canyon or Siq that in places is as narrow as 12 feet, with these walls going up probably a 100 or 150 feet on either side. So you go in through this canyon, which of course was cut by a stream that flowed through there. In the dry season you can go through there with no problem. But as I note here unexpected rainstorms and flash floods can sweep up through that canyon, up to 20 feet deep. Twenty French tourists died in such a flash flood in 1963. It's the only entrance into the city. Once you go through that siq and you come into this wide-open valley, with mountains all surrounding it, and pretty high rock barren areas. In the sides of those mountains you have carved out of very colorful red sand stone, dwellings, houses, various kinds of buildings, and then in the center of that valley there are some freestanding buildings and an old Roman road. But that site originally goes as far back as to having been settled by the Edomites. The ruins you see there today are from a much later time. But the early stages of that site were built by the Edomites. So it's a debatable point how do you read that phrase, "you who live in the clefts of the rocks." Is "sela" a proper name for "Petra," or is it simply the word for "rock."

#### Nabateans Dispossess Edom

But in any case, verse four says, "Though you soar like an eagle, and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down." I think this is best understood as a prediction of Edom's loss of her territory that was fulfilled historically by their defeat by the Nabatean Arabs. The Nabateans came from a region in Northern Arabia. If you look at Malachi 1:3-5, I think it's clear that at 430 BC, during the time of Malachi, the Edomites had already been driven away or out of their territory by these Arabs because Malachi 1:3-5 says, "Esau I have hated and have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." So by the time of Malachi, the Edomites had been driven away from their territory. Malachi 1:4 continues, Edom said, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins. But this is what the Lord Almighty says:

‘They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see with your own eyes, and say, “Great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel.”’” So, Obadiah pronounces judgment to come on Edom, and by the time of Malachi that judgment had already been enacted.

The dispossessed Edomites settled after being driven out of their territory by the Nabateans in an area of southern Judah which eventually became known as Idumea. There they maintained an independent existence for a time, before they were conquered by John Hyrcanus and forcibly converted to Judaism. You may come across in your readings and commentaries that “Idumea” was the Greek form of Edom. So, “Idumea” is really the Greek for Edom. The Edomites settled in southern Judah, eventually forcibly Judaized in 135 to 105 B.C. by John Hyrcanus and the Maccabees. The Dynasty of Herod the Great descended from Idumean stock and he came to control the Kingdom of Judah. So, Herod, of course, persecuted the Jewish people. You have that Jacob/Esau controversy really extending on into the time of Herod, who was Idumean in his origin. In Roman times, the Edomites disappeared as a people. Few Idumeans remained and they disappeared in history. Here is one of the brother nations of Israel, which simply disappears from history. The remarkable thing is the Jewish people have not. They’ve kept their identity. So, that is the judgment you see in verses 1-9, that’s pronounced on Edom.

#### b. Obadiah 10-14 Reason for Judgment and Warning for the Future?

As we discussed last week, verses 10 and 11 are the reason for the judgment, because when Jerusalem was plundered, “You stayed aloof, you were like one of them.” That’s 10 and 11. Now we get to 12 to 14; is that a continuation of 10 to 11, or is this a separate section, warning for the future? The reason for the question is because of the verbal form. This is “*waw ‘al*,” and then a verbal form in the jussive. Those are a series of eight *waw ‘al* forms plus the jussive verb. This

is normally translated from Hebrew as “do not, do not.” On page five of your handout, there’s a question whether these verbs have a reference to the past, as endorsed by Allen in the NICOT commentary and a number of other commentators who dated the book after the destruction of Jerusalem. The question is whether it’s the past, the present or the future, that is, the future to Obadiah. Allen, in his NICOT commentary, as on page 6, tends to deal with the tense issue of the verbal form in these verses by arguing that, “In highly imaginative fashion, the prophet speaks of events in the past, as if they were still present.”

Now, Niehaus, in the *Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, a three-volume commentary on the Minor Prophets says, “It is difficult to understand these prohibitions to have anything other than a future event in view. The NRSV translates the prohibitions as perfect tense, ‘should not have,’ but this is grammatically untenable.” Now, as I mentioned, there are eight jussive forms giving these warnings, frequently taken as referring to events that have already occurred, and therefore a reference to the same events described in verses 10 and 11. See, that’s the issue. Is 12 to 14 speaking of the same thing as 10 and 11? Or is 10 and 11 the reason for the judgment and 12 and 14 a warning for the future? I have various translations of this. The King James translates these jussive warnings, “You should not have looked down on your brother, you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah. You should not have boasted so much in the day of their trouble. You should not have marched through gates of my people on the day of their disaster, again.” That “should not have,” means 12 to 14 is just the continuation of 10 and 11. But, the issue becomes if it is permissible to translate *’al* plus the jussive as “should not have.” In other words, it is a completed action, rather than as “do not,” either in the present or the future. You notice King James says, “Shouldst not have.”

The New American Standard is “Do not.” Now see, that’s better as far as *’al* plus jussive, that can either be present or future. “Do not, do not, do not.” The Jewish Publications Society has, “How could you have?” That’s past but a



footnote says, “literally ‘do not.’” The NIV has, “You should not,” which implies present. The NLT, “You shouldn’t have.” That’s past tense. It’s much like the King James. So, translations differ on how to deal with those eight jussive forms, as do commentators. Depending on how you translate those forms, you’re going to decide that either 10 and 11 are to be combined with 12 to 14, and it’s all speaking for the reason of the judgment on Edom, and it’s something of the past; or you’re going to say, as I’ve suggested on the outline, that 10 and 11 are the reason for the judgment, and 12 to 14 is a warning for the future.

Now, let’s go a little bit further with that, after those various translations. Keil in his commentary says, and I think rightly, that that jussive form cannot be taken as the future of the past, “shouldst not have.” Keil says that jussive form does not allow that kind of a translation—it should be either present or future. But then what he says is, it is “neither past nor future specifically, but in an ideal sense, it includes both.” To me that kind of suggestion is too abstract; I’m not even sure exactly what he means by that.

Theodore Laetsch, a commentator on the Minor Prophets, uses 11 to 14 as an eyewitness description of the present, and thus finds the warning of 12 to 14 as appropriate. He places it in the time of Jehoram as something that’s ongoing, in the present. I think that’s possible. Gaebelien mentions another scholar, who says 10 to 14 initially applies to Jehoram’s time, 2 Chronicles 21:16, but had a forward fulfillment in the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem. What he’s doing is what we call double reference, this plundering of Jerusalem applies to the plundering of the time of Jehoram, but also at the same time, with the same words, the plundering refers a second time to the Babylonian plundering in 586. It seems to me that although Laetsch’s present tense is possible, a future reference is intended in 12 to 14. While 10 and 11 and 12 to 14 refer to similar actions by the Edomites, verses 10 and 11 refer to past actions that had already happened to Jehoram. But 12 to 14 are warnings for the future that Edom ignored at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. because we know that the Edomites did participate, or at

least rejoiced, in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586. If you look at Ezekiel 35:5, you read there, “Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax, therefore as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I will give you over to bloodshed.” So, the Edomites seem to have ignored that warning. Aalders is similar to Allen, who sees these forms as rhetorical. He argues that 10 and 11 refer to the same events as 12-14. J. Eaton takes it with irony to the past. Hengstenberg takes it as future.

Why have so many of these commentators refused to take 12 to 14 as future, when this form is jussive? It seems to me so clearly to refer to the future. One may object, as Aalders does, that it is strange for judgment to be pronounced on Edom in verses 10 and 11 and then a warning given concerning the future, in verses 12 to 14. That seems to be the primary objection. Why would you have judgment pronounced on Edom for something Edom has already done in 10 and 11, and then in the next verses give a warning concerning the future? The argument is: that makes no sense. The judgment’s already been pronounced—Edom has already committed this offense against God’s people and the Lord, she is going to be judged—what’s the point of warning for the future?

#### Future Warnings Elsewhere: Jer 18; Amos 2 & 5

Notice Jeremiah 18:5-10. We talked about that earlier. In Jeremiah 18, “The word of the Lord came to me. He said, ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as a potter does?’ declares the Lord. ‘Like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or a kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.’” In other words, it seems to me there’s still a place for warning for the future, “don’t do this again.” Perhaps, Edom would repent and turn away from the kind of attitude and actions that they had had in the past.

If you go to Amos—of course this is concerning Israel not Edom, but I think the same principles are involved—you get in the early chapters, warning after warning of impending judgment. Look at Amos 2:13-16, “I will crush you as a cart crushes, when loaded with grain. Even the swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength.” Verse 15, “The archer will not stand his ground. The fleet-footed soldier will not get away.” Verse 16, “The bravest warriors will flee naked on that day.” Now that’s a pretty strong announcement of judgment. In 3:2, “You only I have chosen of all of the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.” 3:11-15, “An enemy will overrun the land, he will pull down your strongholds, and plunder your fortresses,” and so on. Amos 4:1-3, “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, you who say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks!’ This sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness, ‘The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fish hooks... you will be cast out.’” Amos 5:27, “I will send you into exile, beyond Damascus.” Amos 6:14, “I will stir up a nation against you, house of Israel, that will oppress all the way from Lebo-Hamath to the valley of the Arabah.” So you get all these pronouncements of judgment.

But look at Amos 5:4. At the same time you have the judgment, in 5:4 you read, “This is what the Lord says to Israel, “‘Seek me and live.’” Verse 6, “Seek the Lord and live.” In verses 14 and 15 of chapter 5, “Seek good not evil that you may live,” 15, “Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the court.” Then notice the next statement. “Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Jacob.” So, there’s always that open door, it seems to me, that the Lord leaves when he gives these pronouncements of judgment and warnings of judgment to come. If whoever it’s directed to repents, perhaps the Lord will relent. So it doesn’t seem to me that there’s any inconsistency between describing a reason for judgment in 10 and 11, and then also at the same time, saying, don’t do this again. Of course, Edom ignored that warning, and did do it again, when the

Babylonians attacked in 586.

But if you take it the way I'm suggesting, that also has implications for the date. It suggests that the plundering in 10 and 11 was the time of Jehoram in the 800s, and the warning for the future is the 586, which the Edomites ignored. Now if you say 10 through 14 is all the same, a description of the reason that judgment's coming on Edom, that might result in your thinking this is all about 586. So, this issue of how you interpret the relationship between verses 10 and 11 and 12 to 14 not only has relevance to how you understand what is being talked about, whether you have "a reason for judgment and warning for the future," it also has implications for dates.

#### 4. Obadiah 15-16 Announcement of Judgment on Unjust

Let's go on to 15 and 16. 15 and 16 says, "The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done it will be done to you, your deeds will return upon your own head, just as you drank on my holy hill, so all nations will drink continually, they will drink and drink as if they had never been." So, you move in 15 and 16 from a pronouncement of judgment on Edom to a pronouncement of judgment on all the unjust. So you have a transition from Edom to the heathen in general, or, as the text says, "the day of the Lord is near for all nations."

#### Day of the Lord discussion

Now, if Obadiah is dated at 840 B.C., then he is the first of the prophets, and that means this is the first reference in the prophetic books to the Day of the Lord, which becomes a rather prominent theme, for example, in Joel. What is the Day of the Lord? I have a few comments here on that because this says, "the Day of the Lord is near for all nations." I think in general terms you could say the Day of the Lord is a time in which the Lord will bring judgment on his enemies and blessing to his people. You find use of this expression in many of the prophetic books, even with variations such as the "day of his anger," in Zephaniah 2:2 and

“the Day of the Lord’s wrath,” from Ezekiel 7:19. There are other slight modifications of it but all with reference to the day of the Lord. It seems to be a term known and understood by the people, even with the earlier prophets, Amos and Joel both speak of the Day of the Lord.

In Amos 5, the people desire the day of the coming of the Lord because they expect it’s going to be one of blessing for Israel, but Amos tells them they are mistaken. So, let’s look at that. In Amos 5:18, he says, “Woe to you who long for the Day of the Lord, why do you long for the Day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light, it will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house, rested his hand on the wall, only to have a snake bite him. Will not the Day of the Lord be darkness, not light, pitch dark, without a ray of brightness,” why? “because Israel has turned away from the Lord and God will put judgment on Israel.”

So, if the day of the Lord was a well known expression, and these prophets seem to use it, what does it mean? I think it’s not difficult to determine it’s tied to God’s judgment, but as Amos suggests, the popular conception is that this day would be a day of judgment on Israel’s enemies only. Consequently it would be a day of blessing on Israel itself. Joel and Amos warn against that idea. Then, on the basis of the coming of the day of the Lord, they call the people to repentance with their whole heart.

So those are some general comments about the Day of the Lord, which we’ll discuss a little bit further. Does the Day of the Lord refer to one specific day only, and if so, when is it? If you look at usage, I think you’ll be forced to make the conclusion, that it’s not a reference just to one specific day. Look at Isaiah 13:6 and 9, where you read about the Day of the Lord, “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near, it will come like destruction from the Almighty.” Verse 9, “See, the day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light.” Verse 11, “I will punish the world for its

evil.” The context of those statements in Isaiah 13 is a prophecy against Babylon. Judgment is coming on Babylon, and Babylon will be destroyed. Go down to Isaiah 13:17, “I will stir up against them the Medes.” Verse 19, “Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, Babylon’s pride will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.” That overthrow of Babylon is referred to as the coming of the Day of the Lord.

If you go to Jeremiah 46:10, you have another use of it, in another context, you read, “That day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty—a day of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes. The sword will devour till it is satisfied, till it has quenched its thirst with blood. For the Lord, the Lord Almighty will offer sacrifice in the land in the north by the River Euphrates.” Then you have the message of verse 13, “This is the message the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon to attack Egypt.” So in Jeremiah 46, the Day of the Lord of Hosts, is the day of the battle involving Egypt and Babylon at Carchemish in 605 BC, in which Babylon was victorious and Egypt suffered defeat. This passage is a passage of judgment on Egypt.

So, I don’t think you can say that the Day of the Lord, as used in various contexts in these prophetic books, is always the same Day of the Lord. And as I noted in that next paragraph, it’s not just one particular day, but it’s used to refer to special times of God’s judging and punishing activity. In some passages there’s an eschatological context. That eschatological context says there is a yet future Day of the Lord when ultimately God will bring judgment on all the ungodly, much like Obadiah 15 and 16. But one cannot say that the Day of the Lord in prophecy is always the day of judgment at the end of the world. It would seem that manifestations of God’s judging, punishing activity that foreshadow that final judgment, are also referred to as the Day of the Lord. So you have to be careful. The Day of the Lord is not automatically the eschatological end times. In some contexts it is, but in others like a couple of the ones we have looked at, it is not.

Let’s get back to verse 15 of Obadiah, “The day of the Lord is near for all

nations, as you have done, it will be done to you, your deeds will return upon your own head.” What’s the connection between Edom’s judgment and the judgment of all nations? Keil has a comment on that, it’s on page 37 of your citations, where he says “The difficulty is only removed by the assumption that Obadiah regarded Edom as a type of the nations that had risen up in hostility to the Lord and his people, and were judged by the Lord in consequence, so what he says of Edom applies to all nations which assume the same or similar attitude toward the people of God. From this point of view he could without reserve extend to all nations the retribution which would fall on Edom for its sins.” So, I think that’s the logical flow of thought there, all nations who exhibit similar attitudes and actions to that of Edom will also experience God’s judgment.

So, you go onto verse 16, and there’s another question that arises. It says, “Just as you drank on my holy hill, all the nations will drink continually, and they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.” Who is the “you” there? It says, “you drank.” Is it the Edomites, or is it the Jews? I think in the context, it’s the Edomites. In this whole message of Obadiah, Edom is addressed, not Judah. The parallelism is “As you, Edom, have done,” (Verse 15) “And just as you drank,” (Verse 16). What that means is that in verse 16, the verb “to drink,” is taken in two different senses. In 16a, “Just as you have drank on my holy hill,”—drink is in the sense of celebrate in triumph, rejoicing at what happened to your brother Israel when Jerusalem was plundered— “so all nations will drink continually,” drink, in that second phrase, not in a sense of celebration, but drink in the sense of tasting judgment. In other words, “drinking the cup of God’s wrath.” Just as you drank in celebration on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually, drink in the sense of tasting judgment, the cup of God’s wrath, which becomes a rather common expression in the prophets as well.

I’ve listed some references there, let’s just look at one, Jeremiah 25:15 and 16, where you read, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel said to me, take from my hand this cup, filled with the wine of my wrath, and make all nations to whom

I send you drink it.” Drink here is in the sense of tasting God’s judgment. “When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.” So he took the cup and made all nations to whom he was sent drink it.

#### d. Obadiah 17-21 The Restoration and Future Blessing for Israel

That brings us to verses 17 to 21 in Obadiah, the final section, which I have labeled, “The Restoration and Future Blessing for Israel.” Let me read 17 to 21, and then look at how various people have interpreted these verses. Verse 17 says, “But on Mount Zion will be deliverance, it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess his inheritance.” In other words, judgment is coming on Edom and on all the nations, but in the contrast to that, on Mount Zion, there will be deliverance. Obadiah verse 18, “‘The House of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame, the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau.’ The Lord has spoken. People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord’s.”

#### Ways of Interpreting Obadiah 17-21:

##### 1. Spiritualization Approach -- Church

So, these are interesting verses. Some real interpretive issues arise here. How are these verses to be understood? There are really three basic ways they have been understood. Notice one, some suggest 17 to 21 should be spiritualized and understood as descriptive of the extension of God’s kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel. Remember we looked at the latter part of Isaiah 11 when



we were talking about the question of how to interpret “culturally dated terminology” and of those categories, take it literally, take it symbolically or spiritually, or take it in some kind of correspondence or equivalence. See, that issue comes right back here. Some say, spiritualize it. Theodore Laetsch is an example. He says, “Briefly stated, we have here the future history of Judah and Jerusalem. What’s due to Jerusalem? It’s a symbol for the Church, of its enemies, of those members of the Church who are oppressed, held captive by the enemies.”

On Verses 17 and 18, where you read, “On Mount Zion will be deliverance, the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance, the house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, the house of Esau will be stubble.” What’s that talking about? Laetsch says, “Jerusalem, the very fitting symbol of the New Testament Church, on Mount Zion, within the Church of God shall be deliverance. Literally that escape from the old, evil foe, promised already in Paradise. As a result of this deliverance, there is holiness. A holiness perfect in every detail, a holiness not of man’s making, but procured by the promised Messiah. Another result of this deliverance, and the resulting holiness is the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.”

On verses 19 and 20, where it elaborates on that, and says, “People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead.” You get all this speaking in geographic terms, re-occupation of the land by various segments of the people of Israel. What does Laetsch say about that on 19 to 20? He says, “19 and 20 do not mean that every district named shall possess only that territory named in the predicate. We meet here, rather, with quite a common Hebrew idiom. A number of subjects and first the number of predicates are listed. Each of the predicates are connected with one of the subjects. In reality, all of the subjects are the parts of one body, which carries out the work described by the predicates. Israel, God’s people, shall again possess or take possession of the various districts and countries

named. So that the land occupied then by them shall exceed by far the territory they possessed in the day of Obadiah.” And then he says, “When and how were the promises of 19 and 20 fulfilled?” That becomes the interpretive issue. His response is, “We need not resort to guess work, Matthew and Mark tell us that people from Judea, Jerusalem, Galilee, beyond Jordan, Decapolis, Idumea, Tyre, and Sidon were gained for Christ’s kingdom by Christ’s preaching. The book of Acts records the fulfillment of Obadiah 17-20.” What’s Obadiah 17-20 talking about? Laetsch suggests the expansion of the Church. “The conquest of the countries and districts named by Obadiah by the Church of the New Testament, the true Mount Zion.”

“Philistia,” in verse 19 of Obadiah, where it says, “the people of the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines.” Where is that fulfilled? Laetsch says Acts 8:40. What’s Acts 8:40? Philip appears at Azotus, and traveled about preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Cesarea. It’s the preaching the gospel in Philistine territory. Acts 9:32, “As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. And there he found a man named Aeneas, and he said to him, ‘Jesus Christ heals you, get up and take care of your mat.’ All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.”

You have a reference on the outline there to Samaria in verse 19. Where it says, “People from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines, they will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria.” How’s that fulfilled? Acts 8:5-17, where you read, “Philip went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ to them, when the crowds heard Philip, and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” and so on.

Zeraphath in Phoenicia, verse 20 of Obadiah, is fulfilled in Acts 11:19, “Now those who have been scattered by the persecution in connection with Steven, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message only to the Jews.” Zeraphath is in Phoenicia. Sepharad is in Asia Minor, that’s the Church at Sardis from Revelation 3:1. So, the spread of the Gospel is, in Laetsch’s

view, what is being described here in these verses of Obadiah.

On verse 21, “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord’s.” Laetsch says, “But what about Edom? Are they hopelessly doomed to eternal damnation? No. Obadiah spoke in stern words of judgment against the relentless enemies of God’s people, yet he closes his prophecy with a glorious promise. “Deliverers will be sent to Edom.” Gratitude for their own salvation will prompt the delivered children of God to ascend Mount Zion, proclaim salvation to Edom, their enemy and oppressor.” And here’s the crux of it, “Edom is a ‘type’ and symbol of the grace of God, evidence of the preaching of the Gospel of salvation unto all people. Thus, by faithful cooperation, the members of God’s Church, be they clergy or laymen, the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”

So that’s one way that verses 17 through 21 have been understood. This is not talking about anything in reference to the ethnic or national “nation” of Israel, and geographical, or territorial conquests, but rather it’s talking about spiritual realities of the spread of the Gospel in the context of the beginning of the Church, recorded in the Book of Acts.

## 2. Predicting the Return of Israel to Her Possession

Two, others suggest that these verses are to be understood as predicting the return of Israel to her possession, that is, to her land, and the judgment of Edom as a nation. If this is so, the question then is, has it been fulfilled, or is it yet to be fulfilled? Opinions are divided on that. Some of the commentators, J. B. Payne and Aadlers, understand the prophecy as having been fulfilled, for the most part, in the inter-testamental period. Aadlers on 17b “Israel will re-possess the land from which he had been driven.” That’s that last phrase at 17, “the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance.” Verse 18, “The house of Jacob shall be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, the house of Esau stubble,” destruction will be brought on Edom by a returned Israel. Verse 19, “occupations of those various areas, people from

the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau,” and so on, is Israel’s return to the land, and taking possession of those areas. Verse 20, is really a repetition of 17b, Israel possessing its inheritance. 20 is a repetition and enlargement you might say, giving more detail, “something about Israelites possessing land as far as Zarephath. Exiles from Jerusalem are in Sepharad, will possess the towns of the Negev,” so you get more detail in verse 20.

J. Barton Payne is similar, who says verse 17 is fulfilled it in the return from the Babylonian exile, that’s where the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance. Verse 18, house of Jacob, house of Joseph, are to return in fulfillment from exile. 18b to 21a, where you have all those different territories being occupied, these conquests were accomplished, in Payne’s opinion, in the second century B.C., when northern Judah and Benjamin were the nucleus from which the Jews under the Maccabees pressed out into the areas indicated by the prophet. The saviors, or deliverers, of verse 21, are human, not messianic. Judas and his nephew John Hyrcanus, are the deliverers, who will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. But, Payne believed most of this was fulfilled in the inter-testamental period. Payne then draws a line between 21A and 21B. And at 21B, he says “the kingdom shall be Yahweh’s” is fulfilled in the future Messianic age. So, you move from that inter-testamental period, Maccabean time in 21A, to eschatological end times, in 21B, “The kingdom will be the Lord’s.” My question there is why not take 21B in the less absolute sense? That is, in the action of the saviors or deliverers if you understand them to be a reference to the Maccabees, why not understand 21B “The kingdom will the Lord’s” as God’s sovereignty being displayed in the achievements of the Maccabees?

So, Aalders and J. Barton Payne both see 17-21 as something, at least with the exception of 21B, as already fulfilled. Rather, with some kind of spiritual sense that these words take a pretty literal understanding of what is being described. Now, the interesting thing is, Aalders is an amillennialist. You might expect Aalders to understand this as descriptive of the Church, in a spiritual sense, the

way most amillennialists do. But he does not. Payne is a premillennialist. You might expect Payne to take it in that way then.

But notice what Aalders does at this point. He's an amillennialist, but he thinks this is fulfilled in the inter-testamental period. He says, "We must take into consideration the matter of typology." And then we see in the relationship of Edom to Israel, the relationship of the world to the church of Christ. Just as here a strong judgment is pronounced on Edom for its animosity towards Jacob, so also the world will undergo God's judgment for its animosity towards the Church. And like restored Israel shall triumph over Edom, so shall the Church triumph over all who were opposed to her. Esau was just as Jacob, a son of Isaac and a grandson of Abraham. But the Edomites were the bitter enemies of Israel. So also in the new economy there are those born in the family of the Church who later become her most bitter enemies. But God will cause the Church to triumph over such enemies." Now you see, what Aalders is doing there, he's saying in that relationship between Edom and Israel you can see a typological significance portraying the relationship between the Church and the world. Seems to me that's legitimate, you're talking about the same kind of dichotomy or relationship. He's not saying that 17 to 21 is speaking directly about the Church, but he's saying that in the relationship between Edom and Israel, typologically, we can see something about the relationship between the Church and the world. Now among those who suggest that we should view 17 to 21 as the return of Israel to her possession, Aalders and Payne see that as something already fulfilled in the inter-testamental period.

### 3. The Other Side of Prophecy is Yet to be Fulfilled – Final Reapportionment of the Land

B., "The other side of prophecy is yet to be fulfilled." The example is Gaebelein. He says 17B is the restoration of Israel to the land, "the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance," is not yet fulfilled. In other words, he doesn't see that

fulfillment in the inter-testamental period. Although, and this is where his interpretation doesn't work very well, he then in verse 18, where it says, "The house of Jacob shall be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble," he says 18 was fulfilled by Judas Maccabeus and John Hyrcanus. So, 18 is already fulfilled and then when you get to 19 and 20, that is also yet to be fulfilled. Gaebelien comments of 19 and 20 where you have that possession of various parts of the land, he says, "One might write over these two verses, this heading, in large letters. 'The Final Re-apportionment of the Land.'"

#### Conclusion on Obadiah 17-21

How are these verses to be taken? Are we to agree with those who see their fulfillment in the past, or like many others, are we to give up any attempt to take them as meaning what they say but simply spiritualize geographical details into a vague prediction of the dominion of the Church? Or, finally, do we have here a brief outline of God's ultimate solution to the Palestinian problem during the millennium? Surely, this last alternative is best. For read in this way, the verses are consistent with the course of Old Testament prophecy as a whole. At the discussion of details, Gaebelien observes that we'll come to a conclusion with difficulty. "You may be certain that these details are all known to God, he has not forgotten his dispersed people, his covenant with them is enduring. One day when the Messiah will occupy the throne of David, the tangled scheme of these predictions will be unraveled." So he looks for future fulfillment of verses 19 and 20. Exactly how, he is not too certain, but it has not yet been fulfilled. Of 21, "The deliverers go up on mount Zion." He says, "In the restricted historic sense of this prophecy, Obadiah is looking forward to such a human deliverance as a Zerubbabel or Judas Maccabeas, but these saviors, are at best a foreshadowing of the Savior, who is yet to come in Obadiah's day, and who's second glorious return we are now awaiting." Skip down a bit, "It is hardly relevant to ask what he meant, but what he saw was the Savior of the world, the Savior who will judge,

the Savior who it is said by biblical prophecy, ‘The kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ.’”

Scientific exegesis sees nothing of this sort in these words, but we may venture to say it is that. And in reference to that last note in the Scofield Bible. There’s a note on verse 18, “House of Jacob shall be a house of fire, Joseph’s house a flame, Esau’s house of stubble,” saying, “Edom will be revived in the later days.” Remember we talked about that with culturally-dated terminology? This pushes culturally-dated terminology to its limits and says, nations that are mentioned, those very nations will be involved at the time of fulfillment.

So you get a host of interpretive issues with a passage like this, there are a lot of passages like this in the prophetic books, it’s kind of what you’d encounter any place, in 17 to 21. What do you do with them? Is it talking about the Church in a spiritual sense, is it talking about a more literal sense, and if so has it already been fulfilled, or is it yet to be fulfilled? I’m inclined to come down on that more literal sense, but in the way Aalders and Payne do, and say it was fulfilled in the inter-testamental period, particularly with the activities of the Maccabees.

### Concluding Comments on Obadiah

Go over to the last page of this, just a few concluding comments. Obadiah is a remarkable prophetic book. It deserves much more attention than it normally receives. Paul Raabe captures its significance in the first paragraph of his Anchor Bible Commentary on Obadiah, I think this paragraph kind of pulls it all together. He says, “The book of Obadiah is the smallest book in the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, with only one chapter.” There, what do you call the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, the proper word is the *Tanak*. “Hebrew Bible” is generally the thing used in academic circles today or Christian circles, but usually Jewish people, they call it the TaNaK, which comes from the Law (Torah), prophets (Nebiim) and the writings (Kethubim). “With only one chapter and 21 verses, it can easily be overlooked by readers of the Bible.” What are 21 verses,

compared to say, the 1364 verses of Jeremiah? “Yet, a close study of Obadiah is worth the effort. For one thing, its small size proves to be advantageous. Readers can hold in the mind, and memorize the whole book without too much difficulty. This enables them to see the entire forest without getting lost among the trees, something that cannot be done so easily with a large book. Furthermore, Obadiah flows in the mainstream of the Israelite prophetic tradition, a characteristic that has not always been recognized. This short book elegantly summarizes many of the great prophetic themes, such as divine judgment against Israel’s enemies, in this case Edom, the Day of Yahweh, the Day of the Lord.” We talked about that briefly, “the Lex talionis as the standard of judgment, as you have done, so will you have done to you, the cup of wrath metaphor, Zion theology, ‘on Mount Zion will be deliverance,’ Israel’s possession of the land, ‘Israel will possess its inheritance,’ and the kingship of Yahweh, ‘the kingdom will be the Lord’s’ at the end of the book. That is a remarkable collection of themes that are developed elsewhere in more detail but flow through the prophetic books. Thereby, the book serves as a concise epitome of much of the message of the prophets. It also illustrates the nature of prophetic discourse. It’s poetry and prose, it’s types of speech, such as judgment, accusation, warning and promise, and it’s rhetorical style. It especially exemplifies oracles against the foreign nations, a category that occupies much of the corpus of the latter prophets, you have numerous prophecies in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, against heathen nations, against unjust Israel. Therefore, attention to the little book of Obadiah should prove to be a rewarding experience for serious students of the Bible.” So I think he sort of summarizes quite well here, the importance of this book which, I think, we generally overlook and ignore.

In Obadiah, my own comment here, we’re also given a remarkable view into the future in the short span of 21 verses. Significant prophecies, one judgment on Edom. Two destructions of Jerusalem, which are not mentioned by name, but it seems to me that’s what surfaces in 12 to 14, and a warning for the future. Scattering of Israel and Judah is intimated in verse 20, return of the Israelites from



exile and dominion extended over Edom in Maccabean times and lastly perhaps the establishment of a future messianic kingdom of Yahweh in 21, although I'm inclined to pick 21 as simply a part of that section that is fulfilled in the inter-testamental period.

## Joel

### A. Author and Date

Now let's move on from Obadiah to Joel. Joel, A. is, "Author and date," and B. is, "Content." So, we'll look a little bit at author and date. It's probably the most difficult of all the prophetic books to date with any degree of certainty but, as you'll note on this handout, it takes its name from Joel, the son of Pethuel, which you find in 1:1, "The word of the Lord came to Joel, son of Pethuel." But we know nothing otherwise about the personal history either of Joel or Pethuel from the book itself or from anywhere else in the Old Testament. So, as far as the date is concerned, you only can get at that by indirect indications from the book and inferences from those indirect indications. For that reason it's difficult to come to a conclusion that everyone believes. There are two basic positions. First, the post-exilic date, after the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, 430 B.C. or something even much later. Or, a pre-exilic date at the time of King Joash 835 B.C. I've opted for that pre-exilic date but not with a great degree of dogmatism. Let's look at what the issues are.

#### 1. The Arguments for the Post-exilic Date

The arguments for the post-exilic date, a., it is said that verses such as 3:2b, 3, 5, 6, and 17 only could have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, and therefore Joel prophesied after this event. Now those verses, 3:2b says, "They scattered my people among the nations, and divided up my land." Verse 3, "They cast lots for my people, traded boys for prostitutes, sold girls for wine." Verse 5, "You took my silver and my gold, and carried off my finest treasures to

your temples.” Verse 6, “You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland,” and 17, “Then you will know, that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy, never again will foreigners invade her.” The argument is statements like that could only have been written after the Babylonian exile of 586 B.C. But in connection with that, because the first couple chapters presuppose the existence of a temple and temple service, it must be later than Haggai and Zechariah. In other words, not only after 586, but also after return from exile and re-establishment of the temple service.

I don't think it's so certain that chapter 3 presupposes the events of 586. It should be noticed that there's nothing said about the destruction of the temple and city. The presence of aliens in Jerusalem, the plundering of silver and gold, taking of prisoners could have happened in connection with several such incidents, from Shishak's invasion to that of the Philistines and Arabs, to that of Jehoram's day. But more importantly, and I think this really is the issue, it is also possible to take the reference in 3:2b, as a prophetic reference to the present day diaspora of Israel which began with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. “I will enter into judgment against them, concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they have scattered my people,” who is the “they”? That's “the nations,” it goes back to 3:1, “In those days at that time when I destroyed the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations, bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations.” That could be prophetic, many maintain. But that's one argument, those statements could only have been written after 586.

## 2, There are Some Arguments from Silence

Then b., there are some arguments from silence. Arguments from silence are generally not very convincing. But 1., the prophecy concerns Judah and Jerusalem,” that is the language used for example in 3:20, where it says “Judah

will be inhabited forever, Jerusalem, through all generations.”

a. No Explicit Reference in Joel to the Northern Kingdom

And it is argued that there’s no explicit reference in Joel to the Northern Kingdom. It is argued that if the Northern Kingdom was still in existence, you would expect some reference to it. The conclusion is that the Northern Kingdom had already been destroyed. Where the term “Israel” is used, which it is, it’s to be understood as a reference to the Kingdom of Judah, in 2:27, 3:2, and 16, but as E. J. Young points out in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, “There was in the prophecy no particular occasion for using the name of the Northern Kingdom.” In other words, the name of Israel belonged to the Southern as well as to the Northern Kingdom; there’s no distinction made between them as you find elsewhere sometimes, Ephraim, and Judah, the Northern Kingdom, you don’t find that in Joel. But how much can you make of that?

b. No Mention of the King

A second argument from silence is that there’s no mention of the king. But there are several references to the elders, 1:2, 1:14, and 2:16. Joel, 1:2 says, “Hear this, you elders.” In 1:14, “Summon the elders and all who live in the land,” and 2:16, “Gather the people, consecrate the assembly, bring together the elders, gather the children.” Now, it seems to me that in both these arguments, no distinction is made between Ephraim and Judah, no reference to the king, they are arguments from silence, and share weaknesses of all such arguments. Pre-exilic prophecies of Nahum and Habakkuk also don’t mention the king. The references to the elders, you find in all periods of Israel’s history. Furthermore, it’s not entirely clear whether these references are references to the office, or simply to older men. It seems to me if you look at 2:16, it’s probably just older men, because it says, “Gather people, consecrate the assembly, bring together the elders,” and look what follows, “gather the children. Those nursing at the breast,

let the bridegroom leave his chamber, let the priests and ministers.” It’s just different categories of people, not necessarily the office. So, I’m not sure you can say that no mention of the king and the couple references to elders means you must place this in the time when there wasn’t a king.

### C. No Distinction between Ephraim and Judah – So Called Apocalyptic Sections

A third argument, after those references in chapter 3 that presupposed 586 had already happened, no distinction between Ephraim and Judah, and no reference to a king is c., the presence of the so-called apocalyptic sections. This is pointed to by some, although, usually, not by evangelicals, but in mainstream commentaries you will find this strongly emphasized, as evidence for a late date. Now what are some of the apocalyptic features? The term “apocalyptic” means disclosure or revelation. This is used in Revelation 1:1, “The apocalypse of John.” It was borrowed and applied to a genre of Jewish literature which flourished from about 200 B.C. to 100 A.D. There’s a genre of apocalyptic literature—on the basis of genre classification, any book containing this type of literature is considered by some scholars as necessarily late and that would include for example, Isaiah 24-27, the “Isaiah apocalypse,” which is a section of Isaiah that has similarities to what is characterized as apocalyptic literature. If all apocalyptic literature is late, then Isaiah 24-27 is late and it’s not from Isaiah, and Joel is late.

However, I don’t think it’s quite as simple as that. I think a distinction has to be made between what you might call biblical and later non-biblical apocalyptic literature. There is a category of non-biblical apocalyptic literature that flourished in that late period from about 200 B.C. to 100 A.D. The next paragraph is a paragraph from R. K. Harrison’s *Introduction to the Old Testament*, describing the features of the later non-biblical apocalyptic literature. Notice what he says there, “The visionary material of Daniel has frequently been described in terms of ‘apocalypticism,’ which is popularly understood to have originated in

Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Persia, and to comprise a dualistic, cosmic, and eschatological belief in two opposing cosmic powers, God and the evil one, and in two distinct ages, the present one, which is held to be under the power of the evil one, and the future eternal age in which God will overthrow the power of evil and reign supreme with his elect under conditions of eternal righteousness. While this approach has elements in common with the thought of certain OT writers, it is important for a distinction to be drawn between biblical and non-biblical apocalyptic,” that I think is the issue here, and we want “to avoid reading into the canonical Scriptures thought that either occurred in Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature of a subsequent period or that was foreign to the thought of Judaism altogether. In this connection it should be noted that the prophets of Israel placed the final redemption of the elect in this world. While the new order is to be established by the coming of the divine kingdom would be continuous with the present world sequences, it would be different in that suffering, violence and evil, would be absent from the scene.

#### Discourse on Apocalyptic Literature and Its Features

There’s an enormous amount of literature on apocalyptic literature. If you look in your bibliography under this heading, there are some references if you want to look further into that. There is one volume mentioned there by Leon Morris about apocalyptic literature. In Morris’s second paragraph on the handout, he points out that apocalyptic literature is professedly revelatory. In other words, it claims to be giving revelation. It is pseudonymous, that is, we don’t know who the real writers are, but they come under assumed names such as Enoch, the Testament of Moses, 2 Esdras, the Apocalypse of Abraham, writings of that sort. So it’s professedly revelatory, pseudonymous, and contains much symbolism.

He also notes that it is characterized by these four dominant concepts: dualism, pessimism, determinism, and ethical passivity. Now what does Morris mean by dualism, pessimism, determinism, and ethical passivity?

Dualism: Late non-Biblical apocalyptic literature expresses an eschatological dualism involving a sharp contrast between the present age and the age to come. The present and the future were seen as quite unrelated. Why? The problem is, Israel has received and kept God's law. Why, then, are they suffering? It can't be God's doing, the only answer is that God's ways are inscrutable. He will ultimately rectify the situation, but the final redemptive act has no bearing on the present. The present age is under the power of the evil one. So, there is that contrast between the present age, which is under the power of the evil one, and the age to come.

Pessimism: The apocalyptic literature was pessimistic about things. God had abandoned this age to suffering and evil. It's the only possible explanation for the current plight of the Jews.

Determinism: There's little emphasis on a sovereign God who is acting in history to carry out his purposes; rather, God himself is awaiting the passing of the times that he has decreed.

Ethical Passivity: As the apocalyptic writers saw it the problem in their day was not the need for national repentance. Ethical exhortation is lacking, because there's a loss of a sense of sinfulness. The problem of the apocalyptists is that Israel does keep the law, and therefore is righteous, and yet they are permitted to suffer. In contrast, the prophets continually appeal to Israel for repentance, to turn to God. So, there is quite a distinction there between the prophetic eschatological literature and this late apocalyptic literature. This late apocalyptic literature involves these ideas of dualism, pessimism, determinism, and ethical passivity.

With that in mind, it seems to me, there's no basis to classify Joel as apocalyptic literature of the sort that would justify using this literary type as the basis for a late date. In other words, this argument seems to me to be invalid. All that can be said is that the eschatological element is prominent in the book of Joel. That's true, and there is some imagery in the book of Joel, especially imagery of the locusts in chapter 2. But that in itself is no reason to date it late, particularly for

those who accept the authenticity of Isaiah's little apocalypse in Isaiah 24-27, that it was written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. So, those are arguments for a late date, that latter argument about the apocalyptic character of the book really comes more from non-evangelical scholars than from evangelical. So then you're left with those references in chapter 3, the lack of a reference to a king, and the lack of a distinction between Ephraim and Judah. So those are not strong arguments.

### C. The Pre-exilic Date of Joel

#### a. The Nations Mentioned fit pre-exilic times

Let's quickly look at the pre-exilic date. Those who opt for a pre-exilic date usually place the book in the time of Joash at about 835 B.C. Letter a., the nations mentioned in chapter 3 as enemies fit a pre-exilic time better than post exilic-times. Assyria and Babylon are not mentioned. Those who are mentioned are the Phoenicians, Philistines, Egyptians and Edomites. Philistines in verse 4, and Egyptians in verse 19 and Edomites in verse 19. In other words, the enemy nations mentioned in chapter 3 are early pre-exilic enemies of Judah.

#### b. The Absence of a King and Prominence of Priests

Point b., the absence of a king and prominence of priests. Quite a few references to the priests may point to the time when Joash as a young boy, ruled under the regency of the high priest. Remember, he assumed the throne as an infant, and the high priest was really the ruling authority. Though, again, that's an inference, there's no direct connection from any statement in the book of Joel to that time.

#### c. The position of the Book in the Order of the Minor Prophets

Point c., position of the book and the order of the minor prophets. Although this is not a decisive argument, remember we talked about the order earlier. What is clear, is Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi, the last three, are post-exilic. If this is

post-exilic why isn't it put with Haggai and Zechariah? But again, why is the order the way it is? It's only those last three that seem to have a chronological principle.

The argument from parallel passages of other prophets is used for dating. Those that try to use this find some parallels in Amos and some other prophets and then argue that Joel is primary, the others secondary, but I think it's extremely difficult to use that argument. As Driver says, "Nothing is more difficult (except under especially favorable circumstances) than from a mere comparison of parallel passages to determine on which side the priority lies." So, I don't think that's a strong argument.

Conclusion: There is no Decisive Basis for Fixing the Date of Joel

That brings us to a conclusion; there is no decisive basis for fixing the date of Joel. I don't see any urgent reason to place the book in late post-exilic times. It seems to fit in pre-exilic times; I suggest that, but it certainly can't be proven. So I think we leave it as an open question. But I'm inclined to suggest the earlier time, during the reign of Joash around 835 B.C. rather than later during the post-exilic period.

That brings us to B., "The Content of the book" and we'll begin with that next time.

Transcribed by Caroline Meditz  
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt



## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 18

### Structure and Content of Joel

#### B. Content of Joel

##### 1. Relationship of Joel 1 to Joel 2: Freeman

When you get to the content of Joel an important question you have to resolve is the question of the relationship between chapter 1 and chapter 2. In Hobart Freeman's, *Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, he talks about various approaches to the book centering around the interpretation of the relationship of the first two chapters. He gives three views listed here as a. b. and c.

##### a. Apocalyptic Interpretation

a. is the one that he adopts and I think a view that seems to fit the book better than the other views. He labels it "the apocalyptic interpretation." What that view gives is an understanding of chapter 1 as being literal and chapter 2 as being figurative, if you boil it down. As I say here in the handout, such an approach takes chapter 1 as a literal description of an actual locust plague that had recently devastated the land. Then Joel uses that description for apocalyptic imagery in chapter 2 where he is describing a future invasion of Judah by her enemies in the latter days. So chapter 1 would be literal and chapter 2 would be a figurative extension using the imagery of the locusts to describe an eschatological event.

##### b. Allegorical Interpretation

The second view b. takes both chapters figuratively. Freeman calls that "an allegorical" as opposed to "an apocalyptic" view. It takes both chapters figuratively and sees in them descriptions of a series of enemy attacks in their future history. The four types of locusts mentioned in 1:4, where you read, "What the locust swarm have left, the great locusts have eaten, what the great locusts

have left, the young locusts have eaten what the young locusts have left, the other locusts have eaten.” That is viewed as four invasions of Israel. The four types of locusts representing Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome. Chapter 2 is descriptive of the end times and the establishment of the millennial kingdom, but both chapters are figurative.

### c. Literal View

A third view c. would take both chapters as literal and that would be the “literal view.” Both chapter 1 and chapter 2 describe severe locusts plagues. The one in chapter 2 is more severe than chapter 1 as it is the one that will usher in the Day of the Lord in a future time.

So I think those are helpful categories both figurative, both literal, or a combination of figurative and literal. The latter being in Freeman’s designation “apocalyptic,” both figurative is “allegorical” and both literal, he calls, “literal.” Ridderbos sees both as literal. Chapter 1 the devastation of the countryside, chapter 2 entrance of the plague into the city. But in chapter 2 he feels there is a fusion of the locust plague and the Day of the LORD so that some of the references point beyond present disaster to a great future judgment. In other words, Ridderbos’ view would be sort of midway between the Freeman’s apocalyptic and literal view.

## 2. Bullock’s Approach

Look at the next page in your handout. You’ve already read Bullock on this. I mentioned there that Bullock categorizes methods of interpreting Joel differently. He gives three answers to the question of whether the locusts in 1:1-2:17 are to be viewed as historical. We’re going to come back to that way of dividing the book 1:1-2:17. He really takes 1:1-2:17 as a unit. He doesn’t take a break between chapter 1 and 2. He places the break in the middle of chapter 2. But he gives three answers to the question of whether the locusts are to be used in

a literal way or not. 1. is the historical literal to describe the locust plague that occurred in Joel's lifetime. 2. is allegorical—the locusts are an allegory of invading armies against Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The third is “apocalyptic.” He uses apocalyptic differently than Freeman does. In Bullock's view apocalyptic categories he says it is eschatological—not terrestrial invaders but extra-terrestrial invaders who usher in the Day of the LORD. I don't know where he gets that view. He says it's not widely held and he doesn't document who holds that view. I'm not sure who holds that view. He cites no one who advocates it. Just so you don't confuse these labels of Bullock and Freeman. I think Freeman's categories are more helpful than Bullock's. So that's one question before you really get to looking at the text. How do you see the relationship between chapter 1 and chapter 2?

### 3. Structure of Joel and the Day of the Lord

There is a second question that is also important as a preliminary consideration and that is the chronological sequence in the flow of the material through the book. What are the temporal relationships of the events in the various sections of the book? Obscurity on this point is one of the factors that complicates understanding the structure of the book and in turn may affect one's interpretation of the book. Many interpreters, including Bullock, divide the book at 2:17 producing two major sections, 1:1-2:17 and 2:18 to the end, 3:21. The first part of the book is seen as a lamentation over locust plagues and divine judgment. The second part of the book is seen as descriptive of a change of fortune to future blessing that has resulted from repentance. Bullock and some others who understand this structure of the book, see a major dividing point between 2:17 and 2:18. The second part of the book is a change in fortune and future blessing as a result of an assumed repentance between 2:17 and 2:18. In my view, framing the structure of the book in this way obscures the relationship between three distinct units in the book.

Let me give you an alternative suggestion to what Bullock is suggesting as far as structure. It is my view that in analyzing the structure of the book it is important to notice that 2:10 and 11 and 2:31 and 3:15 give a similar sign for the Day of the Lord that is referred to in 2:1 as coming. Now let's look at those three texts. 2:10 and 11 says, "Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?" You have a reference here to the Day of the LORD. In connection with the coming of the Day of the LORD, you have these cosmic signs: the sun and moon are darkened and the stars no longer shine, the day of the LORD is great. That's 2:10 and 11.

Look at 2:31, "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." The day of the LORD comes with cosmic signs in 2:31. Joel 3:14b says, "For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem." Once again the Day of the LORD is accompanied by the sun and moon being darkened. So in those three references scattered through the book of Joel, it seems like you have a reference to the same Day of the LORD. It's the same words.

Now it seems to me that suggests that the Day of the LORD referred to in those three places is to be understood as the same day historically. If this is true that means there are three parallel accounts of this "day" in three different sections of the book. These three accounts of the coming Day of the LORD may be viewed as complementary to each other, emphasizing three different aspects of the same subject. It seems to me that is at the heart of the question: how is the book structured?

### 3. Vannoy's Structure of Joel

#### a. Joel 1:1-20 Locust Plague

Look then at 3 on your outline there. The book divides into two sections and that division is not at 2:17 and 18, but it divides into two sections Roman numeral I, is chapter 1:1-20a—description of a contemporary locust plague. I take that as a literal locust plague that happened during the time of Joel's ministry, and he interprets that as a judgment from the Lord and issues a call to repentance.

The second section of the book begins at 2:1 and goes to the end. What you find in the second section of the book is three descriptions of the coming Day of the LORD and these three descriptions complement each other. They address different aspects of coming of the Day of the LORD.

#### b. Joel 2:1-27: Day of Lord using Locus Imagery

You have three, as it were, parallel descriptions of the Day of the LORD. In 2:1-27 the day of the LORD is described in the imagery of the present locusts and drought. In other words, Joel picks up the language of chapter 1 in which he has described a literal locust plague and uses that to speak of the eschatological Day of the LORD.

#### c. Joel 2:28-31 Holy Spirit and the Day of the Lord

In 2:28-32 which if you look in your Hebrew Bible you will find is a separate chapter. In the Masoretic Text it is chapter 3. In other words, in the Hebrew 2:28-32 is distinctly set apart from the earlier part 2:1-27. In 2:28-32 you have the promise of coming of the Holy Spirit which will precede the Day of the LORD. That's that well known passage quoted in the book of Acts 2, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" and that pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh is to precede the Day of the Lord. So here is a second description of the coming of the Day of the LORD that focuses on a different aspect of it.

d. Joel 3:1-21 Judgment on the Nations and Salvation of God's People: Day of Lord

Then a third description of the coming of the Day of the LORD is 3:1-21. In the Masoretic text it is also a separate chapter, it is chapter 4, which speaks of the judgment on the nations and the salvation of God's people in connection to the coming of the Day of the LORD.

e. Summary of Structure of Joel

So it seems to me in book of Joel structurally, you have chapter one: description of the locust plague. Then chapter 2 to the end is three parallel descriptions of the coming of the Day of the LORD. You arrive at that conclusion because of the language of 2:10 and 11, 2:31 and 3:15 all describing the coming of the Day of the LORD in the same language. We'll come back to structure when we get into content and look at 2:17 and 18 with those who want to divide the book into two sections at 2:17 and 18 which obscures this idea of three parallel descriptions of the coming Day of the LORD.

4. Comments on Content:

a. Joel 1:1-20 Description of Present Locust Plague

Four is some comments on content. a. is 1:1-20. That is Roman numeral I in the outline, "Description of the present Locust plague." What you find in chapter 1 is a description of a locust plague in the time of Joel but not just a locust plague. The locust plague was combined with drought and fire. Look at verse 12, "The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree—all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away." Look at verse 20, "Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures." Verse 19 also says, "Fire has devoured the open pasture, flames have burned up all the trees

of the field.” So the description of this judgment is a combination of locust plague, yes, but also drought and fire. Fire often accompanies drought. You need to live in California to experience this. But it seems to me in 1:1-20 Joel is describing a real locust plague and drought, contrary to some who see merely symbolism and allegory. He interprets this as the judgment of God and as such it is a call to repentance and in that perspective it is a manifestation of the Day of the LORD. In verse 15, “Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near.” The NIV says, “It will come like destruction from the Almighty.” That can be translated in the present instead of the future. “It comes like destruction from the Almighty.” This locust plague is a manifestation of the day.

It’s that perspective that this judgment is a manifestation of the Day of the LORD that enables Joel to move from the present situation to the eschatological principle. God will come in judgment on all who do not repent and call on the name of the LORD. So it seems to me that is what is going on in the first chapter.

#### Four Terms for Locusts

Let’s look at a few of the verses. Verse 4 is that verse that mentions four different kinds of locusts, “What the locust swarm has left, the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left, the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left, other locusts have eaten.” Four different Hebrew words for locusts. What do you do with that? Some have suggested the reference is to stages in the locusts life. The problem with that is in 2:25 you have the same four terms used but they are used in a different order. In 2:25, “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you.” If it’s stages of growth you would think the order would be the same. So I’m not inclined to think it is stages of growth.

The interesting thing is there are nine words in Hebrew for locusts. Hebrew has a rich vocabulary for locusts. English as far as I know only has one word. There’s no equivalent in English for these distinctions in these Hebrew words.

And exactly what the distinction is, I'm not sure. But I don't see in the four words here any basis for the allegorical view of seeing Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome or Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome.

### Description of Devastation

Now let's look at verses 5, 9 and 13. Verse 5 says, "Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips." Verse 9, "Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD." Verse 13, "Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God." Verses 5, 9, and 13 tell us the plague was so destructive there was not sufficient vegetation left for the meal and drink offerings of the temple. There was no new wine, the land was desolate.

In the December 1915 issue of the National Geographic there is a description of a similar sort of locust plague that hit Palestine. There is an eyewitness description of what the writer of that article observed in the devastation of a locust plague in 1915. I won't read through it but the parallels are interesting. The amount of destruction of those swarms of locusts can cause to vegetation is amazing. So I think Joel's describing that sort of a plague.

### Call to Repentance

In verses 13 and 14, in light of that judgment, Joel calls on the people to repent and cry out to God. Verse 13, "Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD." He calls for prayer and fasting, a return to the



LORD. He understands that this disaster is an act of God. God acts in Israel's history not only in blessing but also in judgment. Here was the actualization of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:38 and 42. Go back to Deuteronomy 28:38, "You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it." That's one of the covenant curses. When you turn away from the LORD you can expect certain things to happen. Verse 42, "Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land." So Joel is the realization of that covenant curse.

The interesting thing in Joel—go back to chapter 1 verse 3, "Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation." In other words, these mighty acts of God are not only acts of deliverance and salvation, such as at the time of the Exodus Passover when Israel was to remember that and tell children down through the generations. Here you are to remember the judgment of God and tell it to your children down through the generations.

Verse 15, which I already made a comment on, says, "Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty." Joel sees the Day of the LORD as near. It seems he sees the Day of the LORD of consisting in a contemporary locust plague or perhaps a harbinger of its coming. Viewed in this way it is a provisional divine judgment that is intended to point forward to the great day that is to come. So, it seems to me that is what is going on in chapter one.

### Joel 2:1-3:21 3 Descriptions of the Day of the LORD

We move to the second section of the book, which is 2:1 to 3:21, in which you have these three parallel descriptions of the coming of the Day of the LORD—the eschatological Day of the LORD as contrasted to this provisional divine judgment in chapter 1.

### Joel 2:1-27 Day of the Lord using Locust Imagery

And the first of those three descriptions is in 2:1-27, which is the bulk of chapter 2 with the exception of verses 28-32, which as I already mentioned is a separate chapter in the Hebrew Bible. So Joel 2:1-27 the Day of the LORD described in the imagery of the present locust plague of chapter 1. That's that question of the relationship of chapter 1 and chapter 2 which fits with the apocalyptic interpretation where you move from literal to figurative or symbolic language in chapter 2.

Verses 1-11. In chapter 1 the locust plague imagery is described as something that has already occurred. In chapter 2 the description is of something in process. The perfect tenses of the verbs in chapter 1 are replaced for the most part, especially in 2:3-9 by imperfects in chapter 2. Chapter 2 thus speaks of something that either will happen or is in the process of happening. There is a change of the tense of the verbs. In chapter 2 the locusts seem to have become eschatological symbols representing human invaders.

Freeman examines the expression "the invader from the north" in verse 20 in connection with this. In 2:20 you read, "I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise." Freeman's comments, "The 'north' is a technical term in the Old Testament which often appears in passages of an apocalyptic nature and in such contexts is always symbol of the enemies of Israel. In this connection it is also used to indicate the direction from which calamity and misfortunes come upon Palestine. Assyria and Babylon came out of the north against the Hebrew nation and appear in Scripture not only as contemporary enemies of Israel, but also typical of her end times foe who was to come out of the north, that is, the eschatological 'northerner.'" And there are a number of references there. That eschatological northerner is mentioned in Zechariah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zephaniah. I won't take the time to look up all those references.

### Northern Enemy

I've included a paragraph from Allen's NICOT commentary on page 37 of your citations because I think he makes an interesting analogy between this language and another well-known piece of literature. He says, "The locusts are referred to collectively as 'the northerner.' The insects usually attack Judah from the south or southeast, borne by the prevailing wind, but cases are known of approach from the north. The plague that hit Jerusalem in 1915," that's the one that was in National Geographic, "came from the northeast. Presumably in Joel's time the onset came from the north; the ensuing references to geographical features in the other three directions support this inference. But as in 2:1-11 the locusts were seen through psychic spectacles, so here the present term has a numinous dimension superimposed upon the natural. Earlier prophets had given dreaded descriptions of the 'enemy from the north.'" Now Allen, who dates Joel late, so he's saying those other prophets, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah that spoke of this northern enemy earlier. "The earlier prophets had given dread description of the 'enemy from the north.' The phrase has something of the flavor of Tolkien's grim hosts of Mordor. In Ezekiel 38:15; 39:2 the apocalyptic hordes of Gog come from the farthest north to destroy Judah, only to be smashed by Yahweh's counterattack." Now it seems to me, Joel is talking about the same thing as Ezekiel 38-39. "Even before Ezekiel's time, Jeremiah had made the theme his own, using it repeatedly to describe the uncanny forces of evil that Yahweh would employ as his agents to punish a sinful Judah." I won't read the next paragraph. But you get the reference to this northern army that the Lord will drive away in verse 20.

### Judgment of God in Locust Imagery

I haven't read the earlier part of the chapter. Let me read a few verses of it to get the flavor of the text. Let's look at the first seven verses of chapter 2,

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the Garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste—nothing escapes them.”

So, this is the imagery of the locusts. “They have the appearance of horses, they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. They do not jostle each other.” Then verse 9, “They rush upon the city.” So there’s this picture of this devastation this judgment of God in the imagery of locusts coming on the land.

#### Joel 2:12-17 Call to Repentance

Verses 12-17 is a call to repentance. Verse 12 says, “‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly, bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the LORD weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why

should they say among the peoples, “Where is their God?”” So there is a very strongly worded call to repentance, “rend your hearts not your garments.”

#### Joel 2:18-27 The Lord’s Response

Verses 18-27 describe the response of the LORD. There is a translation issue in verse 18. You notice in your handout I’ve given the translations of five English language versions. The King James says, “The LORD will be jealous,” it’s future. The New Scofield, “Then the LORD was jealous,” past. The NIV, “The LORD will be jealous,” future. The New American Standard, “Then the LORD will be jealous.” New Revised Standard Version, “Then the LORD became jealous,” that’s past. Now the question here, is verse 18 telling you about something that will happen or something that had already happened. I might add to those translations. The English Standard Version “it came” just like the NRSV. The New Living is future “Then the LORD will pity his people and jealousy guard of his land.” So 18 and following “The LORD’s response.”

Many think this is not a prophecy but an account of what happened. If you understand it that way you translate it as past. The verbs are translated in the sense of a completed action. In such cases a pause is assumed between verses 17 and 18 in which one supposes that the day of repentance that Joel called for was held. Because 17 was a call for repentance, the assumption is that offer of repentance was something that was observed, and then in 18 and following you have the LORD’s response. It’s a description of a change in the LORD’s relationship to his people as a result of the already-manifested repentance. This then becomes the major dividing point in the entire book, as interpreted by Bullock and others.

The problem with this, in my view, is there is no mention of the presumably held day of repentance. It’s called for but there is no description of it having actually taken place. And much of what is contained in the remainder of the passage is difficult to interpret as having already occurred, even if the chapter

refers only to a contemporary locust plague. What I mean by that is, look at verse 19 in the aftermath in the LORD's response. The LORD says in verse 19, "I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations." The NIV says, "Never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations." Verse 20 says, "I will drive the northern army from you, and remove the invader from the north." Verse 25 says, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten." But most importantly look at verse 26b and 27a. 26b says, "Never again will my people be shamed. And 27b says the same thing, "Never again will my people be shamed." If one understands Joel to be describing a locust plague and a call for repentance which was observed between verses 17, and 18 and then 18 is the response of the LORD and you translate that in a past tense, "The LORD was jealous for his land, he took deep pity on his people," how can you in the remaining flow of that response make the statement "never again will my people be shamed"? After the time of Joel Israel was shamed repeatedly.

#### Joel 2:18 and the Prophetic Perfect

So that brings us back to the translation issue in verse 18. If you look at the Hebrew text there is a *waw* consecutive with the imperfect. "And the LORD" you would normally translate that "was jealous for his land." That *waw* consecutive throws the imperfect tense into completed action normally. And the second phrase "and pity his people" uses the same form, a *waw* consecutive with the imperfect. However, you look in this discussion at Ridderbos, for example, as well as others, argues the form that is the *waw* consecutive with the imperfect does not exclude the possibility of translating the verbs as future. "But then the LORD will be jealous for his land." That's the way the NIV translates it. If you look up in the grammars, Jouon in *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, which is considered one of the best Hebrew Grammars, paragraph 112h in his discussion of the 'prophetic perfect' says, "This notion of prophetic perfect is extended by Ibn Ezra," an early Jewish scholar, "even to cases of *wayyiqtol* as in Joel 2:18, see his commentary."

In other words, the argument is you have a prophetic perfect for completed action of the perfect tense can be considered future as far as its idea is concerned. That is equality true of the *waw* consecutive with the imperfect which really creates the same concept. So here you get into an interpretive issue that is not determined strictly by or only by the form of the Hebrew verb. As for the prophetic perfect you have to look at context and make a judgment. Now we've look at that with Obadiah, "I will make you small among the nations," talking about Edom. Is that talking about the future or is it "I have made you small"? You have to wrestle with that in the context. The verbal form will allow you to go either way.

You can take an imperfect with the *waw* consecutive as a prophetic perfect. I think that is probably the best thing to do with it. If you do that then verses 17 and 18 don't become a major dividing point in the book of Joel. Then chapter 2 is following on from verse 1 through verse 27.

We'll stop here and pick this up next time and spend a little more time in Joel, particularly on Joel 2:28-32, where you have the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh and the quotation in Acts. Then we'll start our discussion of Jonah.

Transcribed and edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Edited by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 19

### Joel 2-3

#### 1. Joel 2:17-18

Last time there was a discussion of how to understand Joel 2:18 and following. If you remember from your reading of Bullock he makes the primary structural dividing point of the entire book between verse 17 and 18. The question in verse 18 is how to understand the statement, “then the Lord” either “was jealous” or “will be jealous for his land, and takes pity on his people.” Bullock understands it as “was jealous” and that was a response to a supposed repentance that had taken place after the call to repentance in the previous section. So in that space between 17 and 18 he would say repentance took place and now you have a record of the Lord’s response to that repentance.

If you recall the suggestion that I made last time at the end of our discussion, I think 18 is future and it’s not a response historically to a supposed repentance that already was held. This whole chapter I think is eschatological. You have the imagery of the locusts being used to depict the horses that will come against Israel eschatologically before the day of the Lord. If you take 18 as something that is past and already happened, what do you do with 26b and 27b where it says, “Never again will my people be shamed”? Certainly since the time of Joel the Jewish people have been shamed. It is hard to maintain that this is something that has already happened.

#### 2. Joel 2:23b Rain or Teacher of Righteousness

Now I say that just as in the introduction where we pick up with verse 23b, which says, “Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sent you abundant showers both autumn and spring rains as before.” In the NIV that I’m reading from, where it says, “He has given you the autumn rains in righteousness” has a text note K which says, “or the teacher for righteousness.” So the question becomes, what’s



this verse talking about? What's the translation issue between the Lord giving either "autumn rains in righteousness," or a "teacher for righteousness"? There's a pretty significant difference of meaning.

Look at your handout where I've given the Hebrew there for "he has given to you," that's the phrase that is at issue. What does *moreh* mean? Under that there's NIVa and NIVb. NIVa says, "for he has given you a teacher for righteousness." NIVb says, "He has given you the autumn rains in righteousness." As far as NIVa and NIVb go that is part of the history of the translation process and publication of the NIV. When the NIV was initially translated it read as, "he has given you a teacher for righteousness." There were periodic revisions to the NIV text over a number of years.

I don't know if you've ever come across, sitting in a church somewhere with someone reading the NIV and the one you're looking at is different from what you're hearing. That created confusion because the translation committee would collect issues that were raised about particular translations and then modify the text with each additional printing of the NIV. So they had a number of different NIV printings out there that differed from each other. At a certain point in time they stopped that. More recently they collected a lot of the questions that were being raised about the translations and did a thorough revision of the NIV text, and that was published a year or so ago in the TNIV which is Today's New International Version. But in any case that's NIVa and b.

The King James has, "he has given you the former rain moderately." It takes "the rain" understanding. The New American Standard has "rain". The Keil and Delitzsch commentary has, "teacher for righteousness." The Septuagint has "two fold," and where that comes from I'm not quite sure. Perhaps there was a misreading for the term *moreh*? Let me just give you a couple more translations. The English Standard Version has "early rain for your vindication." The New Living Translation has "rain" as well. So the majority of recent translations are "rain" instead of "teacher for righteousness."

The crucial word in the phrase, *moreh*, is taken by some as “teacher” and by others as “former” or “early rain” is due to some contextual problems. This gets a bit complex but follow me with this. Most of the rabbis and early commentators will translate it as “teacher.” Others, including Calvin and many modern commentators take it as “early rain.” One of the meanings of *yoreh* that you find in this text, *moreh* means “teacher,” that’s in dispute. *Moreh* means teacher. *Yoreh* the following word there means “early rain.” That’s the rain that falls on Palestine from the last of October to the first of December at sowing time for the germination of seeds; but that’s open to interpretation. Then there’s *geshem*, which occurs in the second line of that Hebrew text. He has poured down for you, *geshem* “the rain,” and then in the last phrase of that Hebrew text you get *moreh* is “latter rain,” it seems in that last phrase that *moreh* is a mistaken use, probably due to dittography, a copy error because that last phrase reads, “the early and the latter rain” as before.

What is striking is that *moreh*, which occurs twice in this verse, is unquestionably used in the last clause of the verse, in the sense of “early rain.” You can hardly do anything else with it. In every other instance in the Old Testament, early rain is *yoreh* not *moreh*, except something in the English where there’s textual problems, but that’s a different issue.

Dittography: *Moreh* written instead of *yoreh*

So, what’s going on? It seems to me likely that the *moreh* in the last phrase of the verse is an example of the copyist error called dittography. The scribe wrote a *mem* instead of a *yodh*, because of the occurrence *moreh* earlier in the verse. It is very easy for your eye to confuse, you look at it and see the *moreh* and the *yoreh* are very similar. You put the *mem* down there instead of the *yodh* because *moreh* was earlier in the verse.

### Messianic Prophecy? Cf. Qumran

The following word after *moreh* in the first line of the text, *sadaqah*, means “in just measure at proper time,” if you’re going to translate that as rain rather than teacher. This is *sadaqah*; because it’s used in the ethical sense of righteousness not the physical sense. How can *sadaqah* refer to rain? It can, however, refer to a teacher. The understanding “teacher” is an old Jewish interpretation and it’s found in Vulgate and Rashi. It seems to me there’s a good case to be made for understanding this the way it was understood for centuries; and that is “teacher for righteousness.” If “teacher for righteousness” is accepted then what we have here is probably best taken as a messianic prophecy. If this chapter is all future and its talking about the end times, day of the Lord, there’s going to be that teacher of righteousness. Although some see it as a reference to Joel, that Joel is talking about himself is contested, and in context that’s not too likely he would use that definition to refer to himself. Keil sees it as all prophets idealized in Christ; or as in Qumran, some particular leader. You remember there was a teacher of righteousness in the Dead Sea Scroll community in Qumran. They called their leader the “teacher of righteousness.” Where did they get that? They got it out of this text, the only place in the Old Testament that you have that phrase.

### Payne Sees It as a Self-Reference to Joel Himself

Payne sees it as a reference to Joel. His view presupposes that Joel here is speaking of something that’s already come. The sons of Zion are to rejoice because God has given them Joel, the teacher who instructs them in righteousness with the result that God has now sent the rain. But, as I said, it doesn’t seem to me very likely that Joel would label himself a teacher of righteousness and his coming as cause for rejoicing.

In addition, Payne’s view can only be accepted if you accept his larger general approach to the interpretation of Joel 2. What he does with Joel 2 as a whole, is he says 2:1-11 is an impending contemporaneous local plague in the time

of Joel. In other words, he doesn't take that as apocalyptic or symbolic. It's an impending contemporaneous locust plague. 2:19-26 he sees as a contemporary deliverance from invading locusts, and, of course, verse 23 is in the middle of that. So when 23 says, "He gives the teacher for righteousness" it is not the Messiah or the leader of the sect at Qumran but seemingly the prophet Joel referring to himself and his own preaching.

Well, what does he do with 26b if that was all fulfilled in his own time? 26b says, "Never again will my people be ashamed." Payne says 26b and 27 are the future messianic teaching. In other words, there was a time gap between 26a and 26b. He moved 26 from Joel's time to the end time. That's that question that we talked about concerning time perspective, and there are clear examples where you're almost forced to say there's a time gap. I think as a hermeneutical principle it's possible, but is there a reason to do that here? It seems to me the flow of the text is pretty natural. So I think, the whole chapter is looking to the future. One additional consideration is the inhabitants of Qumran evidentially interpreted the word as "teacher" because their leader was known as the teacher of righteousness. Where did this title come from if not in Joel's teaching? So I'm inclined to take 2:23 as "teacher for righteousness" not "autumn rains and righteousness"; and see chapter 2, as I have said, as descriptive of things that will come to pass before the coming or in connection with the coming of the day of the LORD.

#### Vannoy's Analysis: Covenant Way, Teacher and Rain Connections

Now I want to just add to those comments a few others that are not on that handout about the connection between walking in the way of the covenant and the blessing of rain. I think in this verse, 2:23, with this *moreh/yoreh*, you have at least some element of a play on words and a connection of concepts that are rooted back in earlier passages of the Old Testament. If you go to Exodus 24:12, you read there, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and stay here and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commands I have

written” and those last two words there, “for their instruction.” That is a Hophal verb form. It’s that same root that *moreh* and *yoreh* come from. So, “I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.” A *Hophal* form of *yora*.

Turn to Leviticus 26:3-5. There you read, “If you will follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit; your threshing will continue until grape harvest and grape harvest will continue until planting and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.” So rain is given in this text. The rain is the Hebrew word *geshem*; it’s that other word that’s used in the end of the passage. Rain is given when the Israelites follow the Torah, the instructions.

Turn to 1 Kings 8:35-36. This is the prayer of Solomon on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple, and in that prayer he says, “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray towards this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven, forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel.” Then notice what follows, “Teach them the right way to live and send rain.” “Teach” is *yoreh* again, “Teach them the right way to live and send rains.” See this connection between teaching and walking in the right way and the giving of rain. “Send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.”

Go to Isaiah 30:20 and following. Isaiah says, “Although the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers,” that’s *moreh*, “will be hidden no more. With your own eyes you will see them.” You look in the Hebrew text and the “them” there is your teachers, teacher is repeated, *moreh*. “Whether you turn to the right or to the left your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’” walk in the way of the Torah. “Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold, you will

throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them away with you,” What follows in verse 23? “He will also send you rain.”

So, you get a number of passages where there’s a connection between walking in the way of the covenant, teachers, and rain. So that the language of Joel 2:23 is not something that is unprecedented in earlier passages in the Old Testament. It seems to me that this provides at least, some measure of response to the usual arguments that it makes no sense to translate the first part of 23b as, “He has given you a teacher for righteousness.” It is claimed that it makes no sense to translate *moreh* there as “teacher” because the rest of the verse is talking about rain. See the last part is, “He sent you abundant showers, autumn and spring rains as before.” Just because those last lines are talking about rain, doesn’t make it inappropriate for the preceding line to be talking about a teacher. There’s abundant previous reference in the Old Testament that connects teacher and rain and walking in the way of the covenant.

So, it seems to me that a good case can be made that God will give a prophet or a teacher who will teach you to walk in the right way and this will lead to the temporal blessing of rain. So the verse makes perfect sense and it is consistent with previous usages of similar language and association of words.

### 3. Joel 2:28-32 and Its Connection to Acts 2:14ff – Different Approaches

Let’s go on to number 2, Joel 2:28-32. There is the outline of the book of Joel that we’re following. Roman numeral I, which is chapter 1, “Description of the contemporary locust plague.” Then section 2 of the book from 2:1 to 3:21, at least in my view, contains “Three descriptions of the coming day of the Lord,” emphasizing different aspects. We just looked at a. under that which is 2:1-27, first description of the day of the LORD.” b. 2:28-32, “The second description of the coming of the Day of the Lord, and here the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit will precede the Day of the Lord. So, let’s pick up and go forward from there.

In Hobart Freeman's *Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, he lists 5 different interpretations of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-31, which in the Hebrew text is chapter 3 of Joel. The question is, was Joel's prophecy of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:14-24? If it was, in what sense was it fulfilled? Now we should probably turn to Acts 2. In Acts 2:14 you read, "Peter stood up with the eleven raised his voice, addressed the crowd, 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk as you suppose, it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel,'" then he quotes from Joel 2:28 and following and says, "In the last days God said, 'I will pour out my spirit upon the people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your young men will see visions,'" and so on. I think 2:16 is a pretty strong statement when Peter says, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel."

But keep that in mind as you look at these five views. There's a "Termination at Pentecost" view. Ridderbos held that the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy is to be applied to certain events of Joel's time, as well as on Pentecost at which time the prophecy terminated. Several Jewish interpreters, according to Keil, saw in the prophecy a reference to some event in Joel's own time with its fulfillment terminating at the end time.

b. is "Fulfillment at Pentecost," a prophecy of the messianic age when the Spirit of God is poured out on all flesh, and the gospel will be offered to all. The fulfillment of the prophecy is found in Acts 2:17, when the Holy Spirit was out poured at Pentecost.

c. "A non-fulfillment or eschatological view." "When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost it was not in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. This prophecy has never been fulfilled, nor will it be fulfilled in the present age, in which the church is being formed." This is Gaebelin articulating a sort of classic dispensational view. "After this is accomplished the Lord will begin his relationship with his earthly people [Israel]; when he appears in his day then they

will experience the fulfillment of this great prediction.” So he is really saying you have two people, Israel and the church, and this concerns Israel. It was not fulfilled. The church is that mystery or parenthesis that the Old Testament knows nothing about.

d. “The typical fulfillment view” sees the prophecy of Joel as being fulfilled “in earnest” at Pentecost, but not fully realized until the millennium. This is set forth in the Jamieson, Fauset, and Brown commentary. It’s double sense, fulfilled at Pentecost but to be completed with final fulfillment eschatologically. Pentecost says, “Peter is not citing the experience before them as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy but is citing it as an analogy to its fulfillment in the millennial age.”

And then e. “A continuous fulfillment view,” the prophecy of Joel will have continuous fulfillment from Pentecost to eschatological time. So those are the five options out there. People have gone in different directions with this.

Joel 2:28

So let’s look at the prophecy. If you go to 2:28 in Joel you read, “And afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and all the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness, the moon to blood before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.”

“Afterwards,” and/or “in the Last Days”

So let’s look at this a little more closely. It begins with the words the NIV translates “and afterwards.” The Septuagint translates that “after these things.” In



Peter's quotation of this in Acts 2:17, he replaces "afterwards" with another, what I would say is, a more precise time designation. Instead of that general "afterwards" he says, "in the last days." If you look at Acts 2:17, "'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon them.'" So, it seems to me that Peter interpretively replaces "afterwards" with the more precise time designation "in the last days." This then is the sense in which the phrase is to be understood. This means that it is not to be taken with direct sequential reference to what precedes it in the Joel 2 context.

In other words, when you go back to 2:28 and it says, "and afterward" after he came, that's not talking about after what is described in verse 27. Joel 2:27 says, "You will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, that there is no other, never again will my people be shamed." Then you're starting a new section here in verse 28. That time designation is talking about the last days, it doesn't have sequential reference to what precedes it in the Joel 2 context. Remember that in the Hebrew text there's a separate chapter beginning with Joel 2:28. Although, of course, that was not in the original text but there was understood to be a break there, going way back. From the New Testament citation it appears that "afterwards" is used in Joel 2:28 in the sense of indicating a new period in God's dealing with His people. "And afterwards" is this new period in which I will do something for my people, that's what in view. "The last days" are understood as beginning with Christ's first advent and then will end with the second advent and the events related to it.

Seems to me if he wrote some of those texts I listed there, that is a pretty common way in which the "last days" is used in the New Testament and the time between the advents. That's the introductory time designation and it is best to understand "afterwards" in the sense that Peter interpreted it adding, "in the last days," this new period of God's dealing with his people and the time between the advents, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people."

### Pouring out of the Spirit

That phrase “I will pour out my spirit on all people” needs to be looked at a little more closely. In the Old Testament to get to the Spirit was not completely lacking; the Holy Spirit was certainly active in the Old Testament period. But now the Spirit in this new period of divine activity is to be poured out on all flesh. There’s something new that is to happen.

In the Old Testament period the Holy Spirit is referred to in connection with enablement for particular tasks or functions in the theocracy for certain select individuals. If you look at references to the Holy Spirit, those are the kind of references you find. For example, the Spirit came upon the craftsmen who built the tabernacle, Exodus 31:3, and enabled them to do their artistic work. The Holy Spirit comes on a number of the judges, Judges 6:34 and 11:29; enabling them to deliver Israel from their oppressors. The Holy Spirit comes upon Saul and David when they were becoming kings in 1 Samuel 16:13-14 to equip them for the tasks in the theocracy that had been given to them. The Holy Spirit comes upon the prophets to enable them to speak God’s words, 2 Samuel 20:32-38. In such cases, the Spirit came upon these individuals to qualify and to consecrate them for their particular task in the theocracy.

In the new period, about which Joel speaks, the Spirit will come on all flesh this is a general term (*basar*: flesh), but implies that the work of the Spirit will not be limited to certain leaders of the people, and, if not directly certainly by implication, extends the gift beyond the people of Israel, to all flesh; it’s not necessarily confined to Israel.

Now having said that, this need not be understood as implying that the Holy Spirit did not function in Old Testament times to affect regeneration and spiritual growth of God’s people even though there’s no explicit reference in the Old Testament to the Spirit’s work of that sort.

## Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Leon Wood, in a work called, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, discusses numerous Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit. There's not a lot of literature out there on the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament period. I think that little book, by Leon Wood is as good a discussion of that as you'll find. It's unfortunately out of print—you might have come across it somewhere, but it's a very helpful discussion of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. His conclusion is that just because there's no reference in the Old Testament to the Spirit's work in effecting spiritual renewal in a person, that is not sufficient reason to conclude that the Spirit was not active at this point. Abraham and David and others are examples of men of faith. Did they achieve such by their own efforts apart from the Spirit of God? Did they have some resource that some New Testament believers do not have? The evidence that the Spirit was at work in the lives of Old Testament saints is to be seen in the way they lived. If their lives showed the fruits of the Spirit which are defined in the New Testament, then the Spirit must have been at work in them. How can a life exhibit the fruit of the Spirit if the Spirit is not at work in the person to produce it?

On the basis of New Testament teaching on the work of the Spirit we can deduce that Old Testament saints were regenerated just as New Testament saints are. Now that is admittedly a deduction but it seems to me a legitimate theological deduction. Why doesn't the Old Testament discuss regeneration? Wood says, "The answer can only be that God saw fit to wait with this revelation until New Testament time." So basically it seems that this is a legitimate conclusion.

Quoting Abraham Kuyper, who also wrote a volume on the work of the Holy Spirit, Wood says, "Believing Israelites were saved. Hence they must have received saving grace, a logical conclusion, and since saving grace is out of the question without an inward working of the Holy Spirit, it follows that he was the worker of faith in Abraham as well as in ourselves." I think that kind of sums up the issue.

### Difference of the Work of the Spirit in the OT and NT [Wood]

But if that's so, then what is the difference between of the work of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times and in the new period of the last days? The Holy Spirit was at work regenerating, sanctifying, in the lives of Old Testament saints—what's this prophecy of Joel talking about? In the last days in the time between the advents of Christ I'm going to pour out my Spirit on all flesh. What's the difference?

Wood points out that a number of terms are commonly associated with the Spirit's work in the New Testament, they include: regeneration, indwelling, sealing, filling, empowering and baptism. Wood argues, and he does this I think quite well in his book, that regeneration, indwelling, sealing, filling and empowerment are all to be found in both dispensations. It is then only the baptism of the Spirit that is new in the New Testament—that's his thesis. It's this aspect of the Spirit's work that began at Pentecost. Now I quote from Wood, "The reason for this is that baptism has to do with the church, and the church did not begin as a distinct organism until Pentecost. In fact, it was the baptism of believers by the Holy Spirit that inaugurated the church.... It began when believers were baptized to form it. This happened when the Spirit came upon the believers assembled in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost Acts 2:1-12."

### Baptism of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13-14

The truth of baptism by the Spirit is set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:13-14. If you ask the question, "what is baptism by the Spirit?" 1 Corinthians 12:13 defines it saying, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." So, Wood comments, "The baptism of the Spirit is that work which joins Christians together into a common bond of church relationship." If you go to 1 Corinthians 12:13 in its context, the context there is a passage where Paul is

speaking about the unity of the body of Christ. We are one body, and baptism by the Spirit brings that sense of being the body of Christ and the unity that exists between believers across racial, ethnic, and linguistic barriers. There is now this one body; a spiritual body of the unity in Christ. That is what baptism does. Baptism is the “work which joins Christians together in the common bond of church relationship. It unites them, giving them an organic oneness. It provides them with a sense of mutual love, and sets before them a common purpose. It is because of this unifying baptism that Christians, wherever they meet, feel an immediate closeness and friendship. They are one group, a part in one grand enterprise...”

“The moment of baptism is the same as the moment of regeneration; in fact, it is the same also as the moment when indwelling and sealing begin... The reason baptism’s being instituted at Pentecost—which is another way of stating the reason for the inauguration of the church—was that there was a need for the spread of the gospel message. Christ had now lived and died and the good news of salvation was ready to be taken to a lost world. Through Old Testament days, God had in large part segregated his word in Israel, until the provision for man’s salvation might be made in the work of Christ. Now that this had been done, there was no longer need for segregation. The world at large should hear of the wonderful provision. No longer should there be a special people—in terms of a nation—but a universal people, without barrier or ‘middle wall of partition’ between them. For this reason, a new organism was called for, established on a different basis than the nation Israel. This organism was the church. The organism needed unity, a sense of oneness, so it could recognize and present itself as a common group. This was supplied initially by the collective baptism of believers at Pentecost, and continues to be provided by a continuing baptism of individuals at the time of their regeneration.”

Now Wood says, “The last matter to notice is that baptism involves a certain aspect of empowerment for the believer.... This power for gospel

proclamation was promised already by Christ in Luke 24:49, 'Tarry here in the city of Jerusalem until you be endowed with power from on high.' Jesus again promised it in Acts 1:8, just before his ascension to heaven, 'But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and all of Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'" So you see what Wood is suggesting is the pouring out of God's Spirit on all flesh is something that is to happen in the last days, preceding the day of the Lord, and it involves this baptism by the Spirit and empowerment for the proclamation of the Gospel. That's what's new, that's what's different from the Old Testament period. That's connected with the difference that now begins in the organization of God's people in the transition from a national body to a spiritual body, that crosses ethnic and national boundaries.

Wood's discussion of course raises the question of Israel and the church. There are those who have posited, I think too much, discontinuity between the church and Israel. The view that this wasn't being fulfilled at Pentecost but is to be fulfilled in future time in Israel, this great parenthesis is where extremes formulate. It is a dispensation view which sees no continuity of two peoples, two destinies and two ways of salvation; in short, a total discontinuity. Others have made too little distinction between Israel and the church. In other words, some would say the church is in the Old Testament.

Seems to me there is one people of God but the principle of organization is different. It's national in the Old Testament, it's supra-national in the New Testament, where it's spiritual qualities compared to this national and ethnic organization. So others have made too little distinction; they are equated without sufficient recognition of the different principle of organization and the new economy of God's dealing with His people, which is inaugurated with God's pouring out of his Spirit at Pentecost. The biblical perspective is that of one people of God, yet two distinct forms of organization. There is continuity in one way of salvation by grace through faith. I think that's clear. I don't think people were

saved by works in the Old Testament but by grace in the New Testament. That's too much discontinuity. There is at the same time a measure of continuity in the change from a national to a supra-national spiritual body. So it's a matter of keeping continuity and discontinuity in proper perspective, and that's often not done.

#### Return to Joel 2:28a and the Work of the Spirit in Acts

Now let's go back to our text. Joel 2:28a says, "I'll pour out my spirit on all people" and then goes on to say, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days." How do we understand verses 28 and 29? The meaning here seems to be that the Spirit will be given in discernable ways to God's people regardless of their age, sex, station, or position in life, even slaves will be recipients of the fruits of the Spirit. That's all flesh and all sorts of people will be given the Spirit.

When interpreting the significance of the expressions, "prophesy," "dream dreams," "see visions," it seems quite reasonable to follow the suggestion of Calvin when he says that Joel here speaks in the terms of the commonly known Old Testament conceptions of the function of the Holy Spirit. In other words, he's using the language that was understood about the way in which the Holy Spirit functioned in the time of Joel. They should not be rigidly interpreted as restricted to only these specific functions in respect to their fulfillment. It also should not be assumed that prophesying is to be limited to sons and daughters since it says "your sons and daughters will prophesy." Only sons and daughters will prophesy? Or that "dreaming dreams" will be limited to old men. This usage, as Keil suggests, can best be taken as "rhetorical individualizing." In other words, that what is being said here is that the manifold work of the Holy Spirit will be demonstrably given to individuals in all walks of life in the new era of which Joel speaks. All the manifold works of the Holy Spirit will come up on people from every age and

every function in society.

Jesus had promised that the Spirit would come, in various New Testament texts in the gospel. The disciples no doubt looked forward to the realization of this promise. In Acts 1:4-7 after the resurrection Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to “wait for the gift my father promised, which you have heard me speak about.” Look at Acts 1 there, something interesting happened. You read in verse 4 he says, “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” What’s the response? Look at verse 6, “So when they met together they asked, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”

Jesus said, “Don’t leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.” The interesting thing about the response of the disciples is the statement that they ask Jesus, “Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” It is clear that for some reason the disciples linked the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the Kingdom. Seems to me that there is no other way to understand their response there. Jesus says, “Wait for the promise of the Spirit that I told you about.” What does the Spirit have to do with the coming of the kingdom? Why would they link the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the kingdom? The most likely explanation is that they knew very well the connection Joel had made between the coming of the Spirit and the coming of the day of the Lord, because you see in this passage in 2:28 and following, this pouring out of God’s Spirit in verse 28 flows right into verse 31 when “the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” The pouring out of the Spirit is



going to precede the coming of the day of the Lord. They associated the two. Both belong to the same era of the last days.

Jesus' response however avoids a specific commitment to when the restoration of the kingdom of Israel will take place. It seems best then to understand the fulfillment of 28 and 29 as beginning at Pentecost and continuing into the period of the last days. This is at least my view. Peter says clearly the events which transpired in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were what was spoken by the prophet Joel. The notion of a continuous fulfillment should be distinguished from a view of partial fulfillment or typical fulfillment. The prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost and continues to be fulfilled throughout period of the last days. The time span on the last days is unknown. How long is the time gap? It's obviously, since Pentecost till now, a couple thousand years. So it seems to me that that's what is in view.

#### 4. Joel 2:30-32 Signs and the Spirit on Pentecost

Let's go on to Joel chapter 2 verses 30 to 32. The prophecy goes on to announce, signs in the heavens and earth that both precede the dark and terrible day of the Lord. It seems best in my view to regard these signs as yet to be fulfilled. One may ask why Peter quoted almost the entire passage, if only part of it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost? Seems to me that we have here an example of prophetic time perspective in which two things are juxtaposed, both of which belong to the last day but are separated by an unannounced period of time. Both the giving of the Spirit to all flesh and the day of the Lord belong to the period of God's dealing with his people that was beginning at that particular point. The period of time separating the two advents of Christ is never indicated in Scripture. Rather the idea is imminence, that it could occur at any time, in regard to the end time. Therefore, be ready, is what it says.

My view is that there is a future for Israel in some sense. Seems to me there is too much emphasis in the Old Testament in numerous prophecies about the

dispersion and exile, in the next return to the land. But I do look for a teacher for Israel and it seems to me from Romans 9-11 that Paul supports that. But that's what's behind that statement.

#### Bavinck (*Reformed Dogmatics*) on the Spirit

Let me just pull your attention to a paragraph by Herman Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. It is interesting that Herman Bavinck wrote a four volume theology, an excellent piece of work. It was not translated into English for a long time. It is being translated right now; first two or three of the four volumes have been published in the last couple years. I don't think they've got the fourth volume. But I thought this paragraph on the Holy Spirit was worth inserting here. Notice what he says, "The first activity which Christ accomplished after his glorification consists in the sending of the Holy Spirit. Because he was exalted at the right hand of God and received the promise of the Holy Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit promised by God in the Old Testament; he could now send this one to his people on earth (Acts 2:33)... Before the ascension the Holy Spirit was not, because Christ was not yet glorified." That's an interesting statement in John 7:39 that I think is easily misunderstood. Bavinck says, "This cannot mean that the Holy Spirit did not exist before the glorification of Christ because in the Old Testament there is constant talk of God's Spirit." So when John 7:39 says, before the ascension the Holy Spirit was not because "Jesus was not yet glorified," it doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit didn't exist, it can't. "And the Gospels tell us that John the Baptist and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit." There is filling prior to Pentecost. In Luke 1:15 it says that "Simeon was by the Spirit in the temple," Luke 2:26-27. That Jesus was anointed by the Spirit without measure, John 3:34. And the intention also cannot be that the disciples did not know that a Holy Spirit existed before Pentecost. Because they were taught by the Old Testament and by Jesus himself. Even the disciples of John had said to Paul at Ephesus that they at their baptism not only had not received the Holy Spirit but had not heard if there

was a Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2).

This does not thereby indicate that the existence of the Holy Spirit was unknown to them but only says that an extraordinary working of the Holy Spirit, that is the wonderful work at Pentecost, they had not heard of. They knew very well that John was a prophet sent by God and endued with his Spirit, but they had remained disciples of John and had not become disciples of Jesus. Thus they remained outside the circle of believers who received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The event which took place on this day therefore can have no other meaning than that the Holy Spirit, who earlier already existed and gave many gifts and worked many powers, presently, after the ascension of Christ from his people is now come to live in his people as in his temple.” Notice this next statement is great because it is so striking, “The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is, after the creation and incarnation, the third great work of God.” Now as Bavink said, there are three great works of God: creation, incarnation and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. It is an enormously significant event. This extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit was repeatedly promised in the Old Testament and so you don’t want to minimize the significance of what happened at Pentecost. It seems to me what continues to happen in the life and experience of every believer from the day of Pentecost to present. There is in the last days a continual pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all those who were regenerated into this one body and then empowering them to spread the gospel. That’s what this is all about.

#### Joel 2:31 AND THE Work of the Spirit in Acts

Let’s go a little bit further, the day of the Lord is mentioned in Joel chapter 2 verse 31, as it was in 2:11. In my view these three verses are speaking of the coming of the Day of the Lord. Here, however, it comes subsequent to the pouring out of the Spirit and the cosmic signs in the heavens. This passage thus assumes an important place in sketching the progress of the history of redemption. We

learn in this passage that the sending of the Spirit will precede the day of the coming of the Lord. Several things may be inferred from this in this period in which the Spirit is poured out. The fullness of God's Kingdom has not yet been revealed because it precedes the Day of the Lord.

And second, this period may appropriately be characterized as the period of the Spirit in the last days, the time between the advents. What follows on the remainder of this handout is discussion of the work of the Spirit, particularly as pictured in the book of Acts. The Spirit directed Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, the Spirit led Peter to Cornelius, the Spirit drove the church to Antioch, the Spirit guided the church on crucial questions arising from the missionary tasks, the Spirit would not allow Paul to enter Asia, and so on and so on. So you know some people wrote and said, instead of being entitled, "The Acts of the Apostles" it should be entitled, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" because that's what flows through the remainder of the book.

##### 5. Comments on Joel 3: Judgment on the Nations and Salvation of God's People

Let me just very quickly make a few comments on the third passage, which is Joel chapter 3 in the English Bible, chapter 4 in the Hebrew Bible. This third passage on the coming of the day of the Lord I've given the heading, "The Judging of the Nations and the Salvation of God's People." Let me just make a few comments then because I wasn't going to deal with this in great detail. It is Joel 3:1-21 in your English Bible and chapter 4 in the Hebrew Bible.

Joel 3:1 In those days

You get a time designation again to introduce this passage, notice Joel 3:1, "In those days and at that time." In what days, and at what time? I don't think it's again just like the preceding passage referring to what went before. I think that "in those days and at that time" is really defined by what follows in verse one, "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I

will gather all nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.” So it’s, “in the days when I do those things.” So the time designation has reference to the following phrase rather than to what immediately precedes; and the phrase introduces the third passage describing the coming day of the Lord.

### Valley of Jehoshaphat

So, Joel says, “In those days in that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem I will gather the nations, bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel.” Where is the valley of Jehoshaphat where the Lord will gather all nations and judge them? Some suggest it’s the valley of Beracah, based on 2 Chronicles 20:26, where Jehoshaphat defeated the Moabites and the Ammonites. The problem with that is that valley is not called the valley of Jehoshaphat, it’s called the valley of Beracah. If you reflect on the name, “the Valley of Jehoshaphat,” Jehoshaphat means “the Lord has judged.” It has the Hebrew root *shaphat* and the prefix of that “the Lord had judged.” Since the Valley is the location of a judgment of the Lord it is possible to take the name as symbolic of the judgment rather than as a geographical place name. If you go to verse 14 you have a similar reference, “multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” So I’m not sure we should try to pin it down to a precise geographical location. This is the place where the Lord will enter into judgment against the nations that have gathered against Israel.

### Joel 3:2 – Judgment on the Nations

Verse 2 speaks of all the nations with which the Lord will enter into judgment. Now what is that judgment? Who is it that is to be judged? It seems to me that the judgment is simply the victory that will be won by the Lord at his appearance in power and glory when the enemies of returned Israel are drawn up

to battle prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Now of course that assumes there is such thing as a millennial kingdom. I would relate this to texts like Zechariah 14:2 where you read, “I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it. The city will be captured, the houses ransacked, the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,” which is the second coming. Seems to me that refers back to chapter 2. You may associate it with Revelation 19 as well.

When you get down a little further in the passage you read in verse 9, “Proclaim this among the nations, prepare for war, rouse the warriors, let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plow shares into swords, your pruning shears into spears.” Notice the reversal of the Isaiah passage? Beat your spears into plowshares; this is the reversal of that. “Let the weakling say, ‘I am strong.’ Come all ye nations from every side assemble there. Bring your warriors let the nations be roused, let them advance into the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side.” That judgment is simply the victory that the Lord achieves over the nations that are assembled against Israel. So the battle and the trial are the same thing. So I think I’ll leave my comments with that but that’s the third passage describing the coming of the day of the Lord in association with this judgment of the nations.

Transcribed by Audrey Dias  
 Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
 Final editing by Katie Ells  
 Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20

### Jonah

#### IV. Jonah

##### A. Jonah's Name and Writer

Let's look at Roman numeral IV and A., "Jonah's name and writer." The book derives its name from Jonah son of Amittai. If you look at Jonah 1:1 you read there, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai." In 2 Kings 14:25 a prophet of the same name is said to have come from Gath Hepher, a place north of Nazareth in the Northern Kingdom. I want to look at that text 2 Kings 14:25 because it is significant in another connection. Here you read of Jeroboam II, "He was the one that restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah in accordance with word of the LORD of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher." So, Jeroboam II extended Israel's borders way to the North and down to the Sea of Arabah, the Dead Sea, in accordance with a prophecy of Jonah. It seems quite clear that Jonah son of Amittai during the time of Jeroboam II is the same as the author the book of Jonah. So, in 2 Kings 14:25 the prophet of the same name is said to come from Gath Hepher. According to this reference he must have come during or before the time of Jeroboam II. If it was during the time of Jeroboam, he was a contemporary of Amos and Hosea. He prophesied that Jeroboam would regain the ancient boundaries from Hamath in the north to the Sea of Arabah in the south. Other than this we know nothing of Jonah apart from what is told in the book.

Now we get to the story of his mission to go to Nineveh and his lack of desire to do that, the fish swallowing him, and eventual going to Nineveh. The author of the book is not specified, but there are no compelling reasons to assume Jonah was not the author. It should be added however, if the book was written by someone other than Jonah, that in no way affects its authenticity since the writer is not specified.

## B. The Nature of the Book: Historical or Non-historical -- Survey of Approaches

B. is a discussion of how to understand this book, “The nature of the book: historical or non-historical.” This becomes a much-discussed issue. So let’s look at it. The book distinguishes itself much from the other minor prophets. Its content is not just a record of Jonah’s prophecies, but it is a narrative in which the prophet is a central figure. In this respect it bears more resemblance to the narratives connected with Elijah and Elisha; this is like a piece of narrative out of Kings. There is wide diversity of viewpoint with respect of the character of the narrative. Its religious value is recognized by almost everyone, while its historical value is often considered lacking. Since this book is one of the first to be cited by those who chose challenge the historical reliability of the Bible we should consider it in some detail.

It’s been said the author had a didactic purpose in mind when he wrote this story, that he told this story in order to teach certain things. From this premise it is then concluded that the purpose of this story is not to give historical information, but rather to teach certain lessons and that the author uses the story form to accomplish this didactic purpose. It is usually not recognized that there could be such a thing as didactic history just as well as didactic fiction.

See T.D. Alexander “Jonah and Genre,” it’s in your bibliography, page 17. If you’re interested in this topic we might look at this article. It’s quite a good article. But in it, Alexander says in surveying the ways in which Jonah has been classified and what label has been attached to it. He says even the partial survey reveals a wide variety of proposals, and he footnotes each of these labels. Some say it is history, some allegory, some midrash, some a parable, some prophetic parable, some legend, some prophetic legend, some novel, some didactic fiction, some satirical, some short story, and the list goes on. In other words, if you look at the people who work with this book and tried make a genre classification, you get this long list of possibilities.



Alexander himself classifies it as didactic history, or history that's intended to teach something. Among the non-historical group there are differences of viewpoints concerning its nature. The most common are fiction, legend, allegory, and parable. See Alexander, page 36 and 37.

### Non-Historical Approaches

#### 1. Jonah as Fiction, Legend, allegory and Parable

So let's look at each of them. One, fiction. Some think the author intended the story as a prose fiction. Two, legend. Others think the author made use of a prophetic legend that was in circulation among the people of Israel. This view accepts that there may be a real historical kernel behind this story. Perhaps someone named Jonah did indeed go to Nineveh. Perhaps a royal message or even a message of religious overtone, but this original kernel of historical facts is surrounded by all sorts of legendary expansions and accretions that were added, such as the story of the fish. I might say those three things: the fish, the gourd and the conversion of the Ninevites usually cause people the most trouble, for they are the things most often question its historicity. In some expressions, particularly with the story of the fish, some find a point of agreement with non-Israelite like legends of deliverance from sea monsters. The author is said to have used this legendary motif for his own purposes, including the teaching of such things as the mercy of God toward the heathen, and the rebellion and the sin of Jonah refusing to do God's will. That things of that sort are taught is not denied by those who see the story as truly historical. The question is: On what basis then can we say it is not historical? What are the implications of such a view?

The third approach among those who deny the historical events of the book is an allegorical view. The most usual form of this view sees Jonah as the people of Israel, Nineveh is the heathen world to whom Israel had the task of proclaiming the message of repentance. Jonah's unfaithfulness is thus Israel's unfaithfulness to be a light to the Gentiles. Jonah swallowed up by the fish is Israel's captivity,

Jonah's cast up on land is Israel's return from captivity. Returned Israel is to make religious truth known to the heathen and they become recipients of God's grace by conversion. Israel is to be rejected because of the dissatisfaction over the Lord's mercy to the Gentiles. These are the general lines of the allegorical view.

The fourth category is the parable view. Others would not make the allegorical elements so prominent but rather see the story as a parable invented to teach some lessons. Such a view would not necessarily deny the divine inspiration of the story but would be willing to deny its historicity. Now an example of that is Leslie Allen in the NICOT Commentary. If you look in your citations page 41 paragraph 2, there is a paragraph from Leslie Allen's commentary on the books of Joel, Jonah, and Micah, where Allen says, "For a long time the book of Jonah was interpreted in a strongly historical vein. Yet although the Church Fathers, who mostly used Jonah symbolically, admitted its historicity, there were those who doubted it, including in the fourth century Gregory of Nazianzus... Luther viewed the story as nonhistorical." I'm not sure where he gets that as there are no footnotes. "Today there are both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles that maintain the historicity of the book with a fervor that assumes that its inspiration and authority depend upon it: If the book of Jonah is history, it is part of the evidence for the most important truth imaginable, namely that the Almighty God seeks to bring men to repentance and will pardon those who truly repent." There is someone else who is pressing that view. Here is Allen's comment, "But if the book is not historical, then it is only the opinion of some singularly broadminded Jew that God ought to pardon even Gentiles if they truly repent." But is it inconceivable that "some singularly broadminded Jew" was inspired to teach this much-needed lesson? Such a viewpoint is in danger of restricting the Spirit of God and belittling the value of the parable as a genuine scriptural medium. To me he really begs the question of: is this a parable? Why would you conclude that this is a parable? And what does it mean? Certainly, God can inspire someone to tell a parable. But is that what this is?

## Comments on Non-Historical Approaches

Now get back to your handout of Jonah, I want to make some general comments on non-historical views first. Later over on the next page I'll make some more specific comments on non-historical views. But the first is the general broad issues involved. It seems to me there is insufficient basis for validation of these non-historical views and some strong reasons for rejecting them. I've listed three reasons here.

### a. Book Itself Alleges it is Historical

One, the book itself gives is no good reason for taking it as anything other than historical, unless the presence of the miraculous is considered as evidence against that. Certainly, there is a strong element of the miraculous. Were the possibility of miracles not an issue the book itself gives no good reason to be taken as anything but historical. The reference to the leading personality in the narrative in 2 Kings 14:25 provides a solid basis for historicity for a prophet named Jonah. See, that's where 2 Kings 14:25 plays a pretty significant role. If we only had the book of Jonah we might wonder if this is a parable. We know that Jonah was a prophet who prophesied either during or before the time of Jeroboam II.

### b. Jesus Understood it as Historical – Matthew 12:38-41

Two, Jesus' references to incidents in the book of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-41 are indicative that he understood it to be historical. Let's look at Matthew 12:38-41. "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" Now most people that refer to this statement of Jesus with

regard to the book of Jonah and discuss this historical issue connect it with verse 40, “As Jonah was three days in the belly so I will be three days in the heart of the earth.” That is not where it seems to me the argument falls. It’s with verses 41 to 42, notice what Jesus goes on to say, “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.” Now notice what Jesus does there with verses 41 and 42. Jesus places Jonah’s historicity on the same plane as that of the Queen of the Sheba. He places the response of the Ninevites on the same plane as that of the people of his own time. In other words, the Ninevites repented when Jonah came to preach to them. You are not repenting and I’m greater than Jonah. There is an historical analogy there. If the people of Nineveh did not repent historically at the preaching of Jonah, the analogy falls flat. It’s assumed that these things happened. Jesus is using it to condemn the people of his own generation.

Now look at what Allen says about this, Allen says, “Yet does not the statement of Jesus concerning Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41 constitute a testimony to the historicity of our book? Von Orelli, who himself interpreted the story thus, admitted: ‘It is not indeed proved with conclusive necessity that, if the resurrection of Jesus was a physical fact, Jonah's abode in the fish's belly must also be just as historical.’” But see that is not really the crux of the argument. “In this regard it is important to note a feature which will be shown in the later section on the sign of Jonah, that it is not strict exegesis that is reflected in Jesus’ use of the narrative of Jonah and the fish, but the popular Jewish understanding, which the Lord took up and employed as a vehicle for truth concerning himself. If this is so, it is quite possible to maintain that his reference merely reflects the contemporary view without necessarily endorsing it for the student of the OT.” In other words, people believed Jonah was historical and therefore Jesus speaks in those terms as if it

were but it was not. “Moreover, allowance must be made for a figurative element in the teaching of Jesus, an element Western literalists have notoriously found difficulty in grasping. If a modern preacher would not be at fault if he challenged his congregation with a reference to Lady Macbeth or Oliver Twist, could not Jesus have alluded in much the same manner to a well-known story to reinforce his own distinctive message?” Now I think Allen there really misses the point. It’s not so much that Jesus says Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and swallowed up by the fish. There is also a historical reference to the repentance at the preaching of Jonah by the Ninevites and that it is contrasted with the lack of repentance of the people of his own time when they hear his own preaching.

Look at G. C. Aalder’s little book, *The Problem of the Book of Jonah*. He says, “Finally, and this is of much greater importance, our Lord Jesus Christ himself undoubtedly accepted the events narrated in the book of Jonah as truly historical. This is manifest not only from the fact that he alludes to the stay of Jonah’s sojourn in the whale’s belly, but also from his reference to the repentance of the Ninevites: ‘The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah is here.’ Our Lord could not have made such a serious pronouncement unless he was firmly convinced that the Ninevites actually repented at the preaching of Jonah. A parabolic interpretation of this repentance is absolutely impossible in the light of this emphatic warning of Christ.”

“Now this may not mean much to many commentators, but it means everything to us who believe in him as our precious Saviour, the Son of the Father, faultless in his humanity. And perhaps it may mean something to those who share this belief, but do not fully and entirely agree with us in accepting the Old Testament as an integral part of the infallible, authoritative Word of God.” I think that Aalder’s statement there adds to the response against a position like Allen’s.

You see on your outline that Charles Harris says, “It is true that a preacher may cite illustrations fictitious or allegorical personages, but he must not cite them

as analogical evidence. Let him try this before an audience of unbelievers and he will find them muttering, 'That proves nothing, the thing never happened.'" See that is the crux of it, it seems to me. Jesus uses this as an analogy and the analogy falls flat if there is not an historical reality of repentance. Dillard and Longman, in their *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pages 392-393, comment, "The most compelling argument in favor of the historical reading is that Jesus' reference to Jonah and Nineveh indicates that he believed the book was historical. The comment is, however, while this is possible, it is not certain." After all, Jesus could refer to the event if he were preaching even if it were parable. In a similar way a preacher today exhorts the congregation to be like the Good Samaritan even though few believe that the good Samaritan was a historical person. The good Samaritan is not named, Jonah is named. In Kings we know he was an historical person who lived either during or prior to the time of Jeroboam II. But I don't think the analogy holds that this may be parable. That doesn't seem to me to fit the demands of the historical analogy that Jesus was making in his statement. So that's a second general comment on the non-historical views.

### c. The Inclusion of Jonah in the Canon of Scripture

Thirdly, the inclusion of Jonah in the canon of Scripture and the most ancient references to it in Jewish literatures suggest that it was always understood as historical. Go to your citations, page 42—I have a more lengthy quote from H. L. Ellison, who says, "What really matters is the historicity of the book. It is abundantly clear that its literal truth was never questioned in Jewish tradition. Indeed, Philo of Alexandria, that great master of allegory, who would doubtless have eagerly seized on a symbolic or allegoric explanation had it been known to him, 'took great pains to explain the marvel of the fish.'

"Equally the canonicity of the book seems never to have been questioned. Whether the modern scholar explains the book as prophetic legend, symbolic narrative or didactic fiction, he is faced by the impossibility of explaining how the

Jewish people, and in particular our Lord, came to regard it as historically true. The difficulty is the greater when we realize that our spiritual explanation of it as a historically true account will be, to a greater or less degree, significantly different from that we should give it, if we regarded it as fiction. We are asked to believe that the Jews not merely forgot it was fiction, but even forgot its true meaning. It is not unfair to remember also that moderns are singularly in conflict as to its original purpose and meaning.

“Those then who deny the book's factual truth must bear the onus of explaining how a book so very different from the other prophetic books ever came to be included in the prophetic canon, how it was forgotten that it was symbolic or didactic fiction, and above all how our Lord was incapable of realizing its true nature.

“Let us face a simple fact. From Eichhorn onwards the denial of the book's historicity was in the first place the result of the then dominant rationalistic view of the world, in which there was no room for miracle or for Divine interference in things physical.

“The conservative must bear part of the blame, however. For him, all too often, the first half of the book is all that has mattered. He has tended to overlook that God's miraculous dealings with Jonah were but a preparation for the revelation of the Divine character. If we want the literal truth of the book to be taken seriously we must both give it an adequate spiritual interpretation and justify the exceptional miraculous element in it.” In other words, if you just focus on the historical details you may miss the real significance of the book.

#### 4. The Opinion of the Jew – They did not regard it as a parable

On top of page 4 of your handouts there is another reference to your citation on page 39 from Aalders' commentary on this latter point, paragraph 2 of Aalders when he's talking about the way the Jewish people understood the book. He said, “Such was also the opinion of the Jews. They did not regard the book of Jonah as

a parable, but assumed it to be a record of real historical events. This is evident from the apocryphal book of Tobit. As Tobit is dying he calls to his son, Tobias, and commands him to go into Media, ‘for (says he) I believe the word of God upon Nineveh, which Nahum spake, that all those things will be, and will befall Assyria and Nineveh.’ This text is probably correct, but the Septuagint has Jonah instead of Nahum. This may be a false emendation, but it proves that the Jews certainly did not regard the book of Jonah as a parable. In the third book of Maccabees the priest Eleazar when praying refers to the deliverance of Jonah as follows: ‘And when Jonah was languishing unpitied in the belly of the sea-born monster, thou didst restore him, O Father, uninjured to all his household.’ This reference is preceded by similar recollections of the Pharaoh who was drowned together with his proud host, of Sennacherib, who was defeated in sight of the holy city, of the deliverance of the three friends from the fiery furnace, and of Daniel from the lions’ den. This likewise is a firm proof that the Jews regard the book of Jonah as a record of actual historic events. And Josephus, who repeatedly emphasizes the historical character of his work, includes the contents of the book in his Antiquities. Though we may have good reason to question the actual value of his historical accuracy, there is no doubt at all that he voices the view of his people,” that Jonah was an historical narrative. So those are general comments on non-historical views. I think those are three strong reasons for rejecting the non-historical view.

### Vannoy’s Analysis of the Non-Historical Approaches

Now we get to more specific comments. Seems to me first that those who hold non-historical views generally do so for two reasons. The first one, a., is that “the events described are viewed as either improbable or impossible.” In other words, the historicity of the book is denied on basis of the miraculous elements contained it. Some are of the opinion miracles do not happen, so reports of them cannot be historical. Others are willing to accept the miraculous in general, but



feel that the multiplication of miraculous element in Jonah is so great that is best not to consider it historical. That's basically what Allen says in his NICOT commentary. Allen says, "This element of surprise is a key factor throughout the book. A prophet's journeying to Nineveh to deliver his message is an extraordinary phenomenon. Prophetic oracles against the nations are common place, but they were normally spoken on the prophet's native soil for the benefit of his fellow nationals. The political mission of Elijah and Elisha to Damascus is the nearest parallel, but Jonah's journey is of a different nature." So it's surprising the prophets are going to another nation. "Another surprise, a shocking one, is Jonah's refusal to shoulder his prophetic burden. Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah indeed shrank from their assignments, but Jonah's blunt refusal goes far beyond their hesitation. In fact this little book is a series of surprises; it is crammed with an accumulation of hair-raising and eye-popping phenomena, one after the other. The violent seastorm, the submarine-like fish in which Jonah survives as he composes a song, the mass conversion of Nineveh, the magic plant--these are not commonplace features of OT prophetic narratives. While one or two exciting events would raise no question, the bombardment of the reader with surprise after surprise in a provocative manner suggests that the author's intention is other than simply to describe historical facts." So it's not the miraculous in itself, but "it's accumulation of eye-popping phenomenon" that makes you begin to wonder if this is really intended to be read historically. "Bold would be the man who ventured to say that this series of happenings was impossible, for who can limit the omnipotence of God and say categorically that anything could not happen? Not impossible but improbable is how they strike the ordinary reader. What if the author meant to arrest our attention and focus it on his message by means of a string of improbabilities?" So that's the way Allen addresses that issue.

#### John Stek's Approach: Analogy of History

Look at page 42 and 43 for a response to that type of approach by Allen this

statement from an article by John Stek. He was for many years the Old Testament professor who is now retired but wrote a book called *The Message of the Book of Jonah* which I think is very helpful for this question of the historicity of the book but also the message of the book of Jonah. But notice what Stek says, he says, “The writer assumes the historicity of the events narrated. This is an assumption which most readers...are strongly inclined to reject. Lifting this narrative from its own unique canonical and historical context, and consciously or unconsciously reading it in the context of general history where miracles such as are narrated here do not happen, except in myths, legends, and fairy-tales, the modern reader and scholar feel compelled by the analogy of history to find some explanation for the narrative other than that the events narrated actually happened.” See that reference to the “analogy of history” is that principle often used for historical purposes: If you cannot find analogous phenomena in your own experience then there’s a problem. The principle of what Stek is saying is that readers who do this tend to take this out of its own context, in the context of redemptive history in which God is at work, and put it in another context of general history and then conclude it didn’t happen. He says “Employing the principle of the analogy of history, recourse is generally taken, as does Eissfeldt, to “a mythological, fairy-tale motif which is found throughout the world, namely the motif of the swallowing and vomiting out of a man by a great fish, known, for example, in one form of the Perseus saga.

“The method here illustrated is insidious. It implies, if consistency be a virtue, that the same must be done with every Biblical narrative of a marvelous event. The fatal result is that all Biblical wonders are explained away on the principle of the analogy of history.

“The present writer recognizes the validity of the principle of historical analogy, but insists that the only appropriate historical analogues for the marvelous events recorded in the book of Jonah are the similarly marvelous events belonging to that history of salvation to which the Biblical writers bear witness,

viz., the history of the mighty acts of God. This is the only proper context for the reading of the Book of Jonah. Within this context, historical narrative takes historicity seriously, even when narrating the most unusual events—precisely because there are unusual events to narrate. And within Biblical literature, the Book of Jonah finds its nearest analogy as literature in prophetic historical narrative, as most scholars will admit.” In other words, you find the nearest analogy in historical literature of the Old Testament, the story of the Exodus and stories of the book of Kings.

### Repentance of Nineveh Questioned

Then the next paragraph is a footnote, 35, where Stek says, “The report of a repentance of the Ninevites has often been appealed to as a proof of the legendary character of this prophetic book. H. H. Rowley puts it bluntly: ‘That Nineveh was instantaneously converted is a thesis which will not convince any students of her history, unless the conversion was as ephemeral as it was swift—in which case it was worth-less, and hardly likely to deceive God.’ If the present writer rightly interprets the purpose of the book of Jonah, an ‘ephemeral’ repentance on the part of the Ninevites was sufficient to God's purpose. For even such a repentance, which began to manifest itself already when Jonah's preaching to Nineveh had hardly begun—‘And Jonah began to enter the city a day's journey’ (3:4)—stands in sharp contrast to Israel's callous dismissal long and miracle-filled ministries of Elijah and Elisha. By their response to a prophetic warning, however ephemeral it may have been, the Ninevites put hard-hearted Israel to shame,” I think that is the same thing Jesus is saying. The Ninevites repented, yet one greater than Jonah is here and you're not repenting.

The Israelites did not repent at the ministry of Elijah and Elisha and the Ninevites responded with the response Israel should have had. “Moreover, that God responds graciously to even an ephemeral repentance is evidenced by his sparing of Ahab who similarly manifested what could only have been an

ephemeral repentance in response to Elijah's threat of impending judgment.” You remember when Ahab repented or postponed the judgment that was to come on his son.

### Multiple Miracles Problem

If you are going to go the direction of Allen and others, who say it is the multiplication of the miraculous elements of this short story that leads you to the conclusion that the author is not intending to describe history, you have to realize these things tend to happen elsewhere as well. What then do you do with 2 Kings chapters 4-7? In 2 Kings 4-7, you have 4 chapters. In Jonah you have 4 chapters. In 2 Kings 4-7, in 4:1-7, oil is multiplied in those jars of the wife of a member of company of the prophets to pay the debt. In 4:8-37 Elisha promises the Shunnamite woman a son and later raises him from the dead. In 4:8-34 Elisha purifies and multiplies food for the sons of the prophets. In chapter 5 Elisha heals Naaman. In chapter 6 an axe head is floated. In chapter 6:8 some of Israel were struck with blindness. In 6:24 to 7:20 he prophesied of the deliverance of Samaria during a siege. So I think what you can say is when you go to the narratives of 2 Kings you have 4 chapters that have equally “eye-popping” miraculous events, if that’s going to cause you to say, “the book of Jonah is not historical.” It seems to me, consistency should cause you to say 2 Kings 4-7 is also a prophetic legend. Once you have done that then where you go from there? Because it seems to me the kind of literature you find in Jonah is the very kind of literature you find in 2 Kings 4-7. I don’t see how you can have 2 Kings 4-7 as historical but then say but I can’t accept Jonah, or vice versa. So it seems to me, the question is not what someone thinks is possible or probable. Rather it is whether or not the writer here is intending to describe reality as he knows it. What is the intent of the writer as to whether it happened or not? Inclusion of the miraculous events, even if these events are recorded in quick succession, is not a valid criteria against its historicity.

We go back now to the exodus as C.S. Lewis says, “Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely 'uniform experience' against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately, we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.” I think ultimately we get pushed back to this question of worldview and whether or not you’re willing to admit the possibility of divine intervention. So that’s a little more detailed look at it.

### Fish Story and Ancient Sea Monsters

I’ve said there are non-historical views generally for two reasons. First would be the miraculous. The second reason being, the fish story is viewed to be derived from myths and legends of other peoples. Next when you examine the evidence for derivations I think you will find there is not is a great deal of correspondence between the Jonah story and the others. Most of the parallels are found in the idea of someone of being saved from a belly of the sea monster. In Greek literature Hesione, daughter of the Trojan king, was given to a sea monster to appease the gods but was saved by Hercules. But the reward was not given to Hercules. Also in Greek literature, Perseus rescued a damsel from a sea monster and married her. Herodotus tells of Arion, who was pushed out of a sea monster and was saved by dolphin.

Go to page 41 your citation for Aalders’ comments on page 41. He says, “A third argument which must be discarded is that based on the parallels, especially of the fish story. Many scholars have been engaged in collecting parallels from non-Biblical sources. Time and again it has been asserted that the author utilized ancient myths and folk tales to compose his story. It is, however, impossible to prove that he was even acquainted with such tales.” There is no reason whatsoever to assume the author borrowed from such sources. “The points of

conformity which can be shown are so few and insignificant, that it is impossible to prove from these that the author of Jonah used or even knew the heathen legends. And if acquaintance with such material cannot be clearly proved, how can these parallels contribute to the solution of the problem whether the author intended to give an historical record or to compose a didactic fiction?"

Note at the bottom of page 5 on the handout, even Abraham Kuenen said that the story of the fish miracle is entirely in agreement with the religious standpoint of the author and that therefore we have no right to ascribe some alien origin particularly derivation from myths or legends in which only a few points of agreement can be shown.

### Problems with the Allegorical Approach

Now some more specific comments. One was this discussion of reasons of the non-historical views: the miraculous. Two, the more specific comments on the allegorical approach. I think the difficulty with the allegorical approach is that it encounters difficulty when pressed to details. For example, Jonah's own urging the crew to cast him into the sea is hardly applicable to that of Israel going into captivity. In the story, the fish is the divinely ordained means of rescuing Jonah from drowning in death, which is also hardly applicable to the captivity. This is not to deny that in certain respects Jonah could be considered typical or representative of Israel. I think that is quite possible. In fact, I think it is probably best to understand it that way. But this is entirely different than maintaining that the narrative was designed as allegorical of Israel. A representative or typical significance of Jonah would assume certain analogies between Jonah and Israel. In an allegorical interpretation one would expect a detailed correspondence.

This becomes clearer when we compare the book of Jonah with other examples of Old Testament allegories. There are some allegories in the Old Testament. I'll give you two of them. In Ezekiel 17:2-10, Ezekiel says, "Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell the house of Israel a parable. Say to them, 'This

is what the Sovereign LORD says: A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders. He took some of the seed of your land and put it in fertile soil. He planted it like a willow by abundant water, and it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine. Its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out leafy boughs. But there was another great eagle with powerful wings and full plumage. The vine now sent out its roots toward him from the plot where it was planted and stretched out its branches to him for water. It had been planted in good soil by abundant water so that it would produce branches, bear fruit and become a splendid vine.’ Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Will it thrive? Will it not be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so that it withers? All its new growth will wither. It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it up by the roots. Even if it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not wither completely when the east wind strikes it—wither away in the plot where it grew?’”

Now, the eagle in verse 3 with powerful wings is Nebuchadnezzar, and he came from Lebanon to the little country of Judah. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away.” That is Jehoiachin, who was taken “to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders,” that’s Babylon. “He took some of the seed of your land and put it in fertile soil,” that’s Zedekiah. “He planted it like a willow... and it became a low-spreading vine. But there was another eagle,” that was Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt. Going on, “And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious.”

Now that fits quite closely to the history of this time, and when you go down

to verse 12 you get an interpretation in the text itself. Verse 15, “But the king rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt.” So the interpretation is there. It is introduced by the statement that it is a parable, it’s told, then there is an interpretation.

In Ezekiel 19 you have another allegory. Ezekiel 19:1, “Take up a lament concerning the princes of Israel and say: ‘What a lioness was your mother among the lions! She lay down among the young lions and reared her cubs. She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a strong lion.’” The lion seems to be Israel. One of her cubs is Jehoahaz. “He became a strong lion. He learned to tear the prey and he devoured men. The nations heard about him, and he was trapped in their pit. They led him with hooks to the land of Egypt. He was taken by a prayer. When she saw her hope unfulfilled, her expectation gone, she took another of her cubs and made him a strong lion. He prowled among the lions.” That seems to be Jehoiachin. So we can trace that back again to the book of 2 Kings, and then read an allegorical description of the history of that time.

If you compare examples like this with the book of Jonah, what you find there is much shorter. They have an unmistakable indication of their allegorical character. You’re not going to read Ezekiel 17:19 and conclude that this is historical in the sense of the wording of what was said about eagles and cedars. So there is indication of the allegorical character. Such indications are not to be found in the book of Jonah, and it seems then we are justified in concluding that it is not to be understood in an allegorical sense.

### Problems with the Parable Approach

That brings us to “the parable,” and you can compare Jonah with examples of parables of the Old Testament. I think again you find that the parables are quite different than what you have in Jonah. I’ve listed three that are parables. You can look at Judges 9, the parable of Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1-4, and the parable of the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14:6-7. If you look at them, I won’t take the



time to, but when you look at those and read them, I think two things stand out. a., they are very short, simple, and pointed. The meaning is clear. In each case there is one basic point being made. Judges 9 points to the foolishness of making Abimelech king. 2 Samuel 12:1- 4, that David is guilty with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 14:12-14, David should allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem. And b., there is a direct indication there in the context making it quite clear. David was told it was a story. If you compare that with the book of Jonah, the book of Jonah is characterized neither by making a singular point nor by any indication of application. And in addition, there is no explanation of why a real person is the primary personality in the story. It seems to me those things combined argue against a parabolic interpretation.

Look at page 43 of your citations where D. J. Wiseman gave a statement in an article that is in the *Tyndale Bulletin*. He says, “If this is a parable it is unique in its length and lack of explanation compared with others in the Old Testament and in the inclusion of 'miraculous elements', absent from all other ancient Near Eastern parallels. This is especially remarkable if 'the cogency of the parable depends on its verisimilitude as portraying a human situation.'” In other words, you wouldn’t expect to find miraculous elements in a parable. That’s not characteristic of the parable genre.

Page 43 paragraph 3 gives the response of Allen. He says, “Certainly the story is set out in a narrative form, but "all parables resemble a record of historical events... It is impossible to argue from the form of the book of Jonah that it must have been meant as a record of historical events.” In other words, parable forms are so close to historical form you can’t really distinguish.

“Another factor to be taken into account is the obviously intended identification of the hero or anti-hero with the prophet of 2 Kings 14:25,” so he does address this issue of Jonah’s mentioned outside the book of Jonah also in 2 Kings. “Here at least is a historical basis, which suggests that the incidents related in our book are historical.” And then he says, “There may well be a historical

nucleus behind the story, but this is not relevant to its understanding in its present form. Behind the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) lies 2 Chronicles 28:15... Behind the parable of Dives and Lazarus may well lie the rabbinic tale of how Abraham's steward Eliezer, of which Lazarus is the Greek form, was sent to Sodom to test the hospitality of its citizens. But no one would fail to differentiate these parables from a straightforward recital of events. In each case an older theme has been used as raw material for the creation of something new and contemporary.” Now he makes a number of associations that are behind some of the parables. Get into this and discuss it and I think you can question some of those associations, but even beyond that none of the examples he gives treats a known historical person by name in the parable. The book of Jonah does, so it seems to me the analogy there, although interesting, really doesn’t carry the weight that he is trying to make it bear.

I see my time is up, we haven’t gotten to “content.” So let’s stop at this point. Next time we will have to discuss a little bit about the content of Jonah and go on to Amos.

Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
 Final edit by Katie Ells  
 Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 21a**

### IV. Jonah

#### C. The Contents of Jonah

We were in the book of Jonah, which is Roman numeral IV. In the second section, we looked at the expression of the character of the book. Is this historical writing or not? So we come to C., “The content of the book,” and I have two sub-points. I’m not going to work through all four chapters. But I want to talk about the historical background because I think that has a relation to the message of the book. Then secondly I want to look at the purpose of the book.

#### 1. Historical Background

##### a. External

##### Ascendance of Assyria

So first “The historical background.” First, a., “External,” what is the situation internationally outside of Israel at the time of Jonah. I’d like to push through this so I’m not going to read it all but will summarize it. You notice about the time of Omri, Assyria begins to regain strength. Ashur-nasir-pal (883-859 B.C.) is one of the Assyrian figures that reestablishes Assyrian power. The Assyrians militarily were ruthless fighters; I have there in your handouts a description of the ruthless types of strategies and tactics that the Assyrians used. But I say that because Assyria began to affect Israel. You notice Israel had a series of encounters with Assyria. In the time of Ahab (853 B.C.), Ahab joined forces to fight the Assyrians in the battle at Qarqar on the Orontes River. That is not mentioned in the Bible. Secondly, by 841 under Shalmaneser III after that standoff on the Orontes River, Assyria returned, and the kings of the north, Jehu in particular, were forced to pay tribute to the Assyrian king. There’s a famous Black Obelisk in which Jehu was pictured kneeling paying homage to the Assyrians in 841 B.C. So Assyria begins to assert real threats to the continued independence of the Northern Kingdom. In 833 B.C. Jehoahaz paid tribute to a succeeding

Assyrian king. So in the 800s Assyria began to put pressure on Israel.

#### Jonah and Urartu—Weakening of Assyria

How does this affect Jonah? Jonah is a little bit later, down around 782-780 B.C. I mentioned that Assyria was involved in a struggle with Urartu to the North. They were people who came down from mountains from the northern part of Mesopotamia. They pushed within a hundred miles of Nineveh. Some feel Assyria's very existence was threatened by these mountain warriors. This is the time of Assyrian weakness in which we don't have a great deal of information, so there is a fair amount of dispute. But some think this is the time when Jonah was in Nineveh, and if that is the case, Assyria itself is being threatened by these people from the north. That may explain the readiness of the Assyrians to listen to the message of Jonah when he said, "In 40 days, Nineveh was to be destroyed." Maybe that wasn't just a lame threat; maybe it was a real threat to Assyria.

In an article that's in your bibliography by D. J. Wiseman, he suggests that there was a solar eclipse in 763 B. C., a famine in 765, and an earthquake that were all in that general timeframe, and therefore those kinds of signs may also have contributed to Assyria's willingness to listen to the message of Jonah. If you come back to Israel, nothing would have been better for Israel than the defeat of Assyria. Prior to the time of Jonah, they had been threatened not only by Syria, but also by Assyria. Syria had ceased to be a threat and Assyria had become more of a threat.

In that context Jonah is sent to this nation that constitutes a serious threat to Israel. I think that helps us understand Jonah's reluctance to go to that city, as well as the openness of Assyrians to listen to the message of Jonah. So that is a brief summary of the external historical background context.

b. Internal:

### Prosperity under Jeroboam II

Now “Internal.” Many of the ideas here on the situation internally are taken from John Stek’s article, “The Message of the Book of Jonah,” in which he points out that both Israel and Assyria were in a period of economic resurgence. The time of Jeroboam II was much like the time of David and Solomon; Israel’s borders were extended and there was economic prosperity. And you wonder what’s going wrong, because Israel is not faithful to the Lord. The prophets are speaking of judgment to come because of adultery and immorality in Israel. So you can’t say the prosperity is God’s reward for a repentant and now faithful people. But rather it seems to be God’s gracious granting of relief to a nation he had recently chastised with great severity because of their sin.

Look at 2 Kings 14:26. You read there, “The Lord had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. And since the Lord had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.” Now, what that verse is referring to is Jeroboam’s success in gaining prosperity through Israel by extending their borders, in contrast to what had previously been the case of oppression by the Syrians—not the Assyrians but the Syrians—who had pressed down on Israel. So what I note on your outline there is that the people still remember how God had dealt with Israel in the time of Elijah and Elisha, in the time of Ahab and Jehoahaz, in which there was not only government by foreign nation on Israel, the words of rebuke by the prophets, but also indications of God’s blessing on the neighboring Gentiles.

### Elijah and Elisha’s Benefits to Syria

For example, in the time of Elijah there were many widows in Israel, but it was through the widow of Zerahaphath that the Lord sent Elijah in the time of famine to sustain her. Now Jesus refers to that. There were many lepers in the time of Elisha, but only, Naaman, the Syrian officer, was healed. That mercy was

shown to him even though, in that time, it was his nation, Syria, that was dominating Israel. In fact, in this general time, from Ahab to Jehoahaz, you find that Syria had been shown particular favor by God through prosperity. Elijah had been commissioned to anoint Hazael in Syria, Elisha prophesied that he would be evil for Israel. Elisha miraculously saved Syrian forces who were attacking Israel. So you wonder, what's going on here?

#### Deut. 32:21 God Provokes Israel to Jealousy by Blessing Foreign Nations

What Stek points out is the principle at work seems to be that which Moses explained to Israel on the plains of Moab in Deuteronomy 32:21. It reads, "They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding." Meredith Kline comments on that in his work on Deuteronomy, *Treaty of a Great King*, and says, "The covenant curses threatened Israel with extinction if she played the harlot with the no-gods of Canaan. Applying the *lex talionis* principle," that is, the law of retaliation, "God would incite jealousy in Israel by a means of a no-people." They made me jealous by those who are no god, I will make them envious by those who are no people. "He would reject the chosen people which had rejected him, remove his covenantal protection from them and grant to a people who had not known his covenant favor to triumph over his children." So it seems like that principle of retaliation, or principle of replacement, you might call it, is at work in Israel, just prior to the time of Jonah, in God's dealings with Israel and Syria. He is blessing Syria in a certain way and oppressing Israel. So that's just prior to the time of Jonah. Now, Syria is in decline because of its defeat by Assyria. And the word of the Lord spoken by Jonah concerning Jeroboam was going to be fulfilled. You remember it had been prophesied that Jeroboam's borders would extend all the way up to Euphrates. That is coming to pass at the expense of Syria. Israel was extending as far north as Hamath.

### Amos & Hosea Denounce Israel's Sin

Yet, while that is happening all is not well in Israel. Amos was denouncing or was about to denounce the sin of Israel. We'll look at some of those texts when we get into Amos. He was prophesying that Israel is going to go in captivity beyond Damascus, that's Assyria. Israel is to be brought low. The instrument of this judgment would be a nation from the Mesopotamian region. Hosea was preaching the same message in 4:1, 10:6, and 11:5. Hosea mentions Assyria. So, Israel is characterized by a spirit of pride and complacency, persistence in religious apostasy, and moral corruption. She really forfeited her special position that was hers by virtue of being God's chosen people, but in fact what's going on is that Israel viewed her election as an election to privilege, but it was a misconception, and she was blind to the fact that it was an election to service.

### Replacement: Return to God or He will Work Elsewhere

So that's the situation. God tells Jonah to go to Assyria. He is to present a heathen nation with the obligations and privileges of the covenant that Israel is rejecting. And it seems that this idea of replacement is referred to by Jesus in Luke 4:25-26 with respect to the widow of Zarephath and Naaman; that principle that had already demonstrated itself by this time with respect to the Syrians. If God's people reject this message when they do, the heathen would be called to the obligations and privileges of the covenant. Now that's Stek's suggestion for what's going on internally and what the theological significance is of this mission of Jonah going to Nineveh. It's replacement; if you don't turn to the Lord, the Lord will work elsewhere. God's people must always be conscious of this truth. "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." We do not own God's word. If we are not faithful and obedient, God may take his work elsewhere and place us under its curse and judgment.

It should be interesting to see what plays out in the next 25 to 50 years with respect to Christianity in the West. And what happens to Christianity, say in China, which has been a closed country, but from what I am reading, Christianity is flourishing remarkably there. Is this another example of this principle of replacement? Is God turning from the people who have all the privileges, and working and moving on elsewhere?

To get back to Jonah, the significance of his mission to Nineveh is not limited to just the Ninevites, it also involves Israel and their own relationship to God. Was not God pressing his claims on His own wayward people by means of this prophetic message to the Assyrians after the similar pattern of Elijah and Elisha? So those are my comments on the historical background.

## 2. The Key Purposes for the Book

### a. Jonah's Rebuke to Sin Laden Israel

After that is, "The key purposes for the book." Under "Purposes," I've listed four points. First, I think the ministry of Jonah served to highlight, by means of contrast, the rebellious character of the Israelites. There had been many prophets but they had not repented. But when Nineveh hears the word, it does repent!

Look at page 44 in your citations, Stek comments on this, "The events of Jonah's prophetic mission to Nineveh serve also as rebuke to sin-laden and stubborn Israel. Even the pagan mariners are surprised that Jonah, who serves the 'God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land,' would attempt to flee from such a God, and their words of surprise register at the same time a rebuke (The question *What have you done* ?[1:10]) seems always to imply both surprise and accusation. Moreover, the seamen's concern for Jonah's welfare stands in meaningful contrast to Jonah's callous attitude toward the Ninevites. It is also evident that the repentance of the Ninevites at the one-sign ministry of Jonah serves as a standing rebuke to the sin of Israel who stubbornly refused to listen to the warnings of the prophets, even when these warnings had been accompanied by



mighty signs as in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Once again, Yahweh seeks to ‘move them to jealousy with those that are not a people.’” So by way of contrast, the message of Jonah also provides a warning for the rebelliousness of Israel.

b. Israel did not Have Exclusive Rights to the Lord’s Salvation

Second, I think the mission of Jonah serves to impress upon Israel that she did not have exclusive rights to the Lord’s salvation. You get that at the end of the book because of the repentance of the Ninevites. Any idea of religious exclusivism based on national pride and a wrong concept of election is rejected here. Israel’s election was at God’s grace and mercy, and it can be extended wherever God wishes to extend it; it was not exclusively for them. And Jonah even became offended when God extended it beyond the bounds of Israel.

c. Jonah was Intended to Play a Representative Role

Thirdly, it’s likely that Jonah was intended to play a representative role of some sort and that the book would be perceived in this way by those who read it. I think if you look at commentaries and interpreters, many will comment on it, but there’s not great evidence for exactly what the representative role is. Here are three suggestions for that. First, representative of mankind in general. The narrative says something about God’s ways with man and human beings and their relations with God. Secondly, representative of those to whom God has committed a prophetic ministry. Jonah is an object lesson for those who would turn away from their calling. The focus there is specifically on Jonah and his call. Thirdly, and probably the most valid hypothesis, is that Jonah is representative of Israel, the people of God. Stek comments, “There is no reason to doubt that in Jonah’s attitude toward the Assyrians all Israel would identify itself with him and would know itself to be rebuked in him. And there is equally no reason to doubt that this is exactly what the writer intended.” Beyond this Jonah may also typify something

of Israel's future history. Jonah, an Israelite, was cast into the sea and then delivered in order that he might fulfill his mission. So, the nation of Israel would pass through the affliction of exile because of her disobedience until a remnant might return to accomplish her mission in the world. To this extent the symbolic school may be right. Jonah may well represent Israel. But at the same time Jonah is a real historical figure.

d. Israel's Unfaithfulness Will Not Thwart God's Purposes

The message for Israel is that no matter how much Israel rebels and fails—God will reach his purposes in and through Israel. As Stek says, "...the present unfaithfulness of Israel will not thwart these historical purposes of Yahweh. Although this had been made evident before at various critical periods in Israel's history, it is here demonstrated in a highly dramatic fashion. Jonah, embodying in one person the office of prophet—one of the primary charismatic gifts of God to Israel—and the perverted narrowness of spirit of the 'elect' people, is constrained by God, contrary to his will, to fulfill a mission of mercy to Nineveh. The sin of the Israelite prophet cannot thwart the gracious purpose of God for the Assyrian city. God is even able to use that sin to further His will. When Jonah finally goes to Nineveh, he goes not merely as a prophet from Israel, but he goes also, according to our Lord (Luke 11:30), as a striking, God-wrought sign to the Ninevites which would have profound impact on them. The imperfection, weakness, and brokenness of his people's response to him does not hinder the sovereign Lord of history in carrying out his saving purposes. 'Salvation is of Yahweh.' Yahweh will do his saving work in Israel in spite of her, not because of her."

e. Dominate Theme: The Sovereignty of God who Accomplishes His Purposes in spite of Human Rebellion

I think that perspective embodies the most dominant theme in the book: the

sovereignty of God who accomplishes his purposes in spite of human rebellion. It is God who has the first word and last. He wrote the book. Notice it begins in 1:1, and it ends “should I not be concerned about that great city?” See Jonah 4:10 and 11, “But the Lord said, ‘You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow... But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people ... Should I not be concerned about that great city?’” So it’s God who has the first and last word. In the body of the narrative he is always forcing the issue. So Stek says, “His judgment threatens Nineveh; he commissions the prophet; he sends the storm at sea; he ‘appoints’ the fish; he spares the repentant city; he provides the gourd; he ‘appoints’ the destructive worm; he ‘appoints’ the oppressive east wind; he rebukes the prophet.” Even Jonah’s prayer testifies, “Salvation is from the LORD,” that is in Jonah 2:9. So the narrative is really a narrative of the acts of Yahweh. Stek says, “Any exposition, therefore, which by explicit affirmation, or by implicit suggestion, places Jonah at the center can only be judged to be a misreading of this prophetic writing.” Jonah is an instrument in God’s hand. God’s sovereignty is at the heart of this book.

#### d. Jonah as an Illustration of the Messiah’s Death and Resurrection

Point d. Often it is said the purpose of the book is to point to one who is greater than Jonah because of the Matthew reference. E. J. Young says in fact, “The fundamental purpose of the book of Jonah is not found in its missionary or universalistic teaching. It is rather to show that Jonah being cast into the depths of Sheol and yet brought up alive is an illustration of the death of the Messiah for sins not his own and of the Messiah's resurrection.” It seems to me that Young overstates his point when he says this is the fundamental purpose of the book.

Compare Young’s comment with that of J. Barton Payne, who says, “The Lord Jesus later utilized the period of Jonah's sojourn in the fish to illustrate his own three days in the grave; but he thereby neither constitutes the prophet as a type of himself nor suggests that this had been God's original intent in decreeing

Jonah's miraculous experience.”

Stek comments, “Some have handled the entire book of Jonah as though its primary purpose was simply to provide a prophetic type of Christ. But if that is all that can be said, then it must be acknowledged that the type would have remained a complete enigma until the appearance of the anti-type, and the Israel to which the book was initially addressed could not but have misunderstood it. Its true meaning would necessarily have remained a closed mystery to them.” I think Stek is right in that. I think that is a miss-emphasis; I would prefer to say something where he says Jesus used this story to illustrate his three days in the grave rather than make the whole purpose of the book hang on this analogy of Jesus and Jonah in the fish.

## V. Amos

### A. Author and Background

Let's go on to Amos. I want to be selective in what I highlight in the notes. I wanted to save some the time for the Amos 9 passage. Under A, “Author and background.” One, is “His name.” He is Amos, a herdsman of Tekoa, from 1:1. He's the only Amos in the Old Testament. He comes from Judah and was a herdsman.

2. “The place of his prophetic activity.” He, in contrast to Hosea, was from the Southern Kingdom, but his prophetic activity was directed primarily to Israel, that is, the Northern Kingdom. That appears not only in the introductory sentence in 1:1, but also from chapter 7 where Amos appears at Bethel. That doesn't mean he doesn't have anything to say about Judah, and there is one section on that specifically. He is reminiscent of the man of God out of Judah referred to in 1 Kings 13 in the time of Jeroboam I when they were setting up the golden calves at Bethel.

3. “The time of his prophetic activity.” Amos 1:1 said he prophesied in the time of Uzziah in Judah, you read, “The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of

Tekoa—what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.” So he prophesied in the time of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam the son of Jehoash of Israel, two years before the earthquake. He was a contemporary of Hosea, though Hosea prophesied through later kings. If you look at Hosea 1:1, Hosea adds to Uzziah--Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. So it’s generally thought that Hosea was a younger contemporary and successor to Amos, with some overlap.

Amos 1:1 also mentions this earthquake, he prophesied “two years before that earthquake.” There’s a reference to that earthquake in Zechariah 14:5, where it says, “You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah.” And remember Zechariah was after the exile, so that was quite a bit later, there’s still memory of this earthquake from the time of Uzziah to after the exile. The problem is we don’t know the precise date of that earthquake. So it’s not of great help in terms of specifying the date of the earthquake. Freeman suggests about 760 to 753 B.C. for the time of Amos’ ministry, and that’s based on the silence of the death of Jeroboam in 753 B.C. In other words, the assumption is that had Jeroboam died, that would have been such an important event you would expect a mention of it. So it’s prior to his death, approximately 760 to 753 B.C. So there are end points.

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## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 21b**

### **Amos**

#### Amos

##### 5. The Political and Social Conditions at the Time

Let's return to our discussion on Amos. Number 5 is, "The political and social conditions at the time." Both Israel and Judah were prospering. Israel was relieved from the pressure of both Syria and Assyria. Nowhere does Amos speak explicitly of Syria, and there is no indication of his being in trouble for that. Look at 5:27, "'Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,' says the Lord whose name is God Almighty." In 6:7, "Therefore you will be among us the first to go into exile and your feasting and lounging will end." In 6:14, interesting wording here, "The Lord God Almighty declares, 'I will stir up the nations against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the Valley of the Arabah.'" Does that ring a bell? Especially, "from Lebo Hamath to the Valley of the Arabah." Look at the reference with respect to Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25. It says there that Jeroboam was "the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher." So you see Jonah had prophesied that Israel would extend its boundaries from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah. Here Amos comes along and says, "I will oppress you from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah." So Amos comes close to making an identification of the oppressor nation as being Syria, although he doesn't explicitly use the word.

#### Internal – Prosperity

Internally there was prosperity. You have references to the extravagant houses of the rich in 3:15, "I will tear down the winter house, along with the

summer house; the house adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished.” There are now excavations of Samaria where there were hundreds of inlaid ivories found. The feasting on luxuries are described in 6:4-6, “You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore, you will be among the first to go into exile, your feasting and lounging will end.” So, there’s a lot of luxury and wealth. But as Ellison points out, that is one side of the picture. We look at the rich but we must turn to the houses of the poor to see how they live. That side of the picture comes out if you look at 2:6 where you read. “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.” So there was a lot of injustice. Amos 8:4-6 continues this theme, “Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?’ Skimping the measure and boosting the prices and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.” So as Ellison points out, writers are fond of describing prosperity but for the most part they seemingly fail to focus on justice. So those are comments about the author and the background to the book.

## B. The Book of Amos and Its Content

### 1. General Outline

B. is, “The book of Amos and its content.” One is the “General Outline.” I think the book divides into four sections. First, “Judgment pronounced on the surrounding nations” and we’ll look at that briefly. Amos warns surrounding nations, ultimately Judah, and focuses on Israel. That’s the first two chapters.

Then what he does in the second section is to give more specific judgments on Israel and the reasons for it. That's chapters 3 to 6. And then thirdly, a section of five visions in chapters 7, 8 and 9. The last section a promise of future blessing, Amos 9:11-15. So that's the way the contents fall. The major theme is "Judgment on Israel for social injustice." There is an emphasis on social justice but also on religious formalism. So Amos ends the section with the justice of God at the end of the book with the great hope of promise of the future restoration under the law.

## 2. Amos 1-2

Chapters 1 and 2 are that first section, "Judgment on the surrounding nations." You have judgments there on six surrounding nations followed by a climaxing judgment. Amos follows the regular pattern of introducing each section with the phrase, "For three sins" and then he names a certain city or nation, "and for four I will not turn back my wrath." So you notice in verse 3, "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath." Then verse 6, "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath," and verse 9, "For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath." And that follows on through the chapter and on into the second chapter, "For three sins," and then a certain city or nation, "and for four I will not turn back my wrath." The expression is best understood as indicating the fullness of their sinfulness—for three sins and for four.

Amos also follows a pattern in the order of the nations of whom he speaks. He speaks of foreign peoples all by the name of their capital city. He speaks of Syria and references them by the capital city Damascus. He speaks of Philistia by using the capital city of Gaza in Amos 1:6. And he speaks of Phoenicia using the capital city of Tyre in verse 9.

So he first addresses the foreign nations, then he moves to the cousin nations, Edom, in verse 11. Edom comes from Esau. Ammon in verse 13; Ammon is related to Israel and the Ammonites come from Lot's older daughter. Moab in



chapter 2 verse 1; Moab descended from Lot's younger daughter. So he first looks at three foreign nations then moves on to three cousin nations.

Then he comes closer to home. He speaks of the brother nation, you might say, Judah in 2:4, before focusing in on Israel itself, the Northern Kingdom, in 2:6. So I think the progression is an effective way of hearing, particularly from those who could see the evil of Israel. It bolsters Amos' message and focuses on the issue, even about Judah—that's where he makes comments. The sins in them are not confined to the abuses that are present in Israel. Generally, he recognizes the evil in itself by all nations and these nations will face reparations but not without moral responsibility. Judgment is pronounced for sins that are recognized. The means of the judgment is not specified, but if you look at the history of these peoples and nations, it seems that judgment was carried out.

#### Amos' Focus on Judah

Amos begins to focus his attention internally on Judah. You notice in 2:4 and 5 he says, "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem." He gets to Judah and there is a significant transition. Remember he's speaking to the Northern Kingdom although he himself is from the south. If he had turned directly to Israel he may have been accused of partiality. The north was stronger economically and politically but the south had the presence of the temple. Amos describes the law of the Lord and not keeping his statutes and following other gods. This was fulfilled in 2 Kings 24-25 at the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. So judgment is coming on Judah.

#### Amos on Israel

In Amos 2:6-16, "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back

my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair sandals.” I won’t read all of it. But jump down to “I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men.” Then verse 13 and following, “Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life. The archer will not stand his ground...” Verse 16, “Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day.” This is the climax of these first two chapters. He has pronounced judgment on Israel’s enemies one after another, and now it comes on Israel. Now he directs his message at Israel who will receive the chief judgment. They warned the people before by the surrounding nations. A day of darkness rather than light, a day of judgment.

### Covenant Lawsuit

#### a. Accusation and Indictment

To bring this message, Amos uses what some have termed the “covenant lawsuit.” The features of this legal form are observable here. Notice how this works out. First you have an accusation or an indictment, that is in verse 6-8. I read part of that, “They sell the righteous for silver.... They trample on the heads of the poor.” Verse 7, “Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.” That indictment involves social, moral and religious violations—oppression of the poor in verses 6 and 7 and moral and religious apostasy in verse 8. These involved sacred prostitution, which they thought magically produced fertility of the land. Israel was warned not to be involved in it. Here the Lord is being worshipped as ordinary Baals would be. This practice was a gross violation of the covenant. What made it worse, it was done with things obtained through the oppression of poor. “They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge.” They were doing religion at the expense of the poor. So that’s the indictment of the covenant lawsuit.

#### b. Gracious Acts of the Sovereign in Vss. 9-11

Second is the recital of the gracious acts of the sovereign in verses 9-11. Verses 9-11 say, “The Lord says, ‘I destroyed the Amorite before them, though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below. I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you forty years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites. I also raised up prophets from among your sons.’” Is this not true? I’ve done all these things. I’ve been faithful. I’ve been gracious. So a recital of the gracious acts of the Lord. God had consistently kept the covenant.

#### c. Rejection of the Prophetic Covenant Warning

The third element of the covenant lawsuit is rejection of the prophetic covenant warning. This is found in verse 12. “But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.” The prophet calls the people to return to the covenant faithfulness and repentance, but both were rejected.

That leads to number four, the sentence in verse 13-16. I’ve read that already. It’s given in general terms. There is no specific prediction but the judgment is listed. So that is that climax of the first section of the book where Amos turns from foreign nations, to cousin nations, to a brother nation Judah, and ultimately to Israel.

### 3. Amos 3-6 Pronouncements of Judgment

Let’s go to the second section chapter 3-6 where there are more specific pronouncements of judgment. This section consists of three discourses each beginning with this phrase, “Hear this word the Lord has spoken.” You notice that in 3:1, “Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel.” In 4:1, “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy.” And 5:1, “Hear this word, O house of

Israel, this lament I take up concerning you.” These are three formulaic introductions of these sections.

a. Amos 3

I want to look particularly at chapter 3. Chapter 3:1-2 says, “Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: ‘You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.’” I think that verse summarizes the essence of the message. The covenant idea is central here, even though the term, *berit* [covenant] is not found. In chapter 6, “Therefore I will punish you,” which is taken from a long-time traditional approach of the covenant ideas, where you locate all the prophets who used the word *berit* [covenant], and you assess the result on that basis. Because the word *berit* [covenant] is not used extensively by the prophets D. Hillers concludes inappropriately that the covenant did not occupy a very important place in the conceptual world of the prophets. But what Hillers suggests, and he calls attention to the fact that in recent times, there are a lot of attempts in three areas of work in relation to the covenant and the prophets. One, covenant terminology. In other words, yes the prophets may not always use the word *berit*, covenant, but they do use covenantal language. So you get a more indirect approach to the functioning of the covenant by using covenantal terminology. Secondly, the literary pattern of the covenant we just saw that at the end of chapter 3 with the covenant lawsuit. And then thirdly, there is the use of covenant curses.

### Covenant Terminology

The first on the covenant terminology analysis, I have here in your notes a quote using *yada'* [to know] in chapter 3:2. The NIV says, “You only have I chosen.” Look at the Hebrew text. It doesn’t say that. It says, “You only have I known.” It’s *yada'* [know]. “You only have I known of all the families of the

earth; therefore I will punish you.” What does that mean? What possibly could it mean? “You only have I known.” Did the Lord not know that there were any other peoples on the earth other than Israel? And why the conclusion “you only have I known, therefore I will punish you”? What does knowing have to do with punishing? So a few comments on *yada*’. The term has a wide range of meaning from “to understand” to “sexual intercourse.” What does it mean in regard to the demands of God or when Yahweh says, “he knows Israel”? Knowing can go both directions. But that’s what it says in Amos 3:2, “You only have I known... therefore I will punish you.” In what sense is it true that Yahweh has known only Israel and why does it occur in Amos 3:2? Thus there’s a logical connection between God’s knowledge of Israel and their doom. It has become clear that we have here a usage of “know” borrowed from the terminology of international relations. Huffmon has an article on *yada*’. He says that Near Eastern kings use *yada*’, to know, in both Hittite and Akkadian texts to recognize a legitimate vassal. Look at page 49 of your citations under Herbert Huffmon. He says, “The most obvious technical usage of “know” is that with reference to mutual legal recognition on the part of suzerain and vassal.” In Asia Minor vassals would promise to know only the great king. Moreover, “another Lord you may not know.” And in the treaties the Hittite suzerain assures the vassals that in the case of rebellion against the vassal, “the Sun will know only you.” So “know” there recognizes one as legitimate suzerain or vassal. The context is a treaty or covenant.

But Huffmon goes on to say, “‘Know’ is also used as a technical term for recognition of the treaty stipulations as binding.” They would list the regulations and say, “You know these.” Now with that background the words of Amos are no longer mysterious. The vocabulary is familiar to international relations. Yahweh had recognized only Israel as his legitimate servant, his vassal. Since this sort of covenant involved obligations and the vassal had not fulfilled them, “Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Some of you in your papers noticed that

this term “know” between the Lord and Israel comes through in a number of places. Look at Hosea 13:4-6. You get it from the other direction. “But I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. You shall,” the NIV says, “acknowledge,” but that is *yada*’, “no God but me, no Savior except me. I cared,” that’s *yada*’ too, “for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me. So I will come upon them like a lion.”

Jeremiah speaks in a similar way in Jeremiah 24:7, “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am Yahweh. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.” That this kind of knowledge is closely related to the people’s conduct is evident in another passage, in Jeremiah 22:15, where you read, and this is of Shallum, son of Josiah, “He says, ‘I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.’ ... Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the Lord.” We also see a connection between prophetic terminology associated with treaty relationships. Even though *berit* is not frequently used, the complex of ideas associated with the covenant is present. From a lengthy excerpt from J. A. Thompson, the vocabulary of covenant is pulling out some of the language that is covenantal language that you might not realize by looking at the words. He says, “In general, both in the Old Testament and in the Near Eastern treaties the parties were described as ‘king’ or ‘lord’ on the one hand, and ‘servant’ on the other. The covenant stipulations were known as ‘words’ or ‘commandments’. All treaties and covenants had ‘witnesses’ to the ‘oath’ that was taken. The verbs ‘rule,’ ‘love,’ ‘serve,’ ‘bless,’ ‘curse,’ ‘obey,’ ‘swear,’ ‘cause to swear,’ ‘call as witness,’ and others besides, all belong to the same general *Sitz im Leben*, namely to the suzerain-vassal society which gave rise to the Near Eastern treaties, and which provided a pregnant metaphor for the expression

of the covenant,” and *yada*’ is included there.

### Literary Pattern: Covenant Curses

Second is the literary pattern of the covenant that we already looked at. A third category is the use of covenant curses. Hillers points out, “For again and again we find that the prophets frame their oracles of woe in terms echoing the curses associated with treaties,” similar to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, known “for it is a long list of curses associated with a covenant with Yahweh—it tells what will happen, ‘If you reject my statutes, and loathe my laws so that you do not perform all my commandments and thus break my covenant.’” It’s the treaty curses. That becomes important in Amos 3:10 where this becomes important to the assessment of the prophets. Much modern scholarship of the prophets has been devoted to prophetic psychology trying to capture their states of mind. They were concerned about monotheism and righteous living. But the perspective we’ve been considering has the prophets to be figures who used key phrases from Israel’s history and covenant rather than from their own consciousness. Their oracles are simply covenant curses. They are simply going back to their foundations back in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26.

#### b. Amos 4

Now let’s move on to chapter 4. This is an example of that very thing. You see in 4:6-12 Amos says, “I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me.” That refrain “yet you have not returned to me” is repeated five times. It’s in 6b, 8b, “People staggered from town to town for water, but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me.” 9b and 10b, “I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt, I killed your young men with the sword...yet you have not returned to me.” It’s in 11b, “yet you have not returned to me.” And then in 12, “Therefore this is what I will do to you.” God had sent many warnings in the form of covenant curses, but these had

fallen on deaf ears.

Go to Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 and note the list of verses on your outline. You will find that in verse 6 of Amos 4 is famine. Go back to Deuteronomy 28:17 and 18 where we read, “Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.” Go back to Amos 4:7, 8—you have drought. “I have sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up.” Deuteronomy 28:23, “The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust.” Amos 4:9a, mildew, “I struck your gardens and vineyards with blight and mildew.” Deuteronomy 28:22, “The Lord will strike you with a wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew.” Amos 4:9b, locusts, “Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees.” Deuteronomy 28:38 and 42, “You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it.” I have sent these but it hasn’t caused you to repent. At the end of that in verse 11, “yet you have not returned to me.”

Then verse 12, “Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel.” What’s he going to do? It doesn’t say. “And because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” It is an incomplete expression. Some suggest the verbs were lost and it is found in 3:14b, “I will destroy the altars of Bethel, the horns of the altar will be cut off.” So you would have, “Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel,” and then insert, “I will destroy the altars...” But that is totally arbitrary—it could have been pulled in from anywhere. It is understood. You go through all these sins and “yet you have not returned to me.” The implication is it will be worse than what had already happened. It seems to me what Israel can expect in this climax is the covenant curses. I think that’s what’s implied here and what is understood without saying it. Go back to Leviticus 26:27 and following, “If in spite of this,” that is, these covenant curses come on you because of your



disobedience, “you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.” Verse 31, “I will turn your cities into ruins.” Verse 32, “I will lay waste the land.” Verse 33, “I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.” So that is what comes at the end of the prophetic message if you still do not return to God. So it seems to me that that would be understood. This is what I will do executing the covenant curses on those who refuse to repent and those who would not “return to me.”

Next time we will look in detail at the conclusion of Amos 9:11-15 and its citation in Acts 15.

Transcribed by Ted Hildebrandt  
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt

## Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 22

### Amos 9:11-15

#### Amos 9:11-15 Promise of Future Blessing

We'll look at Amos 9:11-15 which is about the fourth section of the book: "Promise of future blessing." Here Amos poses a note of hope against the background of the many preceding pronouncements of judgment. There has been much discussion about two questions pertaining to this final section of the book.

#### 1. Authenticity

One, the question of its authenticity, that is, is this section to be attributed to Amos himself or is this something that was attached to the book at a later time? The line of argument that is used by those who question the authenticity say that the historical background implied is not that of Amos' time. The situation indicated in the concluding verses is that Judah has now been taken captive by the Babylonians.

Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that, at a time when David's dynasty was standing, men were bidden to look for the restoration of his "fallen hut," the closing up of "the breaches thereof," the raising up of "his ruins" and its rebuilding "as in the days of old" (v.11). In other words, in the Epilogue, the viewpoint is shifted; and the problem becomes similar to that of the authorship of Isaiah.

Remember when we discussed that issue with respect to Isaiah when he speaks about the return of Israel? So, the same line of argument is used here. In response, I just would say very briefly I think it can certainly be asked why a prophet might not presuppose the occurrence of what he had predicted? Amos says you're going to go into captivity beyond Damascus. He says your buildings are going to be destroyed. Your warriors won't escape. Why could not Amos, who prophesied the fall of Jerusalem in 2:4-5, presuppose this having happened and then look beyond it. In other words, it doesn't seem to me that that's a convincing

line of argumentation, and therefore there shouldn't be any question about the authenticity of this last section of the book.

## 2. Questions on Interpreting Amos 9:11-15

But, I do not think that issue is as significant as the second issue. The second issue is the interpretive question of how you understand Amos 9:11-15. How are we to interpret verses 11 to 15 in chapter 9 including the use of verses 11 and 12 by James at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15? To me there is a two-pronged question here. How do we understand what he said here and its use by James at the Jerusalem Council? But also more internally to Amos 9:11-15: what is the relationship in interpretation in verses 11 and 12 of this passage to the interpretation of verses 13 and 15? In other words, is this passage a unit in which it's speaking basically about the same thing, or is there some kind of disjuncture between 11 and 12 and 13 and 15? How do you relate 11 and 12 to 13-15?

### Amos 9:11-15 and Acts 15:12-19

J.A. Motyer says of Amos 9:11-15, "The world wide rule of the Davidic Messiah is a regular prophetic feature and figures prominently in the royal Psalms. The warlike metaphor in many of these passages is of course to be understood in terms of," notice his wording here, "the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ and the missionary expansion of the church. This is the interpretation authorized by the N.T. in Acts 15:12-19." In other words, when James quotes Amos 9 in the discussions at the Jerusalem Council, he is interpreting Amos 9 as speaking of the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ in rebuilding the fallen hut of David and the missionary expansion of the church. That is a rather common interpretation that turns up in many of your own papers.

O. T. Allis, in *Prophecy and the Church*, says of Amos 9, "Perhaps the best passage in the New Testament for testing the correctness of the dispensational method of interpreting Scripture." So Allis is an amillennialist and strongly

opposed the dispensational interpretative method.

Notice in the Old Scofield notes in Acts 15, the statement made about the use of Amos 9 in Acts 15, “Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the New Testament.” So it’s interesting to me from the dispensational side of this debate as well as from the amillennialist side of the debate that the disagreement that has to do with this passage is very important.

The passage has been used in the manner of J.A. Motyer and O. T. Allis, and by many in the amillennial school of interpretation. The conclusions drawn from this passage as used here in the New Testament are then used to support similar interpretations of other Old Testament kingdom prophecies as references to the church. In other words, if, as he says in Amos 9 verse 12 that “they may possess the remnant of Edom,” and in Acts 15 that “possessing of the remnant of Edom” is modified to say, “that the remnant of men may seek the Lord” in verse 17. If that is an interpretation of the Amos statement then you have a figurative interpretation you might say, of that statement about Edom that is adopted by the Jerusalem Council.

### Amillennial Viewpoint

Now, the line of argument that’s developed by those of this viewpoint is as follows. First, in verse 11 of Amos 9, the raising up of the tabernacle of David that is fallen is taken as a reference to the power of Christ as the Son of David in the present time of the preaching of the gospel. In other words, verse 11 says, “In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent, repair its ruins and build it up.” That is speaking of Christ and it is fulfilled in the present time of the preaching of the gospel. Theodore Laetsch comments, “He will raise up the fallen hut, and raise it to glory far surpassing that of its highest former splendor...this was fulfilled in the days of Messiah. Jesus and the Apostles began their work by calling to repentance the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Among these converts from the Jews there were undoubtedly a number of members of the ten tribes. In the Church of the

New Testament the breach separating the Northern and the Southern Kingdom of Israel will be healed.” So its fulfillment is for the first advent and the establishment of the church in the early gospels.

O. T. Allis in *Prophecy and the Church* says, “The words ‘I will raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen’ do not refer to a future Davidic kingdom,” nor is there a connection with the raising up of the fallen clan of David in connection with Christ at the second advent. It is first advent and does not refer to a future Davidic kingdom. “The house of David, the mighty kingdom of David and Solomon, had sunk to the level of a lowly ‘booth.’ When Immanuel, Jesus, the Son of David, was born in Bethlehem, He was heralded and acclaimed by angels; and the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity as David's Son was the beginning of the raising up of the fallen booth of David. And when David's Son rose triumphant over death and commissioned His disciples with the words: ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth,’ He claimed a sovereignty far greater than David ever knew, or ever dreamed of possessing.

So, when Peter and the other apostles declared that God had raised up Jesus and ‘exalted him to his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior,’ they were insisting that the mighty acts which they were enabled to perform were the direct exercise through them of his sovereign power.” So, verse 11 was interpreted as speaking about the first advent of Christ, Jesus raising up the fallen house of David.

Verse 12 reads, “So that they may possess a remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord.” Possessing the remnant of Edom is made equivalent to the “conversion of the gentiles.” This is based on the change of wording in the quotation of the Amos passage in Acts 15:17 where it reads, instead of the “possessing of Edom,” “That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the nations upon whom my name is called.” This significant change in wording is construed as a deliberate and inspired interpretation of the Amos passage by means of which the OT statement is raised to a higher level of meaning. You’re moving from possessing the remnant of Edom to the residue of

men seeking after the Lord. It is to be noted, however, that James quotes from the wording of the Septuagint.

We will move on to 13 to 15. Verses 13 to 15 read, “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted, from the land I have given them, says the Lord.” From this interpretative prospective the first advent and the conversion of the Gentiles are in verse 12. Verses 13 to 15 are usually taken as descriptive of the Christian Church by means of figurative language.

Let me just read here from Laetsch page 192 where he says of verse 13, “The reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes.” He says, “the plowman preparing the soil for a new seeding shall overtake the reaper. Busily gathering in the harvest from the seed sown by the sower in the soil prepared by the plower. On the other hand, the treader of grapes will overtake man who is diligently sowing seeds for future crops. In other words, what’s this talking about? In the Church of Christ there will be incessant preparation and seeking out heresy, reaping and harvesting in the Church of Christ, work is prepared in sending out missionaries who are preaching the word, which will go on forever. And just as continuous will be the joyful gathering the sheaves by bringing the converts into the church.” And that’s done consistently with the Amos passage but verse 15 says, “I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted.” What is that talking about? That said, verse 15 is “Old Testament language for such New Testament prophecies as John 10:27, which says, ‘No one shall ever pluck them out of my hands,’ the security of the believer.” So verses 13 to 15 in this way of interpreting the passage are usually taken figuratively as descriptive of the church. Anthony Hoekema takes them as

descriptive of the eternal state, rather than of the church but then one might ask why the emphasis on Israel? “I’ll plant Israel in their own land, I’ll bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities.”

I put in bold there on your handouts, see Anthony Hoekema *The Bible and the Future* for an example of how exactly to use a hermeneutic that can be applied to other passages as well. That’s the issue of the importance of this particular passage and its use in the New Testament because interpreters of this school of thought derive from it their principles of interpretation. Here’s what Hoekema says, “Prophecies of this sort may, however, also be fulfilled *figuratively*. The Bible gives a clear example of this type of fulfillment. I refer to the quotation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:14-18. At the Council of Jerusalem, as reported in Acts 15, first Peter and then Paul and Barnabas tell how God has brought many Gentiles to the faith through their ministries. James, who was apparently presiding over the council, now goes on to say, ‘Brethren, listen to me. Simon [Peter] has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old”’ (Acts 15:14-18). James is here quoting the words of Amos 9:11-12. His doing so indicates that, in his judgment, Amos's prediction about the raising up of the fallen booth or tabernacle of David (‘In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen...’) is being fulfilled right now, as Gentiles are being gathered into the community of God's people. Here, therefore we have a clear example in the Bible itself of a figurative, nonliteral interpretation of an Old Testament passage dealing with the restoration of Israel... Here, then, we find the New Testament itself interpreting an Old Testament prophecy about the restoration of Israel in a nonliteral way. And then notice his next comment. “It may well be that other such prophecies should also be figuratively interpreted. In

other words, here is a biblical example of that kind of interpretation then why can't they use that interpretive method with other prophecies that refer to the future of Israel? At least we cannot insist that all prophecies about the restoration of Israel must be literally interpreted.

### Interpreting Amos 9:11-15

#### 1. Amos 9:12

Now, let's look at these interpretive questions a little bit further. What I want to do is begin with point two, verse 12, in Amos 9. I've made point one verse 11, point two verse 12, point three verses 13-15. You can divide the Amos passage into verse 11, verse 12, and verses 13-15 and points one, two, and three. I want to look at point two first because I think point two, that is verse 12 of the Amos 9 passage, is the heart of the issue. So look at that first, and I think verse 12 is a point of particular importance because first, the New Testament quotation that comes from it, and secondly I think the conclusion that you draw concerning the interpretive issues in verse 12 of Amos has important bearings on how you will interpret verse 11 as well as verse 13-15. In other words, I think the heart of it is found in verse 12 and will determine what you do in verse 11 and verses 13-15.

Darash (seek) LXX & DSS or Yarash (Possess) MT

So looking at verse 12 first, there's a textual problem. Some of you came upon this. An article from 1953 in "Scientific Approach to the Old Testament," by Allan MacRae, refers to this Amos 9 passage. And what he notes is something that others have noted as well, is that the wording in Acts is a quotation of the Septuagint. In other words, when James quotes from Amos the language he uses agrees with the Septuagint. It doesn't agree with the Masoretic text in Amos 9. Allis agrees with this as well. MacRae notes further, however, that if there is any lifting of the OT prophecy to a higher level of meaning as amillennialist interpreters suggest, it is the Septuagint that initially did this, not James. Certainly the unknown writers of the Septuagint are not to be considered inspired.



So how are we going to explain the difference between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text? MacRae suggests the most logical answer is that the Septuagint and the Hebrew text were in agreement at the time of the Jerusalem Council, and that the same wording was found in both. If James had used a quotation that was different from what the men at the Council knew to be the Hebrew original, why did someone not say "wait a minute, an inaccurate quotation of the OT is not going to be the basis for deciding the issue of this council for us!" What makes this suggestion particularly feasible is that the change of just one Hebrew letter, *yodh* to *daleth*, which is easily confused anyway, gives a Hebrew original agreeable to the Septuagint, plus the addition of two vowel letters which may have been introduced in the Hebrew text after the time of the translation of the Septuagint. In other words, the key word here is this *yarash* (possess) or is it a *darash* (seek), "That they might 'seek' me? The "seek" presupposes *darash* instead of *yarash* (possess), if that *yodh* was changed to a *daleth*. You see what is called a *vorlage* which was the Hebrew text that laid before the translators of the Septuagint. It could have been one that is consistent with the way the New Testament quotes Amos.

This suggestion, and this is something that MacRae was not aware of because this was not mentioned in the article, is strengthened by the observation of J. de Waard that one of the Dead Sea Scrolls 4QFlor 1.12, that's not one of the biblical texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is a text that has an anthology of texts that center around the Davidic promise of 2 Samuel 7, and there is an allusion to Amos 9:11-12. The Hebrew wording exactly corresponds to the wording in the quotation in Acts. In other words, with the 4QFlor 1.12 within the Dead Sea Scrolls there is a Hebrew text that matches the Acts rendering of this verse rather than the Amos Masoretic text rendering. De Waard comments, "It would not be necessary to pose this question if a careful examination of Am 9,11 in 4QFlor I.12 and in Acts 15,16 did not compel us to do so. The text form of the Amos quotation in Acts differs from that of the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, but it is exactly

identical with that of 4QFlor.” The Septuagint is in verse 16, not verse 17, in Acts. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, we do have the *darash* (seek) instead of the *yarash* (possess). It seems that this suggestion carries additional weight since we do have evidence for that in the Dead Sea Scrolls now.

But secondly, what was the issue of discussion at the Council of Jerusalem and how does the Amos’ prophecy address this issue? In other words, how does James advance his argument and come to the conclusion that they came to the Council of Jerusalem on the basis of this quotation of the Amos passage? The issue under discussion at the Jerusalem Council needs to be clearly understood. The issue was not whether the Gentiles could become Christians. That question had already been settled, go back to Acts 1:1-18, “The Holy Spirit came on them as on us.” The issue was whether those Gentiles who had been converted would also need to be circumcised. That is, would they first need to become Jewish proselytes to be accepted by the Church. Open to Acts 15:5-6, “Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.’” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. Do we have to circumcise these Gentiles in order to make them eligible to become members of the church. James quotes the Amos passage to settle that question. Who must be circumcised? His argument is as follows.

First, he summarizes Peter’s reference to the conversion of Cornelius and his household in verse 14. Turn to Acts 15 verse 13, “When they finished, James spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.’” And you see, Peter got up, go back to verse 7. He got up and addressed them, “Brothers, you know that some time ago, God made a choice among you that the Gentiles hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then,

why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is by the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” That’s why James gets up and says, “Simon has described how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.”

Amos 9:12 Quote in Acts 15 – Simple Citation not necessarily a Fulfillment Quote

Back to your handouts, point b. He then says that the words of Amos agree with this. Actually, he says the words of the prophets are in agreement with this and then he quotes from Amos. He does not say that the Amos passage predicted the specific matter that Peter described, i.e., the conversion of Gentiles and the beginning of the church. We must remember that the point at issue at the Jerusalem council was not whether Gentiles could be converted; but, rather, would Gentiles be required to circumcise and to keep the law of Moses. It is not logical to hold that James quoted an OT prediction saying that Gentiles will come to Christ, and then from this concluded that since the OT says that Gentiles will come to the knowledge of Christ they do not need to be circumcised. Such a conclusion would beg the question that was being asked. The interpretation which maintains that James was quoting a verse to establish that Gentiles will be converted does not directly address the circumcision issue. Since the Council agreed to adopt James' advice, we must assume that the passage he quoted did address the question of circumcision in some way. The amillennial interpretation, normally, does not give adequate recognition to this point. The issue of certainty is not whether the Gentiles can be converted—yes, they can be converted—but when they do, do we need to circumcise them or not? If one assumes that the Amos passage is speaking about the eschatological kingdom, and about a fulfillment subsequent to the Jerusalem Council then, the use that James makes of the passage takes on a different meaning.

## Amos 9:11 in Acts 15

Notice that James speaks on the appearance of Peter saying, “Simon has declared how God **at the first** showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.” That’s a rather awkward statement. And you notice, as I put in bold here, ‘at the first.’ Why does he put that ‘at the first’? Then he summarizes what Peter had told them. When James connects the quotation from Amos with the conversion of the Gentiles he says (verse 16a) “**After this** I will return and...”

James’ “**after this**” sequences with “**at the first**” of vs. 14 and is a clear modification of the Hebrew wording of Amos 9:11. In other words, as you read in Acts, James says, “God at first did this...after this I will return.” So in the Acts there’s that sequence, “at the first,” then “after this.” It is a clear modification of the Hebrew wording of Amos 9:11. In the Hebrew wording of Amos 9:11, it doesn’t say “after this.” Amos 9:11 begins, “In that day I will raise up.” When James quotes “in that day I will raise up,” he substitutes there “after this I will return and raise up the fallen tabernacle of David.” The words “after this I will return” are not in the Hebrew book of Amos, nor are they in the Septuagint. There seems to be little doubt that James deliberately substituted the “after this I will return and raise up the fallen tabernacle of David” for the general time expression with which the Amos passage begins. James introduces this quotation by placing it in a more specific timeframe.

So, if God at first raised up Gentiles and after that will return, that’s not first half it’s the second half. In addition, as was noted before, James does not say that Amos had predicted that God will visit the Gentiles to take of them a people for his name, Acts 15:14b. Because he says, “To this the words of the prophets agree.” James is not suggesting that Amos specifically predicted the events that Peter had described, but rather is suggesting that Amos, and this is the heart of it, envisions a time when such a people will already be in existence.

So according to James, what Amos says agrees with the fact recorded by Peter and Paul that God has begun to “visit the Gentiles to take out of them a

people for his name.” If the entire passage is read with these considerations in mind, then it is not difficult to see the relation of the passage to the question of circumcision. To the members of the council, the argument seems to have been quite clear. Remember, the issue at the council was not whether Gentiles could become Christians, but whether they could become Christians and remain Gentiles. Thus the quotation from Amos must, in some way, give a clear and logical reason why the council should decide that it was not necessary for new Gentile converts to be circumcised. It does this, only if it is understood to be a description of the situation that will exist at the time Christ returns to set up his kingdom. If Amos is not speaking of this future time, when there will be Gentiles upon whom Christ's name is called, but is merely predicting that Gentiles will be saved, then the prophecy has no clear bearing on the issue of circumcision.

#### Conclusion:

Conclusion: Those who interpret the quotation from Amos as a description of the establishment of the church are one, attributing a “figurative interpretation of Amos” to James, when in fact he was simply quoting the correct Old Testament texts as evidenced by the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts, which was subsequently corrupted. Two, they are taking the quotation in a way that has no bearing on the central question, whether the Gentile converts needed to be circumcised. And three, they are disregarding the language in which James introduces the quotation by omitting Amos’ phrase “in that day” and substituting “after this I will return” and in order to indicate a particular time that Amos’ prophecy will be fulfilled. In other words, it seems that that there’s sequencing where James says, “God at the first showed concern by taking of the Gentiles as a people for himself” summarizing Peter’s discussion of the conversion of the Gentiles. And then he says the word of God agrees with this. Then instead of “in that day,” he says “after this,” “after this I will return.” After the conversion of the Gentiles, I will return. And when I return, you see in verse 17, there will be Gentiles who will bear my

name. There will be Gentiles in existence in that day upon whom the name of the Lord is called. If Gentiles are there at the time of Christ's second advent upon whom the name of the Lord is called, obviously the Gentiles don't need to be circumcised. It seems to me, that's the line of argument.

#### Implication for Amos 9:11 and 9:13-15

Now let's go back. If you take that view of verse 12, that can strongly change the interpretation of verse 11 as a reference to the eschatological kingdom of Christ in the second advent rather than to the Church at Christ's first advent. And it seems that also then, with respect to verse 13-15, that would suggest that we should read 13-15 as descriptive of conditions that will exist at that time, not as a figurative description of the Church. Notice J. Barton Payne takes a mediating position. He views verse 11 as the revival of the line of David in Christ's first coming. Then he sees the fulfillment of Amos 9:12 as the induction of Gentiles into Israel, that is the Church. He takes the phrase "after this and I will return" in Acts 15:16 as meaning after the exile and the preservation of Amos 9:9-10. Also, it is an equivalent for Amos' expression, "in that day" in the Amos context rather than the Acts context. Now to me that doesn't make a lot of sense. It seems to me that it's the Acts context we see James has modifying the wording. "At the first" and this "after I will return" is the Acts context, it's not the Amos context. But people argue it. But what's he do with 13-15? He says 13-15 are descriptive of the millennial prosperity. So Payne moves from the first advent of Christ to the merge of the Gentiles in connection with it to the end times millennial prosperity. Is that necessary? Is this passage a unity?

#### Amos 9:13-15

Aalders, who is amillennial, so normally you are expecting the conversion of the Gentiles as a figurative description of the Church in Acts 15:13-15, says, "My conclusion is therefore that we have two separate prophecies in Amos 9:11-

15 which are concerned with two separate subjects and which find fulfillment in two entirely different periods. The first (verses 11-12) is a proclamation of the Messianic rule of the Davidic dynasty. This is fulfilled with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and its fulfillment continues in the conversion of the heathen by the preaching of the gospel. The second (verses 13-15) is a promise of return from exile, and is fulfilled in the return decreed by the Persian King Cyrus. In other words, it is fulfilled in the Old Testament period. Chronologically verses 13-15 would be earlier than 11 and 12. And he says “With this approach I oppose on the one hand the chiliasts who understand verses 13-15 as a reference to the return of the Jews to Palestine in the messianic time,” I opposed that, “but on the other hand also various non-chiliastic expositors who spiritualize verses 13-15, and entirely against the clear sense of the words see here the spiritual benefits which Christ bestows on His church.” In other words, he finds trouble accepting that hermeneutic that will be able to find the Church in verses 13-15. There’s a literal kind of language we’ve got there: the reaper, the plowman, bring back my exiled people Israel, plant Israel on their own land, never again to be uprooted. He says, “Neither the one nor the other idea is correct.” In other words, the millennial or the spiritual. We can only do justice to the words as they now stand if we keep both prophecies (in agreement with what is often seen in prophecy) separate and understand the first as a reference to the Messiah, but the second as Israel’s return from the Babylonian captivity. Can you see what he’s wrestling with? He’s wrestling with the legitimacy of taking verses 13-15 in a figurative way and applying it to the church. Does that do justice to the language in 13-15? He says, “No.”

Well then what’s his option? See, from his standpoint, there is no millennial period, so if you are going to read it in any kind of a literal way, it must be the return from the Babylonian exile. But this creates as many problems as it solves because, one, the flow of the passage is back to something prior to that. And second, the words, “I will plant them in the land never to be uprooted again,” but

they would be uprooted again subsequent to the return from exile. So, you see where he's struggling, but he doesn't come up with a good response.

### Vannoy's Suggestion

I think the approach that I'm suggesting takes us to the second advent and not as some kind of reference to the conversion of the Gentiles in verse 12, but simply as the statement at that time as a reference to Christ's second return. "There will be Gentiles from whom my name is called" means we don't have to circumcise Gentiles, because when Christ returns we'll all be Gentiles upon whom the name of Christ is called. And if that's the case, why are we going to circumcise these people now? This is a complex passage, and there are a host of interpretative issues. What follows here I don't think is as critical, it is just some additional discussion of some different viewpoints.

Transcribed by Jared Kuipers  
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
Final edit by Katie Ells  
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt



