

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10, Session 11, Prophets & the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?

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 10, Session 11, Prophets & the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Vannoy's lecture on Foundations of Biblical Prophecy explores the role and identity of prophets in ancient Israel. The lecture examines the varying views on whether prophets opposed the religious practices ("cult") of their time, ultimately arguing against this notion. **Vannoy suggests that prophets condemned the misuse and corruption of cultic practices rather than the practices themselves.** He further investigates the idea that prophets were cultic functionaries, finding little scriptural support for this claim. **The lecture then considers whether the prophets were writers, and whether the Book of Isaiah is the work of one author, or two, given the differing styles and subject matter in the later chapters, and provides evidence for the traditional view that Isaiah wrote the book.**

2. 24 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10, Session 11 – 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_Session11.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10, Session 11, Prophets & the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Robert Vannoy's "Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10," focusing on the prophets' relationship to the cult and the authorship of prophetic books, particularly Isaiah.

Briefing Document: Vannoy on Prophets, Cult, and Authorship

I. Main Themes:

- **The Relationship Between Prophets and the Cult:** This lecture critically examines the idea that the Old Testament prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cultic practices of Israel. Vannoy argues against this view, suggesting that the prophets, while condemning abuses and heathen influences within the cult, were not advocating for a religion devoid of cultic expression. He explores the alternative view that the prophets were cultic functionaries and offers the assessment that they were neither anti-cultic nor cultic functionaries but simply proclaimers of divine revelation.
- **Authorship of Prophetic Books, Particularly Isaiah:** The lecture delves into the debate surrounding the composition of prophetic books, with a specific focus on the book of Isaiah. It discusses the traditional view of single authorship versus the literary-critical perspective that posits multiple authors, particularly in the case of Isaiah 40-66 ("Deutero-Isaiah").

II. Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Prophets' Complex Stance on the Cult:** Vannoy acknowledges that prophets like Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Jeremiah made "strong negative statements about cultic observance in Israel." However, he counters the idea that they were "fundamentally opposed to the cult" by pointing out positive references to the temple and sacrificial practices in their writings.
- Isaiah speaks of the temple as "the house of Yahweh" and the Lord dwelling on Mount Zion.
- Jeremiah refers to the temple as "the house which is called by my name" and speaks positively of people bringing offerings.

- **Critique of "Cultless Religion":** Vannoy argues that the notion of a religion without a cult is both "strange" and "in conflict with the data of Scripture," particularly the Pentateuch's detailed regulations for sacrifices and offerings. He posits that "true religion without cult really doesn't exist." He further relates cult to prayer, offering and religious gathering as the expression of the fellowship with God.
- **Prophets Condemned Abuses, Not the Cult Itself:** Vannoy states that the prophets condemned "the heathenisms that entered the Israelite cult" and "a formalistic mechanical idea of the ritual system" (*opus operatum*). They opposed empty rituals devoid of genuine devotion and ethical living.
- Hosea condemned Baal worship and temple prostitution alongside the continued performance of Yahweh rituals.
- Isaiah condemned sacrifices offered by those with "hands full of blood."
- **Amos 5:21-25 and Jeremiah 7:21-23:** The lecture tackles difficult passages often cited to support the anti-cult view: Amos 5:21-25 and Jeremiah 7:21-23.
- *Amos 5:* Vannoy discusses McComiskey's interpretation of Amos 5:25, suggesting the rhetorical question implies Israel's disobedience during the wilderness period (neglect of sacrifices and turning to idolatry). He then presents Ridderbos' view suggesting a lack of *complete* observance and that the passage stresses obedience over ritual.
- *Jeremiah 7:* Vannoy presents Rawls' interpretation connecting Jeremiah 7:22 ("I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices") to the initial covenant in Exodus 19:5, where obedience was emphasized. He also discusses O.T. Allis' suggestion of translating the Hebrew word "al" as "because of" or "for the sake of," implying that God didn't command sacrifices *because* He needed them, but because of their relationship.
- **Prophets as Proclaimers of Divine Revelation:** Vannoy concludes that the prophets were primarily called by God to proclaim His word, regardless of their social standing (priest, farmer, etc.). They weren't fundamentally anti-cult nor professional cult officials, but messengers who denounced the cult when it deviated from its purpose.
- **Composition of Prophetic Books and the Case of Isaiah:** Vannoy then shifts to discussing the authorship of prophetic books, focusing on Isaiah.

- *Traditional View:* The traditional view holds that the writing prophets were authors who put their messages in writing to preserve them. Jeremiah 36 and Isaiah 30:8 are cited as examples of this process.
- *Literary Critical School:* This school seeks to separate original material from later additions, often questioning the authenticity of predictive prophecy.
- **The "Second Isaiah" Debate (Isaiah 40-66):** Vannoy presents the widely held critical view that Isaiah 40-66 was written by an anonymous "Deutero-Isaiah" during the exile, separate from Isaiah of the 8th century BC. He quotes Rachel Margalioth's observation that the division of Isaiah has become an "unquestionable truth" in biblical scholarship.
- R.N. Whybray: Notes that scholarly consensus remains that Isaiah 40-55 are substantially the work of a single anonymous 'prophet of the Exile,' and likely to remain the view of the majority of scholars.
- *Arguments for Deutero-Isaiah:* Different concepts and ideas in Isaiah 40-66 compared to Isaiah 1-39.
- Noticeable difference in language and style.
- The historical background of chapters 40-66 (exile, Cyrus) does not match Isaiah's time (Ahaz, Hezekiah).
- *Counter-Arguments:* Vannoy argues that the differences in concepts and ideas are not conclusive evidence of separate authorship. He posits that a single prophet could experience development in thought over a 60-year ministry and receive new revelations. He highlights that opponents of the single-authorship thesis do not claim there are contradictions, only developments.

III. Key Quotes:

- "Some Statements Not Opposing the Cult"
- "In fact, it seems to me the idea of religion without a cult is a rather strange idea."
- "What the prophets did condemn were the heathenisms that entered the Israelite cult where Yahweh came to be worshipped, much like a Baal or any other heathen deity, as well as a formalistic mechanical idea of the ritual system."
- "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the desert, O house of Israel?"

- "When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices."
- "These words seem at first glance to bear out fully the claim of the critics that Jeremiah knew nothing about a sacrificial system introduced by Moses at the time of the Exodus."
- "The prophets were neither against the cult as such, nor professional cultic officials. We have very little evidence for either of those positions."
- "The assumption that the book of Isaiah is not the work of one author, but that chapters 40 to 66 belong to an anonymous prophet who lived during the Return to Zion, is regarded as one of the most important achievements of biblical criticism."

IV. Implications:

- Understanding the complex relationship between the prophets and the cult is crucial for interpreting their messages and the nature of Old Testament religion.
- The debate over the authorship of Isaiah highlights the challenges of interpreting and understanding prophetic literature and the ongoing tension between traditional and critical approaches to biblical study.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10, Session 11, Prophets & the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?

Prophets and Prophecy Study Guide

I. Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Vannoy, were the prophets fundamentally opposed to the cult? Explain.
2. Give an example from Isaiah or Jeremiah that demonstrates that the prophets were not fundamentally opposed to the cult.
3. What does Vannoy suggest is a "rather strange idea" and in conflict with Scripture?
4. What does *opus operatum* mean, and how does it relate to the prophets' criticisms of the cult?
5. Explain McComiskey's interpretation of Amos 5:25-26, and how it relates to the question of a "cult-less religion."
6. How does Ridderbos interpret Amos 5:25?
7. Explain Rawls' response to the difficult text, Jeremiah 7:22, in relation to Exodus 19:5.
8. What is O.T. Allis' response to Jeremiah 7:22?
9. What does Vannoy say that the prophetic function rests on?
10. According to the traditional view, why are the writing prophets so-called? Give an example.

II. Essay Questions

Answer each question in essay format.

1. Discuss the arguments for and against the idea that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult. Provide specific examples from the prophetic books to support your claims.

2. Explore the concept of *opus operatum* and its significance in understanding the prophetic critique of Israel's cultic practices. How does this concept relate to the prophets' emphasis on inward disposition and ethical conduct?
3. Analyze the different interpretations of Amos 5:21-25 and Jeremiah 7:21-23. How do these passages contribute to the debate surrounding the prophets' attitude toward the cult?
4. Evaluate the arguments for and against the existence of "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40-66). What are the key points of contention, and how convincing are the counter-arguments?
5. Discuss the relationship between the prophets and the cult. Were they anti-cultic, cultic functionaries, or something else entirely? Support your answer with evidence from the lecture and specific examples from the Old Testament.

III. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Cult:** A system of religious veneration and ritual, especially as directed toward a particular object or deity. In the context of this lecture, it refers to the sacrificial system and other forms of worship in ancient Israel.
- **Opus Operatum:** A Latin phrase meaning "by the work it is worked." It refers to the belief that performing a religious ritual automatically produces the desired result, regardless of the inner disposition of the worshiper.
- **Pentateuch:** The first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- **Deutero-Isaiah:** A term used by some scholars to refer to the author of Isaiah 40-66, who they believe was a different person from the Isaiah who wrote Isaiah 1-39.
- **Literary Criticism:** A method of studying literature that focuses on the text itself, rather than the author or historical context. In biblical studies, it is used to analyze the structure, style, and themes of the biblical books.
- **Covenantal Unity:** The concept that true religion involves both an inward disposition of love for God and an outward expression of that love through ethical behavior and proper worship.
- **Moralism:** The reduction of religion to a set of ethical principles, without any emphasis on worship, prayer, or fellowship with God.

- **Cultic Functionaries:** Individuals who perform official duties within the cult, such as priests and, according to some scholars, prophets.
- **Heathenism:** Religious practices that are not part of the Israelite faith, especially those associated with the Canaanites.
- **Oracle:** A communication or message believed to come from God or a deity, often delivered through a prophet or other intermediary.

IV. Answer Key

1. Vannoy states that the prophets were not fundamentally opposed to the cult. While they made strong condemnations of cultic observances at times, they also had positive things to say about the temple and temple worship. Therefore, it is inaccurate to suggest they desired a religion without the cult.
2. Isaiah speaks of the temple as the house of Yahweh, and Jeremiah calls the temple "the house which is called by my name." These are both instances when the prophets speak positively about the temple and its worship. Therefore, they were not fundamentally opposed to the cult.
3. Vannoy suggests that the idea of religion without a cult is a "rather strange idea" and in conflict with Scripture. He argues that religion without prayer, offering, and religious gathering cannot exist. Moreover, true religion requires fellowship with God, which must express itself in religious acts.
4. *Opus operatum* means "by the work it is worked." It refers to the formalistic, mechanical idea that simply going through religious rituals automatically produces the desired result or gains favor with God. The prophets condemned this view, emphasizing that true worship requires an inward disposition of love and obedience.
5. McComiskey interprets Amos 5:25-26 as a rhetorical question with the response being "no," implying that Israel did not consistently observe sacrifices during the wilderness period, but turned to idolatry instead. He argues that this passage doesn't advocate for a "cult-less religion," but rather highlights Israel's disobedience in neglecting sacrifice and embracing idolatry.
6. Ridderbos argues that Amos 5:25 continues the thought of 5:22, suggesting that sacrifices are not the primary and only thing that the Lord asks of Israel. He posits that the rhetorical question highlights that the complete ritual system wasn't

observed in total, and therefore, sacrifices are not the essence of true religion, rather a heart desire to be obedient to the Lord is.

7. Rawls responds to Jeremiah 7:22 by referencing Exodus 19:5, where God initially offered the covenant to Israel based solely on their loyalty and obedience, without mentioning sacrifices. Rawls suggests that Jeremiah 7:22 may refer to that initial presentation of the covenant, explaining why God said He did not give commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices at that time.
8. O.T. Allis suggests that the Hebrew word translated as "concerning" in Jeremiah 7:22 can also be translated as "because of" or "for the sake of." He argues that the verse should be understood as saying that God did not speak to their fathers *for the sake of* sacrifices, implying that He doesn't need them, but desires obedience.
9. Vannoy says that the prophetic function rests on divine calling. God could call anyone to be a prophet, whether a priest, a farmer, or someone else. Therefore, the essential feature of a prophet was not their position, but their calling to proclaim God's word.
10. The writing prophets are so-called because they put their message in writing in order that it might be preserved in permanent form. Jeremiah 36:1-28 describes how Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch, who wrote them on a scroll.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10, Session 11, Prophets & the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Prophets and Prophecy

- **What are the different views on the relationship between the prophets and the cult (temple worship) in ancient Israel?**
- There are three main views:
 1. The prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult.
 2. The prophets were cultic functionaries, essentially officials within the temple system.
 3. The prophets were neither anti-cultic nor cultic functionaries but proclaimers of divine revelation, sometimes denouncing the cult when it deviated from its intended purpose. The first view is not supported by some biblical texts which show prophets having a positive attitude towards the temple. The second view is largely inferential, and lacks sufficient evidence. The final view appears to be the most compelling, with the prophetic function resting on a divine calling to proclaim God's word, combined with a desire to love the Lord and live according to God's purposes.
- **Did the prophets promote a religion without cultic practices?**
- No. While some prophetic statements strongly condemn certain cultic observances, the prophets were not promoting a cult-less religion. The Old Testament prescribes the cult (sacrifices and offerings) which was given to Israel by God through Moses as a means of atonement for sin, ultimately pointing forward to the sacrificial work of Christ. The idea of religion without cult is in conflict with scripture, particularly the Pentateuch. True religion should express itself in religious acts, not just moral acts.

- **What did the prophets condemn regarding the cult?**
- The prophets condemned:
 1. The heathen practices that entered the Israelite cult.
 2. The formalistic, mechanical approach to rituals, known as *opus operatum*, where people thought going through the motions automatically gained God's favor without genuine devotion or ethical living.
 3. The empty rituals performed without a consecrated life or a desire to walk in God's ways.
- **How do passages like Amos 5:21-25 and Jeremiah 7:21-23, which seem to criticize sacrifices, fit into the understanding of the prophets and the cult?**
- These passages are often cited by those who believe the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult. However, there are alternative interpretations:
 - **Amos 5:21-25:** Some argue that the rhetorical question in verse 25 implies Israel didn't offer sacrifices in the wilderness. McComiskey argues that Israel neglected sacrifices and turned to idolatry. Ridderbos suggests the sacrifices lacked significance and were not the essence of true religion, emphasizing obedience.
 - **Jeremiah 7:21-23:** Rawls suggests the passage refers to the initial covenant in Exodus 19, where God emphasized obedience over sacrifices. O. T. Allis argues the Hebrew word translated "concerning" should be translated as "for the sake of", implying God didn't command sacrifices because He needed them. Instead, God desired obedience. In summary, these passages do not advocate a cult-less religion. They criticize the people's misplaced emphasis on ritual over genuine obedience and a right relationship with God.
- **Were the prophets cultic functionaries or officials of the temple?**
- The view that the prophets were cultic functionaries is not supported by sufficient scriptural evidence. Although there are some connections between prophets and places of sacrifice, and occasional references to priests and prophets together, it is largely inferential.

- **What is the significance of ritual in worship, according to the prophets?**
- Ritual is important, but must be combined with a love for the Lord and a desire to live according to God's purposes. Cultic acts have no value in themselves but are meaningful only when they are performed as an expression of undivided love for God and a desire to walk in his ways. Ritual acts separated from a love for God and a desire to walk in His ways are an abomination to the Lord.
- **Were the prophets writers?**
- The traditional view is that the prophets were writers who put their messages in writing to preserve them. Passages like Jeremiah 36:1-28 and Isaiah 30:8 suggest that prophets wrote down their messages or dictated them to scribes. Jeremiah dictated to Baruch, who wrote the words on a scroll. After King Jehoiakim burned the scroll, Jeremiah dictated the message again, and it was rewritten. Isaiah 30:8 commands writing the message on a tablet and scroll as a lasting witness.
- **What are the arguments against Isaiah being the sole author of the entire Book of Isaiah, and what are some counterarguments?**
- The literary critical school argues that Isaiah 40-66 was written by "Second Isaiah" due to:
 1. **Different Concepts and Ideas:** The concepts and ideas in Isaiah 40-66 differ from Isaiah 1-39.
 2. **Different Language and Style:** There is a noticeable difference in language and style between the two parts of the book.
 3. **Different Historical Background:** The historical background of Isaiah 40-66 is not the historical background of Isaiah's time (e.g., destruction of Jerusalem, exile, Cyrus mentioned). **Counterarguments:**
 - Differences in concepts and ideas do not necessarily indicate a different author, especially considering the divine nature of the messages.
 - The historical background is not a problem if one accepts that the prophets received their messages from God who transcends time.