

CHAPTER TWO

THE RISE AND BACKGROUND OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Prophecy plays a significant role in the Old Testament. Not only does prophetic literature form a major part of the materials, it is referred to in all the different structural sections of the Hebrew canon. The beginning of prophecy as a function, position, or role is not clearly indicated in the Old Testament documents but there are a number of passages that provide information on its development. Therefore, texts which present materials that mention functions and terminology associated with the rise and development of Old Testament prophecy will be reviewed in this chapter. The focus will mainly be on passages which present the rise of the prophetic office in conjunction with kingship in Israel. This apparently occurs during the ministry of Samuel where Scripture presents the earliest information concerning prophetic activity leading up to the monarchy. This is a period characterized by spiritual growth and development in Israel before the rise of the monarchy. We will also consider a variety of terms which Old Testament writers use to express the different functions of prophecy and examine the basic titles used in reference to the prophets.

Another aspect of the chapter involves issues concerning the interpretation and composition of the Old Testament records, particularly as they relate to prophecy. There are many differing opinions on the dating, historicity, and writing of passages that shed light on prophecy and some of these views will be discussed. Additionally, a comparison of biblical literature will be made with other ancient Near Eastern cultures that also describe prophetic functions and experiences in a variety of extant records. The review of comparative literature is necessary to expose the similarities and differences in the expression of prophecy that is observed in ancient documents. Some of this material may suggest precursors to Israelite prophecy and shed light on the role of prophetic communication. However, the Old Testament material will be considered primary and its own presuppositions and traditions taken seriously when comparing prophecy to other literature.

1 PROPHETIC LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION

A number of issues must be raised and clarified in order to set the subject matter of this chapter in context. Background issues, assumptions, and presuppositions regarding the formation as well as the interpretation of the Old Testament must be presented in order to understand the scholarly debate regarding the prophets, their ministry and eventual demise. Some of the issues raised in this introduction will be analyzed to a greater degree in the sections appearing below.¹

1.1 OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION, PROPHETS, SCRIBES AND TRADITIONS

Summarizing Old Testament interpretation since the 1950's, Alden (1970:131) comments that, "There has been no giving of ground on the part of those whose basic presupposition is that the Bible is solely a human production and is therefore not necessarily true, accurate, or without error." In his review of literature dealing with the Old Testament prophets he laments that the

negative nature of higher criticism at the turn of the century was still influencing studies in 1970. This state of affairs continued regardless of the archaeological advances and refinements made to views that were largely uncertain. Alden (1970:132) makes a striking claim regarding the state of scholarship in regards to the prophets. “Probably ninety-eight percent of what we know about the prophets, their times, and their message was already written in some commentary in the nineteenth century and probably ninety percent was known to the Reformers” (cf. Rogerson 1984:257-260).

An opinion which continues to influence writers is Wellhausen’s thesis that the Pentateuch is a compilation of books that was written centuries later than Moses. For example, the Pentateuch’s presentation of Moses as a prophet is considered a late development and gloss (cf. Vawter 1985:212; Hs 12:13). This view holds to the assumed “fact” of the alteration, addition, or subtraction of biblical data during the transmission of material. Alden (1970:131) correctly notes the difficulty of knowing what happened between the time when a prophet spoke or wrote an individual oracle and the time they were recorded and eventually canonized. While these comments and criticisms may be warranted to a certain extent, the issue of composition, editing, and writing in regards to the Old Testament materials is very complex and requires more consideration and evaluation. A helpful way forward is the consideration of canonical formation as a process superintended by the community of faith (cf. Sanders 1970; Childs 1979). Issues related to this process are addressed below.

One of the matters which theologians struggle with in regards to the rise and background of Old Testament prophecy is the chronology of events which lead to prophetic functions and behavior as described in the biblical materials. The chronological perspectives presented in Old Testament theologies naturally depend on the assumptions and opinions of the respective writers. Related to this issue are the historical questions regarding the date of an individual prophet’s ministry and the characteristics of his role and function in society. Thus, the question of the

historical beginnings and development of prophecy in Israel must be addressed until a greater consensus is reached (Rendtorff 1967:14-35). Some influential theologians view the prophets as creative innovators of religious ideas in Israel who rejected cultic practices and taught true moral religious values for mankind (Duhm 1875:183). However, Duhm later revised his views to believe that Moses was the founder of religious views in Israel and that Moses, Elijah, and Elisha were forerunners to the classical prophets in Israel beginning with Amos (cf. Clements 1976:56).

Those who assume that underlying traditions are reflected in the Old Testament, will present conclusions that are based on assumptions which hold that source documents and editorial groups are behind certain terms, theologies or texts. In this scheme, attempts are made to trace various prophetic traditions back to cult centers in order to establish a specific tradition that such a prophetic circle advocated (Von Rad 1965b). One such tradition is referred to as the Deuteronomistic or Deuteronomistic history and “is a modern theological construct which holds that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings constitute a single work, unified by a basic homogeneity in language, style, and content” (Knoppers 2000:1). The work of Jeremiah is often added to this list of “Deuteronomistic” materials. The notion of a Deuteronomistic school refers to those individuals who were responsible for the prophetic material, and denotes “a scribal guild that was active in the Babylonian exile and Persian period and had its origins in the bureaucracy of the monarchy” (Person 2002:7). Their main work supposedly was to preserve and reinterpret the earlier records. In doing this redactional work, the prophetic history of the Deuteronomists has a particular theological and literary tradition with a common ideology, terminology, and language. Various genres and literary forms are used in this tradition. Therefore, redaction critics seek to identify the unique vocabulary, phraseology, and dialectical elements of the work in order “to assign different phrases to the various sources and redactional layers with some degree of accuracy” (Person 2002:17).

The difficulty with positing prophetic traditions such as the “Deuteronomistic School” is that such a “school” has not been proven to have existed in Israel nor has this approach to writing in the ancient Near East been verified. Friedman (1995:70-80) claims that rather than a school, the Deuteronomistic history which presents a specific theological view, was written by four authors. Yet, we should take his caution that the literary and social processes for Old Testament materials are not yet clear or identified. At the same time, scholarship has noted the unique strands of theological material which obviously derives from different social and religious sectors of the nation. Blenkinsopp (1983:16-17) observes that “prophecy developed in different directions and with different emphases, drawing on religious traditions that were often radically reinterpreted in the process.” Due to the complexity of the prophetic materials in the Old Testament, such assumptions are worth consideration (cf. Clements 1995:443-446; Zevit 2001:439-458). Furthermore, the observation that there are different theological views in the Old Testament is enhanced when the background, historical circumstances and compositional traits are clarified. Names like the Deuteronomist, the Chronicler or the Priestly work, in reference to certain traditions, can be a helpful way to summarize Old Testament perspectives on themes and also indicate some of the social and historical contexts in which they were formalized.² Additionally, by carefully considering a work like the “Deuteronomistic” history in the light of compositional techniques, the work is not just considered to be a collection of sources but “a coherent work manifesting a deliberate design and a uniformity of purpose” (Knoppers 2000:1).

In considering the possible traditions which led to the present body of Scripture, various scholars have identified two leading groups who helped formulate the final documents. It is often speculated that the main contributors were prophetic or priestly groups—those who were most keen on preserving Israel’s heritage and story. These groups or traditionists summarize the work of people who apparently participated in the life and struggles of Israel who then revised, edited and created older traditions of the community that are often referred to as the Deutero-prophetic

literature and work of the Chronicler (cf. Cross 1973; Petersen 1977). Two of the main groups involved in this work during the post exilic period are referred to as the eschatologists—a group who preserved prophetic material which was forward looking and eventually valued apocalyptic material (Gowan 1998:6-7). The second group is called the theocratic party, mainly priestly groups who emphasize a history that believes Israel is ruled by God. Of course other scholars emphasize variations of these themes or additional ones. Smith explains the development of the Old Testament materials according to two diametrically opposed parties or groups (Smith 1971:95-102). One of them is the Yahweh alone group and the other groups are referred to as syncretistic parties.³ The Yahweh alone group is understood to be responsible for monotheism in Israel and other groups generally advocate the blending of various religious practices. These different perspectives may prove helpful in setting the context for prophetic views.

Albertz (1994a:150-159) works through a number of issues to present a plausible scenario on the developments of prophecy in Israel. As prophecy is observed to arise in conjunction with the early monarchy, court prophets served to give stability to the institution of the monarchy as well as in society. Such prophets were basically positive towards kingship. However, when prophets believed the monarchy was failing in its social obligations, opposition groups represented by prophets like Elijah arose. These opposition groups from the ninth century, basically had no institutional ties and came from the lower impoverished class in society (cf. Long 1995:328; Wilson, R R 1995:244). Later prophets are characterized as cultic prophets who were attached to the temple. Within this scenario, Albertz (1994:59) claims that the prophetic criticism of cultic and political institutions contributed to a reformation of Yahweh religion in the late monarchy period and during the exile.

While the main background to prophecy is connected to the monarchy, prophets are also connected to the cultic needs of the nation. References in the Pentateuch indicate that Abraham

functioned as a prophet when he interceded on behalf of others (Gn 20:7). The function of intercessor and intermediary is notable and is often associated with the sanctuary. Samuel is actually mentored in the sanctuary of Shiloh by Eli the priest (1 Sm 3:1) and prophets frequent high places and serve at altars (1 Sm 10:5; 1 Ki 18; 2 Ki 4:25). Some of the duties of the prophets at sanctuaries include giving “guidance for extraordinary situations or situations unsuited to the use of the sacred lot, such as times of personal or communal stress” (Mayes 1993:37). Although the various elements of prophetic functions in the Old Testament may seem very diverse and complex, they may be explained by observing the different social settings in which prophecy is presented. Different forms of prophecy may be used in order to communicate effectively to diverse social groups. R R Wilson (1980:45-55) refers to these as “central possession religions” and “main morality possession religions.” In part this involves the determination of the social location of a prophet’s role and relation to the community’s “social, religious, and political power structure” (Wilson R R 1995:339). The identification of the central and peripheral prophets is important to note.

Those prophets who carry out their activities close to the centers of power may be called *central prophets*. They are likely to play regular roles in the religious establishment and to enjoy a certain amount of social prestige and political power by virtue of their important religious functions. At the other extreme, prophets may be far removed from the power centers and may operate on the fringes of the society. Such *peripheral prophets* have almost no authority within the society as a whole and are usually dispossessed individuals having little status or political power. Prophets, of course, are not confined to the two ends of this spectrum but may appear at any point on the continuum between a society’s center and its periphery. It is possible for a society at any given time to contain prophets located at various places on this continuum, and over time a prophet may move from one social location to another.⁴

(Wilson, R R 1995:339-340)

While this explanation does not answer all the questions, it does indicate the reasons for the

dominant Old Testament prophetic views and explains why there are also peripheral groups and expressions evident. It also explains why true prophets may communicate different messages to God's people at different times and in different settings.

These perspectives are helpful in reading the various prophetic materials within their respective contexts. At the same time however, the typical Near Eastern practices of record keeping and the writing of important documents must also be appraised. From this brief overview of opinions, we realize that the issues regarding the interpretation and development of prophecy in Israel are complex. Nevertheless, in Israel there were those who compiled a compendium of prophetic materials which gave direction, hope, and longevity to the community. The nation carefully evaluated stories and texts which were then selected and adopted as their canonical record of faith. The role of prophets in this enterprise may not be clear but they definitely were a predominate factor in the writing and redaction of prophetic communication. Grottanelli (1999:182) refers to their perceived influence in his comment that, "written prophecy is treated as the privilege of another court: the heavenly court. The message is written in the heavens. It arrives already fixed in human hands and, moreover, it can be read." Whereas there may be many questions regarding the traditions included in the Old Testament, the fact is that Israel developed and received as authoritative a prophetic record that provided identity and purpose for the community (Sanders 1997:54-55). Therefore, our deliberations into the cessation of this prophetic record must be focused on the canon that was finally adopted as authoritative for the nation.

1.2 THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SETTING OF PROPHECY

Israelite prophetic material is unique in many respects. However, the unique qualities of Old Testament prophecy can only be observed in comparison to the larger ancient Near Eastern background. In the last few centuries, hundreds of ancient texts have been discovered and

translated, then compared with biblical texts to illuminate their setting. Some of these texts have similarities with Old Testament prophecy. Therefore, the common cultural, social, and often linguistic similarities in prophetic material must be considered in order to trace possible origins which may illustrate the biblical texts. In making comparisons and contrasts, several considerations are necessary as Hallo (1997:xxvi) observes. “Even where (positive) comparison is asserted, it is useful to raise questions of category and genre so that, as nearly as possible, like is compared with like.” This is necessary since the focus of the texts discovered are usually related to divine, royal, or individual aspects. The royal focus embraces genres such as myths, prayers, divination, incantations, and rituals. The royal focus seems to be more closely related to Israel’s context but the materials are substantially different from what we read in the Old Testament. Even when texts correspond to the genre of prophecy, the ancient materials are usually more interested in divination to discern the reasons for perceived divine displeasure and the way of restoring harmony (cf Grottanelli 1999:173). However, it is important to observe that prophecy in Israel “was not created *ex nihilo* but was a development of and a reaction to, previous prophetic activity throughout the ancient world including the Land of Canaan/Israel” (Fenton 2001: 129).

Fohrer (1967:1-6) summarizes some of the main roots or influences on prophecy in Israel as follows. The first root is in the nomadic setting where seers received special messages for various individuals. Secondly, the context of the ancient Near East presents a variety of functionaries that resemble Old Testament prophets in their role and expression. Out of these two roots, Fohrer sees a unique development in Israel where the seer becomes a *nabi* who now has more specific functions in Israel. Something new and different develops in Israel where prophets have a major role in the development of “Yahweh faith.” Prophets are now observed as active in a variety of settings. Some are attached to an institution such as the cultus and may be called cult prophets. Others are active in the monarchic circles and may be referred to as court prophets. Therefore, Old Testament prophecy is understood as a developing phenomenon that is expressed

or observed within different social settings. The positive contribution of Fohrer notes the complexity of the Old Testament materials and accounts for a number of “faith traditions.” As Israelite history progresses, cult prophets lose their place in the exile and writing prophets take over the role of preserving and collecting Scripture (Fohrer 1967:6).

Furthermore, Porter (1982:12-13) summarizes similar views to Fohrer’s which have now become a commonly held opinion “that early Israelite prophecy represents a combination of two originally separate strands: a nomadic element that the Israelites brought with them on their entry into Palestine, and a kind of prophecy that was widespread in the settled civilizations of the ancient Near East, which was mediated to Israel through the Canaanites. These two features gradually coalesced from around 1000 BCE onwards, as evidenced by such “transitional” figures as Elijah and Elisha, to evolve into “genuine Israelite prophecy.” However, Porter (1982:13) points out several problems with this hypothetical summary. Basically there is disagreement among scholars regarding the “evolutionistic assumptions” and Canaanite backgrounds, as well as to the phenomenon of ecstasy and the development of terminology to describe prophetic functionaries.

The etymology and usage of terms which refer to prophetic functions and roles, such as seer, visionary, prophet, man of God, and the sons of the prophets, must be investigated to discern any clues as to the development of prophecy in Israel. Unfortunately, proving the development, specific usage, and meaning of the terms during different periods in Israel’s history is very difficult. In recent literature, some scholars are inclined to believe that such terminology was added into the texts after the exile (Auld 1983:7). This perspective holds that, “The designation of figures from the early period as prophets, like Abraham (Gn 20:7), Moses (Dt 34:10, etc.), Aaron (Ex 7:1), and Samuel (1 Sm 3:20), and of Miriam (Ex 15:20) and Deborah (Jdg 4:4) as prophetesses, is the projection of an honorific title on to the past” (Albertz

1994a:315). Whatever theory is applied, in the end, the context in which these terms are used provides valuable insight into the overall meaning and understanding of the prophet in their respective communities. Barstad's (1993:46) corrective is very important here. He states, "The major problem, in my view, with recent trends in prophetic research, including such weighty contributions as those of Auld and Carroll, is that they tend to be too theoretical and take little or no heed of what is actually to be found in the biblical texts, above all lacking any serious attempt to relate the contents of the prophetic books to the phenomenon of biblical and ancient Near Eastern prophecy in general."

The ancient Near Eastern context, therefore, is crucial for our consideration in that a comparison and contrast with similar texts will provide the broader background for prophecy. It will also assist us in observing the main focus and setting for prophecy as it arises and develops in Israel. In addition, the possible cessation of prophecy in the ancient Near East, may provide indications as to what happened to prophecy in Israel.

1.3 OLD TESTAMENT COMPOSITION AND CANONICAL FORMATION

A major issue regarding the cessation of prophecy in the Old Testament concerns the actual process, compilation, preservation, and reception of prophetic canonical books as authoritative. Davies (1992:114) identifies the difficulties involved in this process and argues for three important stages including the creation of the 'historical' material, the adoption of the literature as a cultural, then religious norm, and finally the official adoption of a set of writings as a national archive "with the cultural and religious authority that impels it on its way towards canonization." Specifically, the impetus and reasons behind this process may be indicators to the demise of prophecy in Israel. An important consideration will be whether the finalization of the Torah marked the time when prophecy ceased since the words of the prophets were then available

to the community of faith in written form (Sanders 1987:182).

1.3.1 Canon Formation of Authoritative Writings

Canon formation includes the careful selection and endorsement of inspired writings as well as the rejection of non-canonical texts. Usually the collection and establishment of the text or book occurs after the ministry of a prophet has ended. However, it is likely that most prophets began preserving their own oracles which were then compiled by other interested parties, such as disciples, redactors, or editors (Meade 1986:22). The fact that prophets wrote their oracles, in addition to presenting them orally, is indicated by several texts and prophets (Ex 34:1, 27; Is 8:1-16; 30:8-17; Jr 36; 51:59-64; Hab 2:1-4) and provides prophecy with a powerful means of disseminating its message (Grottanelli 1999:174). The work and identity of those who compiled them is less clear and scholars use a variety of terms to refer to them. It is evident, however, that the “tradents” were very careful to retain the initial literary, biographical and historical elements of the oracles, even though this process probably occurred during different historical circumstances. Apparently those who compiled the oracles of a particular prophet recognized their role and sought to record the prophet’s actual words in view of their perception of a prophet. “The prophet did stand apart from other men, and he was believed to possess an inspiration accorded to only a very few individuals which made his actual words memorable and vital” (Clements 1995:447). Their role was mainly to collect, edit, record and interpret those words with the aid of additional material and supplementation in order to make the words understood in their own setting and context.⁵ Furthermore, “The historical nature of Israelite religion and the developing ‘canon-consciousness’ of those who handled the traditions served as stabilizing elements in the tradition process in order to insure its continuity (Meade 1986:25; contra Thompson 1999:35, 98, 269).⁶ The developing canon for Israel is mainly evident in its authoritative nature for the community which involves a process that eventually brings about the concept of a “closed

canon.”⁷

Basically, a “canon” refers to a collection of literature deemed to be normative or authoritative for a religious community (Beyer 1965:596-597). This includes the belief in the special quality and nature of religious literature. Once received by the community, the canon forms the rules for the faith and practice of God’s people (Beckwith 1985:65). The problem with determining canonical material is partly the time involved in establishing what is authoritative for the community. This process can take several hundred years, and different communities may end up with variations in accepted documents. We may conclude with Meade (1986:22) that prophetic books are the literary expression of a long history of tradition in Israel. Not much is known about the exact agency of canon formation. Leiman (1976:9) says, “Though we possess a fair knowledge of the Bible’s message, we know next to nothing about its literary history. We do not know, for example, when or where the biblical books were first published, or how they gained admission into the very select group of writings which we call the Hebrew Bible.” Also, the Old Testament itself does not indicate a criteria or process for canonical formation which has led to a variety of assumptions regarding inspiration and composition (Dyck 1989:17). At one extreme, scholars thought that a book is only canonical if completed by one author in one sitting. This view reflects the presuppositions of some writers in regards to the authorship of biblical literature, but comparative text composition and writing in the ancient Near East and in the Old Testament does not support this assumption. This debate results in a variety of conclusions because of the complexity of material developed over long periods of time. On the other extreme there are a variety of theories which develop a more complex and protracted period of composition. Peckham (1995:365) summarizes that the process of editing includes annotation, commentary, and interpretation which are all phases in a single process but ultimately result in

completely different literary works which are written for specific historical situations.⁸ Even though the process of canon formation is elusive, the key probable components must be presented here since it has a bearing on the overall discussion of cessation.

The process of canonization includes the initial inspiration of prophets, the compilation of their messages and the final collecting of authoritative books into the canon. Prophetic utterances, according to the Old Testament, usually occur when the prophet is inspired with a message or oracle by the Spirit of God. This may occur through visionary or auditory means. The prophets are clear in their belief that the oracle they speak is the actual “word of the Lord” which is inspired by none other than Yahweh. This phrase is used two hundred and forty one times in the Old Testament (Von Rad 1965b:87). The audience or community which receives the message, evaluates and at some point receives the oracle as inspired or authoritative. Childs (1979:60) refers to this process where, “The growth of Israel’s canon consciousness can be clearly detected when the words of a prophet which were directed to a specific group in a particular historical situation were recognized as having an authority apart from their original use, and were preserved for their own integrity.” The “inspired” messages, stories, and documents are then collected and structured or shaped. The Old Testament includes the use of “intertextuality” where quotations from earlier prophets are referred to and used by later prophets (cf. Day 1995:240-242). This serves as another mark of recognition that oracles were inspired and considered authoritative by the community. In fact the editors had a great respect for the prophet’s materials which made them “eager and anxious interpreters of his words, spelling out in detail how they could be applied to the situation which his warnings and reproof had forewarned them of” (Clements 1995:452). The idea of canon is, therefore, rooted in prophecy.

1.3.2 Collection and Editing

After the community receives materials and messages as bearing normative authority for them, a second process begins. This involves a period of collection, expansion, and editing, where for example the ten commandments (Dt 5:22) are later added to the book of the covenant (Ex 20:22-23:33). Other materials and narratives are then added to complete books and sections and this explains why some books such as Jeremiah have been transmitted in two forms (Waltke 1994:15). Formation and addition takes place over time. Expansion is evident in the book of Zechariah where themes in the first part (1-8) are continued and enunciated in the second part (9-14). Meyers (1995:719) claims that, “The author or authors of Second Zechariah in all probability revered the words of their mentor Zechariah ben-Berechiah ben-Iddo (Zech 1:1) and in attaching the new collection to the old were remarkably effective in achieving what would appear to be a high degree of “canonical intentionality,” leaving the book of fourteen chapters with the appearance that it had been produced by a common mind for a common purpose” (cf. Childs 1979:482).⁹ Childs (1995:514) further elaborates that “In the transmission process, tradition, which once arose in a particular milieu and addressed various historical situations, was shaped in such a way as to serve as a normative expression of God’s will to later generations of Israel who had not shared in those original historical events.” In this way, a prophet’s message continued to be “Sacred Scripture” in not only that generation, but for many future generations of readers.

During this process, careful design, purpose and shaping is observed. Waltke (1994:15) understands that Deuteronomy 18:14-22 anticipates the work of prophets after Moses who will continue to add revelation to books during the period of an open canon. Therefore, prophets over time assure the compilation of books and assist in editorial work. Beckwith (1985:68) asserts that,

The sanctity of prophetic literature would not have been violated by suitable editorial work if faithfully performed by other true prophets; and at a time when prophets were the leaders of the nation or the counselors of the monarch, it would probably not have been difficult for them to carry out whatever work of this kind might be necessary, either in the

standard copies of a sacred text, or in another copy from which it could be transferred into the standard copies.

Whether these are prophetic guilds (2 Ki 6:1; 1 Sm 10:10) or schools is not clear, but Meade (1986:11) indicates there is “ample evidence of scribal schools in surrounding cultures” which makes it possible that some parts of the Old Testament come together as a result of such schools. The fact that books are received and authoritative is observed in Israel’s response and attitude to the reading of the word (Ex 24:7; 2 Ki 23:3; Neh 8:9, 14-17; 10:28-39; 13:1-3).

1.3.3 Stabilization of Texts

The third element in the process of canonization involves the stabilization of texts and the collection of materials into individual books. Although it is probable that the writings of respected prophets were quickly received as canonical, impetus for this stage is intensified during periods of political tension. Meyers (1995:720) assert that, “By the mid-fifth century B.C.E. despite the fact that there were many prophets still around, there was a growing perception that prophecy in its traditional form was at an end and that authoritative prophetic works of the past needed to be collected for future generations” (cf. Greenspahn 1989:37-49). Sanders (1987:38) emphasizes that the finding of the scroll under Josiah in 621 BC marks a key event in the process towards canon reception and shaping. This was a time when crystallization of the torah took place where several traditions of Israel’s history were shaped and affirmed. However, he also claims that the stabilization of the Writings probably did not take place until after the Bar Kochba Revolt of 132-135 BCE (Sanders 1997:39). Books were then integrated into the formation of larger unities such as the Law, the Former and Latter Prophets, and the Writings. This is how Israel organized and presented its faith and beliefs. The Old Testament has three major sections which together make up the final form of the Old Testament Scriptures. The importance of the canonical shape has several implications for us. Whereas many Old Testament introductions focus significant attention

on the possible history of composition, the final product received by the community is equally important and should receive due consideration. For Childs (1979:57-83), the final form is what constitutes the Scriptures for the church, and not the former form or process. Therefore, the authors or editors of the Scriptures focus their attention on specific aspects but often obscure details about them and the process they were involved in. In the same way, the reader must focus their attention on the final canonical product—even in regards to the question of prophetic cessation.

A canonical approach to prophecy recognizes that many original developments in the process and composition of the Old Testament cannot be known since the information and details are not always available. Childs (1979:83) claims that due to the difficulty in reconstructing some Old Testament historical situations, introductory matters must be secondary. He challenges the interpreter to “look closely at the biblical text in its received form and then critically discern its function for a community of faith.” The concept of canon, therefore, assigns a special quality to the Scriptures which become normative for all future generations of a faith community. “The significance of the final form of the biblical literature is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation” (Childs 1995:514-515). For Childs, the final form of the biblical text bears witness to the normative history of the community and the full effect of the revelatory history must be perceived within this context. Thus, concerning the theme of the cessation of prophecy, it is important to consider texts according to a canonical investigation of the Scriptural material in accordance with the structure of the Hebrew canon-- the Law, the Prophets [both Former and Latter Prophets], and the Writings (cf. Barstad 1993:46).

1.3.4 The Function of the Canon

Typically it is claimed that the canon is to function as a rule or standard of behavior and

faith for the community. However, there is much more to canon than this. It also provides insight into the creation and identity of God's people and explains their historical circumstances. Sanders (1997:41-42) elaborates on this in his comment that, "The function of regular recitations of Torah, and eventually of the various canons, was and always has been twofold: to remind the people who they were and what they should stand for that is, identity and life style, mythos and ethos, story and stipulations, *haggadah* and *halachah*." In the variety of literary genres that makes up the Scriptures, there is a common purpose and function. The various texts communicate the origins, experiences, and destiny of God's people, and provide the knowledge required to live in relationship with Yahweh.

1.3.5 The Historicity of Old Testament Events and Prophecy

Deist (1995:583) summarizes the traditional view of the historical nature of the Old Testament prophets and their documents. "Prior to the rise of historical criticism it was believed that the thoughts and times of the Old Testament prophets could be "read" from the texts they produced and that these words had to be understood against the historical background in which they had been spoken." This view led to the quest for the very words of the prophets by using literary criticism and the history of Israelite religion "provided the background for understanding these words as utterances of specific individuals in specific circumstances" (Deist 1995:583). The prophets had an elevated position in the view of their readers. "They were thought of as bearers of a divinely instituted office and viewed as individuals conscious of a unique divine calling causing them to be opponents of the kings, the rich, the priests and false prophets" (Deist 1995:584). However, in recent times there has been a rejection of the historicity of Old Testament events as recorded in Scripture, as well as the historicity of actual prophets. These views generally seek to deny that there is material available in the Old Testament which enables the reconstruction of history in the prophetic books, and furthermore, do not acknowledge the validity of

archaeological discoveries. Since the historical value of the Old Testament records is assumed in this study and has relevancy for the discussion of the historical rise and demise of prophecy, some comments are warranted.

Thompson (1999:34) claims that, “The Bible doesn’t deal with what happened in the past. It deals with what was thought, written and transmitted within an interacting intellectual tradition.” He asserts that “the Bible is almost never intentionally historical” but consists of the “heritage of the past but not history--it is created history as a form of intellectual discussion” (Thompson 1999:99, 269). This view reflects a growing trend among a few scholars who claim that some texts recorded in the prophets tell us little or nothing about actual ‘historical’ prophets like Amos and Isaiah. Beentjes (2001:53) concludes that, “The majority of the prophets and inspired messengers we met in the Book of Chronicles have been ‘invented’ by the Chronicler and should therefore be characterized as ‘literary personages’ rather than historical persons.” However, based on his examination of Jeremiah 26:8-9 and Amos 7:10-11, Zimmerli (1995:420) affirms that “a prophetic word entails a concrete reference to history. Prophecy is critically spoken into a particular context and, in turn, generates a specific response at a given time in history.”

The importance of history is indicated throughout the Old Testament which presents many historical details in order to anchor texts in specific historical situations and contexts. These contexts will obviously affect the interpretation of texts. Gordon (1995:70) notes the problem that arises when literary texts are rejected as “sources of information on external social realities.” Such rejection “can seriously impoverish the interpretive enterprise if some attempt to reconstruct the history, or at least the implied background, of the text is not undertaken” (Gordon 1995:71). Furthermore, the disavowal of historical content and prophets implies that the prophets were not a normal part of ancient Near Eastern societies when much evidence proves the opposite. On the contrary, the “clear indications of a ‘prophetic continuum,’ geographically and chronologically, in

the Near East of the second and first millennium” (Gordon 1995:86) militate against views which deny the historicity of the Old Testament events and prophets as real individuals (cf. Halpern 2000:546-554).

Some writers also claim that the people of Israel as presented in the Old Testament are actually a literary invention of a society which sought to create for itself an identity and is not to be taken as the society described. Davies (1992:92) claims that the name “Israel” was used by a scribal class of a new society that created “an identity and heritage for itself in Palestine, an identity expressed in a vigorous and remarkably coherent literary corpus.” Others speculate that the so called ‘invention of ancient Israel’ is something manufactured by Western scholarship (Whitelam 1996). These views not only deny the value of historical information in the Old Testament but also diminish the impact of archaeology. Although certain scholars seek to minimize the value of archaeological discoveries, it is evident that from very careful and critical examinations that these discoveries often confirm the historical biblical record (cf. Dever 1999). Halpern’s (2000:556) precise examination of archaeology, epigraphy, and the critical assessment of biblical texts brings him to this conclusion:

There is not much doubt that the archaeological record of the 8th-6th centuries comports in almost every particular with the general political picture that we derive from epigraphs and the biblical record, critically regarded. In the 8th-7th centuries, most of Israel was depopulated, and there was a swath of destruction cut throughout Judah in 701, followed by a gradual resurgence. Judahite settlement then plummeted in the 6th century, reflecting Babylonian policy in the region.

He affirms that biblical texts accurately present historical facts that also conform with external sources and archaeological evidence. Overholt (1995:374) also argues against views that seek to deny the historicity of prophets and affirms that “the named individuals of the Hebrew Bible actually were prophets, both in their own eyes and in the judgment of at least some of their

contemporaries.” The debate will no doubt continue but the preponderance of historical and archaeological evidence verify the historicity of the prophetic and historical Old Testament records.

2 EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In recent years the framework for understanding prophecy in the ancient Near East and in Israel has significantly broadened. Literature from different sites and royal courts such as Mari and Egypt, was discovered and some of the materials seem to shed light on Israel’s own understanding of prophetic experience. Such records not only provide insight into the motivation and need for prophecy but they also present similar roles held by functionaries in various courts. Even the Old Testament recognizes the role of prophets in other nations along side of other functionaries (Jr 28:9-15). Weinfeld (1975:178) notes that “the basic forms as well as basic motifs of classical prophecy are rooted in the ancient Near Eastern literature.” Although many aspects concerning the development, content, character, and significance of ancient Near Eastern prophecy remain obscure, a number of similarities between Israel’s experience and that of the surrounding cultures are evident. The main elements of prophecy in the ancient Near East, as characterized by Huffmon (1968:103), include a communication from the divine world, normally for a third party through a mediator (prophet), who may or may not be identified by the deity. The prophet may be inspired through an ecstatic experience, a dream, or what may be called inner illumination. It is often an immediate message that does not require a technical specialist to interpret it, nor is it solicited. The message is usually exhortatory or admonitory (cf. Huffmon 1976:172). The following examples from Israel’s surrounding cultures provide indicators of possible influences on the prophetic development in the Old Testament.

2.1 EGYPT

Literary materials from Israel's neighboring cultures indicate both similarities and dissimilarities to Israel's prophetic literature. For instance, in Egypt the "Prophecy of Nefer-rohu" purports to be a prophetic tract in the sense of foretelling particular events during the reign of King Snefru of the Fourth Dynasty. In apocalyptic terms, the main section details the depravity and chaos that would come on the land. It forecasts a period of social decadence and foreign domination that leads to the downfall of the Old Kingdom. With messianic overtones, the named king will right the wrongs, restore justice and order over a united kingdom, and repatriate the foreigners (Wilson, J A 1969:446). This document is considered to be representative of propaganda writing that assumes the style of "prophetic utterance" to proclaim Amenemhet I as the deliverer of Egypt. According to Shupak (in Hallo 1997:106-107) this text is just a literary disguise in the pattern of prophecy which aims to discredit the current government and to legitimize the monarchy of Amenemhet I. It also serves to present his program of administrative and social reform (Harrison 1970:110; Wilson, J A 1951:125-127). This type of prophecy is used to authorize and advance the political and religious views of the leadership. In addition, it is motivated by a period of historical upheaval and seeks to provide an agenda for change. Often the political directions are given after the crisis begins, whereas in Israel the crisis lies in the future and may be averted if a right response to Yahweh is effected (Wilson, R R 1978:10). Therefore, the closest analogy to prophecy in the Old Testament is an oracle which comes from a certain perspective in Israel which tries to advocate change regarding a practice or to support a political perspective.

From Phoenicia, a text possibly dating from 1090-1080 BC describes an occurrence of what we can refer to as prophetic frenzy. This is an Egyptian text and Lichtheim (in Hallo 1997:89-91) claims the "Report of Wenamun" depicts a true historical situation and precise moment. An official from the temple of Amon at Karnak is sent to Byblos to purchase lumber but is treated poorly by the prince. When the official is continually told to leave empty handed, a

youth, presumably from the prince's court, is seized with prophetic frenzy. "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!" (J A Wilson 1969:26). In short, a prophetic function of some kind is practiced and appears to carry some influential authority in the court. Another similarity is evident when the messenger says "send me" to Amun-Re (cf. Is 6).

Other Egyptian texts that have some similarities with Old Testament prophecy include the "Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage" named Ipuwer from around 2000 BC. This document includes poems which indicate ordeals and calamities to come. The interesting comparisons with Old Testament prophecy are mainly evident in the themes which revolve around a royal focus. They include social criticisms of negative practices and refer to future events. They speak of prosperity, a good life and health. Shupak (in Hallo 1997:93) states, "The climax of the work is in the third part, which portrays an ideal monarch who will rehabilitate the country, and concludes by pinning the blame for the decline into evil days on an unnamed regnant king, and presenting the fortunate conditions in store for Egypt once the nation is redeemed." Similar themes but real differences in presentation. In the light of these differences and due to the limited examples of such material, Egyptian records mainly serve to contrast Israel's prophetic literature.

2.2 MARI

Some of the main correspondences to Israelite prophecy have been found in tablets at Mari, an influential center in Mesopotamia during the third and early second millennia BC. Prophetic literature, discovered along with other documents such as divinatory and oracular texts,

illustrate some interesting similarities with Biblical prophetic functionaries. These texts were apparently written between 1828 to 1758 BC. After presenting several texts, Ellermeier (1968:167) claims that there is a definite connection between Mari prophecy and the contents of Israelite records. An important similarity is in the prophet as a messenger. In Mari the god Dagan sends prophets to communicate messages to the king (Malamat 1966:210). More recently, Gordon (1993:63) indicates that some of the Mari texts might be regarded as precursors if not progenitors of Israelite prophecy (cf. Zevit 2001:488). The Mari texts were also written down for the main beneficiary, the king, and then deposited in the royal archives (Gordon 1995:69; cf. Grottanelli 1999:176).

Within the Mari prophetic texts, a number of designations are applied to various functionaries. Some texts refer to the *apilu*, which generally means “to respond or to answer,” and may indicate the result which the functionary receives as a response to questions put to a god or solicited by him in some way. The servant then passes on the message of the god and leaves it to the king to consider what actions to take. Another professional functionary is referred to as the *muhum*, the root of which means “to rave” or “become frenzied” or ecstatic. Weinfeld (1975:181) indicates that “the literary convention in Mari for the ecstatic action is *imahhi* (he went into a trance).” The activity of ecstasy is, however, associated with influences other than the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. The *assinnu* is a functionary who serves as a male eunuch cult prostitute. He delivers messages from the goddess, at times accompanied by ecstatic behavior, and usually warns the kings of plots against them. These functionaries convey messages to the king concerning details about sacrifices, buildings, military affairs, advice and instruction (Malamat 1966:207-227; Moran 1969:15-56; Ross 1970:1-28; Craghan 1975:32-55; Weinfeld 1975:178-195).

The main content of the messages brought by these functionaries regards matters of the

cult and the royal administration. In one instance the king is admonished for his failure to recognize the gods and their needs, usually in matters of cultus and temple. A sacrifice may have been neglected or the maintenance of a temple may have been avoided. These admonitions are designed to move the king to actively pursue his duties for the building of temples and their maintenance as well as cultic responsibilities such as sacrifices and the feeding of gods which were considered duties of the king in Mesopotamia. A king was often censured, threatened, and evaluated according to his disposal of this duty (Oppenheim 1964:183-197). This kind of censure for sacrificial neglect was also evident in Egyptian literature (Weinfeld 1975:1993). Political relations are also addressed in oracles. The king may be encouraged by the oracle where the foe is denounced and victory is proclaimed for Mari. The salvation oracle is often contingent on the king's response to the prophetic word, both in matters of cultus and social concerns, where he is encouraged to rule with justice and equity. Messages are not solely negative for many of them are supportive of the king and his goals. Another similarity to Old Testament prophecy is in connection to war prophecy where victory is announced for the king (Weinfeld 1975:184; cf. 1 Sm 23:4; 24:5; 26:8; 1Ki 20:13, 28).

Consequently, these correspondences provide the closest examples to what we find in Old Testament prophetic books. However, while there may be correspondences with Old Testament materials, the question of whether this influenced Israel is still to be answered. Barstad (1993:51) warns against a complacent acceptance of the Mari "prophets as the forerunners" of the Hebrew prophets since the parallels occur in a greater cultural context, have no direct connection, and involve a considerable time gap." While expressing caution, he does concede, "Nevertheless, the obvious phenomenological similarities, witnessed by contemporary documents from Mari, are very important for the assessment of "historical" prophecy in ancient Israel (Barstad 1993:51). Furthermore, he underlines that similar types of prophetic expressions are noted not only in the Old Testament but in other ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts. "What we find in these

different contexts are strongly related phenomena within connected cultures, showing us that “prophecy” was a widespread phenomenon in the different ancient Near Eastern cultures.” One of the main similarities to Old Testament prophecy is in the occurrence of an Akkadian cognate of the Hebrew term *nabi*, which supports the connection between Mari prophecy and West Semitic traditions (Gordon 1993:65; 1995:72-73). Gordon surveys Mari texts that indicate ecstatic prophecy, dreams, and the messenger function of Mari “prophets.” In addition, the Old Testament concept of the divine council is also evident in Mari texts (Gordon 1993:71-74; 1995:78-81).

Therefore, the ancient Near Eastern texts indicate that a prophetic role was influential in royal courts and within cultic settings. Also evident is the reality that prophetic functionaries were not timid in addressing royalty and even correcting failures in royal administration. Zevit (2001:491) indicates that in Mari, the oracles of prophets were not only esteemed and taken seriously, but they were kept as records of divine messages. The Mari functionaries and roles are, therefore, instructive for similar royal settings in the ancient Near East and are probable influences on the court in Israel.

2.3 CANAANITE

Although Ugaritic texts provide details into the life and thinking of the Canaanites, there are no specific texts which present prophetic material (Gray 1965:217). At best, Ringgren (1982:9) notes that in the Baal epic there is a portion of speech which is in prophetic oracular form. Unfortunately, the Canaanite experience of oracular prophecy is not recorded for our investigation. It is from the Old Testament itself that we have evidence of Canaanite prophetic practices. Although Israel is warned to rid itself of Canaanite influences, the culture and practices of the people are a constant temptation to Israel (cf. Dt 7-8; 13:1-5; 18:9-15; Lv 18:3). Yahweh warns Israel, “The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination”

(Dt 18:14)—this was not to be the case among God’s people. However, the tendency for the population in northern Israel towards Baalism increases until finally, with Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel, the Baal cult threatens to replace Yahwism completely (1 Ki 18:4-19; 19:10-14). In opposition to the prophets of Yahweh stand four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah who are supported by the court (1 Ki 18:4, 13). The main inroads of Canaanite practice become prominent during the Omride dynasty (ca. 876-869 BC). Altars and cultic personnel, mainly priests (1 Ki 18:19) and prophets (2 Ki 10:19), are introduced. Jezebel’s hostility towards the prophets of Yahweh increases to the point where she seeks to exterminate them and replace them with prophets of Baal and Asherah who enjoy official status (1 Ki 18:19; cf. Bronner 1968; Bergen 1999).

Whereas, many prophets remain faithful to Yahweh during this period, others compromise their trust and prophesy by Baal in support of the apostate kings of the north (1 Ki 22). It is in this context that Elijah confronts the claims of the prophets of Baal and challenges them to solicit proof of Baal’s deity by sending fire (1 Ki 18:24ff.). The prophets of Baal cry out, “O Baal, answer us!” Their cries are accompanied by self-mutilation and frantic prophesying, all to no avail. This kind of frantic prophesying has given rise to speculation that Israelite prophecy was influenced by the prophets of Baal. Although some prophets are said to “prophesy by Baal” (Jr 2:8; 23:13), and others exhibit ecstatic behavior (1 Sm 10:9ff.: 18:10; 19:20-24), it is not clear how this influences prophecy in Israel, but it does illustrate a religious practice that is observed in many cultures. Not only so but it emphasizes the royal court context for prophecy. Since there are no specific texts from Canaanite or Ugaritic prophetic oracles, it is difficult to prove the extent of Canaanite prophetic activity as a determining influence in Israel (Petersen 1981:26; Fishbane 1989:67-69).

2.4 NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXTS

The Neo-Assyrian texts are purported to be from the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE) and Assurbanipal (668-629 BCE). They are evidently written by scribes in cuneiform script and kept in the palace archives (Grottanelli 1999:176). In many ways the content and thought of the oracles are similar to other ancient Near Eastern records, and mainly have to do with political matters. The oracles are apparently inspired by Ashur and Ishtar who speak directly to the king in a variety of formulas. A change in form is evident in these oracles in that the texts simply “reproduce the divine word leaving the lips of the prophet” (Grottanelli 1999:177). However, there is a unique development evident in some of these texts. For Holladay (1970:30), the main function of a prophet is as the messenger of Yahweh. The prophet was called by Yahweh and is an officer of the heavenly court. He participated in the deliberations of the court and then carried the message or written document to its destination (Holladay 1970:31; cf. Ross 1962:98-100). From the ninth century, Assyria spread its military domination throughout the fertile crescent, and ruled their vassals through treaties, messengers, ambassadors, and military might. Holladay summarizes some of the royal letters found in the archives of King Esarhaddon to illustrate a change in procedure and foreign policy. Whereas in the past, messengers mainly addressed the royal court, now the king addresses the populace in general through his messenger with a written declaration. This is illustrated in the address recorded in 2 Kings 19:17-37. “Thus, alongside the older system of private official communications to vassals, the Neo-Assyrian period witnessed the spectacular rise to prominence of the royal herald as an essential instrument of imperial government” (Holladay 1970:42). He concludes that “it can hardly be coincidental that this change in the conduct of the office of royal Assyrian messenger is paralleled by a similar functional shift in the office of the messenger of the heavenly court in Judah-Israel” (Holladay 1970:43; cf. Jr 2:1-2).

2.5 SUMMARY

In this overview of the ancient Near Eastern context and documents, we conclude that comparisons to Old Testament texts are insightful yet limited in their implications for Israel. The main setting for prophecy is in the royal court, both in Israel and in other nations. Similar forms of literature, basic patterns for prophecy, and the roles of functionaries are evident, but Israel's prophets are unique in their relationship with Yahweh who inspires them with the divine message. Whereas there seem to be many parallels in prophetic expression and presentation, there are numerous differences in content. Interestingly, while the ancient Near Eastern neighbors of Israel collected a variety of literary documents, few if any could rival the Old Testament compilation of books preserved in Israel. Inevitably this probably resulted in the complete demise, not only of prophecy among certain groups, but of nations and people groups in the ancient Near East.

Ancient Near Eastern prophecy and documents seem to be temporary institutional supports to specific kings. In the Old Testament, however, prophecy is not only relevant to contemporary situations and for individual kings, but extends to future generations and explains Israel's identity and situation according to Yahweh's perspective (cf. Zimmerli 1995:420-422). Furthermore, Grottanelli (1999:177) states that, "We owe the prophetic biblical texts to the transition from a strictly oral prophecy to a written one. This process begins when oral prophecy is transcribed not as a part of a report but in its own right." Prophecy becomes the written record of God's words and deeds. The authoritative words ensure the perpetuation of the people who receive and adhere to the commands of the word.

Therefore, the Scriptures are relevant to God's people in every generation—even when it appears the nation will be destroyed. In fact, it is in the context of great national threat that the Old Testament prophecies have their greatest value and importance. Whereas other ancient Near Eastern nations rose and fell, leaving behind some literary clues as to their thoughts and ideas, the Hebrew prophets left a legacy of Scripture which has provided hope, instruction, wisdom, and

identity for the people of God.

3 TERMINOLOGY USED FOR PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In this section we review the various terms used for Old Testament prophets and discuss the role and function of prophets as they appear in various texts in the Hebrew canon. The diverse terms for prophets may reflect local preferences and reflect a wide variety of functions that include mediation, healing, moral guidance, influence in public affairs, warfare, and politics (Fenton 1997:31). This overview will provide further insight into the development of prophecy in Israel and indicate possible theological perspectives regarding prophecy in the nation.

3.1 PROPHET (*nabi*)

The etymology of the Hebrew noun for prophet *nabi*, which appears three hundred and fifteen times in the Old Testament, continues to be debated but its relation to the verbal stems provides context and meaning. In the niph'al (*hinnabhe*) and the hithpa'el (*hithnabbe*) the verb basically means to “act or appear like a prophet” or “to prophesy” and, therefore, emphasizes the external aspects of prophecy such as ecstatic behavior observed in audible speech, bodily movements or prostration (Jeremias 1997:697-699; Müller 1998:129-131). It should not be asserted that these verbal forms are referring to different functions, such as prophetic speech in contrast to ecstatic behavior, because they may be used in similar contexts (cf. 1 Sm 10:11; 19:20; 1 Ki 22:8, 12). “There is no hard and fast distinction, though *nibba* came to be the standard word for prophetic speech, just as speaking came to be considered the normal expression of what it meant to be a prophet” (Blenkinsopp 1983:37).

Often comparative material is used by scholars to draw on similarities in order to make

connections with Arabic or Ugaritic backgrounds but a greater consensus is evident in the Akkadian word *nabi'um*, a passive form for “the called one,” whose task it is to “announce,” “proclaim,” or “call” (Jeremias 1997:697; cf. Gordon 1995: 72-76). Holladay (1970:30) emphasizes that *nabi* refers to the one “called” by Yahweh to be a messenger. Alternatively, Fenton (1997:34) claims that the term refers to the “speaker” who is given a mission. However, Fleming (1993:221) concludes that *nabi* has a more active sense which refers to “one who calls on the deity.” This, together with parallel activities in the Mari and Old Testament documents, provides the basic ideas of proclaimer, messenger, and even fore-teller, as being the closest meaning in the Old Testament contexts in which it is used. Even though some scholars speculate that *nabi* is a late term read back into older records, it most likely belongs to the most ancient stratum of Hebrew material, a view that seems evident from similar references in the Mari texts (Fenton 1997:33). Thus, the etymological information may give insights but no direct proof of meaning--this must be sought in the materials and contexts of the Old Testament texts. In fact, since the various terms for prophet are often used interchangeably in Old Testament literature, the actual meaning of a term must be inferred from the context in which it is used.

3.2 THE MAN OF GOD (*'ish (ha)elohim*)

Another designation used for the prophets and men who are in a special relationship with Yahweh is “man of God.” In fact the term is often used in contexts where it has the same meaning as prophet and may be used interchangeably (Rendtorff 1972:796-812). Holstein (1978:75) emphasizes that “man of God” is an honorific title conferred on certain worthy men, whether they are prophets or not. The expression is used seventy three times in the Old Testament and refers to Moses (Dt 33:1), Samuel (1 Sm 9:610), David (Neh 12:24, 36), Elijah (1 Ki 17:18, 24), Elisha

(2 Ki 4:7-13, 16), Shemaiah (1 Ki 12:22), Igdaliah (Jr 35:4), and a number of anonymous individuals. In the contexts in which the title is used, these men are “charismatics” who are closely associated with Yahweh even though their offices and duties are different (Bratsiotis 1974:234). The designation is a reverential term for a man who is God’s spokesman or servant in a special sense. Every prophet who is given the designation “man of God” is viewed as a true prophet and worthy of the special term. Their prophetic utterances are fulfilled and the predictions made by them anticipate momentous events in the history of Israel (1 Sm 2:27-36; 9; 22; 2 Ki 8:7-15; Holstein 1978:71-75). The man of God is commissioned and directed by Yahweh and on occasion, receives sustenance from God as in the case of Elijah. In contrast to the seer, the man of God does not take gifts from those he helps or heals (Jdg 13:7-16; 1 Ki 13:7-10; 2 Ki 5:15-26), and his words may be accompanied by miracles (1 Ki 13:6; 17:20). In the narrative of 1 Kings 13, the term “man of God” is used as a designation which places him above the “sons of the prophets” and the term is maintained throughout the narrative in a way which sets him apart from the prophet of Bethel. The genuineness and special relationship of the man of God is emphasized and a line seems to be drawn between the places from which the different characters come from. It appears that the newly formed boundaries between Judah and Israel have drawn barriers between the prophetic circles and at this time of transition in the nation, Yahweh sends a special representative to confront the king. Therefore, “the man of God” terminology often appears in a context of momentous change in the history of Israel.

3.3 SEER (*ro'eh*) AND VISIONARY (*hozeh*)

The term seer is related to the word “visionary” and “prophet” and mainly indicates one of the functions of a prophet. At times these two terms can be considered as synonyms for prophet, although in some contexts they may indicate a more particular meaning. Sometimes a distinction is made between the more subjective element of receiving revelation or inspiration by “seeing” in

comparison to the more objective work of speaking forth the message of Yahweh. The distinction is based on the observation that at times the seer and visionary seem to have a special gift or insight that not all prophets have, and that prophetic “seeing” is deemed more important than “hearing” (Nm 24:2, 4, 16; Am 7:12, 14; cf. Vetter 1997:694). In some Old Testament contexts it could be said that the seer is connected to a city and esteemed by the people for responding to special inquiries for which he is paid. He has a public role connected also to the cultus where he performs sacrifices and related services. Other scholars consider these terms as having a connection to the early divinatory practices of the ancient Near East. The term “seer” is considered an archaism or old name for a prophet and is frequently used in reference to Samuel (1 Sm 9:11, 18-19; 1 Chr 9:22; 26:28; 29:29). As noted in these texts, Samuel was considered to be a seer who could provide information not normally accessible to others. Whereas the emphasis for the seer is on the process of receiving, the term “vision” denotes the overall presentation or report. Thus, the divine message comes by way of a vision, and the visionary receives it (1 Sm 3:1; 2 Sm 7:15; Am 7:12; Hs 12:11) as an internal appropriation of what is seen (Jepsen 1980:284). Seers and visionaries are, therefore, important functionaries in Israel.

The seer is not just one who dreams and sees visions for revelations but one who is allowed by God to perceive a divine communication for specific situations. This becomes clear from the predominate use of the *leitwort ra’ah* (to see), which occurs over twenty times in the Balaam narratives (Alter 1981:104-106). Balaam claims to have his eyes uncovered or opened, to hear the words of God and to see the vision of the Almighty. The role of a seer was to look into the future or into the unseen reality behind a situation for direction. In this narrative, Balaam is hired to curse Israel for Balak in order to reverse the blessing upon the nation. A magical understanding of the spoken word that can bring about destruction underlies the request. The paradox of the episode is that the professional seer cannot perceive the reality of the situation, while the donkey does, until God “opens” his eyes (Nm 22:31).

In the narratives, Balaam is unable to curse the people of God who are sovereignly protected. Another important connection with prophecy is the speaking of oracles. In addition to ritual sacrifices, Balaam seeks inspiration for his oracles. However, he is unable to curse Israel and cannot subvert Yahweh's promise of blessing to the chosen people of God. It takes the unveiling of Balaam's eyes by the Spirit of God for the seer to turn from sorcery and speak an inspired message (Nm 24:4,16). In true prophetic reception, the text indicates that Balaam "hears the words of God," he "sees a vision from the Almighty," he "falls prostrate," his "eyes are opened." Thus, Yahweh inspires Balaam by the Spirit and rejects the ancient Near Eastern practice of reception by magical or technical means. As Alter (1981:106-107) says, "Paganism with its notion that divine powers can be manipulated by a caste of professionals through a set of carefully prescribed procedures, is trapped in the reflexes of a mechanistic world-view while from the biblical perspective reality is in fact controlled by the will of an omnipotent God beyond all human manipulation."

4 THE RISE OF PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW AND THE FORMER PROPHETS

The main references to the origins, rise, nature, and function of prophecy in the Old Testament are presented in the Law and the Former Prophets of the Hebrew canon and will be the focus of this section.

4.1 THE LAW (PENTATEUCH)

The actual rise of prophecy in Israel is usually considered to have taken place with Samuel

and his successors (Cross 1973:343; Huffmon 1976:176-177). It is generally argued that this is the picture presented in the biblical texts in regards to prophetic continuity and the new development of leadership roles--mainly prophetic and royal. According to this view, any prior references to prophets before Samuel are often considered secondary and attributed to late source data or editing. Whatever the case may be, canonically in the Old Testament, the term for prophet (*nabi*) is specifically used in the Pentateuch to introduce certain prophetic activity and primarily to present the mediatorial role of Moses as the great prophet. Therefore, the first fourteen uses of the term *nabi* that occur in the books of the Law must be considered before we look at Samuel's influential role in prophetic development.¹⁰

4.1.1 Abraham

In Genesis, the term “*nabi*” first refers to Abraham (Gn 20:7). In the context of the passage, God reveals to Abimelech in a dream that he is in danger for having taken Abraham's wife. In the passage God refers to Abraham as a prophet and his role in this context is to intercede on Abimelech's behalf. Abraham is also presented as an intercessor for Sodom in Genesis 18:17. In the patriarchal narratives, Abraham receives divine revelation and has an intimate relationship with God who directed him to leave Ur and settle in Canaan. Genesis 15:1-6 is presented according to the typical form of prophetic reception of the divine word in a vision. Consequently, the Pentateuch presents some of the characteristic Old Testament forms of prophetic function in the patriarchal era (Zimmerli 1977:197-199). Fohrer (1967:1-2) seems justified in his view that early prophecy has two main foundational roots. One is in the nomadic period of the patriarchs where revelation is experienced in a variety of ways. The second is seen in the development of prophecy in the neighboring cultures of Israel where prophets experience periodic ecstasy and receive certain messages from the deity. These roots may be observed in the Old Testament and provide a realistic explanation of the texts which present prophetic functions in the Pentateuch.

4.1.2 Moses

Aaron (Ex 7:1), Miriam (Ex 15:20), and predominately Moses (Dt 34:10) are referred to as prophets in the Pentateuch. Whereas Aaron is mainly a spokesman for Moses, his messages are directed by God through Moses. Aaron is depicted as the prophetic messenger and representative of both God and Moses. As a prophetess, Miriam leads the women in prophetic song and exaltation. When Miriam and Aaron become critical of Moses' prophetic leadership and status, they are punished (Nm 12). This text confirms that Moses has a special relationship with Yahweh who reveals himself to him in a vision or dream and speaks directly with him. The role of Moses as prophet is held in high esteem in the Pentateuch.

In Exodus 20:19, the request for a prophet as mediator before God and Israel is presented as coming from the people. Due to the awe and fear of Yahweh and theophany, Israel requests Moses to mediate the divine message. "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" (cf. Dt 5:23-27). This request finds approval with Yahweh and the mediatorial role of the prophet is affirmed (Dt 5:28; 18:16-17). However, the initial call of Moses comes as God's response to the Israelites' cry for help. This is the pattern later seen in Judges where the oppression of God's people intensifies, causing them to cry out for relief which comes when God raises up a deliverer (Ex 2:23-3:9). Moses is called, enabled, and sent by God to arbitrate Israel's departure from Egypt. In Deuteronomy, Moses is presented as the central figure of the book. He is not only the model for future prophets to follow (Dt 18; 15, 18) but the greatest of all prophets (Dt 34:10-12; cf. Miller 1993:304). He is one of the great prophets because he faithfully speaks the word and will of God to the people. According to the Pentateuch and these texts, the primary function of prophecy is to mediate the divine word and will to the people of God. Thus, Verhoef (1997:1070) asserts that "Officially, the institution of the office of prophet coincides with the institution of Israel as covenant people of God at Sinai." This is an important observation because of Moses' role in communicating the covenant to Israel. Prophets

who follow Moses are tenacious in upholding the covenant and seek to encourage covenant loyalty among God's people (cf. Nicholson 1995:345-347).

In Deuteronomy there are three key texts which present important information regarding the prophetic role (Dt 13:1-5; 18:15-22; 34:10-12). Topics included are concerns regarding idolatry, the use of signs or miracles, and prophetic assessment. They indicate that the significance of signs and wonders performed by the prophet are portentous but must be evaluated. Moses is ranked as a special prophet because of the "face to face" communication with Yahweh and also because of the incredible signs and wonders which he performed in Egypt (Dt 34:10-12; cf. Ex 33:18-23). The Exodus event is the greatest event in Old Testament salvation history and Moses was the instrument of God's mighty power at this time. He is esteemed as the greatest prophet. It may be observed in the Old Testament, that the greater the crisis and event that arises, so the greater the prophetic influence and miraculous activity that marks the event. Moses, is thus the great prophetic leader of the Exodus period of whom it can be said, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Dt 34:10; cf. O'Kane 1996:29-51). Not only is Moses a great prophet and leader, but he is presented as a scribe who records, teaches, interprets, and instructs Israel according to the Pentateuch (Watts 1998:422-444).

The texts in Deuteronomy provide some guidelines for prophetic functions and indicate the threat of the illegitimate means of receiving revelation and of the possibility of communicating falsehood (Dt 13; 18). A key factor in discerning a true prophet was the criteria of total allegiance to Yahweh. A prophet who used signs and wonders to draw Israel away from Yahweh to other gods was not to be tolerated and was to be put to death. The emphasis in Deuteronomy 13:5 is on the special relationship that Israel has with Yahweh who redeemed the nation from Egyptian suppression through the Exodus event. Israel is called not only to remember Yahweh as redeemer and Lord but to adhere to the covenant commands given after the redemption. The

covenant relationship is one governed by the true prophet of God. In Deuteronomy 18:15-22, further expectations for prophetic ministry are presented. This comes in a context where terms for the offices of judge, officers, king and priests are set forth (Dt 16:18-18:14). Before the terms are given regarding the prophet, Israel is warned not to entertain certain cultural practices including divination and the interpretation of omens. Yahweh promises to raise up a prophet to guide the nation. Israel is to listen to the word mediated by the prophet but that word must be evaluated to determine whether the prophet speaks presumptuously or in the name of other gods. In addition, the word spoken must be realized or must come true--a criteria which often proves to be difficult to assess as prophecy develops in complex situations.

4.1.3 Moses and the Seventy Elders

In the Numbers 11:16-30 passage we have another early example of prophetic activity. In this text the Spirit of God is influential in causing the elders to prophesy. Moses gathers the seventy elders in obedience to Yahweh's direction so that Yahweh could take from the *ruah* on him and share a portion of the Spirit on each of the elders. In the context, the Spirit is shared among the elders so that they can accomplish their new responsibilities in the nation. The passage emphasizes the great endowment of Spirit on Moses who has led the nation as a prophet, virtually alone to this point. Moses is presented as the "great Spirit-carrier" and in this passage the connection between prophecy and the Spirit of God is featured for the first time in Scripture (cf. Zimmerli 1977:207). The immediate consequence of the *ruah* resting on the seventy elders is their spontaneous expression of prophesying (Nm 11:25). Not only do the elders prophesy at the Tent of Meeting, but Eldad and Medad, who are in the camp, also prophesy (Nm 11:27). The nature of this activity and what it consists of is not completely clear, but the external manifestation of a type of ecstatic behavior serves to indicate the internal reception of the Spirit. The supernaturally induced prophesying is an indicator of the divine commissioning and enabling for public office.

The coming of the *ruah* and the subsequent prophesying is a public and tangible event indicating to both the elders and the people that the elders are set apart and equipped for a vital role of leadership in the community. The ecstatic nature of the prophesying is not uncontrolled nor viewed in a negative way. Although it is evident in some Old Testament passages that raving and “being beside oneself” are associated with prophesying (1 Sm 18:10; 19:18-20), this kind of expression is not evident in the activity of the seventy elders.

An important indicator of prophetic ministry occurs when Joshua expresses the fear that perhaps the prophesying of Eldad and Medad will impinge on Moses’ authority. But this query evokes Moses’ statement regarding the programmatic hope that all God’s people will be prophets. Moses assures Joshua that this event is divinely orchestrated and part of Yahweh’s programmatic plan. All those chosen by Yahweh are potentially eligible for Spirit-reception and prophetic ministry! In the context of the Pentateuch, Moses’ hope for all of God’s people refers to the divine reception of revelation as well as to various aspects of mediation and intercession. For Moses, the experience of prophesy involves an intimate relationship with Yahweh--he is the paradigmatic prototype of a prophet who has face to face communications with Yahweh and unequalled power. “For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of Israel” (Dt 34:12; cf. Fishbane 1985:536, 258). Implicit in Moses’ desire for the people to be prophets is the removal of fear which gripped the people when they heard directly from Yahweh and due to that fear requested a prophet mediator. Although Yahweh permitted the role of prophet as mediator in the nation, the divine ideal was still to foster a personal, individual, and intimate relationship with his people. Yahweh desires that all the people of God will know Him personally and have access to Him in the same way the prophets did.

4.2 BALAAM THE SEER AND DIVINATION

Some writers draw connections between ancient Near Eastern divination and early prophetic development in Israel. The role of divination in cultures varies but in some civilizations, it is very influential. Ritner (in Hallo 1997:50-51; cf. Grottanelli 1999:173) says that in Egypt there is evidence that “priests performed official ritual cursings of the potential enemies of Egypt.” It is instructive to note that Deuteronomy addresses sorcery and divination in a negative way just before the role of the prophet is addressed (Dt 18:9-14). Often connections between divination and prophecy are related to the professional visionary or seer, Balaam (Nm 24:3-4, 15-16). Since divination and its relationship to prophecy is an issue which receives considerable treatment in the Old Testament, the Balaam narratives and related texts must be considered before we draw positive or negative implications. The term prophet is not used directly of Balaam in Numbers 22:1-24:25. However, Balaam is connected to prophetic functions by receiving the Spirit of God through whom he is inspired to speak (Nm 24:2). Balaam is then used of God to receive visions by “having his eyes uncovered” (Nm 24:4, 16). In this way he exhibits typical characteristics associated with prophecy, but the term “seer” is more appropriate for his activities. The perspective of the men of Moab was that they were employing a diviner (*qosem*; Nm 22:7).

The context of these narratives is that of the threat felt by the inhabitants of Canaan. Moab saw Israel’s encroachment as a serious problem calling for action. Balak the king of Moab, sends for the services of Balaam, son of Beor, in order to hire his talents as a diviner in order to procure curses on Israel. In the ancient Near East, divination was a popular technique of communication with supernatural forces that was believed to provide direction for a group or individual regarding their destiny. Diviners were believed to know about the purposes and views of gods which could be accessed through spirits and other means (Overholt 1989:117). Large collections of omens, clay models and records, testify to the importance of divination in the Near East. Various technical means were devised that were thought to have magical potency in manipulating the

actions of the gods for the benefit of human beings (Guillaume 1938:107-110). There is evidence for West Semitic divination (Hallo 1997:282-298) but especially the Babylonians and Assyrians developed a science of reading omens. Guinan (in Hallo 1997:282-298) says the Akkadians produced many written records “consisting of lengthy omen compendia, commentaries, instruction manuals, reports, correspondence related to divination, rituals and prayers.”

The diviner devised operational or magical means of communication. The professional functionary was called a *baru* and his task was to give direction to the king after consulting the omens. Operational means involved the casting of lots or smoke from a censor to solicit a “yes or no” answer from a deity. These means included the interpretation of various things such as augury (the flight of birds), hepatoscopy (formation of livers), extispicy (formation of viscera), astrology, leconmancey (smoke), libanomancy (oil in water), and the interpretation of dreams. Based on these forms of divination, predictions concerning the future were made. Reports were made and records kept of the events that preceded and followed a technique (Oppenheim 1964:208). Magical conceptions held that the deity produced changes in natural phenomena such as the weather, stars, or animal viscera based on a code acceptable to both the deity and the diviner. This elaborate code took much learning within a guild where apprentices were taught by their masters.

In addition to this type of divination is the intuitive or mediated divination where a human medium passes on some direct divine inspiration or message through his voice (Koch 1982:7-8). Intuitive divination is dependent on individuals who appear to have gifts or a special sense or premonition which leads them to a conclusion. Sometimes this form of intuition is heightened by the use of ecstasy, intoxication, music or spiritual rituals. The amount of material discovered shows the importance of divination in the ancient Near Eastern courts. Basically the king found it necessary to consult the gods about the wisdom or future results of certain activities, especially in regards to war or calamities. However, the Old Testament does not present the Israelite seer or

prophet as employing the technical means described above as normative means of discovering information--in fact they usually reject such practices of divination (Orlinsky 1965:173).

Divination was generally prohibited in the Old Testament for Israel (Lv 19:26; 20:27; Dt 18:9-14; 2 Ki 17:17), especially when associated with magic and sorcery. However, occasionally, lots and dreams were considered valid forms of direction where Yahweh was recognized as sovereignly involved in providing guidance through such means (Pr 16:33). The *Urim* and *Thummim* references are to be considered in this category (Nm 27:21; Jos 7:10-15; 1 Sm 14:36-42; 23:9-13; 28:5-6; 30:7-10), and apparently provide a simple “yes or no” answer (Huffman 1983:355-359). After discussing some of these examples of divination in the Old Testament, Overholt (1989:147) states that “In terms of their social role and function, diviners must be considered alongside prophets as legitimate intermediaries between the Israelites and Yahweh.” There were conventional means used at certain occasions in early Israelite history by which Yahweh showed his will to the nation. In Genesis 44:5 it is noted that Joseph did have a cup which may have been used for divination. When dreams are given (Gn 40:5-8; 41:1-8; 44:4, 15; Dn 1:17; 2:1-11), it is Yahweh who provides the interpretation and meaning through Spirit-filled individuals like Joseph and Daniel. In the Old Testament, diviners are usually associated with false prophets (Jr 27:9; 29:8; Ezk 13:6-9, 23; Zch 10:2). However, in some texts where divination and prophecy are addressed, the negative comments are directed mainly against false prophecy, and not directly against divination (Mi 3:6-7).

Consequently, it is expected for some scholars to align the Near Eastern view of a diviner with some Israelite prophetic practices, and in particular with Balaam. In this view, the terms visionary, seer, man of God, and prophet are often understood as technical terms from Israel’s early history. Connections between the prophet and diviner or seer are at times sought in the phenomenon of ecstasy, however this is not always observed in the narratives. Albright

(1969:153) defines the seer as, “A diviner who sees what is invisible to the ordinary eye by some kind of clairvoyance or organized divination.” Whereas in the ancient Near East, both diviners and prophets were considered proponents of God’s word and received directions from God through dreams, objects, and sounds (Orlinsky 1965:154-155), in the Old Testament this is qualified. Balaam is called a diviner and is eventually put to death for his activities (Jos 13:22). In Numbers he is hired to try and reverse God’s blessing on Israel by means of a curse, but instead his oracles pronounce blessings. For the most part, Balaam behaves like a good and obedient servant who speaks only what God puts in his mouth (Donner 1977:112), but there are also several negative portrayals of Balaam in the Scriptures (Schmitt 1994:181-182). The Near Eastern concept of the power of the spoken word is reflected in these narratives but Yahweh is not manipulated to change his will. Numbers 22-24, therefore, presents Balaam as a misguided seer who is capable of receiving divine revelations from God for the benefit of Israel. He does not function as a typical prophet and divination is not presented as a viable or normative way of receiving the divine will for Israel.¹¹ Implicitly, the Balaam narratives are a significant warning for later prophets to speak what Yahweh commands and to refrain from motivations which lead to greed and the falsification of Yahweh’s word and will. The narratives and texts referring to Balaam indicate some potential problems associated with prophecy.

4.3 LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS AND PROPHETIC FORMATION WITH SAMUEL IN THE FORMER PROPHETS

4.3.1 Joshua

Between the Mosaic era and the beginning of the monarchy, there are limited references to the ministry of prophets. During the period of conquest, Joshua is depicted as a powerful leader in similar terms to Moses (Jos 1:5; 3:7, 17; 5:15).¹² He intercedes on behalf of the nation (Jos

7:7), but Joshua is never called a prophet. His main responsibilities include the leading of Israel in holy war (Ex 17:8; Jos 1:2-5; cf. Dt 1:37-46), as well as in the administration and supervision of land allotments (Jos 2:6-9; 13:7-16). However, Joshua was present when the Spirit of God came upon the elders who prophesied and it is claimed that Joshua was a man in whom was the Spirit (Nm 27:18; Dt 34:9). Joshua is clearly presented as the successor to Moses who has the *charisma* and legitimation for his role as leader of Israel (Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1989:208-210). “Joshua takes over the roles of Moses and develops into a figure who eventually steps out from under the shadow of Moses and becomes ‘the servant of Yahweh’ for his own generation just as Moses had been for the previous one” (Kissling 1996:95). After Joshua and the conquest, security issues continue to be a problem since Israel did not complete the occupation of Canaan. In that period, Shiloh developed as a religious center until the time of Samuel (Jos 18:1; 1 Sm 1:3).

4.3.2 The Period of the Judges

A refrain in the book of Judges indicates that Israel had no king during this period, rather, judges (*shopetim*) provided local leadership (Jdg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This was a two hundred year period of no centralized authority. At times, individual judges served as military leaders who delivered Israel from a variety of oppressors when the Spirit of God came upon them, turning them into charismatic deliverers. A characterization of the times of the judges leading up to the monarchy is that, “Every man did that which is right in his own eyes” (Jdg 21:25). The refrain about no king and the societal problems prepare the reader for the great transitions about to take place in Israel (cf. Dumbrell 1983:30-33).

The structure of Judges presents Israel’s experience in this period as a cycle of sin, oppression and servitude, supplication, and eventual deliverance. In answer to the cries of Israel, God intervenes and delivers his people through the efforts of military leaders. Deborah and Barak

also serve as such leaders during the amphictyonic period. Deborah is referred to as a prophetess (Jdg 4: 4) and seems to prophesy by oracle and song (Jdg 5), but the brief reference does not provide explicit details as to what the prophetess did. However, Deborah is zealous for Yahweh (Jos 5:8) and able to rally volunteers for the battle against enemies. Deborah leads Israel, encourages God's people, and directs the battle effort with Barak. According to Spronk (2001:242) the role of Deborah and the terminology to describe her relationship with the political leader, is to serve as an example to other prophets. Interestingly, Hannah in 1 Samuel 1-2 behaves somewhat like a prophetess. She composes what could be called a prophetic song of thanksgiving which includes prophetic statements concerning kingship in Israel (1 Sm 2:1-10). Early references to prophets before the monarchy usually occur at times of severe crises among the people of God. These individuals are to be viewed as charismatic leaders who bring God's message to his people during a time of transition and social need. By sending such prophetic messengers, God provides theocratic leadership for Israel.

A typical oracle is presented in Judges 6:8-10 where an anonymous prophet delivers a message of judgment to Israel. He reminds the nation of Yahweh's work of redemption, his provision of land and his identity. "I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me." This message comes in a similar response as did the calling of Moses--the people cry to Yahweh who raises up a prophet to address them. Yet, however significant these few references in Judges may be, the period mainly marks the transition from a predominately tribal administration with charismatic judges to that of the monarchy and renewed prophetic activity (Blenkinsopp 1983:63-64). Samuel is presented as a leader with many different roles during this transitional period from the judges to the monarchy. His numerous roles are often difficult to explain and scholars present different ideas about their formation, but the most important emphasis is on his leadership role in the nation. In the victory over the Philistines described in the "Ark Narrative" (1 Sm 4-7), Samuel is depicted as a judge

who demonstrates his sufficiency as a judge as well as the theological propriety of nonroyal leadership (McCarter 1980:149).

4.3.3 Samuel

The intensification of prophetic activity observed in 1 Samuel marks a striking new transition in Israel. Until this period it is noted, “And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent (1 Sm 3:1).” Apparently, the period after Moses and Joshua had little prophetic leadership or influence. A bleak picture of the religious climate in Israel is presented at Shiloh, but the piety of Elkanah and Hannah, who maintain their faith in Yahweh, provides hope. In answer to Hannah’s prayer, Yahweh providentially provides the barren woman with a son whom she dedicates to the Lord’s service at Shiloh (1 Sm 1:11, 28; 2:20; Albright 1969:152).¹³ This passage presents the background context to Samuel’s rise as the prophet in Israel. Samuel is contrasted with Eli and the wicked behavior of his sons until the end of the Elides is foretold by an anonymous “man of God” (1 Sm 2:27-36). The appearance of this prophet indicates that prophecy was not totally absent in Israel but limited to special events in the development of the nation. His prophecy is a serious indictment of the Elides and the punishment detailed in the message quickly comes to pass. Eli had functioned not only as a priest but as judge in Israel. His demise leaves a major leadership void.

With the end of the Elides in view, the call narrative for Samuel’s prophetic ministry is paramount, although he serves in a variety of roles (cf. Simon 1997:52-53). This multiplicity of roles is a perplexing matter to many scholars who then try to determine which traditions regarding Samuel are to be followed. Some believe that prophets cannot be mediators because this is a role reserved for priests. However, due to the many transitions in the nation, the formation of new roles is to be expected, and diverse functions merged and developed. In fact, in the Old Testament

several figures serve in the combined roles of priest and prophet, namely, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Samuel not only becomes the last of the judges who carries out his judicial services at Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah (1 Sm 7:15-17), but also replaces Eli and carries on the priestly sacrifices in various locations. Samuel may in part be the fulfillment of the divine intention, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest” (2 Sm 2:35; cf. 13:8-15), but Zadok fulfills this prophecy (2 Sm 8:17, 15:24, 35; 20:25; cf. McCarter 1980:97-98). Eventually, Samuel presides over the key leadership transition of the nation as a prophet and responds to the demands of the people by anointing Saul as king in accordance with Yahweh’s instructions (1 Sm 12:1; 8:1, 22; 12:6). The transition of leadership from Eli to Samuel is highlighted because it involves transition “from one kind of leadership, namely priestly, to another kind, namely prophetic” (Spina 1997:103). When Shiloh is destroyed, Samuel moves to Ramah.

Although Samuel’s role is not limited to prophecy, this function is primary in the narratives. In fact, he is depicted in similar terms as Moses and Jeremiah who had a miraculous birth, yet had misgivings regarding the confrontational aspects of their prophetic work (1 Sm 3:15; cf. Simon 1997:54-55). They were reluctant prophets but recognized by the people who confirmed their calling (1 Sm 3:17-20). God raises up Samuel to reveal the divine plan and intention to Israel through his servant (1 Sm 3:11-14, 21). Samuel develops in the presence of Yahweh who lets “none of his words fail” (1 Sm 3:19), and as in the case of Moses, the Lord was with him. Thus, Samuel is confirmed as a prophet of the Lord in all Israel and is depicted as the greatest prophet since the time of Moses. This is evident in several texts which present supernatural responses to his activities, including the military victory over the Philistines (1 Sm 7:10) and the confirmation of his message in regards to the king at Gilgal (1 Sm 12:17-18). He also challenges the nation to repent and return to covenant (1 Sm 7:3-6). As a prophet, he performs the primary function of intercession for Israel (1 Sm 7:5, 8-9; 8:6; 12:19, 23) and has an intimate relationship with Yahweh (1 Sm 9:17). The intercessory ministry of Moses and Samuel is

noted in Jeremiah 15:1 where the two great prophets are mentioned together. In these texts, the prophetic role of Samuel is featured above others, thus marking the major transitions in this period to the primary leadership roles of prophet and prince. Spina (1997:106) observes that, “The prophet will have a role in the establishment and maintenance of Israel’s king that no priest could have.”

Another aspect in the narratives about Samuel and his prophetic ministry is that of “foretelling” which gives rise to the discussion of his role as “seer.” In the episode leading up to Saul’s anointing as *nagid*, Saul is on an assignment to find lost donkeys. To assist in this task he is directed to seek the services of “a man of God” (1 Sm 9:6-8, 10), but the narrative mainly refers to this person as a “seer” (1 Sm 9:9, 11, 14, 18-19, 27). There is some indication in the development of the use of terms and a clarifying note by later writers says, “Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he used to say, “Come, and let us go to the seer;” for he who is called a prophet now was formerly called a seer” (1 Sm 9:9). The term is considered a technical term which was used in the early periods of prophetic development, but this does not account for the usage of seer in later periods. What is emphasized in this narrative, is Samuel’s ability to fore-know information through the divine inspiration or insight of Yahweh. Perhaps Orlinsky (1965:156) goes too far in claiming that the seer predicted the future and attempted to control it and perform miracles, but he is correct in noting the seer’s role in advising individuals and helping them with problems, often for payment. Fohrer (1967:3) is more precise in noting that the seer’s role was initially seen in the patriarchal leader who was an inspired leader who received revelation and initiated the sacrificial or cultic rituals.

4.3.4 Samuel and the “Sons of the Prophets”

A text which gives rise to questions regarding Samuel’s role (1 Sm 19:20) presents a

situation where Samuel is presiding over a gathering of prophets who are prophesying. The group or company of prophets here described have already been introduced in 1 Samuel 10:5-10 where a group of prophets are seen coming down from a high place while prophesying to the accompaniment of instruments. Usually the use of instruments and music is viewed as giving rise to ecstatic expression and dance (Ex 15:20; 2 Ki 3:15), thus pointing to possible Canaanite backgrounds (1 Ki 18:28). However, the precipitating factor of ecstasy here is the “Spirit of God” (Jeremias 1997:699). The passage in Numbers 11:24-30 provides a similar expression of prophesying--an external activity indicating some form of internal experience. While many cultures exhibit such tendencies, in Israel prophesying seems to be an expression which emphasizes the prophet’s relationship to Yahweh who inspires them, usually by the Spirit of God.

Samuel is presented in a role similar to that of Moses--he presides over the group and their leadership roles and functions. The major difference is that Samuel presides over a group of prophets and not elders. This introduction to the group of prophets comes without explanation but has obvious connections to the “sons of the prophets” which appear in passages where Elijah and Elisha preside over similar groups. These are groups of prophets who separate themselves from society for special devotion to Yahweh’s service under a prophet who may be referred to as a “father” in the sense of a spiritual mentor (Williams 1966:344). In 1 Samuel 10:12 the question is asked, “But who is their father?” Apparently, those who observed Saul’s public behavior with the prophets were not sure about the meaning of this activity but the implicit purpose is to show Samuel’s authorization of this new transition in leadership. Saul and the prophets share in the Spirit of God who provides this sign that God is with the newly selected king--this is apparently a public indicator of Saul’s charismatic endowment for leadership in the nation (Sturdy 1970:207-209). It is also probable at this key transition period in the leadership of Israel, that the prophetic activity of Saul which overcomes him, serves to establish the fact that the king is subject to the prophetic word and to the prophetic office presided over by Samuel. In these narratives, the close

connection between prophecy and kingship is indicated, and the prophetic role is very much in control of the transition to the monarchic period.

5 CHAPTER TWO SUMMARY

In this chapter we have set the context for our discussion of prophecy, its beginnings, and its main role in the ancient Near East and in the Old Testament. In our survey of the ancient Near Eastern backgrounds which provide the context for Israel's prophetic experience, we discover that prophecy in the Hebrew canon is not an unusual or unique phenomenon. In fact, there are many parallels and similarities which show that prophecy has social, religious, political, and royal affiliations with a variety of cultures that developed before and during Israel's formation as a nation. Of course, some of the materials surveyed provide closer connections than others.

The observations made from the Mari documents show there are close links to prophecy in the period of the monarchy in that the different functionaries and activities are focused on the royal court where messengers address kings. Some external conduct observed among the Mari prophets and functionaries also indicate cultural correspondences with ecstatic behavior practiced in Israel. In the Old Testament, "early prophecy" may show a propensity to special places such as Mamre, Bethel, Sinai or Shiloh, and usually the very place where revelation or oracular activity takes place is considered to be holy or sacred (Haran 1977:385-398).¹⁴ We cannot deny the common background of prophecy in Israel, but we do observe the distinctive and unique role that Old Testament prophets have in the nation. They are very influential in the development of Israel's faith and theology as presented from the Pentateuch onward. This ancient Near Eastern context provides the background in which we interpret the Old Testament documents that are rooted in Israel's historical past.

We also observed the complexity in confirming the identity of the composers of the literature, whether they were individual prophets, prophetic groups or scribes, and summarized the probable process involved before the record of Scripture became authoritative for the Israelite community. Some of the complex issues have to do with the various traditions that seem to be evident in the Hebrew canon, as well as the diverse connections prophecy has to the cultus and the monarchy. Prophetic roles are also numerous. Prophets function as intercessors, covenant intermediaries, messengers, miracle workers, and spokesmen. Although complex, all of these details provide information on how prophecy was understood by Israel in the Old Testament—particularly in the Law and the Former Prophets. The Scriptures discussed indicate how prophecy began in the nation and what meaning it had for the community. This is the authoritative record which provides us with the details of prophecy in Israel, its rise and eventual demise.

According to our review of the materials and references above, the term prophet is used of individuals who have a special relationship with Yahweh. They are individuals who are called by Yahweh to perform a distinctive function in society and at special events. In order to do so, they receive revelation and instructions from God. The emphasis in the early literature is on their mediatorial, intercessory, and leadership roles. They serve to express the messages and thoughts of Yahweh to his people or to rulers of neighboring nations. At times, miraculous signs and wonders accompany their messages and they exhibit certain insight and knowledge. Although prophetic activity is sporadic up until the time of Samuel, the texts considered signal the importance of prophets in the leadership and direction of the nation. God chooses to guide and instruct the nation through the prophets, and to reveal the divine intention to them as observed in the question “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (Gn 18:17). Yahweh desires to reveal his will to the prophets. Although there is no official office for a prophet in the time of Abraham, he is referred to as a prophet because he has a relationship in which several prophetic

functions are evident. Official recognition is given to Moses, however, as the great prophet who rises in Israel in order to reveal and mediate the divine will to the nation. As a prophet, he forms a close relational, intimate bond with Yahweh and leads Israel according to divinely revealed instructions. His main role is to arbitrate Israel's departure from oppression in Egypt and to mediate the divine covenant. Moses does all this with signs, wonders, and miracles. The Spirit of God uses him during this great transitional period in the life of the nation (Nm 11).

Interestingly, prophecy is observed to begin in response to Israel's requests—first for deliverance (Ex 2:23-3:9), then for a mediator (Ex 20:19; Dt 5:23-27), and then in connection to the request for a king (1 Sm 8). The main role of the prophet, therefore, is to provide leadership for God's covenant people. Even during the monarchy, the prophet is presented as having authority over the king—a situation that leads to conflict and suppression. For the most part, prophetic activity in Israel is observed in connection with kingship. In the Old Testament the designation prophet is used in reference to both individuals and those who function in a group or prophetic band. A common opinion in reviewing the use of the terminology is that, "We can only state what view the tradition had of a prophet at certain points without being able to ascertain underlying historical data" (Rendtorff 1972:796). External ecstatic behavior may accompany the prophesying of the prophet, but in the texts where this occurs up to the time of Samuel, there is no negative comment made as to this behavior. It is simply reported as occurring on occasion and with the prophetic groups in Samuel's time, the use of instruments, singing, and prophesying seem to be normative behavior. However, with Moses and Samuel we see evidence that although other prophets are occasionally active, these powerful individuals still exercise authority over them and are recognized by them as leaders. This is observed in much of the Old Testament--whereas individual prophets are much more active in public settings, the groups of prophets serve in much more sheltered settings.

To summarize, Israel's request for a mediator and leadership, ultimately leads to the position of prophet in Israel. As the following quote indicates, this comes about in the case of potential conflict or threat.

So prophecy arises in the context of the central religion as a result of military, social or economic pressures from outside being exerted on society as a whole; the central intermediary has a strong political role, giving guidance for the army in time of war, regulating the succession at a time of change of rulers, providing supernatural legitimation for the existing social order; the object of worship in the central cult is the god or society as a whole, perceived as a moral god, and the central intermediary is concerned with morality in society. On the other hand, the pressures leading to the rise of peripheral cults are internal to society—discrimination against a minority of a political, social or economic nature. Prophetic activity in this context is a group ecstatic phenomenon, and the major concern is with effecting change in society in order to promote the welfare of the oppressed minority; it is, therefore, the power rather than the moral nature of the god worshiped by the minority group that is distinctive.

(Mayes 1993:38)

Perhaps the most significant conclusion we can make regarding the beginning and development of prophecy in Israel, is that the role of the prophet is crucial during the momentous transitional events in the nation. When God chooses Abraham, when he calls Moses and delivers Israel, when he forms a nation with a covenant, when he approves kingship in Israel through Samuel, God raises up prophets to provide leadership for his people. In between these great events, anonymous prophets and groups make appearances and provide a variety of services for God's people. This will be the main subject matter of Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO ENDNOTES

1. Chapter Two contains information and thoughts presented to some extent by the author in Hildebrandt, W 1995. *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*. Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, and in, *An Investigation of Ruach as the Spirit of God in the Hebrew Canon*. Regent College: Unpublished Th.M. thesis, 1989.

2. The tentative identification of these groups is indicated by the use of words like “probable” and “most likely” in scholarship. However, the general identification of the time and location of the process of compilation of the Old Testament is a helpful investigation. Person (2002:152) reflects some common assumptions in the production of the final documents, probably done by the administrative bureaucracy of the monarchy. The Deuteronomistic school may have been formed in the Babylonian exile by scribes who had been active in the Jerusalem temple and palace. They possessed texts which were used to redact Israel’s history from Moses to the exile. When they returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, the literary activity intensified until they were disillusioned with the “Persian-supported Jerusalem administration” that led to the expressed eschatological hope for the future (Person 2002:152). A key concern of this body of literature is to provide reasons for the exile and to inspire hope for Yahweh’s people (cf. Boshoff 2000:155-156).

3. Petersen (1977:11) notes that the main problem with Smith’s book, “is that the parties are more complex in number and ideology than Smith suggests. Furthermore, the dominant interests in the sixth century community were not heresy versus true faith, though strife between religious parties could be expressed in these terms; rather the major issues were: who controlled the cult, which religious traditions were authoritative, and who was loyal to earlier authoritative traditions?” Sanders (1997:45) also criticizes Smith, but mainly because he fails to indicate why the Yahweh only party won out. “The real question is not that why such party won out, but why the people responded to the “tough stuff” advocated by the monotheising hermeneutic in reviewing the old traditions, that survived the canonical process of reading and re-reading the traditions newly edited”.

4. The prophet’s location, therefore, often determines the focus of a prophet’s work. “Peripheral prophets are usually interested in bringing about fairly rapid social change. As representatives of individuals who have been denied access to the society’s centers of power, peripheral prophets are concerned to alter fundamental social institutions in order to end social repression and improve the situation of their support group. The social reforms sought by peripheral prophets sometimes involve a reaffirmation of traditional social values and a return to older religious practices and deities” (Wilson R R 1995:340). On the other hand, “central prophecy tends to be concerned with the orderly functioning of the social system. If central prophets are official members of the cultic establishment, then they are responsible for providing access to the divine world whenever necessary” (Wilson R R 1995:340).

5. The reason for the “routinization” of prophecy is that “this necessitated the elaboration and clarification of an inspired prophet’s message in relation to concrete political and religious issues. The message itself was sensed to lack the specificity which was needed if its import was to be fully heeded by the community which looked back with genuine trust and confidence to the

prophet who was the interpreter of their times” (Clements 1995:452).

6. The importance of the historical context of texts should not be underestimated or rejected as a number of scholars are advocating (Davies 1992; Whitelam 1998; Thompson 1999). See below for further discussion.

7. For an overview of the formation and concept of a closed canon with reference to the question of whether the Old Testament gives signals of an intended closure, see Peels (2001:583-601).

8. Peckham (1995:365) presents the key editorial indicators and notes the issues regarding editing that must be considered. He states that, “The combined methods must admit that authors composed from sources and that their editors contributed to the development of literary and historical tradition by rewriting literary and historical works that had appeared in the meantime. The contribution of the editors is clearly marked and deliberately separated from the original. The original is preserved as the origin, inspiration, and norm of the later works that in turn provoked its re-edition. One can see composition and redaction, working together, as the substance of tradition, the reason for its complexity and depth, the origin of its literary form, and the source of its historical significance.” This comment provides insight into the overall production of a document that is eventually considered as authoritative for the community.

9. See Clements (1995:450-452) for an example concerning Jeremiah and the editing process which is evident in the nature of selection and presentation of the prophet’s oracles (cf. Childs 195:516-520).

10. According to the New Testament, Luke 11:48-51 makes reference to the blood of all the prophets that was shed since the foundation of the world and includes Abel to Zechariah in this category. Noah also experienced revelation normally reserved for a prophet (Heb 11:7; Verhoef 1997:1169; cf. Peels 2001:583).

11. Van Seters (1997:127-130) explains the positive and negative attitudes towards Balaam as being due to two different traditions about him. One tradition vilifies him and the other presents him as a faithful prophet. Whether there are traditions or not, however, the texts indicate that Balaam was still used by Yahweh even though he himself had mixed emotions and wrong devices.

12. Kissling (1996:78-82) identifies numerous parallels which clearly indicate the similarities in function and leadership between Moses and Joshua.

13. Albright (1969:152) claims that Samuel was a Nazarite, which refers mainly to one who is vowed to divine service. This tradition is noted in the Mishnah based on the text that Samuel was not to cut his hair or beard. For further support, Albright refers to Cross who translates a fragment from Qumran on 1 Samuel 1:22 which states, “he shall become a *nazir* for ever.”

14. Haran (1977:385-387) presents this as one of the distinctive features between the old and classical forms of prophecy. However, his summary does not always include the earliest references in Genesis. He notes the mode of activity in bands with collective ecstasy (1 Sm 10:5-

6, 10-13; 19:20-24; Nm 11:29-30), the use of instruments and music which awakens inspiration (Ex 15:20; 2 Ki 3:15; 1 Sm 10:5), an attraction to permanent institutions of oracular activity such as the Tent of meeting (Ex 33:7-13; Nm 11:16-30; 12:4-10; Dt 31:14-15; 1 Sm 2:22; 3:3-10) and the temple's holy of holies (Is 6).