

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9, Session 10, Validation Criteria for True 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 9, Session 10, Validation Criteria for True Prophets, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Vannoy's lecture explores how ancient Israelites distinguished between true and false prophets. A key validation criterion was the conformity of a prophet's message with prior divine revelations, emphasizing that God does not contradict Himself. The lecture uses Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Isaiah to illustrate how prophecies were judged against existing teachings. Objections are considered, such as whether new revelations can be tested by old ones and if specific details can be validated. The lecture also considers the role of God's Spirit in understanding prophecy and addresses whether prophecy continues after the completion of Scripture. Finally, the lecture analyzes the prophets' relationship to Israel's cultic worship, examining the view that prophets opposed ritual observance.

2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9, Session 10 – 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).



3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9, Session 10, Validation Criteria for True Prophets

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Robert Vannoy's "Foundation of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9":

Briefing Document: Vannoy, "Foundation of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9"

I. Main Themes:

- **Validation of True Prophecy:** The lecture focuses on the criteria that the ancient Israelites could use to distinguish between true and false prophets. Vannoy emphasizes the importance of this discernment, as the Israelites were held accountable for heeding the word of a prophet.
- **Conformity to Previous Revelation:** This is presented as the most important *objective* validation criterion. True prophecy must align with existing divine revelation (Law and prior prophets). God does not contradict Himself.
- **Enlightenment by God's Spirit:** While objective criteria are crucial, the internal enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is also necessary to truly understand and apply revelation.
- **Prophets and the Cult:** Examining the relationship between prophets and the outward forms of Israelite worship (cult). The lecture discusses the (misguided) view that prophets were fundamentally anti-cultic.
- **Application to the Present:** Discussing how the issue of discerning true and false prophets is different today than in Old Testament times, due to the completion of the canon of Scripture.

II. Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Validation Criteria:**
- **Moral Character:** Important but insufficient on its own.
- **Signs and Wonders:** Can authenticate a prophet, but not definitive (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Signs and wonders are to be judged by the existing teaching or doctrine.

- *"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."*
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:** God controls the future, but false prophets can sometimes make accurate predictions (Deuteronomy 13).
- **Conformity to Previous Revelation:** The most important *objective* criterion.
- *"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... God is not going to contradict Himself."*
- Jeremiah's skepticism of Hananiah (Jeremiah 28) illustrates this point. Hananiah's message of peace contradicted the consistent prophetic message of judgment for a sinful nation. Jeremiah appealed to the consistent message of earlier prophets, noting Hananiah's message differed.
- Isaiah 8:19-20 emphasizes consulting the "Law and the testimony" to validate messages. *"To the Law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn."*
- **Enlightenment by God's Spirit:** Necessary for understanding and applying revelation (Deuteronomy 29:2-4).
- **Objections to "Conformity" Criterion:**
 - *Objection 1:* Revelation unveils new things, so how can it be tested by existing revelation? Vannoy counters that Old Testament revelation developed organically, building on a foundation.
 - *Objection 2:* It's inadequate for specific details (e.g., Isaiah's prophecy about Sennacherib or Jeremiah's 70-year captivity prophecy). Vannoy argues that these details are usually validated within the context of a larger prophecy, sometimes through short-term predictions that are fulfilled, thus authenticating the longer-term prophecy (example of 1 Kings 13 and Josiah's future actions).
- **Views on Old Testament Prophecy:**
 - Vannoy notes that some scholars (e.g., Walter Brueggemann) believe there are "no objective criteria" to verify prophetic claims of authority. Vannoy disagrees, arguing that Deuteronomy 18 indicates that God holds the Israelites accountable for their response to prophetic words, implying there *are* sufficient criteria.

- **Theological Perspective on Revelation Today:**

- Vannoy argues that with the completion of the biblical canon, the issue of discerning true vs. false prophets is no longer the same as it was in the Old Testament. Revelation is complete.
- He aligns with Geerhardus Vos and Herman Bavinck, who differentiate between objective-central (redemptive history) and subjective-individual aspects of revelation. Objective revelation culminated in Christ.
- *"Revelation, taken as a whole, first reached its end and purpose in the coming of Christ... 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."* (Bavinck)
- He acknowledges that those who hold to a continuationist view of revelation might still use Old Testament criteria for evaluating prophetic claims.

- **Prophets and the Cult:**

- The lecture explores how the prophets related to the outward forms of Israelite worship and religious rituals (the "cult"). Vannoy identifies three perspectives:
- (A) Prophets were anti-cultic, advocating for morality and social justice *in place of* ritual observance.
- (B) Prophets were cultic functionaries in the employ of the temple.
- (C) Prophets were neither fundamentally anti-cultic nor cult functionaries, but proclaimers of divine revelation. Vannoy suggests the Old Testament depicts the latter view.
- The lecture challenges the view that prophets were anti-cultic. The view was especially popular in mainstream biblical scholarship throughout the 20th century. Scholars of this view believed the prophets promoted the worship of God through love of neighbor, concern for social justice, and ethical standards. They supposedly did not just place morality *above* the cult, but in place of the cult.
- Texts commonly cited to support the anti-cultic view include: Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-27, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8, and Jeremiah 7:21-23.

III. Key Quotes:

- "Conformity of the message to previous revelation... I think this is the most important of the validation criteria."
- "The soul who sins is the one who will die." 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.'"
- "The economy of the Son gives way to the economy of the Spirit. The objective revelation goes over into the subjective application."
- "Since there are such people today and since there is a closing of revelation, they are automatically stamped as false."

IV. Implications:

- This lecture provides a framework for understanding how ancient Israelites were to discern true prophecy.
- It raises questions about the nature of revelation and its implications for contemporary believers.
- It offers insights into the relationship between ritual, ethics, and true worship.
- By looking at the validation criteria, it also indirectly offers guidelines on how to interpret prophecy in the Old Testament.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9, Session 10, Validation Criteria for True Prophets

Validation of Prophecy and the Prophet's Role in Ancient Israel: A Study Guide

I. Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the most important *objective* validation criterion for a true prophet, according to Vannoy? Why is it so important?
2. How does Deuteronomy 13:1-3 relate to the validation of prophecy?
3. According to Jeremiah 28, how did Jeremiah argue against Hananiah's prophecy of peace?
4. In Isaiah 8:19-20, what does the prophet instruct the people to do when they are told to consult mediums and spiritists?
5. What is one objection to the "conformity to previous revelation" criterion? How does the author respond to this objection?
6. Briefly explain the example of the prophet in 1 Kings 13 and how it demonstrates the validation of prophecy.
7. What did Walter Brueggemann say about Old Testament prophets?
8. What is the contrast between Ezekiel 18 and Exodus 20?
9. According to the lecture, how is it possible for people to witness great signs and wonders, and not be moved to worship?
10. According to Vos and Bavinck, how has the role of revelation changed since the coming of Christ?

II. Quiz Answer Key

1. The most important *objective* validation criterion is the conformity of the message to previous revelation. This is because God does not contradict Himself, so a true prophet's message must align with what has already been revealed in the law and by previous prophets.
2. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 states that even if a prophet performs signs and wonders that come true, if they advocate following other gods, they should not be listened

to. This emphasizes that doctrine and teaching are paramount and should be used to judge signs, wonders, and prophecies.

3. Jeremiah argued against Hananiah's prophecy by pointing out that earlier prophets consistently prophesied war, disaster, and plague against sinful nations, whereas Hananiah was prophesying peace to a nation that was not obeying the Lord. Jeremiah implied that Hananiah's message was inconsistent with prior revelation, which raised skepticism of its divine origin.
4. Isaiah instructs the people to consult the Law and the Testimony (previous revelation). If the mediums and spiritists do not speak according to this word, they are not to be trusted, indicating that conformity to previous revelation is a key test of truth.
5. One objection is that revelation, by its nature, unveils new things, so how can it be tested by what is already known? The author responds by arguing that Old Testament revelation builds on an already laid foundation, expanding from the same roots, and thus maintains a consistency as it moves forward.
6. In 1 Kings 13, a prophet foretells that Josiah will burn the bones of false priests on the altar at Bethel 300 years in the future. To validate this longer-term prediction, the prophet also performs signs that are fulfilled that same day, such as the altar splitting apart, thus authenticating the longer-term prediction.
7. Walter Brueggemann said that Old Testament prophets make a claim of authority that is impossible to verify. He believes that there are no objective criteria by which to validate their claims, though this opinion is not universal among scholars.
8. Exodus 20 states that God punishes children for the iniquity of their parents to the third and fourth generation, while Ezekiel 18 asserts that individuals are responsible for their own sins and will not be punished for the sins of their fathers. The lecture explains that those living in an ancient household until the third or fourth generation, "the sin of one affects all." But Ezekiel asserts that each person must "take responsibility for yourself."
9. People can witness great signs and wonders but not be moved to worship if God has not given them "a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." Without the enlightenment of God's Spirit, they may see the events but fail to recognize their significance or respond with faith and obedience.

10. According to Vos and Bavinck, since the coming of Christ and the completion of the canon of Scripture, objective-central revelation has ceased, and the focus has shifted to subjective-individual application of the already-revealed truth. They suggest that objective-central revelation may resume with the Second Coming of Christ.

III. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of "conformity to previous revelation" as a validation criterion for prophecy. How might this criterion be applied, or misapplied, in contemporary contexts?
2. Explore the relationship between objective validation criteria for prophecy (e.g., moral character, signs and wonders, fulfillment) and the internal enlightenment of God's Spirit. Which is more important and why?
3. How do the views of Vos and Bavinck on revelation relate to the cessationist/continuationist debate regarding spiritual gifts?
4. Describe the historical view that the prophets were anti-cultic. What biblical passages are used to support this view, and how might one argue against this interpretation?
5. Explain the role of the prophet in ancient Israel as neither anti-cultic nor cult functionaries but proclaimers of divine revelation. Support with examples from the reading.

IV. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Prophecy:** In the context of the Old Testament, a message from God delivered through a human spokesperson, often involving predictions of future events and/or pronouncements of judgment or blessing.
- **Validation Criteria:** Standards or tests used to determine the authenticity of a prophet and the veracity of their message.
- **Conformity to Previous Revelation:** The principle that a true prophet's message must be consistent with the established teachings and principles found in the Law and the earlier prophetic writings.
- **Objective Validation Criteria:** External and verifiable characteristics used to assess a prophet's authenticity, such as moral character, signs and wonders, and fulfillment of prophecy.
- **Subjective Validation Criteria:** Internal and personal discernment guided by God's Spirit, which enables individuals to recognize and understand the truth of a prophetic message.
- **Cult:** In this context, refers to the outward forms of religious worship and ritual practices in ancient Israel, including sacrifices, festivals, and temple ceremonies.
- **Anti-Cultic:** The view that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the ritualistic aspects of Israelite worship, emphasizing instead ethical behavior and social justice.
- **Redemptive History:** The unfolding story of God's plan to save humanity from sin and its consequences, culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Objective-Central Revelation:** The aspect of revelation that accompanies God's objective acts of redemption in history, such as the Exodus and the coming of Christ.
- **Subjective-Individual Revelation:** The aspect of revelation that focuses on the personal application of already-revealed truth to individual believers through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Theophany:** A visible manifestation of God.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 9, Session 10, Validation Criteria for True Prophets, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided text:

What criteria did ancient Israelites use to distinguish between true and false prophets?

The ancient Israelites used several criteria to distinguish between true and false prophets. While moral character and performance of signs and wonders were considered, the most important *objective* criterion was the conformity of the prophet's message to previous revelation, meaning consistency with the law given through Moses and the messages of earlier prophets. True prophecy would align with existing divine revelation. The *subjective* criterion is enlightenment by God's spirit.

Why is conformity to previous revelation considered the most important objective validation criterion for a prophet?

Conformity to previous revelation is considered the most important because God doesn't contradict Himself. A true prophet's message must be in agreement with what has already been revealed. This criterion could be applied immediately upon hearing a prophecy, unlike waiting for fulfillment, and it served as a readily available "touchstone" for judging the validity of a prophetic message.

How did Deuteronomy 13:1-3 and Jeremiah 28 illustrate the importance of doctrinal consistency over signs and wonders?

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 states that even if a prophet performs signs and wonders that come true, if the prophet then advocates following other gods, they should not be listened to. Jeremiah 28 highlights a conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah, where Jeremiah questions Hananiah's message of peace because it contradicted the consistent prophetic warnings of judgment on an unrepentant people. In both cases, doctrinal consistency with previous revelation overrides the apparent power or success of the prophecy itself.

How can specific details of a prophecy, like the duration of the Babylonian captivity, be validated if they weren't explicitly mentioned in previous revelation?

While specific details might not be directly verifiable through previous revelation, they are often validated by the broader context of the prophecy or the fulfillment of short-term predictions within the same prophecy. The fulfillment of these short-term predictions served as authentication of the longer-term predictions.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in discerning true prophecy?

Even with objective criteria, the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for discerning true prophecy. Moses says in Deuteronomy 29:2-4 that even though they had seen mighty acts, they did not have minds to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. The Holy Spirit opens the heart and mind to properly understand and apply revealed truth, allowing individuals to accurately assess a prophet's message. Without this enlightenment, people may deliberately turn away from the truth.

Does the concept of true and false prophets, as understood in the Old Testament, directly apply to today? Why or why not?

According to the lecture, the issue faced by the ancient Israelites no longer exists in the same way because God's revelation is complete and fixed in the canon of Scripture. It is argued that there isn't a need to distinguish between true and false prophets in the same sense because there is no ongoing objective central revelation. The challenge today is how to distinguish biblical truth from other claims of truth, which is more of an apologetic issue. Some may not accept this theological construct and would have to go back to the model that the Old Testament people used.

What was the prevailing view among some biblical scholars in the 20th century regarding the Old Testament prophets' attitude toward the "cult" (outward forms of worship)?

A prevalent view among some scholars was that the prophets were fundamentally "anti-cultic," meaning they were opposed to ritual observance and external forms of worship in general, not just specific abuses. These scholars argued that the prophets emphasized social justice, ethical behavior, and love of neighbor *in place of* cultic practices, advocating a return to a "cult-less" Mosaic religion that existed prior to alleged Canaanite influences.

How did the lecturer describe the true role of Old Testament prophets in relation to the outward forms of Israel's worship ("cult")?

The lecturer suggests that the true role of the Old Testament prophets was neither anti-cultic nor cult functionaries. They were primarily proclaimers of divine revelation. They did not necessarily oppose the cult itself, but they often condemned the people's hypocritical participation in ritual worship when it was not accompanied by genuine repentance, obedience, and social justice. In general, they emphasized the importance of inner transformation and ethical living alongside, not instead of, outward acts of worship.