

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

The Old Testament literature reveals an interesting variety of features related to prophecy and prophetic expression. These characteristics include the call of the prophet, inspiration, ecstatic expression, and a variety of roles and functions relative to the prophet's work in society. Additionally, the role of the Spirit of God quite pronounced in prophetic manifestation. The following overview will discuss the main elements of prophecy in order to determine what prophetic activities are transformed or ultimately cease in Israelite history. Petersen indicates the importance of the examination of the background and context of prophecy in his comment, "Theories to explain the demise of prophecy abound and such theories necessarily depend upon a model of what classical Israelite prophecy was" (Petersen 1977:5). Therefore, an analysis of what prophecy entails is necessary in order to understand if and when prophets ceased to be called as messengers, if inspiration actually ended, and if prophetic roles actually ceased to function in the nation.

1 THE PROPHETIC CALL AND COMMISSION

According to the Old Testament, a number of individuals received a divine call to their prophetic role in society. Whether this call was referred to by the prophet in order to verify his role and authority or whether the community saw the call narrative as their mark of approval for a genuine prophet is not clear. However, the call forms part of the main element in understanding the term prophet, which denotes “the called one” who is entrusted with a message (Holladay 1970:30). The ancient Near Eastern etymology of *nabi* indicates one who is called by God or one who has a vocation from God (Albright 1957:299; Verhoef 1997:1068; cf. Müller 1998:131-134). Rarely is a call narrative presented as the desired experience of an individual. Prophets report that Yahweh called them and they were virtually forced or compelled to respond (Ezk 2; 3:14). “The prophet was a man who felt himself called by God for a special mission, in which his will was subordinated to the will of God, which was communicated to him by direct inspiration” (Albright 1957:303). The call is an underlying conviction for the prophets which authorizes their message and fortifies their understanding that God selected them for a purpose. The call narratives “reflect prophetic claims to be true representatives of Yahweh and express the substance of the commission that they have been given” (Mayes 1993:29). Prophets felt a strong compulsion to serve Yahweh as messengers. For Amos, the prophetic message must be proclaimed: “The Sovereign Lord has spoken--who can but prophesy?” (Am 3:7-8; cf. Hs 1:2; Mi 3:8). The prophets also believed that the Lord needed their services to communicate with Israel. “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (Am 3:12).

In presenting the call narratives, the Old Testament records were apparently very “interested in the origins of the prophet’s own history with God” (Childs 1985:127). Prophetic call and commission narratives are generally auto-biographical reports by the classical prophets

which differentiates them from the ecstatic prophets who are usually not able to explain their experience. “The writing prophets experience Yahweh while they are fully conscious; they hear, consider and answer” (Wolff, H W 1987:17). This does not mean, however, that those prophets who experienced ecstatic symptoms and behavior, could not record their words and oracles at a later time. But prophets like Elisha do not have books named after them. It is significant that all the “major” prophets do present their call details and their early charismatic experience (Tournay 1991:60). Although the call is an important aspect of prophecy, especially in the records of the writing prophets, it is not observed in every prophet’s experience. Most prophets, including Elijah are simply introduced and presented as active prophets in Israel.

An analysis of the call narratives presented in the Old Testament proves helpful in understanding the nature of the prophet’s or individual’s experience. Call narratives, which have a similar format, include those of Moses (Ex 3), Gideon (Jdg 6), Samuel (1 Sm 3), Elisha (1 Ki 19:16-21), Isaiah (Is 6), Jeremiah (Jr 1), Ezekiel (Ezk 1-3), and the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42-61. The actual call of God upon the person may come by way of a vision, a visual presence of Yahweh by way of theophany or angelic messenger, or by an auditory call as in the case of Samuel and Jeremiah. An analysis of the call narratives reveals a certain structure and some common elements (Habel 1965:297-323). Many call narrative components appear to build on those observed in Moses’ call and are at times referred to as a vocation account.¹ As observed in Chapter Two, there are a number of roles and functions which some individuals like Moses and Samuel fill. Although they may be referred to as priests as well as prophets in the Old Testament, the call narratives seem to emphasize a much greater leadership role as a prophet who initiates momentous transitions in Israel.

1.1 MOSES

The key elements in Moses' call begin with the appearance of God in the form of a burning bush and in the appearance of the angel of the Lord. This manifestation occurs at Horeb and once the attention of Moses is obtained, God calls to him, "Moses, Moses," to which he responds, "Here I am" (Ex 3:2-4). The presence of God marks off the site as sacred ground. Moses responds with reverence and fear (Ex 3:5-6), and Yahweh identifies himself as the same God who revealed Himself to the patriarchs (Ex 3:6, 15-16; 4:5). Yahweh is responding to the cries of Israel and reveals his intention to deliver his people by calling and commissioning Moses to be his messenger to Pharaoh. "I am sending you." Moses responds with a characteristic fear of rejection and awareness of unworthiness. To this human response, Yahweh assures Moses of the divine presence and provides several signs to encourage him in his task (Ex 3:12; 4:1-10). After Moses continues in his persistent fear, Yahweh approves the use of Aaron as Moses' spokesman. The divine commission will be completed by Moses who is called to serve as prophet, along with Aaron his co-messenger (Ex 4:12; cf. Nm 12:7-8; Dt 18:15, 18; 34:10; Hs 12:14; Jr 15:1). Therefore, the basic call structure in the narrative includes the divine call, a commission, the human objection, and divine reassurance through the promise of divine presence and signs. After his call, Moses becomes the prime paradigm of prophet for Israel and all who follow him are to be of the Mosaic type (Fishbane 1985:536, 258-259).

1.2 GIDEON AND ELISHA

The elements of the call narrative are also evident with the charismatic judge, Gideon. Rather than a call to prophetic ministry, however, he is called to a military role which brings deliverance to his people. As in the case of Moses and Israel in Egypt, the people Israel cry out for relief from oppression and Yahweh sends a prophet to address the people (Jdg 6:6-10). Following this, Gideon is addressed by the angel of the Lord who communicates the presence of Yahweh, a call, and a commission, "Go...am I not sending you?" Like Moses, he lacks confidence

and is fearful but then finds encouragement with the promise, “I will be with you” (Jdg 6:14-16). Also, signs are given to assure and enable Gideon in his task which is ultimately completed when the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him (Jdg 6:34). A different call episode occurs in the case of Elisha who receives his ”call” through the actions of Elijah (cf. Schaefer-Lichtenberger 1989:210-217). At the direction of Yahweh to anoint Elisha to succeed him, Elijah throws his cloak around Elisha. This symbolic act is understood by Elisha as a call to leave his profession and become Elijah’s attendant (1 Ki 19:16, 19-21). Elisha becomes the legitimate and model successor-designate to take over when Elijah is done (Kissling 1996:154). Bergen (1999:47) comments that, “Elisha is the only prophet ever anointed because he is the only prophet whose authority rests upon his being the legitimate successor of another prophet.” He is, therefore, called and authorized to complete Elijah’s prophetic work. Elisha serves Elijah as an attendant until he also is Spirit endowed and confirmed as his successor (2 Ki 2:15).

1.3 SAMUEL

Samuel’s call comes while he is a lad in service at Shiloh. The context gives the impression that Samuel is an apprentice priest who is taught and mentored by Eli. During the night he hears a voice calling him. On the third call and as directed by Eli, he responds to Yahweh who proceeds to present the divine intention to bring down the house of Eli and replace his ministry of the priestly service in addition to the new prophetic work of Samuel. This is clearly the emphasis in 1 Samuel as the passage summarizes: “The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word” (1 Sm 3:19-21). Auld (2001:34-41) mainly shows the common terminology used in the books of Samuel and Kings, but comments that, “Samuel himself is not reported as seeing anything or anyone. He is called and he hears; Yahweh speaks and

Samuel receives his word. The conclusion of the chapter encapsulates the situation: Yahweh does permit his own unveiling--but in his word." Samuel is authenticated as an ideal prophet who is fully capable of leading Israel by the divine word (McCarter 1980:19).

A major transition takes place as the prophetic role of Samuel now supercedes the priestly role which the Elides exercised to this point (Spina 1997:98-106). Newman (1962:87-88) alleges that this passage mainly serves to present Samuel in the transitional role of a "covenant mediator" whose role usually includes speaking to the people of Israel for Yahweh and in his name, and reminding them about Yahweh's deeds and the requirements of the law. He believes that the cultic office of the covenant mediator was gradually assumed by the charismatic prophets (Newman 1962:93). Although the covenant mediator is not presented as an office, this does appear to be a significant role for the prophet as seen in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Yahweh will "raise up" a prophet like Moses and inspire him with words for Israel. Samuel's call, therefore, presents several transitional roles but now emphasizes the prophetic ministry. Newman conjectures that Samuel was instrumental in the development from charismatic prophet to classical prophet--a conjecture that is helpful in understanding the role of the presiding prophet over the groups of prophets--prophets who are devoted to Yahweh. "Samuel was probably concerned with transferring the basic functions of the covenant mediator to the prophetic groups and thus insuring that these functions be perpetuated for the people of Yahweh. This must have been an important result of his association with the groups" (Newman 1962:91).

1.4 ISAIAH

The call of Isaiah and the description of his commission is usually viewed in regards to the mission to Ahaz as presented in Isaiah 7-8, a commission which is similar to the role of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 (Knierim 1968:47-68; O'Kane 1996:42). The elements in the call narrative are

analogous to that of Moses and Gideon. Two important aspects in the call of Isaiah are the specific mention of historical detail and the emphasis of historical connection with past prophetic tradition. The tradition which is emphasized is noted in regards to the prophet's task as described in Isaiah 6:9-10, which stresses the complexity of the prophet's message for the people who will hear but not understand (Aitken 1993:40). A similar perspective is also found in Deuteronomy 29:1-3 at the beginning of Moses' covenant speech. Once again this emphasizes that Isaiah is a prophet following in the tradition of prophets raised up by Yahweh to perform crucial covenant tasks (O'Kane 1996:43-44). Isaiah "sees the Lord" in a vision which reveals the awesome holiness of God. Isaiah sees the throne room of God and angelic beings in the heavenly council. The sight is overwhelming because of the absolute holiness of God and Isaiah becomes conscious of his unclean state and sin in the presence of the Holy One. The need for cleansing before his task begins is made clear and God graciously provides the required purification. Then God asks a question, "Who will go for us?" Contrary to most prophetic calls where prophets are compelled to perform their task and are reluctant to accept them, Isaiah responds with the favorable, "Here am I, send me." The function of the call vision in its context is also important in indicating to a sinful nation, as depicted in Isaiah 1-5, that the prophet's experience can also become the cleansing and commissioning experience for Israel (Oswalt 1986:174-175). The call and commission provides the prophet with the consciousness of the Spirit of God's presence and gives him the confidence to speak on his behalf. "And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me, with his Spirit" (Is 48:16).

1.5 THE ISAIANIC SERVANT'S CALL

In the book of Isaiah, there are a number of texts which are often called the "Servant Songs." Initially these songs were ascribed to the section in Isaiah 40-55 which are attributed to the authorship of "Deutero-Isaiah." The main passages referred to as the "servant songs" are in Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-6 (or 49:1-13); 50:4-9 (or 50:1-11); and 52:13-53:12. Variations in length

depend on the perspectives of commentators. However, Isaiah 61:1-3 should also be included in this category due to the thematic similarities in these passages. The reason that these passages are discussed here, is that the identity and role of the servant in these songs has many things in common with various prophetic roles and may identify a prophetic figure in the texts (Westermann 1969:21). The significant prophetic themes which Isaiah presents in this section have to do with a call from birth and the investiture of the Spirit upon the servant (Is 42:1; 49:2; 61:1; cf. Petersen 1977:22). The tasks of the individual include the proclamation of good news involving even the gentiles, the calling of Israel back to covenantal relationship (Is 40:9; 41:27; 49:1-6; 52:7), as well as various acts of mercy (Is 42:5-9). It is these themes and other elements in the songs that cause us to inquire as to the identity and function of the servant in order to note the call and commission this servant fulfills.

Scholars have sought the identity of the servant in a variety of interpretations. Some argue for a collective representative or corporate Israel, an individual [messiah figure, prophet], a cultic [priestly figure] or corporate personality identification.² Perhaps the greatest reason for these diverse views is due to the complexity of the language and details in these passages. Various parts of the songs seem to be supported by the individual, collective, and actual ideal elements in the songs. The title “servant” as used in the Old Testament refers to a variety of individuals ranging from slaves, to officers (1 Sm 19:1), officials (2 Ki 22:12), and ambassadors (Nm 22:18). It is a title of honor for the king who rescued God’s people from their enemies (1 Sm 3:18; 7:8, 19; 1 Ki 3:6). Moses is referred to as servant about forty times (Zimmerli 1970:654-656.). The prophets are also considered Yahweh’s servants who act as his messengers and warn people of impending judgment (2 Ki 17:13, 23; Jr 7:25). Even Isaiah the prophet is called “my servant” (Is 20:3; cf. 44:26).

Recently, Hugenberger (1995:119) has renewed an interpretation which notes that a

dominant image underlies the servant figure and justifies the blending of prophetic, royal, and priestly features in the songs. He proposes that, “this dominant and unifying image is that of a second Moses figure. In other words, the servant is the “prophet like Moses” promised in Deuteronomy 18:14-22 and 34:10-12.” This interpretation follows the pervasive exodus typology theme found in Isaiah 40-66. The exilic context of Israel in Babylon is paralleled to the bondage of Israel in Egypt (Is 40:3-5; 41:17-18; 42:14-16; 43:1-3, 14-21; 48:20-21; 49:8-12; 51:9-10; 52:11-12). The exodus paradigm of salvation and deliverance is to become a new way of deliverance for the exiles (Anderson 1962:177-195). The prophet announces that preparation is to be made for the Lord because he will again act on behalf of his people. Isaiah 40:10-31 emphasizes the greatness of God in order to encourage the brokenhearted that Yahweh is with them--through the chosen servant salvation will come (Is 41:8-10). This context sets the stage for the expected “prophet like Moses.”

In addition to the many thematic parallels found in the exodus typology, there are significant details which affirm the servant and prophet connection. Moses is identified as a special servant of Yahweh in about forty references and is commended for his distinguished character and function (Nm 12:6-8). Since Moses functioned in several roles, the various characteristics of royal, priestly, and prophet references are easily explained. Moses is also featured as the corporate representative of Israel and the chosen prophet who speaks on behalf of the nation (Ex 20:18-19). The endowment of the Spirit of God on the servant is similar to the experience of Moses whose incredible leadership skill is explained to be possible due to the Spirit upon him (Nm 11:17-29; Is 42:1; 61:1-7). He was also the great lawgiver whose key purpose was to establish judgment in Israel (Is 42:1, 3-4). The call narrative for the servant finds a parallel in the prophetic call of Jeremiah whose own call is based on the Mosaic call to service (Is 49:1; Jr 1:4-10; Ex 3:11). As prophets, their prophetic purposes are made clear and their roles of proclamation and messenger on behalf of Yahweh are presented as primary (Ex 4:11-17; Is 49:1, 5; 50:4-5).

Another typical function of the prophet is presented here, namely the role of intercession. Mediatorial elements are in the passages which also indicate the rejection, suffering, and notable response of the servant--traits which are normally experienced by prophets in the course of their tasks (Is 42:4; 49:4, 7; 53:3-8). The importance of intercession is a crucial prophetic role as seen in the experience of Moses (Ex 32:31-32; cf. Is 53:12; Ps 99:6). Prophetic intercession is a burden placed on many prophets who sometimes are restrained by God from pleading the case of the people before him (Am 7:1-9; Jr 15; Ezk 3:25-27). The various references to healing and deliverance are additional functions for the servant with background paradigms observed in Moses' experiences (Nm 12:13; 21:9; Hugenberger 1995:129-138).

Therefore, the servant songs have a rich vocabulary and imagery which effectively present the variety of roles and functions which prophets characteristically are called and commissioned to perform. The servant songs further detail the kinds of characteristics which the anticipated servant will embody. This role and function is important since it carries forward the expectation of a prophet to come who will be like Moses as well as the kind of prophet who will always be raised up to attend to the commission of Yahweh. This is the thrust of the Deuteronomistic perspective, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Dt 18:18). To a degree, this belief in Israel negates the idea that there will not be a prophet active on behalf of the nation at all times and goes against the thought of prophetic cessation in general. When the prophetic word is considered to have come to an end, there appears to be an anticipation of a renewal of the divine word at some future time.

1.6 JEREMIAH

For Jeremiah the call is unique in that his report claims a certain "predestination" to the

prophetic role. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jr 1:5). Not only does he claim consecration from birth but his role has far reaching contours of service beyond Israel, even to other nations. His commission is similar in that he must go to whomever God commands him and say what he is inspired to speak (Jr 1:7, 10). For his task, Jeremiah is promised God’s presence--regardless of how difficult it may be, Yahweh will fortify him and be with him (Jr 1:8, 17-19). This is another important element in call narratives and related passages--Yahweh’s presence is promised because of the difficulties involved in the prophetic task (cf. Ex 33:14-17). The import of this strong call report is summarized by Brueggemann (1987:116): “The Book of Jeremiah here seeks to give a sketch of unchallengeable authority, to provide a basis from which an alternative word can be spoken in the world, a word not grounded in or derived from the official, legitimization apparatus of the day. This person who is absolutely claimed by Yahweh is subject to no other authority. His life consists in speaking from this free place of authority precisely to those who do not acknowledge it.”

1.7 EZEKIEL

Ezekiel’s call is the most elaborate and extensive, involving detailed visions, and extraordinary instructions for the priest who serves in the Jerusalem temple until the deportation of Israel in 597 BC. The dating of his call indicates that Ezekiel is active between July 593 BC and April 571 BC, and comes when he is at the Chebar Canal near Nippur. This is a period of intense political and religious crisis for Israel--the exile causes considerable turmoil in the nation and Ezekiel is called to address and direct in this context (Wilson 1987:160). A unique feature in Ezekiel’s call is the location of Yahweh’s call. “In all this period, no person outside of the holy land had received a “call” from the Lord, had experienced the Spirit of God coming down upon him and into him, had been commanded in a vision to become a prophet” (Orlinsky 1974:164).

Key elements of the call include the vision of the throne and the language used intends to communicate the divine presence of God. The vision ties Ezekiel and his call to that of Moses, and the purpose of the call vision according to Wilson (1987:164) is that: “The vision makes clear that Ezekiel came as close as any Israelite since Moses to seeing the face of God, and the Prophet’s message must, therefore, have divine authority.” His commission is a difficult one in that the people are characterized as rebellious, obstinate and stubborn (Ezk 2:3-8)--but his task is clear. “I am sending you to the Israelites...Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says’...You must speak my words to them” (Ezk 2:3-4, 7). Ezekiel is, therefore, God’s messenger and is called to be a watchman (Ezk 3:17-19; 33:1-9), with the specific function of warning evildoers of judgment. The call and circumstances in which he is told he must speak God’s words and eat the scroll (Ezk 2:8-3:4) indicates a mandatory commission, which Ezekiel is forced to accept. The Spirit of God lifts him up and “transports” him in order to assure that the task is accomplished. This type of control is evidently to convey to the exiles the impression that Ezekiel is dominated by God and that he is only a conduit of the divine word of warning and judgment.

In summary, there are many similarities in the narratives which record the call and commissioning of the prophets such as their objection to that commission, the divine reassurance and promise of Yahweh’s presence, and the confirming sign. Mayes (1993:29) emphasizes that in these call narratives the prophets are claiming legitimacy as prophets who belong to the authentic Yahwistic traditions as expressed in Deuteronomy 18:15-22: “The prophetic call narratives reflect claims to be true representatives of Yahweh and express the substance of the commission that they have been given.” The prophets stood in the presence of God, they received the word and were commissioned to perform on his behalf (Sanders 1972:59).

In a similar vein, Lindblom (1962:182) sees the call as verifying the ministry of the true prophet and of establishing them as authoritative messengers sent by Yahweh to his people.

In Israel the certainty of being called by Yahweh was one of the most characteristic features of the prophetic consciousness. This certainty was an impelling force in the lives of the prophets and at the same time a source of confidence and fortitude. The legitimacy of the true prophet and the authority of his message are established by his call. He knew that he was properly called by Yahweh to carry out his task. The false prophet is declared to be such, and his visions and messages are rejected as valueless, not because he did not have visions and ecstatic experiences, but because he had not been called.

However, the call criteria to assess a prophet's veracity is only one of many--not all prophets describe their call. But when the call is appealed to, the call and commission may prove to be a crucial indicator of the true prophet's authorization to speak for God. Without the call and commission, a professing prophet would be assessed accordingly and when prophets claimed to speak for Yahweh, the question of the veracity of their call arose. Not all the prophets received recognition in Israel, nor did all prophets have documents named after them. But those who did receive Yahweh's call to serve as messengers are eager to present their call in their prophetic record. The end of call narratives and the development of using pseudonyms to obtain authority for written documents, may signal the eventual cessation of prophecy in Israel.

2 INSPIRATION OF THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

In order to fulfill the commission of God, prophets had to receive and communicate the divine word or message accurately. This assumes a process whereby the divine message is apprehended by the prophet through the process called inspiration—a term which describes the reception of the message which is received through the work of the Spirit of God. This part of a prophet's function involved the process of seeing the vision or hearing the word and then discerning its meaning and intention for the target audience. They had to express what they saw in understandable language and give shape to the message (Jr 1:11, 13; Am 7:1-8; 8:1-2; 9:1-4; Hs 1:2-11). Although inspiration is not a biblical term, it describes how the Spirit of God imparts or impresses the prophet with the divine message (cf. Jr 1:7, 10). This process is so typical among

the Old Testament prophets that in Judaism the Spirit of God is often equivalent to the Spirit of prophecy, where the Spirit inspires divine revelations. Lindblom (1962:42) writes, “A prophet may be characterized as a person who, because he is conscious of having been specially chosen and called, feels forced to perform actions and proclaim ideas which, in a mental state of intense inspiration or real ecstasy, have been indicated to him in the form of divine revelations.” It is the claim to inspiration and a divine message, however, that is often challenged and leads to the discussion of veracity.

The claim to prophetic inspiration comes in the various formulas which call an audience to attention. The prophet cries, “hear this word,” or “the word of the Lord came to,” or “thus says the Lord.” The claims to inspiration often appear to involve a level of “possession” by the Spirit who fills a prophet and motivates him to prophesy. This may or may not include influences referred to as ecstasy [see below]. Claims to inspiration or possession include the following expressions. “The hand of the Lord fell on me” (Ezk 8:1; Is 8:11; 1 Ki 18:46; Jr 15:17); “the Spirit lifted me up” (Ezk 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5); “the Spirit entered into me” (Ezk 2:2; 3:24); “the word of the Lord came to me” (Jr 1:4; 2:1); “the Spirit rested on them” Nm 11:25-26); “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Is 61:1); and the “Spirit of the Lord clothed itself with Gideon or Amasai or Zechariah” (Jdg 6:34; 1 Chr 12:19; 2 Chr 24:20; cf. Wilson, R R 1979:325).

Many communities in the Old Testament did not appreciate the Spirit and inspiration connection which prophets often made to emphasize their reception of the divine word. The ecstatic behavior associated with this connection, however, was not always evident. Hosea is referred to as a “man of the Spirit” but his service as a prophet is apparently not well received by the people. They express their irritation at the presence of the prophet in their festival. According to them, the prophet is a fool and an inspired maniac (Hs 9:7). The caricature of the prophet according to the people is one who babbles unintelligibly and is out of control (cf. 2 Ki 9:11; Jr

29:26). Hosea sets the record straight by noting his deep concern for the spiritual health of the nation—he serves as a watchman over them. Rather than being a raving and irrational maniac, the prophet knows Yahweh and is inspired by him to call Israel back to relationship with him.

Micah also claims to be filled with power and with the Spirit of the Lord for the divine role of declaring the nation's sin (Mi 3:8). The presence of the Spirit provides the power and inspiration of Yahweh. Therefore, it is God that makes him behave as he does. Zechariah summarizes the task of the prophets and consequence of speaking the divinely inspired message to a reticent populace: “But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry” (Zch 7:11-12). This passage illustrates the authority of the prophets as is evident in their endowment of the Spirit by which they are inspired to call the people back to covenant loyalty. These are not the words of the prophet—they are divinely inspired messages delivered by Yahweh's emissaries the prophets. It is this conviction that they were inspired with a prophetic word which motivates them to speak into the most difficult situations.

Therefore, the veracity of a prophet depends on his ability to receive revelation and inspiration from Yahweh by the Spirit of God. When this process is interrupted or impeded in anyway, prophecy ends or develops into what may be referred to as false prophecy or auto-inspiration where a prophet claims to have a message or revelation but it is in fact an unauthorized message, vision, or audition [the subject matter of Chapter Four). When inspiration is no longer apparent, the decline and eventual end of prophecy is implied. Furthermore, the message of the prophet is not just a number of sporadic prophetic oracles and incidental communications. The inspired message is a culmination of a ministry, whether long or short, and the written record is the summary or catalogue of a lifelong impression upon the prophet given by the Spirit to be

delivered to different audiences, as well as to all of God's people in every generation. The record represents the major themes which the individual prophets continually repeat and refine. Perhaps the greatest proof of the inspiration of the prophet's message is in the canonization of the words attributed to various prophets by the people of God. The fact that these documents were then compiled and received by the community and no longer added to, suggests another marker indicating a judgment that contemporary prophecy had ceased.

2.1 INSPIRATION AND THE HAND OF THE LORD

A particular phrase that is evident in a number of Old Testament books occurs often in Ezekiel and Ezra, namely, "the hand of the Lord," or "the hand of God."³ Perhaps because of the ecstatic aberrations of some prophets, which were also evident among the prophets of Baal, there is an apparent reluctance to refer to the Spirit of God in Jeremiah, Amos, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Therefore, they seem to use other terms to refer to the presence and enabling of God. Ezekiel uses both the Spirit of the Lord and the hand of the Lord to indicate God's work through his prophetic ministry. In the case of David, both the Spirit of God and the hand of the Lord are involved and credited in transmitting and inspiring the plans for the temple (1 Chr 28:12, 19). The expression, "the hand of Yahweh" is used in prophetic texts to describe Yahweh's possession, inspiration, and empowering of a prophet.⁴ The phrase often occurs to denote the revelation of divine visions and the activity of the Spirit. The divine hand may inspire the prophet and instill the divine message: "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and over-throw, to build and to plant" (Jr 1:9-10).

Prophetic texts also use the expression "hand of Yahweh" to describe Yahweh's possession and empowering of the prophet with the commensurate inspiration to speak. The

phrase occurs seven times in Ezekiel, often in concert with the revelation of divine visions and the activity of the Spirit (Ezk 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 27:1; 33:22; 40:1). The Spirit of God inspires Ezekiel with the very words he is to speak and brings him to the place of proclamation. “The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God” (Ezk 11:24). In the revealed visions, Ezekiel is inspired with the message he is to proclaim to the community (Ezk 37:1; 43:5). The prophet is commanded to prophesy: “Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, “Say, thus says the Lord” (Ezk 11:5). The hand of the Lord first comes upon Ezekiel at the river Kebar and from that time on he is commissioned and continually controlled by the divine presence as indicated by the Spirit and the hand of the Lord (Ezk 3:14, 22; 8:1-4; 33:22; 40:1). This experience of being under the hand of the Lord also occurs in the case of Elijah (1 Ki 18:46), Elisha (2 Ki 3:15), Isaiah (Is 8:11), and Jeremiah (Jr 15:17). In the two hundred references to the “hand of the Lord,” or “hand of God,” in the Old Testament, most refer to the power of God by which he demonstrates his ability to fulfill his word, deliver, inspire, protect, or create (1Ki 8:15, 24; Is 45:12; 48:13; 48:2; Zimmerli 1979:42, 117-118). This extensive usage of the term is therefore indicative of Yahweh’s active presence with his people. On the other hand, the termination of the term indicates that Yahweh had departed from the influences he brought to bear in the community.

2.2 INSPIRATION AND THE POWER OF THE PROPHETIC WORD

Related to the inspiration and nature of the prophetic word, is another aspect of prophecy which has to do with its authenticity and power. In order for the prophetic message to be received by the community, it is assessed according to its effectiveness and origin. This is a double edged sword in that the prophets are claiming divine inspiration and are demanding a hearing, while the audience is demanding proof of the veracity and origin of the prophetic word. Even though some of the following texts are found in genres other than prophetic literature, the theological views of

the community concerning the power of the word and its vitality are presented in each part of the Hebrew canon.

Both the Former and the Latter Prophets stress the resilience and effectual power of the inspired prophetic word (1 Sm 2:27-36; Is 40:8; cf. Dt 8:11; 30:14-20). The word of God is neither empty nor unfruitful (Dt 32:47; Is 55:11). Moreover, the spoken word of God is believed to be brought into reality by the Spirit of God (Gn 1:2; Ps 33:6), who causes the word to form a physical creation or reality. The Spirit of God is the active, creative, and vital presence of God which functions to fulfill the spoken word or commandment. This relationship between the spoken word and the fulfilled or created word is vividly portrayed in Isaiah where the word of God is like a messenger that goes forth and subsequently becomes effectual. “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes forth from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Is 55:10-11). This simile illustrates the efficacy of the word, which like a prophet goes out to proclaim and accomplish the will of God (cf. Is 45:23; Jr 23:29). The specific relationship between the word and the Spirit is featured in Isaiah. “For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together” (Is 34:16). The implementation of the word is further implied: “He allots their portions; his hand distributes them by measure” (Is 34:17). The prophetic word was believed to be effective, creative, and charged with energy (Lindblom 1962:51-53; 113-115). Furthermore, the Spirit inspires the word and brings it into reality. “I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted and they came to pass” (Is 48:3).

Therefore, Israel held this belief in common with the ancient Near East view, that “the word of the god was a mighty and terrifying power which could prove effective in all spheres of

life, a dynamic force bringing about the death or victories of kings as well as the growth or withering of the crops” (Albrektson 1967:67). Particularly in Mesopotamia, the divine word was conceived as a physical-cosmic power, the giver and sustainer of life, creative, irresistible, irrevocable, and a constant energy (Schmidt 1978:120, 91-93; cf. Schmidt 1983:236-237). It should be emphasized that the Old Testament does not have the same magical or mantic conception of the word of God as most of the ancient Near Eastern cultures did. The potency of the word has to do with the one who inspires as well as speaks the word, not with the speaking of formulas or the manipulation of forces to fulfill the words of functionaries. Even the utterance of blessings and curses and their fulfillment depended on whether the utterance was inspired and condoned by Yahweh or not. This is one of the key theological purposes of the Balaam narratives which vividly portrays the ineffectiveness of attempts to curse what Yahweh has blessed (Nm 22-24).

The Old Testament emphasizes that God can foretell his great deeds in history through the prophets. Numerous verbs indicate the accomplishment, fulfillment, establishment, confirmation, and truth of the divinely inspired word. Israel believed that history was shaped and directed by the word of the Lord, who had the power to bring divine plans and foretold events into reality. Yahweh’s word to Samuel illustrates this: “At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family--from beginning to end” (1 Sm 3:12). This feature in the Former Prophets is abundantly portrayed in the prophetic word that is presented by a prophet and then specifically shown to be fulfilled in the history of the nation (Zevit 2001:481-486).⁵ One key purpose of the Former Prophets is to record the faithfulness of God in fulfilling the divine promises made to the covenant people at some point in history. The fulfillment of the prophetic word also witnesses to the veracity of the prophetic word and God’s power to cause its realization in history. The prophets play a substantial role as the emissaries sent by God to foretell the word and to act as those who direct history by anointing and deposing some of the kings

(Saul, David, Solomon). The Spirit's role in this process is often illustrated in the commissioning, inspiring, motivating, and guiding of the prophets (Ezk 3). The relationship between the word and the Spirit in the prophet's estimation were very intimate. Eichrodt (1967:73) summarizes: "As a cosmic power of God, therefore, the word takes very much the place for these men which in popular thinking was occupied by the *ruah*, and enables them to discern God's direct control of history." The prophetic word is thus a guiding force in history, and the Spirit is the active presence of God that implements it and causes the spoken word to live. In the Latter Prophets, this conception is evident in passages where the judgments of God are spoken by the prophets and implemented by God (Is 9:5-10; Ezk 2:4-8). Jeremiah's prophetic ministry included the destruction of false beliefs and the replacement of them with divine truth.

Through the word of the prophets, therefore, the operation of the Spirit is realized in the community. Unfortunately, Israel often rejected the prophetic word and thereby grieved the Spirit, as is indicated by Zechariah. "They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry" (Zch 7:12; cf. Is 63:10; Neh 9:30; Ps 95:7-8). This response to the prophetic word keeps the community of God from experiencing the relationship envisioned by the prophets. The process and intention of the word is summarized by Eichrodt (1967:73): "It was the spirit which gave rise to the word of God uttered in times past and now of formative significance in the present, and which is at the same time the power giving life to the community." The word becomes a living reality in the life of the community as the Spirit, that inspired the prophet and motivated him to speak, also applies it to the spiritual life of the nation. In this sense, the Old Testament function of the prophetic word together with the Spirit is similar to the New Testament role as signified by Jesus in John 14:25-26, where the Holy Spirit reminds and teaches the community those things taught by Christ in the past. Unfortunately in Israel, even though the prophets spoke under divine compulsion (Am 3:8; Jr 20:7-10), their word was often initially

rejected. The criteria that a prophet's words must come to pass, was only realized after the fact and usually later in history after the prophet's death. The continual rejection of God's word ultimately leads to a period where God chooses to be silent and withholds the prophetic word. Amos warns of this time using the imagery of famine, not of food but of the absence of the words of God (Am 8:11-14). The prophetic word would no longer be available (Ezk 7:26-27; Hs 5:6; Mi 3:4, 6-7), and the persistent response of rejection of the powerful and effectual word of the Lord will ultimately lead to the end of prophecy in Israel.

2.3 INSPIRATION AND ECSTATIC PROPHECY

In the Old Testament, as well as in the ancient Near East, ecstatic behavior is observed within prophetic communities. As noted in Chapter Two, some functionaries at Mari who are cultic personnel are referred to as the *muhhum* and exhibit ecstatic tendencies (cf. Müller 1998:135-137). Some reference is made to singers and the use of beer which are provided for the ecstasies to induce and promote an ecstatic state. The significance of the ecstatic behavior at Mari appears to be a way of legitimizing the message of the functionaries. By featuring external abnormal behaviors, they convey the idea that a deity, a supernatural force or other influence is taking possession of them in order to communicate a message—usually to the king.

There is no doubt that certain Old Testament passages record similar ecstatic tendencies, but the role, function, and details regarding ecstatic behavior are not so clear. These behaviors have been observed in a variety of cultures and several anthropological reports carefully describe ecstatic experiences. Some of the activities that ecstasies engaged in included “calling out the divine name, performing a type of dance, lacerating themselves according to some pattern of self-flagellation, prostrating themselves on the ground for extended periods (1 Sm 10:5; 19:24; 1 Ki 18:26-29; Zch 13:5-6; cf. Zevit 2001:499). Although similar observations are evident in the Old

Testament materials, particularly in early pre-classical prophetic experience, ecstatic activity is not common to all of Israel's early prophets. The many similarities of ecstatic experiences in various cultures indicate that this is a sociological and anthropological tendency (Lindblom 1962:6-8; Zevit 2001:499-500). Whereas the nature of ecstatic prophecy is not completely clear from the biblical data alone, anthropological studies show that ecstasy may have a variety of manifestations, ranging from dancing dervishes, mantic frenzy, and trances to controlled utterance. From a sociological perspective, the revelatory or auditory condition is an experience characterized by unnatural activities that serve to externally indicate supernatural influences.

The subject of ecstasy has had a significant amount of attention in the past decades where it was often assumed that a prophet received a message from God through a mysterious or psychological experience and then later wrote down the message. This view was formulated by Hölscher (1914) who believed that ecstasy was a typical part of prophecy in Israel. He felt that Israel adopted and transformed ecstatic practices from the Canaanites but that they presented ecstatic behavior along with their public presentation of the message. These views were refined by Lindblom who emphasized the universal nature of ecstatic behavior and spelled out in more detail what ecstasy entailed. He provides this working definition for ecstasy:

Ecstasy is an abnormal state of consciousness in which one is so intensely absorbed by one single idea or one single feeling, or by a group of ideas or feelings that the normal stream of psychical life is more or less arrested. The bodily senses cease to function; one becomes impervious from without; consciousness is exalted above the ordinary level of daily experience; unconscious mental impressions and ideas come to the surface in the form of visions and auditions.

(Lindblom 1962:4-5)

Eichrodt (1961:318) claims that "ecstasy is a new impulse bestowed by God" (cf. Am

2:11; Hs 12:11). According to him, “Ecstasy with all its consequences derives from a direct, irruption of divine power, namely *ruah*, which overwhelms a man and takes him prisoner.” Furthermore, the causation of ecstatic prophetic behavior and its intention for the community is of primary importance since, if ecstasy is caused by Yahweh and the Spirit of God, the text should normally indicate this. This becomes a factor in establishing the matter of prophetic cessation. The focus must be on the nature of the process of divine-human communication and the behavioral characteristics arising from the process of communication (Wilson, R R 1979:324). However, the Old Testament acknowledges that prophecy can be self-induced and that prophets can be inspired by Baal (Jr 23:13-16, 21). In other cultures, trances, communion with ancestral spirits and various supernatural experiences are ways that people use to induce ecstatic experiences (Overholt 1989:45-51). Often such functionaries are referred to as a “shaman,” and characteristics attributed to them include the ability to perform acts of power, control and invoke spirits to speak through them, the self-infliction of wounds, and a variety of other manipulations (Overholt 1989:105).

Haran maintains that the typical distinctive features of ecstatic prophecy in the pre-classical prophecy of the ancient Near East are: (1) collective ecstasy as a mode of activity in prophetic bands (cf. 1 Sm 10:5-13; 19:20-24; Nm 11:24-30), (2) the use of instruments to awaken inspiration and ecstasy (2 Ki 3:15; 1 Sm 10:5; cf. Ex 15:20), (3) the propensity to special places of oracular activity, such as Sinai as a sacred site, (4) an attraction to permanent institutions of oracular activity in which group ecstasy and inspiration take place (like the Tent of Meeting; Ex 33:5-11; Nm 11:16-17, 24-30; 12:4-10; Dt 31:14-15), and (5) a connection to the house of God or temple as the place of revelation (1 Sm 3:3-10; Is 6; Haran 1977:385-397). Wilson (1979:336-337) concludes that some of Israel’s prophets did show stereotypical possession behavior, but that this behavior could vary according to the historical period, place, cultural and social context. So called “possession behavior” can also develop and change over time and is evaluated differently by

various groups in Israel.

Another perspective which helps us to understand ecstasy in Israel is presented by Petersen (1995:285) who observes several levels of organismic involvement in Israel's prophetic experience, as well as various intensities of such behavior. He lists four different levels of organismic involvement including role enactment or ritual acting as observed in Ezekiel 4:1-3. A second level is labeled engrossed acting where prophets like Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and Amos are involved in the court and elsewhere, not just in presenting messages but in wisely maneuvering situations to confront leaders with truth. This is a frequent role taken on by the prophets, but is not the same as "classical hypnotic role taking," where a person who behaves "as if" she or he were receiving external oracular stimuli, without receiving externally observable stimuli which are reported in the vision." Thus the prophets appear to be in a deeper state of consciousness to receive such visions from another world. A fourth role is referred to as "histrionic neurosis" which conveys the idea of pain or illness as experienced in the prophets encounter with the deity (Jr 15:17-18). Next, Petersen discusses ecstasy but feels it is difficult to discern among Israel's prophets since it involves involuntary behavior as seen among the prophets of Baal (1 Ki 18). He concludes his discussion of the five organismic levels by claiming that,

To speak about one level of organismic involvement as definitive for prophetic role enactment, as many have with ecstasy or possession behavior, is to ignore other important levels of Israelite prophetic role enactment. Further, to focus on ecstasy is especially inappropriate since we have been unable to discern one unambiguous example of that level of organismic involvement. Prophets could be prophets at several levels of organismic involvement.

(Petersen 1995:288)

Petersen's survey helps us to understand the variety of contexts in which to view

prophetic behavior. Clearly, Israel has adjusted ancient Near Eastern practices, so we do not observe the blatant Baalism behavior among Israel's prophets. However, we can observe the ecstatic tendencies in Israel, particularly where the Spirit of God is involved in various ways. Pedersen (1957:129) affirms that the power behind ecstatic behavior is in the Spirit of Yahweh which moves the prophet to act, speak, see--as in an intoxication. Ecstasy to the Israelites meant a concentration of strength. On the role and function of the prophet, Pedersen (1957:129) says he was generally, "a member of a guild which had its methods to call forth ecstasy, that gave the prophet a holy experience and so developed a sacred sphere to the benefit of the community, just as it became the basis of the visions through which he was able to give words of guidance to the people." Therefore, it is appropriate to note the value and purpose of ecstatic behavior in Israel, since so many texts present mannerisms which were apparently understood by the prophet's audiences, but are not always clear to readers removed from this context. Before we can comment on the influence of ecstasy on the demise of prophecy, a consideration of related terminology is crucial.

2.4 THE OLD TESTAMENT TERMINOLOGY FOR ECSTATIC BEHAVIOR

Some clues regarding the nature of prophesying and various external behaviors may be evident in the terms used to express prophesying. In the Old Testament, the *hithpael* and *niphal* forms of the root *nb'* convey the thought of one acting or behaving like a *nabi'* [both verbal forms seem to be denominatives of prophet]. The root *nb'* is most likely to be understood in the passive sense of "the called one" rather than the more active sense of "proclaimer" (Rendtorff 1968:797). The nature of this prophetic activity is often ecstatic, as evidenced by the experience of trances, verbal prophesying, and other external manifestations. This conclusion is usually arrived at because the *hithpael* form occurs frequently in contexts where ecstatic behavior is observed (1 Sm 10:5-11; 19:20-24; 1 Ki 22:10). Jeremias (1997:703) claims that "*nb'* *niphal*, which frequently

appears in the participle directly after the plural of the substantive *nabi*, describes the normal activity of the prophet, whether this consists of ecstatic frenzy and prophetic emotion or as in almost all other passages, of inspired prophetic discourse, proclamation, prophecy.” But Wilson (1979:329-330) notes that the semantic development theory where the *hithpael* form indicates ecstatic activity and the *niphal* form comes to be associated with intelligible speech is oversimplified and difficult to prove since the terms often appear together and may carry the same meaning (cf. 1 Sm 10:5, 6, 10, 11, 13; Jr 26:20; Ezk 37:9-10). Auld (1984:67) sees no distinction between the two verbal themes and claims that the variation of the forms in the same context is entirely stylistic, however, his observation is mainly made from passages in Jeremiah and Kings. Scholars often assume that a development in the distinction between the terms occurred and is now lost--the *niphal* forms came to be associated more with intelligible prophetic speech. Although it is true that the verbal themes are used interchangeably, the ecstatic nature of prophecy is apparently more explicit in passages which use the *hithpael* forms (cf. Müller 1998:129-134).

On similar Old Testament verbal analogies, Wilson (1979:329) suggests that *hitnabbe* originally had the general meaning “to act like a prophet” (cf. 1 Ki 22:10; Jr 29:26f.; and with some interchange: 1 Sm 10:5-6, 10, 13; 19:20-21, 23-24). External characteristic behavior probably included the speaking of words and actions that were recognized by the community as prophetic in nature, with variations in acceptable activities depending on the group. In contrast, the *niphal* forms may have originally simply referred to prophetic speech (Am 7:12-13, Jr 19:14; 26:18; Zch 13:3). “In groups where characteristic prophetic behavior was marked more by stereotypical speech than by stereotypical physiological conditions and actions, the *hithpael* and *niphal* forms would have merged, for “to act like a prophet” would have been the equivalent of “speaking prophetically” (Wilson 1979:329-330).

One of the key aspects of ecstasy is the relationship of the prophet to Yahweh who sends,

clothes, and fills the prophet with the Spirit of God. As noted in Chapter Two, this occurs in Numbers 11 where the Spirit is transferred from Moses to the seventy elders. Upon reception of the Spirit, the elders prophesy [*wayyitnabbe' u*]. No clear explanation is given regarding what this entails, however, the external evidence of speaking is observed and deemed suitable by the community who sees these leaders prophesying. This example is an affirmation in the canon received by the community that prophets will exhibit various external behaviors when they receive the Spirit.

2.5 ECSTASY AND THE CASE OF SAUL

Saul is technically not a prophet, although his occasional prophetic behavior gives rise to the question, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” In the contexts from which this question arises, Saul exhibits characteristic ecstatic behavior. These two texts are important for our consideration since they illustrate what happens when Saul’s role changes from that of a supported and inspired leader in Israel to that of a rejected leader without the Spirit of God. We must consider Saul in this respect since his manifestations of ecstasy are more detailed than other Old Testament characters who exhibit similar experiences. Characteristics that follow the coming of the Spirit on prophets may include orgiastic prophetic frenzy and verbal utterances (Nm 11; 1 Sm 10:5-10; 19:20). This type of ecstasy is apparently contagious and in one situation, causes Saul to strip naked and prophesy for a day and a night (1 Sm 19:20-24; cf. Ex 32:19-25). When Saul is anointed to his role as *nagid* over Israel, he is told of three signs that will confirm to him that he is Yahweh’s chosen leader. The third sign is perhaps the most crucial for Saul. He is to meet a procession of “prophesying” prophets playing musical instruments and the Spirit of God will then come on Saul and cause him to prophesy with the band of prophets. In accordance with Samuel’s word, Saul meets the prophets at Gibeah, the Spirit of God comes upon him in power, and Saul joins with the band in their prophetic activity. This prophetic behavior gives rise to the question

whether Saul is now also a prophet. The text indicates a positive occasion where Saul and the prophets share in the Spirit of God which is a sign that God is with the newly selected king (Sturdy 1970:207-209). The focus is not so much on the ecstatic behavior, although it is initiated by the Spirit of God to indicate to Saul the divine enablement for office. It is also possible that at this key transition period in the leadership of Israel, the prophetic activity of Saul which overcomes him, is to establish the fact that the king is subject to the prophetic word and to the prophetic office--an issue that is tested at Gilgal where Saul's failure leads to his rejection as king.

Although Saul's first experience is presented in a positive way and comes in fulfillment of one of three signs which verifies his election to leadership (1 Sm 10:5-10), the second situation is viewed negatively. While a number of passages refer to the Spirit of God as overcoming Saul, others indicate the influence of an evil spirit on him which replaces the Spirit of God. A negative consequence of the coming of the evil Spirit of God occurs on two occasions. In the first instance it is recorded that, "The next day an evil spirit of God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, 'I'll pin David to the wall.' But David eluded him twice" (1 Sm 18:10). In another instance, Saul tries to kill David when he is overcome by the evil spirit sent by God (1 Sm 19:9-10). On both occasions David escapes danger. Lindstrom (1983:74-75) claims that Saul's ailment has to do with an attitude of the mind, not a demon or God's Spirit. He claims it is a way of indicating judgment and the consent of God to allow evil to affect humankind. But there is more than a psychological disturbance indicated here because of the influence of the evil spirit (cf. 1 Ki 22). Grottanelli (1999: 93) notes that the evil spirit "is sent by Yahweh and appears precisely at the moment when the Spirit of Yahweh departs from Saul." This is the cause of his excessive melancholy and revolt against David. Saul is unable to shake the affects upon him. He tries to hold on to his former experience with the Spirit of God and the positive influences that the presence of God gives to him. The interesting phenomenon is that

although Saul is influenced by the evil spirit, he still has the ability to prophesy while David plays the harp. But his ability to lead the nation as intended is impeded. Saul seeks to hang on to the only tangible element that initially indicated his relationship to the presence of God, namely, the verbal utterances of his lips.

The persistent attempts to kill David grow in intensity and number as Saul's mental condition deteriorates. After David escapes the hand of Saul who tries to kill him with his spear, David seeks refuge with Samuel and the prophetic band at Ramah and then at Naioth. Saul, however, manages to locate David and sends a number of men to capture him. Each of the three groups are overcome by the Spirit of God as they near the prophetic group that prophesies (1 Sm 19:20-21). The men of Saul prophesy [*wayitnabb'u*] and are unable to take David. Finally Saul himself goes to Naioth but is also overcome by the Spirit of God, causing him to walk along "prophesying." Upon arrival at Naioth, Saul stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel all that day and night (1 Sm 19:23-24). As indicated in this narrative, the presence of the Spirit of God at Naioth was inescapable. The nature of the prophetic activity at Naioth seems to include not only verbal utterance but a trance-like experience that incapacitates those who seek to capture God's anointed king. Contact with the prophesying band presided over by Samuel was in this instance contagious.

This account of Saul and his men who are overcome by the Spirit of God serves a number of functions. The first and more obvious function is that Saul and his men are restrained. Their desire to capture David is thwarted as the Spirit of God comes on them. David is protected by the Spirit and Saul is rendered harmless. Saul's uncontrollable actions before Samuel present the king as a weak and pitiful character. A different role of the Spirit is indicated in this passage from that of 1 Samuel 10:10-12, where Saul's election as leader is confirmed by the Spirit of God. In 1 Samuel 19:23-24, Saul is constrained by the Spirit of God. Saul lies helplessly before Samuel the

prophet and king maker, stripped not only of his dignity and kingly robes but of his ability to function as ruler over the people. This is the last time that Saul sees Samuel. The context confirms the necessity of the king to submit to the prophetic word. The passage also highlights the difference between Saul, who tried to kill the anointed of the Lord, and David, who attempted to uphold the anointed of the Lord (1 Sm 24:10). These episodes also illustrate the potential consequences for prophets who could lose the presence of the Spirit of God who inspires the prophets with messages due to various factors.

2.6 THE SPIRIT OF GOD GIVES PROPHETS SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

Visions and auditory revelations are also transmitted by the Spirit or by the hand of the Lord (Ezk 3:1-9; cf. 2 Ki 3:15). When the power of the Lord comes on Elijah after his victory over the priests of Baal, he runs all the way to Jezreel (1 Ki 18:46). Supernatural revelatory knowledge is imparted to the prophets, on occasion, that gives them special insights into the spirit world and into events that are not seen in the natural realm (2 Ki 6:12, 17, 32). Elisha could even discern what his servant was doing as he asks, “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you?” (2 Ki 5:26). Whereas these features of Spirit-induced, ecstatic-revelatory activity are positive, the danger of ecstatic behavior as exhibited in the activities of priests and prophets in other groups threaten pure Yahwism. This is illustrated by the activity of the prophets of Baal in response to Elijah’s taunts: “So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention” (1 Ki 18:28-29).

Jeremiah specifically denounces the prophets of Samaria who prophesy by Baal and lead Israel astray (Jr 23:13). According to him, these prophets who are probably associated with

syncretistic cults at the high places, are inspired by Baal and exhibit ecstatic behavior in seeking inspiration and answers from their deity. Some writers, such as Blenkinsopp (1983:55), claim that there is little to distinguish this type of ecstasy, including the slashing and frantic behavior, from that of the sons of the prophets who are associated with Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. But there is not much Old Testament evidence to show that Israel's prophets exhibit the more negative features of ecstatic prophecy. In fact, they seem to avoid this association according to Old Testament texts. It is particularly this perceived notion that led to the silence among many prophets in relation to Spirit-reception and inspiration. They mainly feature a direct relationship with Yahweh and the inspiration of the word that comes to them. Lindblom (1962:178) claims,

The reason for the infrequent references to *ruah* in the accounts of the revelatory experiences of the great prophets was essential theocentric. In every situation they were in the presence of Yahweh and under His constraint. What they uttered was the word of Yahweh, and what they saw and heard in their visions came from Him. Yahweh had sent them, consequently Yahweh Himself dictated to them the oracles and messages they had to deliver. Accordingly, they had no need of intermediary power such as the spirit.

Rather than complicate the issue, the writing prophets identify the reception of the word in other ways than simply through the Spirit. What seems to be clear from the Old Testament accounts is that in Israel, the prophets who experience ecstasy do so as a by-product of the conscious reality of God's presence and Spirit. The Old Testament focus is mainly on the verbal utterances of the prophets.

2.7 ECSTASY RECEIVES NEGATIVE PRESS

Negative statements concerning the prophets are often made in reference to ecstatic behavior in some parts of the Old Testament prophetic materials. Hosea serves in a period when prophets are considered fools and those with ecstatic behavior are called maniacs or inspired men

(Hs 9:7; cf. 2 Ki 9:11). The people's negative perception of the prophet in Hosea 9 is observed in their irritation of Hosea's presence at the festival. The caricature of the prophet according to the people is one who babbles unintelligibly and is out of control. They also refer to him as a "man of the Spirit" and thereby place him in the same category as Elijah (1 Ki 19:11), Micaiah (1 Ki 22:21f.), and Elisha (2 Ki 2:9, 16)-- but they probably refer to Hosea derogatorily for his ecstatic behavior. For them, possession by the Spirit was undesirable and therefore, not mentioned or claimed by some prophets. Hosea defends his behavior and emphasizes that rather than being a raving and irrational maniac, he knows Yahweh and abides with him, which is the very thing that the people failed to do. His external behavior helps to get the attention of the people so that the prophetic message can be delivered. In Jeremiah's time, such "madmen" who act like prophets are placed in stocks (Jr 29:26).

Therefore, in both early and late prophetic literature, the relationship of the Spirit to ecstatic experiences is noted. Perhaps because of the Spirit-ecstasy association, particularly in the eighth century, there is evidence of a growing disdain for Spirit-induced ecstatic behavior. In other cultures, trances, communion with ancestral spirits and various supernatural experiences were typically practiced (Overholt 1989:45-51), but for Israel, these became too closely connected to foreign gods and were increasingly rejected. People become sceptical and ambivalent towards excessive ecstatic behavior. Fenton (1997:32; cf. 2001:133-136) observes that,

One senses that in exilic times or before, as in 5th century Athens, there begins an increasing discomfort with the ecstatic elements in prophecy. It might appear that a new stage has been reached; whereas formerly ecstatic behavior and mediation were generally regarded as inseparable and one tended to accept or reject the one with the other, there are now men of a new religious consciousness who accept and desire mediation between the divine and human worlds but who reject the physical behavior, especially in its extreme forms, of the mediators.

Although ecstatic behavior is downplayed and restrained by the predominance of the “word” in the writing prophets, the association of Spirit and ecstasy always remained a factor in Israel’s prophetic circles. In Israel, the coming of the Spirit on the prophet could result in the manifestation of ecstasy, but the function of this manifestation depends on each narrative’s emphasis. Ultimately, ecstatic behavior among prophets diminishes as prophets no longer receive divinely inspired messages. Alternatively, ecstatic behavior might be used by prophets to persuade an audience of their reception of a divine message!

3 THE ROLES OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

During Israel’s history, the prophets play a variety of roles in the nation.⁶ However, the prophet’s work as divine messenger and covenant mediator is primary. Chapter Two presented the key elements of early prophecy which led to the development of the prophetic office with Samuel. At this juncture, it is necessary to consider the other key roles of a prophet in order to observe whether the decline and end of prophecy come about due to the demise or discontinuation of the need for these roles. This will include the consideration of the roles played by prophets in the king’s court, their influence in cultic matters, work as court scribes, and other monarchy related services, as well as their role in prophesying to other nations.

3.1 THE PROPHET AS MESSENGER

In the Old Testament, there are various forms of divine communication presented to explain the way in which humankind perceives and understands God’s message. In Israel’s early period, the terminology of *nabi* is used of Abraham and Moses at the same time that other messengers are used to convey God’s message. Reference is often made to “another messenger” from God who appears to come in some form of God’s self-manifestation (Gn 16:7, 9-11; 22:11,

15; 31:11; Ex 3:2; 14:19; Jdg 6:20; 13:6, 9; 2 Sm 14:17, 20). The term *mal'ak yhwh* is used to denote a heavenly messenger from God who is able to communicate the divine message and is so closely identified with Yahweh that at times the messenger may be confused with the actual presence of God (Gn 16:13; 31:11, 13). The term can also be translated by “angel” so that the role of the angel of the Lord according to Eichrodt (1967:28), is to “make possible the direct entry of Yahweh into the field of human vision, and to make speech uttered in the divine first person audible while at the same time referring the divine act of will, effective even from afar, the hearkening, the watchful eye, and the rescue directly to Yahweh.” The need for this “early” type of messenger is particularly evident since the role of a human prophet was just developing and God uses the angel to communicate his will and message to the prophet. As the role of the prophet develops and becomes the standard for Israel, the role of the angel of the Lord gradually disappears. Not only does the angel communicate messages, but at times, serves as a guide and protector (Gn 24:7, 40; 1 Ki 19:5-7; 2 Ki 1:3, 15). As Yahweh’s emissary the angel appears as a special helper during the wilderness wanderings (Ex 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:24; 33:2), and is used as an instrument of judgment (2 Sm 24:26-27; 2 Ki 19:35; cf. Eichrodt 1967:23-24).

As prophets become the main communicators of the divine message, the angel of the Lord is less prominent in the Old Testament, but interestingly more frequent in the inter-testamental period. The prime example of prophet as messenger is observed in Moses. In fact, the role of Moses is greater than that of messenger according to Deuteronomy. There, only Moses and God speak and Moses is presented as the bearer of the divine word. “In Deuteronomy as a whole, however, the total focus is on Moses’ role as the mediator of the divine word, the spokesman for God to the people” (Miller 1993:302). Miller goes on to note that Moses is not only the communicator but also the teacher of the word (Dt 1:5; 4:5, 14; 5:30-31; 6:1)--a perspective that only Deuteronomy emphasizes. Moses is to communicate, teach, and provoke the people of God to observe the things taught (Dt 4:1, 5; 6:1). Prophets take over this role consequent to their call

when commissioned or sent to communicate messages to an individual or community. While this is not a prophet's only function, it is still the predominate purpose which a prophet fulfills—the prophet's primary characteristic was as messenger sent to Israel by God (Kaufmann 1960:216-217; cf. Holladay 1970:30).

In this respect, the Israelite prophet is very similar to the Mari prophet in function and some texts even show similarities in messenger-formulas used by prophets in Israel and Mesopotamia (Weinfeld 1975:179). Not only so, but Israelite prophets are often similar in function to certain officials in Mesopotamia. Holladay depicts the Neo-Assyrian messenger's role as follows:

The messenger was an official representative of the sender himself. The royal messenger stood in the court of the Great King, participated in the deliberative processes of the court, received the declaration of the king's wishes from the king's own mouth, and then carried the tablet or sealed roll of papyrus to its destination--in the case of imperial state administration, to the court of the vassal king. Here, received in the manner befitting a representative of the Great King, he would break the seals, hold up the letter, and proclaim, 'To PN, thus (says) PN: I am well, may your heart be at peace. Now concerning the matter of...'.
(Holladay 1970:31)

With this kind of introduction, the prophet would proceed to give the message. Old Testament prophets usually present their message according to a certain format and structure which often includes the formula, "Thus says the Lord" and ends with the characteristic, "says the Lord" (Is 45:11-13). Many of the prophetic oracles are introduced in a similar way. For example, Yahweh tells Nathan, "Go and say to my servant David, "Thus says Yahweh" (2 Sm 7:4-5, 8; cf. Jr 7:2-3 Ezk 2:4; 3:11). Therefore, an important focus for the prophet's work is as messenger to king and court. However, their roles as messengers also involved matters of war and went beyond that of the royal court to the general populace and even to international settings (Rabbe 1995:236).

Before we discuss this, however, we should emphasize the nature of the majority of prophetic messages. Most oracles are not directed only to the king but to the populace at large. Old Testament prophecy is often an exposition of contemporary events in the light of the Mosaic covenant. This interpretation frequently involves an exposition of the meaning behind certain calamities in nature. The prophets believed that Yahweh was Lord over nature and the condition of the natural environment reflected Israel's spiritual condition (Dt 28-29; Hs 3-8). Covenant curses were then connected to events in nature and the prophets would warn the people of failure, call them to repentance in the light of impending judgment and then provide the opportunity for repentance (Jl 1:2-12; 2:1-32; Am 4:6-13). Repentance would then bring about the covenant blessings. Thus, the prophetic word was both interpretive and direct, with the purpose of calling Israel to heed the word of Lord (Jr 11:1-17).

3.2 WAR RELATED PROPHECY

In the early period of Israel's history, the nation was formed during struggles for survival in diverse situations such as the oppression in Egypt. Even after the deliverance, the period of conquest proved challenging and therefore, we agree with Blenkinsopp (1983:66) that Israel "was forged as a nation in the crucible of warfare." It was essential for the prophet to communicate to the nation the divine will. In this context the prophets had a significant role to play in what may be referred to as "war prophecy." An early example of this can be seen in Abraham's role in the conflict of Genesis 14. Moreover, the religious conflict between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt requires Moses' role as messenger. Yahweh directs the battle and its consequences (Ex 6:28-7:5; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 13:17). The same is observed in the conquest period where Yahweh directs Joshua and the Israelites in their campaigns (Jos 1:2). "The Lord will fight for you; You need only to be still" (Ex 14:13), is an encouraging message to Israel. The Lord is a warrior (Ex 15:3). Following Moses' example, "The war oracle was pronounced by the prophet as courier of the

divine warrior, Yahweh of hosts” (Cross 1973:229). In Numbers 11:25-54, regulations are presented for disposal of the spoils of war and plunder.

When Saul becomes king over Israel he looks to Samuel for guidance, asking whether he should pursue the Philistines or not (1 Sm 14:36-43; 28:6; cf. of David in 1 Sm 23:2-9; 30:7-9). The situation arises when the king requires information from God whether the battle is sanctioned. In some cases prophets or priests use technical means with the ephod, *urim* and *thummim*, to receive direction. During the monarchy, the prophets had a greater role in this sphere. Perhaps the clearest examples are in 1 Kings 20:13-14, 22, 28; 22:6-28 and 2 Chronicles 18:6-27, where the man of God and Micaiah predict what will transpire between Syria and Israel. Elijah and Elisha are given the title “the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof” which signifies the military context and their role (2 Ki 2:12; 13:4).

Thus, the Old Testament prophets had an important role in war related issues to express the divine will on whether to proclaim holy war or to refrain from battle. Weber (1952:90-91) states, “The *casus foederis* of a confederate war, its army leader, and the object of the war were always charismatically and prophetically determined through inspirations and oracles sent by Yahweh as the warlord.” Therefore, the prophets had a major role in the nation during periods of conquest and war. As Israel’s power and influence diminished as a nation, the role of the prophet also receded. This was largely due to the implementation of the covenant curses where Israel is judged for breach of the covenant relationship—at that point, the prophets warn Israel of impending judgment at the hands of their enemies (cf. Nicholson 1995:345-353).

3.3 PROPHETS TO THE NATIONS

Prophetic messages were not only addressed to the kings and people of Israel. There is also an international orientation to the messages, since Israel believed that Yahweh was also sovereign over all nations. The Mosaic covenant claims the special relationship and election of Israel but recognizes that the whole earth belongs to Yahweh (Ex 19:5). Some of the nations who have oracles addressed against them have integral relationships with the Davidic empire and appear to be vassals at some time (Cross 1973:228-229; 345). However, Yahweh judges them according to their humanitarian failures rather than for covenantal breach as in Israel (Am 1-2). He not only addresses smaller states but also the great empires for they too were accountable to Yahweh for their behavior. Issues of brutality, slave trade and disrespect for the dead are addressed. Israel and Judah, however, are judged for rejecting the law and for their injustice. As Jeremiah indicates, prophecies against foreign nations were an important aspect of Old Testament prophecy. “From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms” (Jr 28:8).

Other prophets speak to foreign states such as Babylon (Is 13-14:27; 21:1-10; 48; Jr 50), Philistia (Is 14:28-32; Jr 47), Egypt (Is 19-20; Jr 46; Ezk 29), Tyre (Ezk 28:1-19), Edom (Is 34:5-15; Jr 49:7-22; Ezk 35) and several other nations. These prophecies are gathered into collections within the corpus of the Latter Prophets (Rabbe 1995:236). To emphasize God’s sovereignty over all the nations, they are not only indicted but used by Yahweh as instruments of his wrath. The nations are at times servants used by God to punish Israel and Judah and assist him in bringing the covenant curses upon them (Is 37: 26; 47:6-7; 2 Ki 19). Alternatively the nations may be used as instruments of blessing and restoration for Israel and Judah (Is 44:28-45:1; Jr 25:12; 29:10; Ez 1:1-2). Ultimately all the nations are accountable to Yahweh for their deeds (Jr 25:15-38). They will also be welcome to participate in Yahweh’s salvation (Is 2:2-4; 19:19-25; 25:6-9; Mic 4:1-3). Although there are several purposes for these oracles, Israel believed that their God could intervene in the history of the nations in order to benefit not only Israel but all the

nations (Rabbe 1995:254). As Israel's influence diminishes globally, so does the internationally oriented prophetic message decline and eventually cease.

3.4 PROPHECY AND THE FUNCTION OF THE DIVINE COUNCIL

The authority for the messenger comes from the sender. For the most part the sender is identified as God, but there are also a number of texts which refer to the divine council (Robinson 1944: 151). The concept of a "divine council," with an earthly corresponding prototype in the royal council, is not new in Israel but evident in other ancient Near Eastern cultures (Gordon 1995:78-81). It appears that decisions are often formulated in a council and then acted upon by the commissioned messenger. In the Old Testament the messenger could be "the angel of the Lord," a prophet, or even a spirit (1 Ki 22:20-22; 25:5-19, 28). The divine council members are "the holy ones," "the sons of God," or simply "the gods" (Ross 1962:103). At times the veracity of a prophet's message is evaluated according to its inspiration in the divine council (Ezk 13:9). Jeremiah asks,

But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word? 'I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied.' But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.

(Jeremiah 23: 18, 21-22)

Thus, Yahweh and the divine council make decisions and send their message by way of inspired messengers (Gn 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; 28:12; Job 1:6, 12; 2:1, 7; Zch 3:1-10; Ps 82; 89:6-8). "The prophet becomes in effect the *mal'ak* or herald of Yahweh's council, and like a supernatural ambassador mediates the divine pronouncement" (Cross 1973:187).

Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord asking, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”-- to which Isaiah volunteers as messenger (Is 6:8; cf. 40:1-8; 48:20-21; 57:14). The ultimate authority for the prophetic messenger lies in the council of the Lord who calls, inspires, reveals, and then sends the announcement to its intended audience. “The prophet is the messenger of the divine court or council, and his authority rests upon the absolute authority of the council, its great Judge or great King who pronounces the judgment which the prophetic messenger is to transmit” (Cross: 1973:189). Therefore, the most vital part of the prophetic role is to receive and communicate the divine message accurately. If the divine council ceases to function and inspire, the prophetic messenger has nothing to announce.

3.5 THE MONARCHY AND COURT PROPHETS

Court prophets are closely associated with the administration of various Israelite kings. Cross (1973:223) claims, “It is fair to say that the institution of prophecy appeared simultaneously with kingship in Israel and fell with kingship.” But before this period, individual prophets appeared with messages during times of special crisis and domestic problems in order to facilitate transitions (Overholt 1989:112). According to the Deuteronomistic history, Samuel is the prime example of the prophetic leader in Israel. Samuel is very involved with the beginning of the monarchy and anoints both Saul and David to kingship. The prophet also reproves and censures Saul for disobedience (1 Sm 10:1; 13:11; 15:11; 16:13). Cross (1973:223-224) summarizes the key roles of the prophet as follows:

Samuel is described as engaged in several activities which will characterize functions of the prophet in the following century in Israel. (1) He designated the chosen of Yahweh to be king by royal oracle and anointing. (2) He pronounced judgment on the king, the forfeit of kingship for breach of law or covenant, as well as the death of the king for like reasons. (3) He called Israel to battle in the authentic “war of Yahweh,” as well as determined the times for Israel to go to war (in victory or in defeat).

This is basically the pattern which prophets emulate in the prophetic literature. As court prophets they are vitally involved with court matters. Similarly, Nathan is involved in David's court--he announces the covenant to David (2 Sm 7) but also exposes and confronts the king's personal sin (2 Sm 12:1). Likewise, Gad the seer announces judgment to David (2 Sm 24:11-12). Nathan and Zadok the priest are involved in anointing Solomon to the throne (1 Ki 1:34). Other court prophets and their respective functions are observed in narratives which include Ahijah (1 Ki 11:29-39), Shemaiah (1 Ki 12:22-24), Iddo the seer (1 Chr 9:29), Jehu (1 Ki 16:1-4, 7, 12; 2 Chr 20:34), Elijah (1 Ki 17:10; 19:16), Micaiah (1 Ki 22:8, 17), and Elisha (2 Ki 2 ; 8:13; 18:15-16).

As stated above, the function of court prophets includes the anointing of kings and the initiation of various events. They then record their actions and the development of those events which they initiate. In this sense they are dynamically identified with the forward movement of Israel's history. The purpose of recording events and changes in the monarchy are to explain the guilt or innocence of specific kings, and to provide reasons for the nation's ultimate exile. At the same time, they record the Lord's promises in order to demonstrate his faithfulness in fulfilling his words and covenant. Thus, court prophets serve as scribes and preservers of court records. These court records appear to be the sources for much of the historical literature in the Former Prophets and in the Chronicles. The records kept by the prophets are referred to as the Chronicles of Samuel the Seer, the Chronicles of Nathan the Prophet, and the Chronicles of Gad the Seer (1 Chr 29:29). Others include the records of Nathan, the prophecy of Ahijah, and the visions of Iddo the Seer (2 Chr 9:29). Also, the records of Shemiah the prophet, the records of Iddo the Seer (2 Chr 12:15), the book of Jehu (2 Chr 20:34), and the visions of Isaiah the prophet (2 Chr 26:22; 32:32), were used to write the Old Testament Scriptures. Such records were, therefore, a preliminary step towards the canonization of Scripture—a process which intensified as individual prophet's aged and eventually died. Records were carefully selected, edited and preserved.

Canonization marks an important step in the community as Israel recognized the changing times and were determined to preserve the inspired messages of the prophets.

This brief summary indicates a powerful and positive function for the prophets. However, with the rise of the monarchic era, conflicts between prophets and kings are all too evident. Whereas, prophets before the monarchic era have political leadership functions (Jdg 4:4-14; 1 Sm 2:27-36; 3:15-18; 7:3-11; 10:17-24), they serve mainly as messengers, record keepers, and advisors during the monarchy (Zevit 2001:497). Prophet's roles ostensibly diminish in power. Some kings seem to keep them silent (Solomon), and their lives are often threatened (1 Sm 16:2; 1 Ki 13:4; 17:1-18:2; 22:26-27). Even so, they still hold an important role in Israel as divine agents of Yahweh.

3.6 ANONYMOUS PROPHETS AND PROPHETIC GROUPS

In the Old Testament we are also introduced to prophets who are part of a guild or members of prophetic groups. These prophets are at times referred to as “sons of the prophets” [*bene hannebhi' im*] with some discipleship type of relationship (1 Sm 10:5-20; 1 Ki 20:35-43; 22:6-13; 2 Ki 2:3-18; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1-4), and are “loosely organized groups accepting the guidance and tutelage of various prophets” (Zevit 2001:498). They appear to form some kind of a sub-culture in society.⁷ Their activities are often connected to a specific location or sanctuary with which they are connected. Examples include Gibeah (1 Sm 10:5) Ramah (1 Sm 19:18), Bethel (2 Ki 2:3), Gilgal (2 Ki 2:1), and even Samaria (1 Ki 22:10). The composition of these groups and their structure is not very clear from the Old Testament texts. They are simply introduced into various contexts where they apparently have an accepted social function in the community. No details on a call or membership, roles, duties and functions are given, but Blenkinsopp (1995:133, 137) suggests that they may have been bands of the economically and socially marginalized due to

the pressure from Philistine expansion (cf. 2 Ki 4:1-7, 38-41)--as such they were perhaps recruited to these communal bands. Provision for the groups comes through alms or payment for the provision of information (Nm 22; 1 Sm 10:2; 28:6; 2 Sm 7:1-17.; 1 Ki 14:1-3; 22:5-15; 2 Ki 4:8, 42; 5:22; 6:21-22; 8:7). The sons of the prophets associated with Elisha were very dependent on him, as noted by Bergen (1999:176) who states that, "The inability of the sons of the prophets to feed itself (2 Ki 4:38-41), care for its widows (2 Ki 4:1), or solve basic problems (2 Ki 6:5) without the aid of a wonder worker makes it difficult for readers to perceive this group as an alternative to the social structure of the larger society."

A presider or leader who is called a master or father seems to give oversight to the group (1 Sm 10:12; 19:20; 1 Ki 22:6-12; 2 Ki 4:1, 38; 6:1, 5, 21). The title "father," "indicates a distinctive type of charismatic organization and corresponding leadership of a familial, emotional, and personal kind" (Blenkinsopp 1995:134). Some consider these prophets to be disciples of the leader who may live together or congregate for certain functions. These functions may include the provision of information, playing instruments, and singing, but mostly they are

presented as a group who actively prophesy. The actual content of this type of prophecy is not indicated. Samuel tells Saul that he will meet such a procession of prophets who will be prophesying while musicians play flutes, lyres, tambourines and harps (1 Sm 10:5). They prophesy by the Spirit of the Lord and come from the high place at Gibeah. In the court of the king of Israel, four hundred prophets are also active in prophesying before the king in order to convey the divine will or purpose (1 Ki 22:11-13), and some texts number the members in groups of fifty (1 Ki 18:13; 2 Ki 2:7). Prophetic bands are particularly active in the northern and central parts of Israel and are mentioned from the eleventh century to the period of the Omride dynasty.

Although the texts do not detail how membership in prophetic guilds is achieved, there must have been some form of confirmation that one was able to receive the Spirit of God for prophesying. Prophets are usually mentioned as part of a group within society and since individuals function as those who receive the divine word and appear with messages, other prophets may function in the same way--they are recognized as part of a significant social group in the nation (Is 3:2-3; 28:7; Jr 6:13; 8:1; 14:18; 18:18; Ezk 13:9; Hs 4:4-5; Mi 3:11; Zph 3:4). Perhaps out of these groups we see the special messages of individuals presented such as Nathan (2 Sm 7:1; 12:1; 24:11), Ahijah of Shiloh (1 Ki 11:29), the man of God from Judah (1 Ki 13:1), Ahijah (1 Ki 14:1), Jehu son of Hanani (1 Ki 16:1), and another prophet (1 Ki 20:13). The groups of prophets are often active in times of war or political and religious upheaval as noted above. They or their leader are involved in issuing instructions and predicting success in battle (1 Ki 20:13-15, 22, 28, 35-43; 22:10-12). Since these groups are only mentioned during a certain period of Israel's history, particularly during the monarchy, their influence probably declined along with the monarchy period.

3.7 THE PROPHETS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO INSTITUTIONS AND CULTUS

We have noted the integral role of the court prophet to matters of kingship and monarchy. An example of support given by a prophet to an individual king is during the Davidic period. Nathan especially supports David in the selection of Jerusalem and in regards to preparations for the temple (2 Sm 7). The temple becomes the focal point for the cultus in Israel. Although the prophets make critical comments about cultic observances (Is 1:11-17; Jr 7:21-28; Mic 6:6-8), there are also many who are interested in the positive use of the temple and sacrificial system (Is 6:1-5; Hg 1:7-8; Zch 2:14-16; Ml 1:6-2:9). The connection of the prophets to the cultus and the priesthood is an important aspect to consider for with its demise, the prophetic voice apparently recedes. According to Tournay (1991:31), "The definitive disappearance of the king in Israel was

accompanied by the progressive extinction of the institution of prophecy. After the catastrophe of 587 BCE, it was the Levitical singers who took over this role in their own way and conducted themselves as cultic prophets, fully aware of being inspired by the Spirit of YHWH.” The Chronicler depicts the Levitical singers as prophets (cf. Petersen 1977:98-100).

Initially in Israel there were a multiplicity of sanctuaries where various cultic rituals would take place, until Shiloh took more prominence (1 Sm 1-3; Albertz 1994a:87). As religious and theological beliefs developed, the prophets and priests worked towards a consensus of thought regarding Yahwism and appropriate practices. But in addition to cultic functions, there apparently was a measure of “instrumental prophecy” whereby enquiries addressed to Yahweh would be answered by prophets (Albertz 1994a:88). Therefore, an area which has been widely discussed is whether the prophets should be considered “cult prophets.” This term is used by Johnson (1962:58-59) to indicate the intercessory and spokesman roles of the prophet. This theoretical context for the prophets supposes that they were involved in the liturgical and ritual activities offered to the nation and individuals (Zevit 2001:499). Prophetic utterances are understood to have been communicated at the cultic center, not just through the liturgical service of the priest, but directly by prophets. In this view, the main feature which distinguishes the priest from prophet is that “cult prophets have a special gift of power or inspiration which makes them bearers of the prophetic word,” and this power comes by the inspiration of the Spirit of God (Mowinckel 1987:76).

In 1922 Mowinckel (1987:74-98) presented the idea that prophets were active in a cultic setting where they gave a prophetic reply or guidance to the inquirer’s religious questions. He showed the similarities between priestly activities in teaching and providing guidance and that of the prophet’s role. He views the prophet as an “employee of the society”--one who serves between the two members of the covenant. He understands the prophet as

One who by appointment of society as well as by the divinity, provides the community with necessary information in religious things directly from a divine source by virtue of an extraordinary supply of power, one who definitely knows about divine things, either because he is inspired or capable of receiving revelations or because technical means are available to him through which he can mediate the will and instructions of the divinity and can convey the same to the community as an answer to a question or to a prayer.

(Mowinckel 1987:75)

He acknowledges that the utterance or oracle goes through a process of formalization and frequent use. Mowinckel theorizes that prophets are observed to be active in the following settings. At times they appear at festivals and perform cultic actions (1 Ki 18:16-22; Jr 26; 28; 36). Prophetic voices belong to the festival which includes sacrifices, singing, music and the prophesying shows a fixed form and content according to his exegesis of Psalm 132 and 81. Prophets may also visit a high place (1 Sm 10:5) and may be based at cultic sites such as Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho. Early in Israel's history he takes note of Balaam who builds an altar and offers sacrifices before he can prophesy (Nm 22-24).

In the Old Testament the *nebiim* and priests are often mentioned together (Is 28:7; Jr 4:9; 6:13; 14:18; 18:18; Mi 3:11; Zch 7:3), and in fact, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are both priest and *nabi*. Some texts may indicate an institution of temple prophets (1 Chr 15:22, 27; Jr 29:26) who belong to Levites and singers (2 Chr 20:14). Thus he says, "we find it completely normal to seek for cult prophets and also authors of prophetic psalms employed among the temple singers" (Mowinckel 1987:87). As examples he refers to 1 Kings 22, Jeremiah 28, and 2 Chronicles 20 as typical instances where the prophet provides Yahweh's answer to the situation at hand. "It's form is naturally a free, unsought, momentary inspiration; therefore the Chronicler also says: the spirit of the Lord came upon him (2 Chr 20:14). The enthusiastic singer now promises in Yahweh's name the complete destruction of the enemy." These prophets are assumed into the levitical ranks until

the institution of cultic prophecy died out. Even Haggai and Zechariah are temple prophets who use the cult imagery in their prophecy. Mowinckel claims the main context for cultic oracles is in public days of fasting and repentance, as well as when inquiry about wars and battles are made, and when great religious-national festivals are celebrated (1 Chr 15). The main problem with Mowinckel's theories concern the extrapolation of information from the Chronicler which is then generally applied to the idea of cultic prophecy during earlier periods (cf. Tournay 1991:29). During the monarchy, priests mainly officiate the cultus and prophets are generally seen in other social settings (Wilson 1980:51-56)

To a certain degree, there may be examples in the Old Testament to add credence to Mowinckel's assertions. Many of the Psalms have verses in which God speaks in the first person singular, often interrupting the previous movement of the psalm—an indicator of possible prophetic interruption. In addition, the intercessory role of prophets shows an association with the sanctuary and Israel's cultus (Mayes 1993:36). Samuel and Eli serve at Shiloh (1 Sm 3:1) while other prophets perform duties at Gibeah (1 Sm 10:5; cf. 1 Ki 18; 2 Ki 4:25). "Prophecy represented a power for radical change that derived from within Israelite social institutions rather from outside those institutions. With this understanding of the nature of prophecy, it is not impossible that even the classical prophets should be closely related to the institutional cult (Mayes 1993:37). However, the Old Testament also indicates that the prophets were normally not happy or pleased with the typical cultic practices of the priests. Indeed many of them were critical of the cultus. Even though the sacrificial system is a dominant feature of the Mosaic covenant and in the Pentateuch, the prophets often reject and denounce the sacrifices and general abuses of the system. This perspective is usually referred to as ethical in contrast to cultic. The attitude and view can be summarized in the condemnation of Saul by the prophet Samuel (1 Sm 15:20-25). The prophets denounce improper approaches to sacrifice and appeal to people to behave in appropriate social ways (Jr 7:1-8; 22:3-5; Hs 6:6; 8:11-14; Mi 6:6-8; Mal 1:6-14). A typical

message states, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts...Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.” But then the refrain comes to appeal, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Am 5:21-24). Not only do the prophets condemn the cult established by Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan (Amos and Hosea), but they also condemn the cult at Jerusalem (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi). For the most part, prophets are not so much against the sacrificial system but against the false attitudes and practices of the priests and worshipers. They were against religious practices which separated morality from sacrifice and ritual.

Since the existence of cultic prophets during various periods in Israel’s history is still “sharply debated and problematic” (Tournay 1991:30; cf. Gordon 1995b:9-10), it is best to recognize the extensive functions that prophets play without speculating on their cultic affiliations. At times they perform various functions for individuals which may be done at the temple, and at other times they denounce the activities of the temple and cultus. Whatever the specific roles of the “cultic prophets” were, they are best to be understood as serving during the second temple period, and not during the monarchy and earliest periods of Israel’s history.

4 CHAPTER THREE SUMMARY

This chapter presents some of the key components of Israelite prophecy as contained in the Old Testament. At this point we draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the end of prophecy in Israel. The overview of prophetic accounts concerning a divine call indicates that some prophets had a unique experience which convinced them that they were called by Yahweh from other pursuits of life to be his own messengers and servants. The great paradigm for call narratives is observed in regards to Moses. Although a reluctant leader, he becomes the great prophet who speaks authoritatively for Yahweh. Yahweh promises to raise up prophets like

Moses who will be mediators to Israel (Dt 18:18). This great assurance to Israel provides the encouragement that God will continue to speak through called, commissioned, and authorized prophets. To a degree, this theological notion negates the idea that prophecy will become inactive and goes against the thought of prophetic cessation in general. Based on this idea, where the prophetic word comes to an end, there appears to be an anticipation of a renewal of the divine word at some future time. However, the fact that recorded call narratives cease after Ezekiel may imply that Yahweh no longer calls prophets.

As noted, not all prophets provide details of their call. Sanders (1972:58) affirms that, “Not every prophetic book records the prophet’s story of his call, just as not every prophetic book records the prophet’s reference to Israel’s story of God’s mighty acts in creating her and making her a people apart. But there is sufficient material in the prophetic corpus to see that both references were indeed very important.” Prophets were the authoritative spokesmen for God to his people. They were sent to announce his intentions in history and although they were not always listened to by the general populace, their words were validated by the community in the canonization of their prophecies. The crucial purpose of call narratives lies in regards to the authority of individual prophetic messages. Some prophets had to verify their words which were then recognized and preserved by the community. The emphasis was on the fact that Yahweh had revealed his words to the prophets, and that the divine council had inspired specific messages for God’s people.

Whether there are prophets and contemporary messages then, is determined on whether or not Yahweh has sent or inspired a message. The word of God is communicated through unique and diverse means which involve the work of the Spirit of God and the divine council. Inspiration in the Old Testament among true prophets is always initiated by God who imparts to the prophet his message and instructions. Therefore, the prophets emphasize the reception of the word and

present it using various formulas to indicate “Thus says the Lord.” The loss of the presence of the Spirit meant that inspiration would also diminish and result in imitation or auto-inspiration where some prophets manufactured their own messages. Therefore, an interruption in this process occurs when there is no inspiration and no message for the prophet. The role of the Spirit of God is crucial in this process. By the Spirit, the message is given, the word becomes powerful, effectual, and is brought to fulfilment. Persistent rejection of this word leads to the grieving of the Spirit whose presence eventually departs and leads to periods of silence.

Another form of authorization which was prized during some periods of Israel’s history is that of ecstatic expression. This external and visible act of prophesying and manifesting various expressions, mainly communicated to the audience that Yahweh was present in the message and activities of the prophets. However, the external emphasis apparently gave rise to aberrations in behavior that were not tolerated. These aberrations could technically lead to the rejection of prophecy altogether. However, even though some prophets do not refer to the Spirit of God as inspiring such behavior, they still indicate that prophecy was a necessary function. Therefore, ecstasy is an important function during certain times of Israel’s history and a valid expression.

The roles of the prophet are often determined by the historical events and transitions in the nation as well as by the specific needs among the people. Their involvement in the king’s court, in the cultus, in presenting oracles and messages to kings, individuals, or the populace in general, was determined by the political and spiritual needs of the nation. As covenant mediators, they often had much to say when the covenant relationship with Yahweh was in jeopardy. Most of the prophet’s messages were presented in this regard. The prophet proclaimed covenant breach and indicated the judgment which would come if there was no repentance. Thus, the roles of the prophet were determined by Yahweh from time to time and ended when the need in the nation and various institutions ceased.

During the monarchy, the kings liked to use prophets for their own purposes and needs, whether it was during a time of war or building or rallying the people for support. The court prophets served in various capacities but often animosities between king and prophet are evident (1 Ki 22). When the prophet took his rightful role as spokesman on behalf of Yahweh, his authority and power was over that of the king. The conflicts that resulted when kings did not recognize prophetic authority (1 Ki 13), could end in the death of the prophet. At times the prophets went into hiding from the wrath of kings when their message went against the popular theology (Elijah). Also, the prophets had much to say against the abuse of the sacrificial system. With the end of the temple cult and the exile, prophetic messages and services changed. Ultimately, the functions of the prophet appear to come to an end in Israel as the monarchy expires.

An interesting document to close the prophetic scroll with is the book of Malachi (*mal'aki*) which is an anonymous book--Malachi means "my messenger." Traditionally he is the last Old Testament prophet who brings prophetic activity to an end. But the book holds out hope and the anticipation that, "See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me" (Mi 3:1). This is reinforced in Malachi 4:5 where Elijah is the prophet who will be sent once again to God's people. The Old Testament then appears to come to two paradoxical conclusions. One is the recognition that prophets were called for a certain time and purpose but that at some point, Yahweh no longer called them. Secondly, there is an anticipation that prophecy would be renewed and that God would once again send a messenger on his behalf.

Eventually, however, the people inquired as to whether God was actually still speaking to them. Times came when the people desired a word but did not receive a message--Yahweh appeared to be silent (1 Ki 19; Ezk 7:26-27; Am 8:11-14; Mi 3:4-7). He no longer called, commissioned or functioned through the prophets. In this regard, the Psalmist claimed, "We are

given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left and none of us knows how long this will be” (Ps 74:9). Zechariah also spoke of the day when prophets would be removed and no longer sent by Yahweh to speak on his behalf (13:2-5). This eventually leads to the comment in 1 Maccabees 9:27 which concludes that prophecy actually ceased at some point in the past. “There was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them” (cf. 1 Macc 4:46; 14:41). Therefore, all that Israel had at certain points of history was the tradition of the prophets which they attended to by preserving, reading, and teaching, with the hope that Yahweh’s will and message would be made known through the written word.

CHAPTER THREE ENDNOTES

1. Coats (1979:34) refers to Exodus 3:1-4:18 as the “Moses–Aaron Vocation Account.”
2. For surveys of various interpretations, see: North (1948), Rowley (1965), Hugenberg (1995).
3. The references in Ezra do not imply that he is a prophet but mainly support the theological understanding of this type of terminology used to convey notions of inspiration and preservation.
4. This point does not mean this is the only connotation of the terminology, for as Roberts (1971:246) points out, in the ancient Near East it can refer to “the disastrous manifestation of the supernatural power.” This may be the case in Exodus 9:15 but in the prophetic literature it usually

indicates the prophet's response to the divine influence in the prophet's life—which may be painful and stressful but also accompanied by ecstatic experiences (Roberts 1971:251).

5. This is an important observation made by Von Rad (1953:74-91). Note the following prophetic declarations (P) and their fulfillment (F): Jos 6:26 (P) 1 Ki 16:34 (F); 1 Sm 2:27-36 (P) 1 Ki 2:26-27 (F); 2 Sm 7:13 (P) 1 Ki 8:20 (F); 1 Ki 11:29 (P) 1 Ki 12:15b (F); 1 Ki 13 (P) 2 Ki 23:16-18 (F); 1 Ki 14:16 (P) 1 Ki 15:29 (F); 1 Ki 16:1 (P) 1 Ki 16:12 (F); 1 Ki 22:17 (P) 1 Ki 22:35 (F); 2 Ki 1:6 (P) 2 Ki 1:17 (F); 2 Ki 10:30 (P) 2 Ki 15:12 (F); 2 Ki 22:15 (P) 2 Ki 23:20 (F). Zevit (2001:481-486) provides 58 examples of prophecy and fulfillment from the Former Prophets!

6. Chapter Two also discusses the various terms used to describe some of the roles prophets had in Israel (cf. Petersen 1981).

7. The “sons of the prophets” are mentioned in 1 Kings 20:35 and then again in 2 Kings 2. No descriptive material is given to note their social role or function. The interpretation of this group depends on the reconstructions of Israelite society proposed by various authors. It is assumed that they were responsible for the collection and preservation of some of the stories concerning Elisha, and yet, the narratives generally reflect a negative view of these “sons” (cf. Bergen 1999:5760). Furthermore, they seem to be very dependent on the “father” figure among them, rather than being mature, developing prophets (2 Ki 2-6).