

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 20th 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