

# Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3, Session 4, Companies of Prophets Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3, Session 4, Companies of Prophets, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Vannoy's lecture explores the concept of prophets and prophecy in ancient Israel. He clarifies that the term "sons of the prophets" refers to members of prophetic groups, not literal descendants. **The lecture challenges the notion of "schools of the prophets" as formal educational institutions**, suggesting instead that these groups were communities led by figures like Samuel and Elisha. **Vannoy highlights the degeneration of prophetic integrity over time**, contrasting true prophets with those seeking personal gain or courtly favor. **The lecture also discusses the nomenclature associated with prophets**, emphasizing that their primary role was to deliver God's message, not merely predict the future, and the canonical prophets were distinct from the companies of prophets.

## 2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Foundations).



**Vannoy\_FoundProp  
hecy\_Session04.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3, Session 4, Companies of Prophets

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Robert Vannoy's "Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3."

#### Briefing Document: Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3

##### I. Main Themes:

- **The Nature of "Companies of Prophets" (Sons of the Prophets):** Vannoy explores the meaning of "sons of the prophets," arguing it refers to members of a prophetic group rather than literal offspring. He uses examples from Nehemiah, Psalms, and Chronicles to illustrate the broader use of "son" as "member of a group."
- **The "School of the Prophets" Idea:** Vannoy refutes the notion that these prophetic groups were formal educational institutions, pointing out the lack of biblical support and the direct calling of prophets like Amos from their everyday lives.
- **Life and Functioning of Prophetic Companies:** He discusses the communal living arrangements of these groups, the potential for degeneration in prophetic function, and their distinction from canonical prophets.
- **Prophetic Nomenclature:** Vannoy examines various terms used to describe prophets in the Old Testament, highlighting that predicting the future was not the primary role of a prophet, but rather they served as preachers calling people to repentance and covenant faithfulness. He delves into the etymology and usage of the Hebrew word "nabi" (prophet).

##### II. Key Ideas and Facts:

- **"Sons of the Prophets":** This phrase signifies membership in a prophetic group, not necessarily familial relation. "It's under that last meaning that we should understand this expression 'sons of the 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.'"
- **No "School of the Prophets":** The idea of formal prophetic training is not supported by scripture. "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."

- **Communal Living - Debated:** Evidence for communal housing is meager, though they may have lived in prophetic neighborhoods. "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."
- **Degeneration of Prophetic Function:** Over time, some members of the prophetic companies may have been motivated by material gain rather than genuine prophetic calling. "When you read references to these companies of prophets it seems like over time degeneration sets in... it's possible that over time people began to associate with the companies for material advantage."
- **Canonical vs. Company Prophets:** Canonical prophets (writing prophets) were distinct from the prophetic companies; they were not known for receiving support for their prophetic tasks. "The canonical prophets are distinguished from these companies... I don't think there's any evidence that any of the writing prophets... belonged to a company or a guild of prophets."
- **Amos' Stance:** Amos' statement, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son," (Amos 7:14) can be interpreted as a rejection of professionalized or mercenary prophecy. Vannoy explores both the past and present tense translations to explain Amos' intent to distance himself from those who prophesied for profit.
- **Writing/Canonical Prophets:** "Writing prophets" and "canonical prophets" refer to the same group: the authors of the Old Testament prophetic books. The term "writing prophets" could theoretically include other prophets whose writings were not canonized.
- **Prophetic Function vs. Office:** Vannoy prefers "prophetic function" over "office of prophet" because the role was more sporadic and dependent on the Spirit's prompting, unlike the established offices of priests and kings.
- **Prophet not primarily a foreteller:** "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... I think that really misses the point...The prophets were basically preachers."
- **"Man of God":** This is the most general term for a prophet, indicating a relationship with God.

- **"Servant of the Lord":** This term denotes a relationship of service to God.
- **"Messenger of the Lord":** This term explicitly identifies the prophet as bringing God's message to the people.
- **"Nabi" (Prophet):** Vannoy discusses the etymology of *nabi*, noting scholarly debates regarding its origin (potentially from "bubble forth" or Akkadian *nabu*, meaning "to speak"). He highlights that its usage suggests someone who speaks for God or is called by God. He references Deuteronomy 18:18 and Exodus 7:1 and 4:15 to demonstrate that the nabi is like the mouth of God.
- **Prophetes (Greek):** Vos notes "the Greek *prophetes* does not stand in the same direct relation to the deity as the Hebrew *nabi* does... *Prophetes* is therefore rather an interpreter than a mouthpiece of what the god speaks through the one he directly inspired."

### III. Quotes:

- "It's under that last meaning that we should understand this expression 'sons of the 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.'"
- "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."
- "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."
- "When you read references to these companies of prophets it seems like over time degeneration sets in... it's possible that over time people began to associate with the companies for material advantage."
- "The canonical prophets are distinguished from these companies... I don't think there's any evidence that any of the writing prophets... belonged to a company or a guild of prophets."
- "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... I think that really misses the point...The prophets were basically preachers."

**IV. Potential Discussion Points:**

- The social and economic context of prophetic companies in ancient Israel.
- The distinction between true and false prophets.
- The relevance of the prophetic message for contemporary audiences.
- The implications of the different interpretations of Amos 7:14.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive overview of the key information presented in the lecture excerpts.

## 4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3, Session 4, Companies of Prophets

### Companies of Prophets Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each, based on the provided source material.

1. According to Vannoy, what are the different ways the Hebrew word "ben" (son) can be used in the Old Testament?
2. What are some of the examples from the Old Testament that demonstrate that the term "son" can be used to refer to a member of a group?
3. Why does Vannoy suggest that the "school of the prophets" is not an accurate description of these groups?
4. What evidence in 1 Samuel 19 and 2 Kings 4 suggests Samuel and Elisha acted as leaders of the companies of prophets?
5. What evidence is there in 2 Kings 4 and 6 that suggests the companies of prophets did *not* live in communal housing?
6. According to Vannoy, how might the prophetic function have degenerated within the companies over time?
7. How does Amos 7:14 provide evidence for the distinction between canonical prophets and the companies of prophets?
8. What is Vannoy's opinion on translating Amos 7:14 in the past or present tense?
9. According to Vannoy, what was the primary role of the prophets, and how does this differ from a common misconception about prophets?
10. What does the term "man of God" suggest about a prophet's relationship with God?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The Hebrew word "ben" (son) can mean male descendant, a longer-term descendant (like Jesus as the son of David), or a member of a group. Vannoy emphasizes that "sons of the prophets" should be understood as "members of the group" of prophets, not literally children of prophets.

2. Nehemiah 12:28 ("sons of singers" referring to choir members), Psalm 18:44 ("sons of strangers" referring to foreigners), and 2 Chronicles 25:13 ("sons of troop" referring to soldiers) illustrate the use of "son" to mean "member of a group." Vannoy also thinks Psalm 72:4 might support this translation.
3. Vannoy argues that there is no clear biblical basis for viewing these groups as educational institutions. The term "school of the prophets" does not appear in the Old Testament, and there is little evidence that prophets received formal training.
4. In 1 Samuel 19:20, Samuel is described as standing as the leader of a group of prophesying prophets. In 2 Kings 4:38, Elisha is shown commanding the cooking of stew for the company of prophets, implying a leadership role in providing for them.
5. In 2 Kings 4:1-7, the wife of a member of a company of prophets calls on Elisha from her own house, suggesting she lived in a private residence. Also, in 2 Kings 6:2, the prophets request permission to gather lumber to "build a place...for us to live," not *live together*, which suggests they do not share one dwelling.
6. Vannoy suggests that some individuals may have joined the companies for material advantage, such as receiving food or support. He notes that some prophets associated with royal courts gave favorable messages to the kings rather than speaking the truth of God.
7. In Amos 7:14, Amos states, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son," seemingly distinguishing himself from the type of prophet associated with a group or guild. This separation highlights that Amos was not a professional prophet seeking livelihood from prophesying.
8. Vannoy prefers translating Amos 7:14 in the present tense to emphasize that Amos is differentiating himself from prophets who prophesy for personal gain. He believes this highlights Amos's point that he is not prophesying for livelihood but out of obedience to God.
9. Vannoy states the prophets were primarily preachers who called people to repentance, covenant faithfulness, and obedience to God. He argues that while prophets did foretell the future, the essence of their ministry was not primarily about predicting the future.
10. The expression "man of God" suggests that the prophet is a person who stands in a unique relationship with God. It indicates a connection and intimacy with God,

though the exact nature of the relationship is not specifically defined by the title itself.

## Essay Questions

1. Analyze the evidence for and against the idea that the "companies of prophets" were structured educational institutions, similar to modern seminaries.
2. Discuss the significance of the expression "sons of the prophets." How does understanding the various meanings of "son" in Hebrew affect our interpretation of the role and function of these groups?
3. Explain the concept of "degeneration of the prophetic function" within the companies. What factors might have contributed to this decline, and how is it reflected in the Old Testament narratives?
4. Contrast the role and function of canonical prophets with that of the prophets associated with the "companies of prophets." How do the actions and statements of Amos illustrate this distinction?
5. Describe the different terms used to designate prophets in the Old Testament. What do these terms reveal about the multifaceted nature of the prophetic ministry and the prophet's relationship with God?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Bene hanebiim:** Hebrew term meaning "sons of the prophets," often translated as "company of prophets." It refers to members of a group associated with prophetic activity.
- **Canonical Prophets:** The prophets whose writings are included in the canon of the Old Testament, also referred to as "writing prophets." Examples include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and others who have books in the Hebrew Bible.
- **Companies of Prophets:** Groups of individuals associated with prophetic activity, often led by figures like Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. The nature and function of these groups is debated.
- **Nabi:** The Hebrew word most often used to designate a prophet. Its etymology and meaning are debated, but it generally refers to someone who speaks for or is called by God.



- **Prophetes:** The Greek word used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate the Hebrew word *nabi*.
- **School of the Prophets:** A theory about the nature of the companies of prophets. They might have been educational institutions or training grounds for prophets. This idea lacks strong biblical support.
- **Man of God:** A general term used to describe a prophet, indicating that the person stands in a relationship with God.
- **Servant of the Lord:** Another term used to describe a prophet. It emphasizes the relationship between the prophet and God as one of service.
- **Messenger of the Lord:** Used infrequently, this term highlights the prophet's role in delivering God's message to the people.
- **Etymology:** The study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history.
- **Targums:** Ancient Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- **Baal Shalishah:** Location where food gifts were brought to Elisha for the company of prophets.
- **Naioth of Ramah:** Possible complex of houses where members of a company of prophets dwelled, in the city of Ramah.
- **Gibeah:** Location where Saul encountered a company of prophets with musical instruments.

## **5. FAQs on Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 3, Session 4, Companies of Prophets, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**

### **Companies of Prophets: An FAQ**

#### **What does "son of the prophets" mean in the Old Testament?**

The phrase "son of the prophets" (bene hanebiim) does *not* refer to the literal children of prophets. Instead, "son" (ben in Hebrew) signifies membership in a group or category. Thus, "sons of the prophets" refers to individuals belonging to the company or class of people known as prophets. This is similar to how "sons of singers" refers to members of a choir (Nehemiah 12:28) or "sons of strangers" refers to foreigners (Psalm 18:44).

#### **Was there really a "School of the Prophets"?**

While the idea of a "school of the prophets" has been around for a long time and is found in the Targums, there is no explicit biblical support for it. The term "school of the prophets" is never used in the Old Testament. While figures like Samuel and Elisha led companies of prophets (1 Samuel 19:20, 2 Kings 4:38), it's unclear whether this involved formal instruction or simply leadership and provision. It is more likely that prophets were called out of their normal lives by God to proclaim His message.

#### **Did the companies of prophets live communally?**

The evidence for communal living among the companies of prophets is inconclusive. 2 Kings 4:38 suggests they ate together, but this occurred during a famine. 2 Kings 6:1-2 might imply they were building a place to live together or just a gathering place. 2 Kings 4:1-7, about the widow of a member of the company, suggests that individual members had their own houses, even if they lived in a prophetic neighborhood (1 Samuel 19:19, "Naioth at Ramah").

#### **How did the prophetic function within the companies potentially degenerate over time?**

It's possible that over time, some individuals associated with the companies of prophets for personal gain or material advantage. Some prophets, particularly those associated with royal courts, may have delivered favorable messages to the king rather than speaking the true word of the Lord (1 Kings 22:4-12, Micah 3:5). This suggests that the prophetic function could become corrupted when prophets sought personal benefit or royal favor.

### **How were the canonical prophets different from the prophets in the companies?**

The canonical (writing) prophets, whose messages are recorded in the books of the Old Testament, were distinct from the members of the companies of prophets. There is no evidence suggesting the canonical prophets belonged to prophetic guilds or received financial support for their prophetic activities. Amos 7:14, where Amos declares, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son," may indicate a rejection of professional or guild-based prophecy, though the translation and interpretation of this verse is debated.

### **What is the significance of Amos 7:14 in understanding the role of a prophet?**

Amos 7:14 ("I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son...") highlights the distinction between prophets who prophesy for personal gain (like those associated with the king's sanctuary) and those who are called by God to deliver a message, regardless of the personal cost. Depending on whether the verse is translated in the present or past tense, it may either emphasize that Amos is *not* a professional prophet or that he was *not originally* a prophet until called by God. Either way, the verse underscores the divine calling and rejection of prophetic careerism of true prophets.

### **What does the term "nabi" (prophet) really mean?**

The Hebrew word "nabi," which is most often used to designate a prophet, does not simply mean someone who predicts the future. The origin and etymology of the word "nabi" are debated. Some scholars believe it comes from the Akkadian word "nabu," meaning "to speak," suggesting a "speaker" or "spokesman of God." Others argue it means "one who is called by God." Regardless of its etymology, the core meaning of "nabi" is someone who conveys God's message to the people (Deuteronomy 18:18, Exodus 4:15-16, 7:1).

### **What is the significance of the prophet nomenclature, such as "man of God" or "servant of the Lord"?**

The various terms used to describe prophets in the Old Testament offer insight into the nature of their role. "Man of God" indicates a relationship with God, while "servant of the Lord" suggests a relationship of service. "Messenger of the Lord" (Malachi 1:1, Haggai 1:13) emphasizes the prophet's role as a bearer of God's message. These terms highlight that the prophetic function was centered on their relationship to God and the message they conveyed to others.