

Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy; Lecture 5

Prophecy in the Ancient Near East

III. The Origin of Prophetism in Israel

A. Alleged Analogies to Israel's Prophecy in Other Nations

1. Mesopotamian Analogy

a) Summary Review

Last week we were on Roman numeral III., "The origin of prophetism in Israel" and A., "Alleged Analogies to Israel's Prophecy in Other Nations." The four sub-points were: Mesopotamian analogies, Egyptian analogies, Canaanite analogies and a conclusion. We were under one, the Mesopotamian analogy. I have given you a handout from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* by Pritchard with the section that's called the Akkadian letters with the subtitle "Divine Revelations." We looked at some of those texts from Mari, where you have an example of the person who received the message from a deity, in this case from Dagon, and he takes that message to another individual who writes it up on a tablet and sends it along to the king and this we noted last week. There were some faint similarities in both form and content between this phenomenon in Mesopotamia at Mari, and what you find in the Old Testament. You do have a person who claims to have a message from the deity a messenger who passes it on to the king, although indirectly, not directly.

b) Differences

1) Indirectly to the King

But at the end of the hour, I was discussing some of the differences. You can see some faint similarities, but there are also some very striking differences. The first one I mentioned is that it's given indirectly in Mari, while the Israelite prophets give the message directly to the king to confront him. Two of the tablets end with the statement, "Let my Lord do what pleases him." So here's the message formally from a deity given to a king but with that qualification, which certainly is radically different from the message of the prophets of the Old Testament. The

word of the Lord was to be obeyed. When someone heard the word of the Lord, he wasn't to do what pleased him, he was to do what pleased the Lord. So that's certainly a difference.

2) ...

3) Cultic Concerns with no ethical or spiritual concerns

Then the third thing I mentioned right at the end of the hour was that the focus of the message in the Mari text does not concern ethical or spiritual realities but rather external cultic obligations. In other words, you didn't perform this sacrifice, you didn't give me a report for cultic obligations. That term "cultic" is used in reference to the Old Testament work, it has to do with outward forms of worship. In other words, if you speak of Israel's cult, you're speaking of the outward forms of Israel's worship: the sacrifices, the festivals, the rituals—not cultic in the sense that it is normal to our understanding. We think about Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, or something such as that. But when you speak of the cult of ancient Israel you're talking about outward forms of worship. So, the message deals with external cultic obligations through the sacrifice used in this report, not with ethical or spiritual realities. If you look at the message in the Old Testament prophets, they might have said something about cultic observations. Isaiah, Micah, Amos, were very critical of Israel bringing sacrifices when their heart wasn't in the sacrifices, but the focus of the message is 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." So they were concerned primarily with the morals and spiritual condition both of the king and of the people, generally speaking.

4) No purposeful divine acts in history referred to

The man I studied under in the Netherlands, Ridderbos, wrote something on this question of the prophets in Israel and prophets outside of Israel, how they compare. And he says in one of his essays, "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. The prophets outside Israel give no indication of knowing anything about such purposeful divine acts in history."

Now you reflect on that for a minute, that is a significant difference. In other words, any individual statement of a given prophet in the Old Testament has to be put into a larger context, and that larger context is really the entire corpus of prophetic writing and the prophets, beginning with Moses and Samuel and on through the prophetic movement in the Old Testament period. These were a succession of individuals that arose over centuries of time. Their message was a redemptive message not just about immediate detailed little matters about bringing the right sacrifice, although we've already talked about that. The message sets the larger context of the movement of redemptive history all the way to the climax and consummation of history.

Now you get this eschatological vision of God's sovereign purposeful control of all nations, all people, and his purposes are going to be worked out in history. You have this leap of an enormously broad perspective of the message and, as Ridderbos points out, when you look at these kinds of tablets in Mari, there is not even any awareness that there is such a broad sweep a purposeful movement in history. So, again, a significant difference. When you look at what you find in these Mesopotamian texts, any way you see it, at best it reminds you of the false prophets in Israel. You had people in Israel claim to be prophets, but they were giving a message of their own, out of their own hearts, their own ideas. I don't think what you find in these Mari texts is any different than the kinds of the things you see among soothsayers, and diviners, that you find among all people, and have always found there. You find them in Mari. So, to try to say that what you find in Mari is in some way analogous to what you find in Israel I think ignores the radical differences between the prophetic message as a whole and what you find there.

5) Mari “prophets” distinct from Israelite Prophets

If you look at your citations, page 4, at the bottom of the page there are a couple paragraphs from an essay, “Prophecy and the prophetic literature” in a volume called *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters*. This essay is by Gene Tucker, who is not an evangelical scholar, but notice he says, “Malamat was more specific in his definition of the Mari ‘diviner prophets’ and more cautious about the parallels with the OT. He saw them as parallels to the prophets of the Old Testament in their consciousness of mission and their willingness to speak uninvited to the authorities in the name of the God. But, the all too obvious gap is apparent in the essence of the prophetic message and in the destiny assigned to the prophet’s mission. The Mari articles address the rule of origins for representatives, and not the nation as a whole, and express material concerns of local people. “The most recent major treatment of the Mari texts, and also one of the most careful, is that of Noort, who is not at all convinced that the Mari “prophets” were the predecessors of those known from the Old Testament, or even that the two were related. In at least the last point he certainly goes too far.”

Now this is Tucker speaking, “For the two are phenomenologically if not historically related.” Now phenomenologically related, or periodic phenomena: you have a phenomena of somebody who claims to speak for a deity—you find it at Mari, you find it in the Old Testament, but that’s just normal, it’s not material. So he says they are phenomenologically if not historically related. In other words, he’s saying it’s pretty hard to say there is some sort of historical connection between what’s going on in Mari and what we find in Israel. “Whether or not one accepts his conclusion that the Mari oracles are basically unlike the Old Testament prophecy, he has presented a very useful analysis in the various means of revelation at Mari and of the roles of both the speakers and the addressees. The messages are quite diverse, but they have in common the communication of a word of a god in a situation of crisis.” Now that’s what they have in common, and that’s not a whole lot. We find there is a communication of the word of God in a

situation of crisis, I think it's not too significant. So I don't think we have any very convincing evidence from the Mari texts for drawing the conclusion that somehow prophetism in Israel was derived from or borrowed from what we find in Mesopotamia.

2. Egyptian Analogies: Egyptian Oracles and Prophecies

Let's go on to the Egyptian analogies. See the handout last week, go through a couple pages, you'll see a section titled, "Oracles and Prophecies" with the subtitle "Egyptian Oracles and Prophecies." Just as some have alleged analogies to prophetism in Israel in Mesopotamia, the same has been said in respect to Egypt. I want to call your attention, if you notice on your outline, to two Egyptian texts. The first is the Admonitions of Ipuwer and the second, the prophecy meant for Nefer-rohu. But on that first page, which is really page 441 in the *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* you see the Admonitions of Ipuwer.

a) Admonitions of Ipuwer

1. Summary

This text dates from about 1350 to 1100 B.C., but it's a copy. The original text was much older, probably going back to about 2000 B.C. The beginning and the end of the text is missing and in the body of the text itself there are a lot of gaps, with a text like this they call the gaps, lacunae. But it's still reasonably clear what the text is about. There's a man called Ipuwer who appears before the reigning Pharaoh in Egypt. He sums up and describes the disasters that have come over the land of Egypt. There's trouble everywhere. There's robbery, revolution, foreigners have come in, the Nile's overflowed its banks, women don't conceive, everybody has dirty clothes, there's lack of water, the land is desolate, there is a lot of suffering, there is role reversal in the sense that people who had slaves now have become slaves themselves, rich people are now poor, poor people are now rich, those who had beautiful clothes are now in rags, those who didn't have any clothes now have fine linen and so on. So there is a lot of upheaval, you might say, in Egypt.

If you look at that first page, second column, right at the top, you see “robbery is everywhere. Why really the Nile is in flood. Why really women are dried up and none can conceive. Why really poor have become the possessions and treasures.” Go down the page, “Why really dirt is throughout the land.” Next to last paragraph, “Barbarians from the outside have come to Egypt.” So he describes this situation in Egypt and after a brief section in which Ipuwer reminds the pharaoh and his audience about a much better past. In other words, things weren’t always this bad, though they’re pretty bad right now.

2. Alleged “Messianic” Prediction Text and Its Translation

Then after a break in the text where it’s kind of hard to tell what the connection is, you come to a section that some would call a messianic prophecy. That’s on page 443, 2 pages over. Toward the bottom of the first column, you see all of those, about the middle of the first column, you see each paragraph beginning with remember, remember, remember, remember, that’s remembering a so much better past. But the last paragraph in that first column after a gap says, “It shall come that he brings coolness upon heart. Men shall say, he is the herdsman of all men, evil is not in his heart. Those herds may be small, still he has spent the day caring for them, would that he might perceive their character from the very first generation, then he will smite down evil, he would stretch forth the arm against it, he would destroy the seed there and of their inheritors.” It seems that what Ipuwer is doing is speaking about an ideal king. The question is, in the context, and it’s not too clear in the context: is this an ideal king of the past, or is it a king of the future? That question is not easily answered because of the gaps in the text that surround the statement.

There are three major published recognized translations of this text, two in English, and one in German. In German, there is a volume that is the equivalent of the English *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, and it’s abbreviated *AOTP*, which is *Ancient Oriental Texts and Pictures*, that’s the *AOTP*. It’s the standard German translation of the text; it’s by a man named Ranke. The translation that you’re

looking at is Pritchard's by *Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)* with translations by an Egyptologist by the name of John Wilson, whose name is there at the beginning. There is a third translation in English in a volume called *Context of Scripture*. Which is a three-volume collection of ancient Near Eastern texts, published in 1997, which is really intended to be a collection of ancient texts for the *Context of Scripture*. It's intended to be an updating of Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. In other words, this is a new published collection of ancient near eastern texts, with new translations of all those texts. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* was published in the 1950's I believe, you'll have to look on your bibliography for the date, but this is a new collection of English texts. The translator of the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" in the *Context of Scripture*, published by Brill, is a man named Shupak.

So you have 3 recognized major translations of this text. Now if you compare the translations you will find Wilson translates this section that we looked at, the bottom of that first column, in a future tense, "It shall come that he brings coolness upon the heart." You notice in footnote 36, which is just before that paragraph begins Wilson says, "In context, of lacunae, there's a transition to a new theme. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure about the argument. Ipuwer is certainly describing the ideal rule. The alternatives are, A., that this ruler is empowered from the text, perhaps the sun god Re, or B., that the passage is truly messianic, and that Ipuwer is looking forward to the god king who will deliver Egypt from her woes." And then you see his next comment, "This translation takes the later approach." In other words, Wilson chooses to translate this as future, this is a god king of a future, a messianic kind of figure who's going to come and remove evil from the earth, smite down evil. Evil is not in his heart.

Now if you look at the German translation, by Ranke, Ranke chooses the past tense. In the note in Ranke's translation, he says the translation is not completely certain, but it is certain it should not be a future, "He had brought coolness upon the heart." It's not that he brings or will bring, he *had*. If you look

at the Shupak translations in the *Context of Scripture*, he translates it in the past tense, “He has brought wholeness upon the heart” and in his note he says, “The following section is very problematic and has been discussed at length in research. Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether we are dealing here with criticism directed to Re or with a description of the ideal redeemer.” So, that discussion goes on, some including Wilson and the translation you have recorded, translated this as the future and see this as a reference to the messianic deliverer of the future. Those who translate it that way, then say just as Israel’s prophet describe the coming messiah, so here you find in this Egyptian text, with the idea of a coming deliverer, a messianic prophecy.

3) Analysis of Ipuwer

A few comments: I think if you want to start preparing these two texts, you have to start out and recognize that it’s not all very clear what’s going on here in this text, because of the gaps, before and after, so it’s questionable whether the so-called messianic section is even speaking of the future, as an idea from the text. Secondly, even if it is speaking of the future, there’s still significant differences between the messianic concept of the Old Testament and what we’ve found here in Ipuwer. In the Old Testament, the coming king will bring his people into fellowship with God and restore peace and harmony in the whole the earth. That messianic vision in the Old Testament foresees a universal condition, where swords will beat into plowshares with the lion laying down with the lamb and that kind of universal eschatological vision is rooted in spiritual realities. You don’t find anything of that here, nor do you find it anywhere else in extra-biblical literature.

There’s one further point that sometimes is made with this text, although unfortunately Wilson’s translation here doesn’t even include it. If you go to the top of the second column, you’ll see in footnote 38 right at the end of that first paragraph Wilson says, “In an unintelligible section, here omitted, Ipuwer uses the second person singular. As Nathan said to David, ‘thou art the man,’ so Ipuwer

must finally be addressing the Pharaoh and pinning the responsibility of Egypt's woes directly on the king as indicated in the following context." So, someone said, "Here is an equivalent to what we find the prophets doing in the Old Testament, Nathan to David, 'thou art the man,' here you have Ipuwer saying to the pharaoh, 'you are the man.' The reason there's so much trouble in the land is because of you." But again, this is a section that is not altogether clear, and in fact Wilson says, "An unintelligible section, here omitted," so if you're going to make a whole lot of that, it seems like it's not on a very solid basis and besides, even if he does put the responsibility on the king, there is no hint of God's purposeful and sovereign directional role through the history.

b) Prophecy of Neferohu

1. Text Summary and Dating

That's the first Egyptian analogy; the second one is the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu," if you'll go over to the next page. Wilson has the title, "The prophecy of Neferti." Neferti and Nefer-rohu are the same, you notice the footnote 1, "Neferti. This translation retains the now traditional name of Nefer-rohu for the Egyptian prophet, even though Posner has produced evidence making positive whose name is to be written, there is some disagreement as to how to read his name." But this is another text in which some find analogy to Israel's prophets and that deals with what some see as a prediction of the fall of the Old Kingdom in Egypt and the desperation under Amenemhet I.

This prophecy is given by this person called Neferti or Nefer-rohu. Amenemhet I is dated at about 1910 B.C. According to this text, Snefru, you see his name in the second line, "Now it happened the majesty of the kingdom of upper lower Egypt, Snefru the triumphant was the magnificent king of this entire planet." Snefru—who was a very early Egyptian ruler, going back to, I think its 2650—asked the city council in Egypt, the capital city of Egypt, if they could find someone who could entertain him with what he calls "fine words and well chosen

speeches,” looking for someone to entertain him, who can speak well. He is given the name of Nefer-rohu, who was a priest of Bastet. Bastet was the calf goddess.

So, he is given the name of Nefer-rohu, he commands that Nefer-rohu will be brought to the court, and you find that if you go to the second column on page 444, “Then his majesty taught with life, prosperity, health, said ‘My people, behold, that I’ve called you to be called, to have you seek out for me a son of yours who is wise, or a brother of yours who is confident or a friend of yours who has performed a good deed, one who may say to me, a few fine words or choice speeches at the hearing of which my majesty may be entertained.” So you see that’s what he wants.

In the middle of the next paragraph, “a great lector-priest of Bastet a sovereign ruler whose name is Nefer-rohu, he’s such a person.” So the next paragraph, “He was ushered into him,” that is the king of Egypt. “Then his majesty, life, prosperity, health,”—every time you address the king you also have to say life, prosperity health—“said, ‘Come great Nefer-rohu, who, my friend, that thou mayest say to me a few fine words and choice speeches at the hearing of which my majesty may be entertained.” Then the lector-priest, Nefer-rohu, who said “of what has already happened or of what is going to happen, Sovereign, life, prosperity, health?” Then his majesty, life, prosperity, health said, ‘What is going to happen.” So he wants some speeches about what’s going to happen in the future and when Nefer-rohu begins to speak he doesn’t talk about the future, he describes again conditions of the land and calamities of the land.

If you go over to page 445, you see in the second paragraph, “this land is so damaged there is no one who is concerned with it, no one who speaks, the sun disk is covered over.” And then the next line at the end of that paragraph, “I shall speak of one who before my face. I cannot foretell what has not yet come.” So here is this man that’s brought in to entertain the king and the king says he wants to know what’s going to happen in the future, and Nefer-rohu says, “I can’t do that.”

However, he finally says at the end of the second column, on page 445, the last

paragraph there, that “a king will come, belonging to the south. Many will triumph in his name, he is the son of a woman of the land of Nubia, he is one born in upper Egypt, he will take the white crown, he will wear the red crown, he will unite the two mighty ones. He will satisfy the two lords with what they desire.” The middle of the next paragraph, “The Asiatics will fall to swords, the Libians will fall to swords and so forth.” So he speaks about this Ameni who will come, and Ameni and most understand it to be this Amenemhet empire. But he did come long after Snefru, in 1910, and unite the kingdoms of Egypt, upper and lower Egypt.

What about this text? Look at your citations page 5, middle of the page, there’s a paragraph out of E.J. Young, in *My Servants the Prophets*. He says, “One must notice the utter lack of seriousness of this text. The king is seeking merely for entertainment, and so he desires to be informed concerning the future. Nefer-Rohu makes no pretense of being a prophet; in fact, he even explicitly states he cannot foretell the future. Furthermore, the text states that it is dealing with the message of Nefer-Rohu, as he brooded over what would happen in the land. In other words, the message is not a revealed one, nor does it report to be. It is in a class with the many, “predictions” of the ancient world, and far removed from the prophecies of the Old Testament.” So Young points out the lack of seriousness of the text.

2. Vaticinium ex eventu

But there’s another issue involved here. That is the question of the authenticity of the text itself. If you look at that same page in your citations, what G. D. Smith says in the article on “Prophet,” in ISBE, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, he says, ““The prophecy of Nefer-rohu’ purports to tell how Pharaoh Snefru of the 4th Dynasty was entertained by a prophet who predicted that chaos would soon overtake Egypt, but that order and justice would be reestablished when Ameni of Nubia (a reference to Amen-em-hep I, the first king of the 12th Dynasty) became king. The so-called prophecy undoubtedly was

written as political propaganda to support the rule of Amen-em-hep I.” In other words, the question is what about the date of the text? It is alleged to be from the time of Snefru, 2650 B.C. It describes events from about 1900, if it is speaking about Amenemhet. The oldest copies of the text however, are from about 1450. In other words, five centuries after the time that it is allegedly speaking about, as far as prediction.

If you go up to the second paragraph on page 5 of your citations, William F. Albright’s *The Stone Age to Christianity* says of this text, “Somewhat later is the prophecy of Nefer-rohu, which is extremely interesting as the oldest certain example of a *vaticinium ex eventu*.” That’s a Latin phrase meaning “speaking from the events.” In other words, you’re saying something after the time of whatever you’re talking about, but allegedly speaking before the time that it happened. It purports the date for the reign of Snefru, but describes in some detail the reign of Ameni, the founder of the 12th Dynasty six centuries later. But it’s speaking after the event rather than before the event. So many question the authenticity of this. Is this really a prediction of Amenemhet or is it political propaganda written after the time of Amenemhet, trying to elevate his reign? That’s certainly a very legitimate question. But those are two of the most significant Egyptian texts that are alleged to have something similar to what we find in the prophetic purpose in the Old Testament.

C. Canaanite Analogies

1. Lack of Data

Let’s go on to Canaanite analogies. 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. We don’t have a lot of texts from the land of Canaan. The closest place that we do have texts of a religious sort is Ras Shamra texts from Ugarit, on the Phoenician coast. But even there you don’t have anything analogous to prophetism in Israel. In spite of that, if you look at the literature, there are numerous scholars who are convinced that the land of Canaan

must be considered a cradle for prophetism in Israel, that it must have been out of contacts that the Israelites made in the land of Canaan that prophetism was given its birth.

In your citations, bottom of page 5 over to page 6, Abraham Kuenen discussed this in a volume from the late 1800s, which was recently republished within the last 15 years, so it's something still referred to a lot. Abraham Kuenen is the same Kuenen of the Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen theory previous, so you're right in that whole period of historical-critical analysis of the Bible. Kuenen says, "It would be of course very desirable that we should be able to speak with certainty upon such an important question as this. But from the want of historical account, we must rest content with probable conjectures.... They give us a satisfactory explanation of the first appearance of prophecy in Israel." So he's looking for Canaanite analogies and he doesn't find any. So he says we have to be content with the probable conjecture and that probable conjecture is to be commended because "it will provide us with a satisfactory explanation of the first appearance of prophecy in Israel." They must have come out of the Canaanites. Now to update Kuenen of the late 1800s to late 1900s, look at what Gerhard Von Rad said in his *Old Testament Theology*. "In eleventh century Syria and Palestine, there are signs of the rise of an ecstatic and mantic movement whose origins are apparently outside that area, and perhaps lie in the mantic of Thrace and Asia Minor." Notice the next line. "Canaanite religion must, then, have been the medium by which the movement came to Israel. The earliest Old Testament evidence for its appearance are the accounts of the Dervish-like enthusiasts who from time to time emerged up and down the land, probably to be eyed askance by the settled Israelite farmers." Now what he's talking about there, "the dervish like enthusiast," are these companies of prophets? Remember when Saul met a company of prophets and they had musical instruments and they were prophesying and Saul was walking and prophesying with them. This kind of abnormal behavior, you're trying derive from the ecstasies of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor,

from that ecstatic movement into what Von Rad and others find as something similar in Israel and you're going to make those links, connect the dots. Canaan must have been the source from which this phenomenon was introduced to the Israelites, when they settled down in the land of Canaan.

2) 1 Kgs 18:19: Ahab, Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel

Now the idea that prophetism was known in Canaanite religion is strengthened for people of this position by what we know of the Phoenicians who had similar religious practices, presumably, to the Canaanites. First Kings 18:19 becomes a pretty key text for this new point. This is the time of Ahab and Jezebel. You read in 1 Kings 18:19, Elijah said, "Summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. Bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." Jezebel was that Phoenician woman who was married to Ahab, who imported prophets of Baal and Asherah into Israel. Elijah's out there challenging Ahab and the prophets of Baal in the name of Yahweh, and you're familiar with that story there of that confrontation on Mount Carmel.

If you go down further in that chapter, look at verse 27. "At noon Elijah began to taunt them. 'Shout louder,' he said. 'Surely he is a god. Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened,'" referring to Baal. "So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom until their blood flowed. Midday passed and they continued their"—the NIV says—"frantic prophesying." Now that's simply a form of the verb *naba*, to prophesy, "until the time for the evening sacrifice." So here you have these prophets of Baal dancing around the altar in some sort of frenzied state, slashing themselves, crying out to their deity, and the word used here is they were "prophesying." But what were they actually doing? Were they getting a message from Baal? Doesn't appear like it. It appears like they would begin prophesying, which is descriptive of some kind of extremely abnormal behavior. Ecstatic behavior, if you want to use that word of some sort.

3. The Journey of Wenamen to Phoenicia

There is another Egyptian text that I gave you this last week as well. It's called, "The Journey of Wenamen to Phoenicia." This text tells about a journey of a man named Wenamen who was an Egyptian priest. He went from Egypt to Phoenicia to purchase lumber for the construction of a barge or boat for the Egyptian deity Amon-Re. That barge was to be the throne of the deity in the form of a ship. He gets to the king of Byblos up in Phoenicia to purchase this lumber and the price he wanted to pay was not acceptable. The king of Byblos tells him to go back to Egypt, that he couldn't send it immediately because of the cost of the shipping. But the king of Byblos was caused to change his mind about the sale of this lumber to Wenamen when he received a message from an ecstatic. If you go over to page 18, the second page of this handout, you read, about the middle of the page, "The prince of Byblos sent to me saying, 'Get out of my harbor.' And I sent to him saying, 'Where should I go to? You have a ship to carry me, have me taken in it to Egypt again.' So I spent 29 days in his harbor. All the while he spent time sending to me every day, saying, 'Get out of my harbor.' Now while he was making offering to his gods, the god seized one of his youths and made him possessed, and he said to him, 'Bring up the god. Bring the messenger who is carrying him. Amon is the one who sent him out. He is the one who made him come.' And while the possessed youth was having his frenzy on this night, I had already found the ship headed for Egypt and had loaded everything that I had into it. While I was watching for the darkness, thinking, "When it descends I will embark the god also, so that no other eye might see. The harbor master came to say, 'Wait until morning, so says the prince.' So I said to him, 'Aren't you the one who spent the time coming to me every day saying, "Stay out of my harbor?" While he says, "Wait till the morning."' Finally an agreement is worked out and the lumber is sold."

But the point here that is made is that in this story, you have an example of what some call prophetic frenzy. Here is this youth that sees and while he is

possessed he gives this message to the king of Byblos to make this deal with this priest from Egypt. So you get this reference to prophetic frenzy in this text, “The Journey of Wenamen.” You combine it with the behavior of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 and then combine that with the prophetic bands in the time of Samuel. What is concluded is prophetism that originated in Israel is this kind of ecstatic phenomena. We have evidence it existed in Phoenicia, Mesopotamia presumably in Canaan, at least with the priest of Baal and Asherah in the court of Ahab and Jezebel, and in these companies of prophets in the time of Samuel. So on that kind of a basis it is said Canaan must be the cradle of prophetism in Israel. Since Samuel was the leader of these ecstatic bands of prophets, so Samuel is the person who adapted originally this heathen phenomena to Israel. So that’s the theory.

I think what you can say is it is largely speculative, it rests on very little evidence and certainly does not fit with Samuel’s strong opposition to Canaanite religion as recorded in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. He called on Israel to get away, destroy their Baals and to worship the Lord. Certainly he was not one who fits with this description. But that is the way the case is made for finding origin for prophetism in Israel—on the basis of these influences and phenomena we find in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and allegedly among Canaanites, although the evidence there is really nonexistent.

4. Conclusions

That brings us to 4., “Conclusions.” It seems to me that while we may admit that, yes, there are some formal similarities between prophecy outside Israel and what we find in Israel, there is very little that is even remotely comparable in the area of what I would call material correspondence. In terms of formal correspondence, a person who claims they have a message from a deity, you find that everywhere. As far as material correspondence, that is, correspondence between the message of the prophets of Israel and the kinds of statements you find

made by these prophets outside of Israel, there's very little similarity. So the attempt to explain the origin of Israel's prophetism from analogies outside of Israel I do not think is convincing.

B. Internal Israelite Explanation for the Origin of Prophetism

We must look for the origin of prophetism in Israel somewhere else and that brings us to B. and C. on your outline. B. is, "Internal Israelite Explanation for the Origin of Prophetism."

1. The Religious Genius of Israel

1., "The religious genius of Israel." Some argue that Israel had this particular spiritual inclination. Thus because of that, they developed a very high form of religion. They had a particular gift to do something like that. In that high form of religion, a very important part of it, was prophetism; it is an essential feature of this religious genius that certain people had. So the religious genius of Israel itself was used as an explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel. Seems to me what that explanation fails to recognize is the reality of Israel's history. If you look at the Old Testament, it seems quite clear. Historically, Israel did not show itself to be a people with a natural inclination for the high form of religion that was embodied in the message of the prophets. The inclination of Israel, quite to the contrary, was to go after the religious beliefs and practices of the surrounding heathen nations. What the prophets do spend an enormous amount of their time on, is urging Israel to turn away from those heathen deities, and to worship the one, living and true God. So, to say that the religious genius of Israel is the explanation for the origin of prophetism in Israel really lacks any basis in the history of Israel's religious attitudes and expressions. The prophets of Israel were counter-cultural, you might say. They were going across the grain, there was no inclination on the part of Israel to listen to the words of the prophets, more often they didn't than they did. So Israel itself is not an adequate explanation for the origin of prophetism.

What about just backing up and saying, “It’s the religious consciousness of the prophets?” If the whole nation did not have some sort of special gift for developing this high form of religion that we find in the Old Testament, then maybe some individual Israelites did have that gift. They’re the ones who are to be considered the originators of prophetism in Israel.

Now it seems to me again that you quickly run into a problem there. The problem is what we have already talked about, which is this: when the prophets speak, they indicate very clearly that what they speak is from the Lord, not their own words or ideas. They speak only what they are compelled to say by God himself. God says, “I will put my words in your mouth.” It’s not the prophet’s words, it’s God’s words. The message they give is not their own message, it is God’s message. So the prophets themselves in their own self-testimony clearly deny that this phenomenon called “speaking the word of God” is something that originates from what is in the prophet himself. It’s something that comes to him from outside. So, internal Israelite explanations for the origin of prophetism also fail to explain why this phenomena arose in Israel.

C. Prophetism in Israel according to the Witness of the OT finds its origin in God

That brings us to C.: “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.” It seems to me that that is what the Bible itself represents as an explanation of why prophetism arose in Israel. Now I want to elaborate on that, but we’ll have to do that next time.

Transcribed by Katie Brewster
 Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt
 Final edit by Katie Ells
 Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt