

# Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 5, Session 6, Ancient Near East Prophet 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 5, Session 6, Ancient Near East Prophet, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Vannoy's lecture explores the origins of prophetism in Israel by examining alleged analogies in the ancient Near East. It contrasts Israelite prophecy with Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite practices, finding significant differences in ethical focus, historical context, and divine inspiration. **Mesopotamian texts are viewed as indirect and focused on cultic obligations rather than ethical concerns.** Egyptian texts, like the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" and "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu," are examined for potential messianic parallels but are found lacking in universal spiritual vision and authenticity. The lecture asserts a lack of data supporting Canaanite influence, despite some scholars' claims. Ultimately, Vannoy argues that Israelite prophetism uniquely originated from God as a gift, rather than from surrounding cultures or the inherent religious inclinations of the Israelite people.

## 2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 5, Session 6 – 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\_Session06.mp3

### 3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 5, Session 6, Ancient Near East Prophet

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpts of Robert Vannoy's "Foundations of Biblical Prophecy; Lecture 5: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East."

#### Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 5

**Main Theme:** This lecture explores the origins of prophetism in Israel by examining alleged analogies in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures (Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan) and then considering internal Israelite explanations. Vannoy ultimately argues that the origins of Israelite prophecy are unique and divinely inspired, not derived from surrounding cultures or inherent in the "religious genius" of the Israelites themselves.

#### I. Analogies to Israelite Prophecy in Other Nations

Vannoy analyzes supposed parallels in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite cultures, ultimately arguing that they are unconvincing.

- **A. Mesopotamian Analogy (Mari Texts):**
- **Summary:** Vannoy reviews the Mari texts, which contain examples of individuals receiving messages from deities (like Dagon) and conveying them to the king. He acknowledges faint similarities in form (a messenger delivering a message to a leader).
- **Differences: Indirect Communication:** The message in Mari is delivered indirectly to the king, whereas Israelite prophets confronted kings directly. Two of the Mari tablets conclude, "'Let my Lord do what pleases him,'" which contrasts sharply with the Israelite concept of obedience to God's word.
- **Cultic vs. Ethical/Spiritual Concerns:** The Mari texts primarily focus on "external cultic obligations" (sacrifices, rituals), while the Israelite prophets focused on "repentance and on 'wash your hands, come to the Lord with clean hearts, come to the Lord with the desire to obey him and worship him.'" The Israelite prophets were concerned with the moral and spiritual condition of the people.
- **Purposeful Divine Action in History:** Vannoy quotes Ridderbos, stating that Israelite prophets connect specific situations to "God's purposeful action in history," offering a broad perspective of God's sovereign control, while the Mari texts show no awareness of such a historical movement.

- **Expert Opinion:** Gene Tucker, a non-evangelical scholar, is quoted, stating that the Mari texts address "the rule of origins for representatives, and not the nation as a whole, and express material concerns of local people." Noort is cited as being unconvinced that the Mari prophets were the predecessors of Old Testament prophets. Tucker concedes they are "phenomenologically if not historically related," meaning the phenomenon of someone claiming to speak for a deity is common, but a direct historical connection is unlikely.
- **B. Egyptian Analogies:**
  - **1. Admonitions of Ipuwer:Summary:** The text describes a time of disaster and upheaval in Egypt, with Ipuwer describing the chaos to the Pharaoh.
  - **Alleged "Messianic" Prediction:** One section has been interpreted as a messianic prophecy speaking of an ideal king, but this interpretation is debated, and its context is unclear due to gaps in the text.
  - **Translation Issues:** Different translations render a key passage in either the future ("It shall come that he brings coolness upon the heart" - Wilson) or the past ("He has brought wholeness upon the heart" - Shupak), significantly impacting the interpretation.
  - **Analysis:** Vannoy emphasizes the text's ambiguity. Even if it refers to the future, it lacks the universal, spiritual dimensions of the Old Testament messianic vision.
  - **Responsibility:** The lecturer mentions that the prophet might be holding the Pharaoh responsible for the woes of the land, like Nathan to David, but considers the evidence for this to be unclear.
  - **2. Prophecy of Nefer-rohu (Neferti):Summary:** The text depicts the prophet Nefer-rohu being asked by King Snefru to predict the future. Nefer-rohu describes calamities and predicts the coming of a king (Ameni/Amenemhet I) who will restore order.
  - **Criticisms:Lack of Seriousness:** E.J. Young is quoted, pointing out the lack of seriousness in the text, with the king merely seeking entertainment.
  - **Vaticinium ex eventu:** G.D. Smith and William F. Albright are cited to argue that the text was likely written *after* the reign of Amenemhet I as political propaganda, making it "speaking from the events" rather than a genuine prophecy.
  - **Dating:** The oldest copies of the text date from about 1450 BC, centuries after the events it allegedly predicts.

- **C. Canaanite Analogies:**
- **Lack of Evidence:** Vannoy states, "There's been a considerable effort to find analogies for Israel's prophetism among the Canaanites. There's one small problem. None have ever been found."
- **Speculation and Theories:** Despite the lack of evidence, some scholars argue that Canaanite religion influenced Israelite prophetism, particularly through ecstatic movements.
- **1 Kings 18:19 (Elijah and the Prophets of Baal):** This passage is sometimes cited as evidence of prophetic behavior in Canaan, with the prophets of Baal engaging in "frantic prophesying" (NIV translation) and self-mutilation.
- **The Journey of Wenamen:** This Egyptian text describes a Phoenician youth who becomes possessed and delivers a message to the king, cited as an example of "prophetic frenzy."
- **Critique:** Vannoy finds the Canaanite connection to be largely speculative and lacking in concrete evidence. He points out that the theory doesn't align with Samuel's opposition to Canaanite religion.
- **Conclusion:** Despite the formal similarities, there is very little material correspondence.

## II. Internal Israelite Explanations for the Origin of Prophetism

Vannoy examines and rejects explanations rooted in the "religious genius" of Israel or the unique spiritual consciousness of individual prophets.

- **A. The Religious Genius of Israel:**
- **Rejection:** Vannoy argues that Israel's history demonstrates a tendency to follow the religious practices of surrounding nations, not to develop a high form of religion independently. The prophets were counter-cultural, constantly urging the people to turn away from heathen deities.
- **B. Individual Spiritual Inclination of Prophets:**
- **Rejection:** The prophets themselves claim to be speaking the words of God, not their own ideas. "I will put my words in your mouth." Their messages are not self-generated but divinely inspired.

### III. The Biblical Explanation: Divine Origin

- **A. God as the Source: Thesis:** Vannoy concludes that, according to the Old Testament's own witness, prophetism in Israel originated with God and should be viewed as a gift to His people. He postpones further elaboration on this point to the next lecture.

#### Key Quotes:

- Mari: "Let my Lord do what pleases him."
- Ridderbos: "When Israel's prophets bring a message in a concrete situation, we must notice the backdrop to their pronouncements. But while making detailed statements, they also connect the particular situation with which they deal to the great subject of God's purposeful action in history."
- Tucker: The Mari articles address "the rule of origins for representatives, and not the nation as a whole, and express material concerns of local people."
- E.J. Young (on Nefer-rohu): "One must notice the utter lack of seriousness of this text."
- God: "I will put my words in your mouth."

#### Overall Argument:

Vannoy systematically dismantles the idea that Israelite prophetism was derived from or significantly influenced by surrounding cultures. He emphasizes the unique features of Israelite prophecy, particularly its ethical focus, its connection to God's redemptive plan in history, and the prophets' own testimony about the divine source of their messages. He sets the stage for a discussion of the internal, biblical explanation: that prophetism was a gift from God.

## 4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 5, Session 6, Ancient Near East Prophet

### Origins of Israelite Prophetism: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

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

1. What is one similarity between Mesopotamian divination and Israelite prophecy?
2. What is a crucial difference between the messages delivered in the Mari texts and the messages of the Old Testament prophets?
3. According to Ridderbos, what crucial element is missing from extrabiblical prophetic pronouncements?
4. What is the main problem in determining the purpose of Ipuwer's text?
5. Why do some scholars believe the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" contains messianic prophecy?
6. What is *vaticinium ex eventu*, and how does it relate to the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu?"
7. What was the main purpose for which Snefru sought the services of Nefer-rohu?
8. What is the main problem with the theory of the Canaanite origin of the prophets?
9. According to the lecture, how is the story of Wenamen connected to the theory of Canaanite origin of prophets?
10. According to the lecture, why is the "Religious Genius of Israel" an inadequate explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. One similarity is that in both cases, individuals claimed to receive messages from a deity, acting as messengers to those in authority.
2. The messages of the Old Testament prophets focused on ethical and spiritual realities, calling for repentance and a change of heart, while the Mari texts primarily concerned external cultic obligations.

3. According to Ridderbos, extrabiblical texts lack connection to God's purposeful action and redemptive plan in history, seeing events as isolated incidents rather than part of a larger divine narrative.
4. The main problem is the presence of lacunae (gaps) in the text, making it difficult to determine whether the so-called messianic section speaks of the future or the past.
5. Some scholars believe it contains messianic prophecy because Wilson's translation renders a section in the future tense, depicting a god-king who will deliver Egypt from its woes, a concept reminiscent of the Old Testament's messianic expectations.
6. *Vaticinium ex eventu* is a Latin phrase meaning "speaking from the event," referring to a prophecy written after the event it supposedly predicts; this concept is used to question the authenticity of the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu" as it may have been written after the reign of Amenemhet I.
7. Snefru was seeking someone to entertain him with "fine words and well-chosen speeches," desiring to be informed about the future for his amusement rather than for guidance or spiritual insight.
8. The primary issue is the lack of concrete evidence; there are very few religious texts from the Canaanites, and no direct analogies to Israelite prophetism have been found.
9. The story of Wenamen is used as evidence for prophetic frenzy because it recounts an Egyptian priest receiving a message delivered by a possessed youth.
10. Israel's history shows a tendency to follow the religious practices of surrounding nations, contradicting the idea of an innate inclination towards the high form of religion embodied in the message of the prophets.

## Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the alleged analogies to Israelite prophecy found in Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts. What are the key similarities and differences? How convincing are these analogies?
2. Discuss the concept of *vaticinium ex eventu* in relation to the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu." How does this concept impact the interpretation of the text? What are the implications for understanding the nature of prophecy?
3. Evaluate the argument for a Canaanite origin of Israelite prophetism. What evidence is presented to support this claim? What are the weaknesses of this argument, according to the lecture?
4. "Prophetism in Israel according to the witness of the OT finds its origin in God, and must be viewed as a gift of God to his people." Do you agree with this claim? Support your position with examples from the text.
5. How does the lecturer's understanding of Israelite history impact their interpretation of the alleged analogies to Israelite prophecy?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Cultic:** Relating to the outward forms and practices of worship, such as sacrifices, festivals, and rituals.
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end times or the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world.
- **Lacunae:** Gaps or missing sections in a text.
- **Mari Texts:** A collection of ancient texts from the city of Mari in Mesopotamia, including letters containing alleged divine revelations.
- **Phenomenologically:** Related to observable phenomena or experiences, rather than historical connections or material realities.
- **Vaticinium ex eventu:** Latin for "prophecy from the event," referring to a prophecy written after the event it purportedly predicts.



## 5. FAQs on Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 5, Session 6, Ancient Near East Prophet, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: An FAQ

Here's an FAQ based on the provided excerpts from Robert Vannoy's "Foundations of Biblical Prophecy; Lecture 5: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East".

- **Q1: Are there any similar prophetic examples found outside of Israel, like in Mesopotamia, that can explain the origin of Prophetism in Israel?**
- While there are some superficial similarities between Mesopotamian texts, specifically from Mari, and Old Testament prophecy (such as a messenger conveying a divine message to a king), there are also significant differences. In Mari, the message is often delivered indirectly to the king, and the tablets sometimes end with the qualification, "Let my Lord do what pleases him," implying the king has the option to disregard the message. The focus of the Mari texts is on external cultic obligations (sacrifices, rituals) rather than ethical or spiritual concerns. Further, there's no indication of a broad, purposeful divine action in history connected to these messages.
- **Q2: What are the primary differences between Mesopotamian "prophecy" and Israelite prophecy?**
- Israelite prophets deliver messages directly to the king, demanding obedience to God's will. Their message focuses on repentance, moral and spiritual condition of the people, and connects to a larger redemptive historical narrative. They address not just immediate matters but also God's sovereign control over nations and his purposes in history, culminating in an eschatological vision. Mesopotamian texts lack this broad perspective and ethical focus.
- **Q3: Does the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" in Egyptian texts provide an analogy to the messianic prophecies of Israel?**
- The "Admonitions of Ipuwer" describes disasters in Egypt and contains a section some interpret as a messianic prophecy, speaking of an ideal king. However, the text is fragmented, and it's unclear whether this section refers to a past or future king. Translations differ, with some interpreting the relevant verbs in the future tense. Even if it refers to the future, the messianic concept lacks the universal

eschatological vision rooted in spiritual realities found in the Old Testament. The gaps in the text make definitive interpretations challenging.

- **Q4: What is the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu," and how does it compare to Israelite prophecy?**
- The "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu" involves a priest named Nefer-rohu who is asked by King Snefru to speak of the future. Nefer-rohu initially says he cannot, but then speaks of a king (Amenemhet I) who will unite Egypt. However, the text is questioned for its authenticity. It may have been written after Amenemhet's reign as political propaganda. Moreover, the lack of seriousness of the text, with the king merely seeking entertainment, and Nefer-rohu explicitly stating he cannot foretell the future, distinguishes it from the revealed prophecies of the Old Testament.
- **Q5: Is there any evidence of Canaanite origins for Israelite prophecy?**
- Despite some scholars' assertions, there is very little direct evidence of Canaanite prophecy analogous to that of Israel. Some scholars point to the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) or the "Journey of Wenamen" as evidence of ecstatic behavior. The prophets of Baal in this narrative slash themselves and engage in frantic prophesying. Wenamen discusses the message given to the King of Byblos. However, these instances are used to speculate that Canaan served as a cradle for prophetism in Israel.
- **Q6: What are the issues with attributing Israelite prophetism to Canaanite influence based on texts like 1 Kings 18 and "The Journey of Wenamen"?**
- The interpretation relies on limited evidence and speculative connections. The behavior of the prophets of Baal might be seen as ecstatic, but not necessarily as receiving genuine divine messages. In "The Journey of Wenamen," the youth gave a message while possessed. The link to Samuel's opposition to Canaanite religion also raises questions about the plausibility of Canaanite origins for Israelite prophecy.

- **Q7: Is the "religious genius of Israel" a valid explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel?**
- This explanation suggests that Israel had a unique spiritual inclination that led to the development of prophetism. However, the Old Testament portrays Israel as frequently turning to the religious beliefs and practices of surrounding nations. The prophets often urge Israel to abandon these heathen deities and worship the one true God. This historical reality contradicts the idea of a natural inclination towards a high form of religion.
- **Q8: According to the Old Testament, what is the origin of prophetism in Israel?**
- The Old Testament attributes the origin of prophetism to God. The prophets themselves claim to speak words given to them by God, not originating from their own ideas or religious consciousness. God puts his words in their mouths. It is understood as a gift from God to His people.