

## 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