

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATING OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Questions regarding the authenticity and veracity of individual prophetic messages arise in the Old Testament. Incidents occur where certain elements of prophetic behavior are called into question and indicate that the expressions of prophecy can be construed as wrong, misguided, false, counterfeit, delusional, or simply inauthentic. In this chapter, texts and narratives will be considered which show a development in prophetic circles towards disruptions in prophecy. Ultimately, such disruptions lead to the cessation of prophecy in an individual prophet's experience and role, as well as in the canonical role such prophecy plays. Scholars refer to this problem in a variety of ways, including labels such as prophetic conflict, false prophecy, or prophetic dissonance. A number of factors that address the falsification and possible loss of prophecy will be examined as they arise in key texts. These factors include the role of the Spirit of God, religious and theological beliefs, moral issues, as well as social and political affiliations. As specific texts are discussed, they apparently imply a "degeneration" of prophecy which ultimately could lead to the diminished value and end of prophecy.

1 WILL THE REAL PROPHET PLEASE STAND UP?

A growing concern for the people of God in the Old Testament is the question of the authentic message of God. Unfortunately, proof regarding which prophetic message actually comes from Yahweh is not always easily determined. Overholt (1989:10) claims that “biblical evidence has not made possible the formulation of a set of concrete rules that could be applied in a straightforward way by anyone desiring to distinguish a true from a false prophet! As a result, interpretations of prophetic conflict have tended to have a theological cast” (cf. Long 1995:309; Sanders 1987:87; Carroll 1981:192; Blenkinsopp 1983:186). Crenshaw (1971:111) goes even further when he notes the difficulty that prophets had in proving their words were authoritative. “Not a single one of the numerous criteria proposed for this purpose functioned in the present moment (cf. 1 Ki 13) either for the prophet or for his hearers, both of whom needed to know whether a spoken word carried any more weight than the authority of its bearer. The result was increasing polarization of prophet against prophet, and people against people, followed by claim and counterclaim, self-assertion and inner turmoil.” Furthermore, Eichrodt (1961:333) indicates that one of the main dangers to prophecy occurs in the context of the monarchy. “The development of a sense of office and power which believed itself capable of controlling the divine revelation, and sought to be Lord over the word.”

Since the Old Testament canon provides some answers and perspectives which show the communities’ understanding and evaluation, it provides an important discussion that has implications for the end of prophecy. Although it is difficult to establish criteria to discern true from false prophecy, we must assess the texts and describe the issues as they arise. We also must acknowledge a “certain bias” on the part of those who authored and collected the biblical documents. “Careful study of the traditions has exposed therein a history of developing consensus among people who were convinced of the religious truth and value of certain individual prophets,

and of the falsity of those who opposed them” (Long 1995:308 cf. Zevit 2001:508). This is important because in the end, the consensus of the community of God’s people who received the word, indicated their understanding of true and false prophecy. Therefore, in this chapter we will consider relevant passages dealing with this subject and then consider recent contributions to the discussion in order to provide insight on how this development may affect the cessation of prophecy.

1.1 TRUE PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE PENTATEUCH

How do we know that the prophet’s message is what Yahweh actually said? The answer to this question is formulated to a limited degree in the Pentateuch. The problem of knowing the actual word of Yahweh arises due to the mediation process. Israel’s response to the theophany at Sinai is a call for mediation. “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Ex 20:19; Dt 5:22-33). Fear motivated this request but Yahweh responds favorably by raising up Moses to communicate the divine purpose, will, and message of Yahweh to the people. The book of Deuteronomy presents Moses as the great prophet and spokesman for God as he imparts the words of Yahweh to Israel (Dt 1:1). Furthermore, Yahweh indicates that this is the way he will continue to communicate his words to Israel. “I will raise up 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). Although Old Testament mediators include priests and kings, prophets have a distinctive role as they communicate the word of Yahweh and mediate between God, people, and other leaders. To a degree, Abraham is presented in this role as he intercedes for Abimelech and Sodom (Gn 18:17; 20:7).

Human nature lends itself to the possibility of a communication breakdown in the mediation process. “This is so because prophecy is essentially a process by which an intermediary

(the prophet) facilitates communication between the human and divine realms” (Gordon 1995:333). Two other major areas of potential disruption in the process involve the character and moral behavior of the prophet and the actual content of the prophetic word. The Old Testament emphasizes that a prophet should only speak what Yahweh inspires. Failure to do so could be fatal. “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything in the name of other gods, must be put to death” (Dt 18:20). Some prophets did not take this admonition seriously. Thus, it was vital for Israel to evaluate accurately, to recognize the true prophetic word, and to reject the presumptuous word.

1.2 NUMBERS 11-12: MOSES AND AUTHORIZED PROPHECY

In Numbers 11 and 12 we have a prophetic theme raised which indicates the potential for prophetic conflict. The context in Numbers 11 presents a climactic incident where the characteristic grumbling of the people of Israel come to a head. Moses feels the weight of burden, laments this predicament and requests for help with his leadership tasks. Yahweh instructs Moses to assemble seventy elders and officers to assist him in meeting the people’s needs. Yahweh proposes to take from the spirit which is on Moses and share it with the seventy elders in order to enable them in assisting Moses. This is the first narrative which indicates that Mosaic leadership was charismatic or enabled by the Spirit of God. Also, an example of prophetic fulfilment is noted where Yahweh’s word is to be verified. “Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not” (Nm 11:23). Yahweh’s word is fulfilled and the elders receive the spirit which inspires them to prophesy. This features the vital connection between the Spirit of God and prophecy. Apparently the prophetic functions inspired by the Spirit, legitimize the leadership role of the elders for Israel. An issue arises when two men named Eldad and Medad, who are not part of the seventy, also begin to prophesy while yet in the camp. It is Joshua who objects to this, perhaps thinking it is illegitimate. It was not according to the prescribed place at the Tent of Meeting.

However, Moses is not intimidated by this and expresses the programmatic desire that all God's people would be prophets (Nm 11:29)!

Due to the brevity of this narrative, it is difficult to specifically say what potential conflict may be indicated. The identity of Eldad and Medad is not known. Whether they are part of the seventy elders is not completely clear but it appears they are in addition to the seventy elders. Even the role of "prophesying" on this one occasion can only be speculated on. The narrative may be used as an eitiology to indicate two different forms of prophetic authority—this arises when the two prophesy in the camp while the seventy are at the prescribed Tent of Meeting. Budd (1984:127) thinks that there is a concern "that possession of the spirit should play its part in the professional institutions, represented by the elders, and in the charisma of men freely raised up by God to declare his word." Therefore, Yahweh may choose to speak through recognized leaders or even through individuals or non-professionals. The Spirit of God is free to use whoever he desires and can do so even at an unauthorized place (Dafni 2000:373). Whatever the case may be, the narrative indicates that the essential element for leadership authorization and prophecy is the spirit bestowed by Yahweh. In order not to speculate on the silences of the narrative, perhaps the most we can determine in the passage regarding prophecy is that there will always be a voice, like Joshua's, crying for some prophets to stop prophesying! Some who "prophesy" may be unauthorized for this function and discernment is necessary. Prophetic conflict was thus a possibility from the beginning of prophetic expression in Israel. Whereas it may be speculative that Joshua represents a "kind of sanctuary clericalism" the fact remains that "leadership must be prepared to hear the authentic voice of prophecy in such as Eldad and Medad who here represent the nonprofessional prophets" (Budd 1984:130).

The narrative which follows is another that raises issues of prophetic role and authority. In fact a direct challenge of Mosaic authority is presented by Miriam and Aaron. The main issue

seems to be the question, “Has the Lord only spoken through Moses?” (Nm 12:2). The issue is very serious judging from Yahweh’s response. The divine clarification and defense of Moses and explanation is worth noting. “When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Nm 12:6). Apparently, “prophetic inspiration is compared unfavorably with the direct guidance given by God to Moses” (Coggins 1993:87). In an earlier narrative, Yahweh encourages Moses to trust him for prophetic speech: “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Ex 4:12). Even so, Moses was a reluctant prophet, and God had to also use Aaron to be a spokesman. In that case, Yahweh promised to help them both but Moses would still be in charge—“as if you were God to him” (Ex 4:16). Rank, role and selection are elements that arise in Numbers 12. Although Aaron and Miriam were also viewed as having prophetic functions (Ex 15:20), Moses had an elevated relationship, position, and responsibility before Yahweh.

In both of the Numbers narratives, there are serious consequences indicated. The people of Israel who are implicated in the rebellion are judged and Miriam is punished. The latter narrative raises the issue of prophetic inspiration, authority, and validation. Who is authorized to speak for Yahweh? Who can question the selected, inspired, and authorized vessel of Yahweh? Apparently, these questions regarding prophecy continue to arise throughout Israel’s history.

1.3 NUMBERS 22-24: THE EXAMPLE OF BALAAM

Much has been written about the character of Balaam son of Beor who acquired quite a negative reputation according to some biblical traditions. His origins are somewhat obscure but he was obviously a highly respected seer with the ability to produce results based on divination (Nm

22:5-7). There seems to be two main perspectives of Balaam in the texts and attempts to determine which tradition espouses the negative and positive views are made in scholarship. A detailed presentation of the Yahwistic and Elohist accounts maybe helpful in juxtaposing the seemingly contradictory perspectives (Budd 1984:257-261; Van Seters 1997:127-130). However, the main purpose of the narrative must ultimately be determined from the role these chapters seem to emphasize in the book of Numbers and in the Pentateuch. Specific contents in the narratives actually illustrate what true prophets should do and say according to texts in Deuteronomy. In addition, other references to Balaam and his role as seer and prophet must be considered.

The main emphasis of Balaam in the Numbers 22-24 narrative, is that he cannot say anything other than what Yahweh permits him to say. Therefore, even though Balaam proceeds to go through the motions of divinatory practices, in the end he will only say what Yahweh inspires. This is noted at the outset when he informs the leaders sent by Balak, “I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God” (Nm 22:18; 42:13). Balaam sticks to this perspective and understands that he cannot manipulate Yahweh in changing his mind from blessing the covenant people to cursing them. For Yahweh said, “You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed” (Nm 22:12). The repetition of this theme indicates its importance and shows that Balaam was an accurate spokesman for Yahweh. “I must speak only what God puts in my mouth” (Nm 22:20, 35, 38; 23:3, 12, 16, 26; 24:13). To this requirement, Balaam appears to be an upright and effective messenger who consistently frustrates Balak with oracles that support Israel. Balaam is a great example, therefore, in two major ways. He speaks the words of Yahweh as inspired and he stands up against the personal interests of Balak even though this meant the loss of personal fortune for Balaam. This is an important lesson for court prophets of other periods who were similarly tested to support the interests of kings rather than the interests of Yahweh. “The story is a dramatic vindication of the independence of the prophetic spirit over against kings, and of the invincibility of Israel under God” (Budd 1984:272).

Furthermore, Balaam is presented as a typical prophet in his judgment oracle over Moab (Nm 24:15-19).

Although Balaam looks like a faithful and competent messenger, other references indicate negative traits in his behavior. One aspect is in regards to spiritual sensitivity and obedience. Balaam apparently is eager to go to Balak and Yahweh eventually permits him to go. However, Yahweh is angry that Balaam went (Nm 22:22). The story of the angel and Balaam's donkey highlights the fact that Balaam is insensitive and will only be effective if he has his "eyes opened" by Yahweh. His eagerness to go to Balak is described as a reckless or perverse path (Nm 22:32). The negative features in the narratives are most likely due to the divinatory practices which Balaam employs. The altars and sacrifice rituals are indicative of ancient Near Eastern practices believed to manipulate the gods to perform certain favors for mankind—in this case, to curse Israel and make them impotent in harming the people of Moab. This method is viewed negatively in the narratives and Yahweh indicates it will not work. "There is no sorcery against Jacob, no divination against Israel" (Nm 23:23). The fact that sorcery or divination was being practiced is made explicit in Numbers 24:1. Also, Balak takes Balaam to Bamoth Baal for the first sacrifice which has implications for false worship (Nm 22:41). In some contexts where true and false prophecy are at stake, sacrifice and the potential of breaking the first commandment are observed (1 Ki 13; 17:16-40). In short, the Balaam narratives are highly instructive for the assessment of prophetic activity. The importance of obedience, the necessity of speaking only what Yahweh commands, and the rejection of divinatory practices to manipulate Yahweh are presented.

A few other texts evaluate Balaam in a negative sense and show his demise (Mi 6:5 is generally positive). The issue in Numbers 25:1-18 shows that Moabite women were able to seduce and lead Israelites into false worship of the Baal of Peor cult. Balaam is implicated in this as the advisor who instructed the women to lead Israel away from Yahweh at Peor (Nm 31:16; Dt

4:3). In two references it is implied that Balaam actually wanted to manipulate Yahweh to curse Israel but he would not listen to Balaam (Dt 23:4-6; Jos 24:10). Balaam is ultimately killed for practicing divination and referred to as a soothsayer (Jos 13:22; Nm 31:8). The positive contribution which Balaam offers in his oracles is thus diminished as he apparently changes his course to actively advise the apostasy of Israel. At some point, Balaam who initially rejected wealth and honor in favor of Yahweh, became greedy, idolatrous, and perverse (2 Pt 2:15-16; Jude 11; Rv 2:14). In this sense, Balaam is an important example for prophets who are instructed in these narratives to avoid the basic temptations that prophets tend to face. The narratives serve as a strong warning to prophets that they should remain true to Yahweh and his purposes.

1.4 DEUTERONOMY 13:1-5; 18:14-22

Two texts in Deuteronomy indicate a number of criteria with which Israel is to assess prophecy. The Balaam narratives actually illustrate how this criteria may be applied. In Deuteronomy 13 the focus of the chapter is on covenant allegiance and fidelity to Yahweh. Instructions are presented to warn Israel not to heed those who would advise them to adhere to other gods. Even a prophet who is able to perform a miraculous sign or wonder [as Moses did] is not to be followed if they direct the community to accept other gods. In fact, if a so called prophet does this, it should be viewed as a test of allegiance to Yahweh (Greene 1989:165). Obedience, reverence, and steadfast adherence to Yahweh is essential. Such a prophet should not only be recognized as false but should be put to death, “because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God” (Dt 13:5). Israel must always recognize that only Yahweh brought them out of Egypt and formed them into a nation (Ex 19:1-6; Dt 1:6; 4; 6:1-6). This reinforces Old Testament monotheism which claims Yahweh’s superiority over all other gods, even those with limited power and signs which were performed by the wise men and sorcerers of Egypt (Ex 7:11-12).

Deuteronomy 18:14-22 indicates the main differences between prophecy in Israel and typical cultural practices of the Near East. While other nations may practice sorcery and divination, Israel is to receive communication from Yahweh through the authorized prophet he would raise up. The commitment that Yahweh makes regarding the prophet is not temporary but apparently perpetual. "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 18:17). Therefore, prophets would resemble Moses in function and communicate God's messages to Israel (Craigie 1976:262). There would always be a need in Israel for an authorized prophet but perhaps none would again compare to Moses whom the Lord "knew face to face" (Dt 34:10-12). In addition to this intimate relationship between Moses and Yahweh, Moses' prophetic ministry was unique in that he was involved in the foundational aspects of Israel's formation. Prophets after Moses would mainly be instrumental within the community of Israel (Craigie 1976:406).

The prophet was authorized to speak to Israel and the message was to be heeded. In this text, several criteria for evaluation are evident. The spoken word of an Israelite prophet must be accepted unless the messenger advocates something which Yahweh did not inspire. Implicitly, the law would have to determine what is to be practiced and what is to be rejected. Genuine prophecy would be modeled on the ministry of Moses and, therefore, be concerned with covenant and law issues (Blenkinsopp 1983:189). Also, if a prophet speaks by the inspiration of another god, he should not only be rejected but put to death, because such a prophet advocates breaking the first commandment (Ex 20:2; Dt. 18:20). The prophet who speaks for Yahweh must be an Israelite and not a foreigner (Dt 18:15, 18). Lastly, the criteria of fulfillment is presented: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously" (Dt 18:22). The difficulty in assessing this last requirement is considered to be an important part of the prophet's role, and yet "by its very nature predicting the future is precarious" (Carroll 1995:377). Successful prediction

implies that “true prophecies are those that do come to pass, but unfortunately this test can only be applied retrospectively, long after the time for public decision about the truth claim has passed” (Wilson 1995:334).

These initial guidelines for prophets in Israel served an important but limited purpose. Initially a respected prophet would build a reputation in the nation when consistently presenting messages verified by the community. Prophets who failed in gaining such a reputation would have less impact in the nation or be killed. Of course the last criterion is the most difficult to verify because of the delayed time factor in the fulfillment of prophecy. Not only so but a word of judgment could be unfulfilled if repentance was effected and punishment averted. However, Israel had these initial tools available for assessment. In the case of Balaam we see how the criteria may be applied. Balaam is referred to as a seer and diviner, not a prophet. However he functions as a prophet by proclaiming only the inspired words of Yahweh. He does not claim inspiration by any other God but Yahweh—his messages may be received as true. Even though Balaam is a foreigner, Yahweh uses him for his purposes, and the narratives emphasize the sovereignty of Yahweh over other gods and over Balaam’s own divinatory practices. There is also a strong “test” element in the passage. Yahweh allows Balaam to go to Balak after his persistence to do so, but he does so after emphasizing Balaam’s need to speak only what he is commanded to. In the end, when Balaam advises Israel’s enemies on how to subvert the blessing of God by enticing the Israelites to follow other gods, Balaam suffers the consequences and is put to death. Therefore, in the Pentateuch, the criteria which are given in Deuteronomy to assess true and false prophecy are appropriately illustrated by the Balaam narratives.

2 TRUE PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE FORMER PROPHETS

During the period leading up to the monarchy, individual prophets appear at significant events in Israel's formation. As the monarchy takes more control over the nation, prophets within the court and those who distance themselves from the court, have various challenges in their prophetic functions. These challenges are observed in the following passages.

2.1 PROPHECY DURING MONARCHY DIVISION: 1 KINGS 13

The problem of discerning authentic prophecy is highlighted in the enigmatic narrative of 1 Kings 13. This narrative is placed in a strategic position in 1 and 2 Kings in order to highlight the prophetic word as a guiding force in the history of the monarchy, as well as the requirement of prophets to walk in obedience to God's instructions. The importance of this chapter has been noted by many scholars but they draw different conclusions about the key purposes of the text (Simon 1976:81-117; Lemke 1976:301-326; Gross 1979:97-135; Dozeman 1982:379-393; van Winkle 1989:31-43; Herr 1997:69-78). The confrontational incident between the man of God from Judah and Jeroboam occurs after the significant religious reforms that Jeroboam institutes in the north (1 Ki 12). Featured in the narrative is the immediate power of the prophetic word against the altar which symbolizes the religious reforms. The spoken word is followed by signs that verify the word and within the context of 1 and 2 Kings are ultimately fulfilled in detail (2 Ki 23:15-20). The text also shows the potency of the prophet's intercession (1 Ki 13:1-6). The first ten verses of 1 Kings 13 are concerned with the oracle against the religious reforms imposed by Jeroboam and in characteristics terms, shows the man of God doing what prophets of Yahweh are supposed to do—he delivers the message of warning with an attendant sign. The narrative indicates that Yahweh is against the religious reforms instituted by Jeroboam and that the prophetic word is true.

The second and more pronounced conflict in the passage is between the man of God from

Judah and the old prophet in the north. The old prophet hears about the events that have taken place at Bethel and determines to test the veracity of the man of God. Implicitly, the old prophet supported the new cult at Bethel and was intrigued by the strong prophetic word of denunciation declared by the southern prophet. Although the man of God had resolved to follow the instruction of God, which meant not to partake of extended hospitality, and to return directly to Judah (indicating God's wrath on the religious reforms in the north), he succumbed to the old prophet's claim to secondary revelation. "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord. Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water" (1 Ki 13:19). The note in the text indicates that this is a lie—the old prophet tempts the man of God to discover his veracity. After accepting this change of instruction as being from Yahweh, the man of God is confronted in the midst of a meal with the words, "You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you" (1 Ki 13:21). Punishment for this action results in death for the man of God but a powerful lesson to the old prophet. The illegitimate religious reforms at Bethel are denounced and the prophetic word of Yahweh against it is highlighted. Neither the intrigues of the old prophet nor the weakness of the man of God can thwart the realization of the word of God (Herr 1997:78).

Through the events of this episode, the old prophet realizes that the word of the man of God against the cult at Bethel is true. Apparently no prophet in the north is prepared to denounce the new religious system inaugurated by Jeroboam. The man of God had to come from Judah, demonstrating that the political divisions are also evident among the prophets of Israel. No other chapter in 1 and 2 Kings emphasizes the word of God to the extent that 1 Kings 13 does. This chapter has important lessons for kings, prophets, and priests. The narrative indicates the tension between the monarchy and the prophets, as well as the struggle between true prophets and those supporting an apostate monarchy and false religious system. At this juncture in the history of Israel, there is a major temptation set before the prophets of Israel. Not only are they tempted to

become more or less like the prophets of surrounding cultures which coexist with the king they serve, but they are tempted to change their basic prophetic loyalties from Yahweh to monarchic led religious systems. The narrative also addresses the nature of prophetic inspiration, commission, and the requirement for complete obedience. The narrative addresses the prophetic community and calls for prophets to take their stand against a perverse monarchy and religious cult. Those who do take their stand are often forced to gather in monastic groups or rise against the tide of apostasy as individuals, such as Shemiah, Elijah, and Elisha.

In addition to this function, the narrative of 1 Kings 13 addresses the theme of true and false prophecy. Although some scholars claim there is no criteria to distinguish true from false prophecy in this chapter (Crenshaw 1971:47), Dozeman (1982:392) asserts that the issue of true and false prophecy is a major theme in chapter 13. Three main criteria to assess true prophecy are evident according to him. One is the element of prophetic fulfillment—does the prophet’s message come true? According to 2 Kings 23:15-20 it does. The issue of fulfillment is clear and unambiguous in the texts—“the prophets words are set out in a way that leaves no room for doubt when we wish to establish who is true and who false” (Long 1995:89).

Another matter is the issue of confirmation suggested when the prophet was tested (Dt 13:3). The third criteria is in regards to the character of the prophet—his obedience and disobedience. The prophet must remain “in the way of Yahweh,” and show that his actions are consistent with his message (Dozeman 1982:392-393). This last issue is emphasized as a key criteria for the true prophet by van Winkle. Obedience to the commands and law of Yahweh are required. Therefore, any message which encourages disobedience to the commands of Yahweh, is to be rejected (van Winkle 1989:40-42). In this case, the limitations put on the prophet not to eat or drink are indicative of the greater need to conform to the Mosaic law which prohibits the worship of false gods.

2.2 MICAIAH AND PROPHETIC CONFLICT: 1 KINGS 22

The nature of the Spirit's involvement in the process of prophetic inspiration is presented in a narrative that introduces prophetic conflict in the context of kingship. One of the reasons why prophetic conflict develops is due to the refusal of some prophets to go along with the political and religious trends that arise from time to time in Israel. The context of 1 Kings 22 indicates the political and religious pressure faced by Micaiah. "When Queen Jezebel, wife of King Ahab of Israel, set out to suppress Yahweh worship by championing the cause and cult of her Tyrian Ba'al Melkart, the prophets of Yahweh in Israel of the North received the brunt of her attack and became major targets for persecution. Many capitulated under a real fear and under expressed orders gave favorable oracles, and said whatever they had been told to say" (1 Kings 22:1-28; Greene 1989:163). Micaiah refused to go along with the majority of prophets.

Events leading up to the third battle between Israel and the Syrians are recorded in 1 Kings 22. In this account the king of Israel and the king of Judah come together and plan to retake Ramoth Gilead from the Syrians (DeVries 1978:93-95). Before aligning himself with the king's proposal, Jehoshaphat makes a demand: "First seek the counsel of the Lord" (1 Ki 22:5). In other words, a war prophecy oracle is sought. The court prophets are called upon to provide Yahweh's counsel for holy war (1 Sm 7:4-17; 24:11). Sometimes the king calls for a prophet to give guidance (1 Sm 28: 5-6), and on other occasions the king goes to the prophet for direction (2 Ki 3:11). In this instance, the king of Israel was able to bring together four hundred prophets supported by the king's court, who encouraged the king to enter into battle with the positive claim that Yahweh would deliver Ramoth Gilead into his hand. Oracles often were solicited in relation to battle plans (1 Ki 20:13-15, 35-45; 2 Ki 6:8-10, 15-23). Oracles by independent prophets, however, were frequently unfavorable (Is 30:3; Jr 21:2; 23:33-37; 38:14-23; Ezk 20:1) and often went against the policies and designs of the monarchy, as well as against the majority of

prophets!

In this case, Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with the majorities positive response and he requests the services of a *nabi* of Yahweh. He doubted the inspiration, motivation and veracity of the popular oracle. It is evident that Ahab indicates to the prophets what his preferred message would be (1 Ki 22:3). Jehoshaphat is very aware of the complicity of prophets in the king's court and he clearly perceives some level of falsehood (Dafni 2000:369-370). On the other hand, Ahab is consistently presented as following his intention to make war. Micaiah son of Imlah is then introduced into the narrative as one hated by the king of Israel because of his typically unfavorable prophecies--those that went against the king's interests (1 Ki 22:8). The four hundred prophets were prophesying as one intelligible voice before the two kings. Then Zedekiah steps out from the crowd and emphatically summarizes the consensus of the prophets. Using iron horns to illustrate his prophecy, Zedekiah declares, "With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed" (1 Ki 22:11). The anticipated victory of the king was vividly dramatized and the positive direction was meant to encourage the king to embark on his battle plan. However, the narrative does show Zedekiah and the court prophets as foolish—a clue of the author's evaluation of true prophecy (Coggins 1993:89).

Micaiah comes into this situation with a much bleaker picture of future events. The prophet initially agrees with the others but he does so sarcastically. This original statement is understood by Ahab as a lie. "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand" (1 Ki 22:15). Perhaps the intention of Micaiah is to reveal and emphasize the emptiness of the majority counsel. In disbelief of Micaiah's statement, the king demands the truth. The import of Micaiah's second prophecy is that Israel will soon be without a master—the king will be killed in battle (1 Ki 22:17). His authority for this negative message and his understanding of why the four hundred prophets have a different message is then presented. Micaiah has access

to the heavenly court where he sees Yahweh and his host around the throne. This claim of access to the heavenly court serves to indicate his authority not only for his oracle but also for his interpretation of the events occurring in the king's court (Jr 23:22; Is 6:1-4; Am 3:7). Access into the heavenly court was presumably of greater importance for the authority of a message than the claim of the *Heilspropheten* to possession of the Spirit of Yahweh (DeVries 1978:7, 50-52).

In this court scene, Micaiah is a silent observer who then becomes Yahweh's mediator of the divine word. He overhears the council discuss Yahweh's plan of how he might lure the king into battle and thereby end his reign. In the midst of the discussion in the heavenly court, the *ruah seqer* stepped forward and volunteers to "lure" Ahab into battle. In this reference to the lying spirit it is intimated that there are spirits under the power of God. There is a spirit of true prophecy just as there is a spirit of false prophecy, and a spirit of truth (1 Ki 17:24; Ps 25:5; cf. Dafni 2000:373). In the narrative, the lying spirit comes from outside the court and stands before Yahweh and his court. This is similar to the Satan in Job 1 who comes before the council and seeks to test Job. Another main difference between Micaiah and the prophets is that the spirit of Yahweh is in Micaiah's inner being and speaks the truth through him (Dafni 2000:374). The lying spirit volunteers to put the false message in the prophets and Yahweh allows him to go in order to expose the false prophets. In this way, the sovereignty of Yahweh is maintained—he is capable of working out the divine plan. The *ruah* inspires a message which was characterized as a "lying spirit" in order to deceive the king and accomplish the divine plan (Blenkinsopp 1983:187). Yahweh is presented as the one who inspires the prophets and although the word they speak is wrong, the purpose of God to thwart the wicked king is effected.

Micaiah's claim that the *ruah* that inspired the prophets was a lying *ruah* infuriates Zedekiah. From his perspective, he was inspired by the *ruah* from Yahweh that he considered to be genuine. To show his indignation, Zedekiah strikes Micaiah and asks, "Which way did the *ruah* from Yahweh go when he went from me to speak to you?" (1 Ki 22:24). Zedekiah cannot believe that two prophets who speak different messages can both have the same *ruah*. One of them must be wrong! Micaiah's only answer to this perplexing problem is basically that the future outcome of the spoken word will vindicate his oracle. He emphasizes his prophetic word: "Mark my words, all you people!" The fulfillment of Micaiah's prophecy is brought to pass just as he said and this validates its authenticity (1 Ki 22:33-34).

This narrative gives rise to some perplexing questions concerning the role of the *ruah* who may inspire a false message in order to deceive the wayward king but may also inspire a prophetic word that comes to pass. The paradox of the narrative is that it takes both the false message and the genuine oracle that is inspired by the *ruah* to bring about the intended purpose (cf. Jr 20:7; Ezk 14:9). Ahab cannot prevent an unfavorable oracle from coming to pass and he follows the counsel of the majority of prophets that leads to his death. The narrative shows that Yahweh is able to control the prophets by inspiring them with his Spirit to accomplish the divine plan. Thus, the irony of the narrative in Crenshaw's words is that "the agents of the state are transformed into instruments of God without their knowledge or volition" (Crenshaw 1971:84). This passage also indicates the different perspectives of the prophetic office in Israel and in Judah. For Ahab, the prophets are to serve the goals of the state, whereas for Jehoshaphat, the prophets of Yahweh must communicate the divine word in the interests of their God.

3 TRUE PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE LATTER PROPHETS

3.1 ISAIAH 3:2; 9:15; 28:7-13; 29:10; 30:8-14

Isaiah does not confront the matter of false prophecy as directly as Jeremiah does. However, he recognizes the problem and mentions some important consequences of this development. The main aspects he notes have to do with a failure in leadership generally. Yahweh will judge the nation including its wayward leaders and prophets (Is 3:2). More specifically, Isaiah indicts those with the responsibility of guiding the nation for lying and for actually leading people astray (Is 9:15). Whatever the prophets are teaching is not from Yahweh since, “The Lord has brought over you a deep sleep; He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers)” (Is 28:10). Furthermore, the priests and prophets staggered from wine and beer and were rendered ineffective in their leadership tasks (Is 28:7-13).

The prophets were not alone in their waywardness. The populace in general did not want to listen to the true words of Yahweh. They are an obstinate and rebellious nation, “unwilling to listen to the Lords’ instruction” (Is 30:9). Rather than face the truth, they long for positive messages and command the seers, “See no more visions!” and to the prophets, “Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!” (Is 30:10-11). In this way, prophets and populace collude together to hear positive messages regardless of their veracity.

3.2 JEREMIAH 2:8-11; 4:9-10; 5:12-14, 30-31; 6:6-15; 14:10-17; 23:9-32, 33-40; 26:1-29:32

No other prophet struggles with issues of conflict and false prophecy as much as Jeremiah does. In fact, the Septuagint uses the term *pseudoprophet* to translate *nabi* in nine references in Jeremiah.¹ The contexts indicate that these false prophets generally try to subvert the truth and the word of Yahweh and because of this, false prophets are criticized in many texts (Auld 1984:20-

21). They are considered to be deluded and lead God's people astray (Jr 23:32). On the other hand, Jeremiah is presented as Yahweh's faithful prophet (Jr 1:5; 29:29; 42:2; 43:6; 45:1; 51:59; Carroll 1981:192). Along with Jeremiah, some prophets are pictured in a positive light as Yahweh's servants the prophets (Jr 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; 44:4). This is important to note. "For the editor, it is not the institution of prophecy which is on trial, but certain practitioners, just as the monarchy is not in itself religiously misguided, only certain kings" (Long 1995:319). The thoughts, views and practices of both true and false prophets are presented in several texts. Jeremiah 23-29 are prefaced by the title "Concerning the prophets" (Jr 23:9). Since there are many references, it seems best to present relative data in a thematic way. Jeremiah provides considerable detail concerning social and institutional background which is helpful in setting the context for the conflicts that arise (Long 1995:317-325; Carroll 1981:181).²

3.2.1 THE MATTER OF INSPIRATION, RECEPTION, AND REVELATION

Several texts in Jeremiah present the conviction that Yahweh revealed his word to the prophet. Jeremiah is appointed as a prophet to the nations (Jr 1:5) and Yahweh is the one who puts words in the prophet's mouth (Jr 1:1-3, 9). Jeremiah is to say whatever Yahweh commands and this process is emphasized throughout the oracles. Jeremiah speaks by Yahweh's revealed word which he faithfully proclaims for twenty-three years (Jr 25:1-3). On the other hand, some prophets prophesy by Baal (Jr 2:8) or claim to have new oracles from Yahweh. False prophets claim to receive revelation through dreams (Jr 23:25, 32) and then attribute their inspiration to Yahweh. They claim to speak on behalf of Yahweh and in his name (Jr 14:15; 23:25; 27:15; 29:8-9; 21). Yet, their auto-inspiration indicates their deception, boldness, and casual approach to the name of Yahweh. Their prophecies are a delusion of their own minds or their imagination (Jr 23:26) and are not to be taken seriously. The main problem in all of this is that the prophets speak their views in the name of Yahweh (Carroll 1981:163).

Jeremiah 23:33-40 takes the matter of inspiration and authority further. He emphasizes in this text that only those who are entrusted with Yahweh's word are "entitled to proclaim it" (Thompson 1980:503). Those who make a false claim to authority will be punished. In this passage the writer uses the word *massa* as a pun. The word in its root form may mean to "lift, bear or carry" and denotes a burden. At times the word is used for "oracle" but here, it implies the question, "What is the burden or utterance of Yahweh"? Although there are many questions about textual, authorship and provenance issues related to this passage (Petersen 1977:28-29), the main thrust is clear. The writer is prohibiting claims of new oracles since there were so many appeals to new oracles that they could not be verified. Therefore, "Use of classical formulae, formulae used to introduce or conclude oracles, was summarily proscribed" (Petersen 1977:28). Prophecy must be evaluated and the true prophet of Yahweh must be faithful in declaring the words put in his mouth and revealed in the council of Yahweh.

3.2.2 THE MATTER OF CHARACTER AND MORALITY

Manahan (1980:89) summarizes five different traits of the false prophet's character: personal immorality, encouragement of evil, confidence, compatibility with the populace and ineffectiveness. These different observations are not characteristic of every prophet, but they are observed to be issues that the false prophets deal with. Some prophets succumb to greed and use deception as a means for personal gain (Jr 6:13; 29:23). Their greed led to compromising the message in order to satisfy the populace and encourage their financial support. Personal morality was also a factor. Some of the prophets in Jerusalem apparently were adulterers. Their activity seemed to justify this sin in the populace (Jr 23:14). "For they have done outrageous things in

Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and in my name have spoken

lies...” (Jr 29:23). This reference confronts two prophets named Ahab and Zedekiah with their immorality which undermined their effectiveness and exposed their falsehood.

Due to the personal failures of the prophets, they actually promoted evil among Israel. Instead of confronting evil, sin, and covenant breach, they practiced sin themselves (Jr 23; 29). False theology brought about the opposite of what the prophetic word was to accomplish, namely, repentance, the destruction of false ideas and beliefs, and the promotion of true teaching in the light of covenantal theology (Carroll 1981:166-167; 174-177). By not advocating such prophetic functions, Shemiah is accused of preaching rebellion against the Lord (Jr 29:32). Therefore, judgment will come to the false prophets “because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land” (Jr 23:15). This is similar to the punishment on Balaam who likewise led Israel astray by advising them to sin (Nm 31:16).

The wickedness of the prophets was in their deception of the populace. Jeremiah refers to some prophets as liars and deceivers in several texts (Jr 8:10; 14:14-15; 20:6; 23:14, 32; 27:10, 14, 16; 28:15). The term for deception is used in texts to show that the prophets have misdiagnosed Israel’s position and they proclaim the opposite of what Yahweh has indicated will come about. Overholt (1970:92) summarizes that these prophets “counseled a course of action diametrically opposed to that which would have been necessary to avoid the coming destruction of the city, temple and land.” However, delayed fulfillment of a prophecy also poses a problem for Jeremiah who proclaims judgment and disaster—it does not materialize as quickly as people would expect. He is, therefore, ridiculed for his supposed failure (Jr 17:15-16; 20:7-8).

3.2.3 THE ISSUE OF POPULAR THEOLOGY

The problem of “popular theology” was another difficult factor to stand up against. A complicity is evident between some prophets and the people in that the prophets are encouraged to speak messages that are positive and appealing, but not truthful. Yahweh refers to this as horrible and shocking. “The prophets prophesy lies...and my people love it this way” (Jr 5:31). Probably this situation came about over time and as a result of complex situations and divergent views. We have already noted some of the key differences between Jeremiah and the false prophets. Jeremiah’s preaching is often confrontational and negative in comparison to other prophets. He calls for repentance and envisions looming destruction and judgment. The message of the false prophets is quite different. This message is often observed in various quotes and reflects basically two main views. The first tenet is polytheistic idolatry where the people view idols as representing the creator and have a belief that such gods could save them (Jr 2:26-27; 3:6-13; 7:17-19, 30-32). They practiced a variety of sacrificial rites which amounted to spiritual adultery. Secondly, the prophets promoted complacency in the nation by contradicting words of judgment. They claimed there would be peace, security, and well being for God’s people (Jr 6:14; 8:11; 23:17). They claimed there would be no famine or sword, nor would they be servient to the king of Babylon (Jr 14:15; 27:9, 14-16; 28:2-4, 11). Their apparent confidence was due to the presence of the temple in Jerusalem (Jr 7:4). They held to these views so tenaciously that they advocated death for Jeremiah because of his diametrically opposite message (Jr 11:18-23; 18:18-22; 20:10; 26:8-9, 11; 38:1-6). Manahan (1980:95) summarizes the problem as a “Para-Covenantal theology built on the hopes attached to the temple and the dynasty.” This theology was focused on covenantal promises which neglected the implementation of Yahweh’s demands.

The interpretation of God’s revelation in the light of changing historical situations, as well as the interpretation of calamities in nature, often went against popular hopes and conceptions. Due to the breakdown between the theory and practice of covenant obligations, the prophets had difficulties in reconciling the disparity between the promises of God and their realization. Part of

the problem involved the “power of tradition,” which stressed the election of Israel and the inviolability of the temple and Zion. It was difficult for the people of God to comprehend the threats of judgments and exile. Inherent in these two issues was the rise of syncretism and idolatry that the prophets could not always distinguish from true Yahwism (Crenshaw 1971:65-68). This led to severe breaches in the covenant (Jr 7; 32:31-35). Ultimately the main dispute arises out of very different political perspectives and the interpretation of events. The prophets support their “political persuasion with oracles from Yahweh” (Long 1995:327). Some represented an “autonomist” view while Jeremiah argued for “co-existence” during the political crisis of the day (Jr 29:5-7).

The main confrontation of prophet against prophet is observed in the heated conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah. Apparently both prophets have their supporters—some supported Jeremiah (Jr 26:16-19, 24; 36:13-19; 39:11-14; 40:1-6), while others were against him (Jr 43:1-7; 44:15-19). Hananiah seems to proclaim the positive popular theology which many in the nation adhered to (Jr 28:2-4). Yahweh would deliver Israel and return the Judeans from exile. It appears that this problem is unresolvable. “When Hananiah confronts Jeremiah with an oracle, Jeremiah’s single option is to appeal to past prophetic performance in suggesting that Hananiah’s words are untrue” (Petersen 1985:31). Verification of a prophet’s word was evaluated according to Deuteronomy 18. Jeremiah asks the appropriate question, “Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, ‘The king of Babylon will not attack you or this land?’” (Jr 37:19). Only history can ultimately prove who the true prophet is but Wilson (1995:342-44) shows how the perspective of a prophet’s reputation in a social setting can influence the audience’s perspective. According to Wilson, Hananiah was probably a central prophet who supported the Jerusalemite royal theology while Jeremiah was a prophet “like Moses” and therefore, acceptable to the Deuteronomistic tradition. Jeremiah’s message “was strongly opposed by the Jerusalemite establishment, which saw him as a madman rather than as a true prophet (Jr 20:1-6; 29:24-28;

36:1-31; Wilson 1995:243; Wilson 1980:231-251).³ Therefore, the social location of a prophet and his support group has implications on the assessment of whether a prophet is true or false.

Moreover, the problem of timing for a prophetic word could also indicate whether it was true or false. In the dispute between Jeremiah and Hananiah, the word spoken by the latter had been theologically correct in another historical moment but was now incorrectly applied to a different situation and context (Jr 28). This conflict led to the characterization of Hananiah as a “cultic, nationalistic pseudo-prophet, a fanatic demagogue, a libertine in morals, illiterate of spirit, and indeed an offender against the Holy Spirit” (Sanders 1987:87-105). Consideration of the context and theology of the message shows that Hananiah was wrong about the application of his prophetic word. This error is presented by the Deuteronomists as leading to Hananiah’s failure (Carroll 1981:187-188). In short, Jeremiah indicates that the consequences for false prophecy and judgment are justified. Therefore, false prophets will be appalled (Jr 4:9-10) because the presentation of lies and falsehood in the name of Yahweh is an appalling thing (Jr 5:12-14, 30-31) and will meet dire consequences. As an example of this, Jeremiah 28 indicates that Hananiah was the false prophet, and according to the word of Jeremiah, Hananiah dies within a year of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jr 28:17).

3.3 EZEKIEL 12:21-25; 13:1-23; 14:1-11; 22:23-31

In Ezekiel the problem of false prophecy is also confronted. For the most part, Ezekiel portrays a positive image of the prophet. His call, commission, and prophetic revelation gives him a prominent status in the Latter Prophets. Nevertheless, he must deal with the prophecies, teachings, and practices of other prophets and prophetesses.

A proverb in Israel summarizes the perception that prophecy is not always accurate or

representative of Yahweh's will. "The days go by and every vision comes to nothing" (Ezk 12:22). That is, it appears that prophetic messages do not come to pass. On the other hand, Israel claimed that visions were for the distant future (Ezk 12:27). In the light of this situation, Yahweh will intervene and bring an end to false visions and flattering divinations among the people of Israel. At issue is the contradictory messages of the prophets. Some promised salvation and freedom while Ezekiel countered with messages of judgment and disaster. Part of the matter had to do with timing. Since messages of doom did not materialize immediately, this led to a general feeling of uncertainty and perhaps confusion. It opened the door to speculation and controversy. But now Yahweh was going to fulfill Ezekiel's warnings. Although it seemed like judgment was not immanent, Yahweh would now bring the fulfillment and expose the false prophet's teaching. The nature of this teaching is recorded—they proclaim peace and protection (Ezk 13:10-16). Whereas this theme might be appropriate in some circumstances, they were not the words Yahweh was inspiring for Israel at this time. This teaching also led to a superstitious trust in the temple and in Jerusalem as inviolable sanctuaries for God's people. They became symbols of divine election and salvation but this was not the message of God for Israel (Eichrodt 1970:168). Ezekiel confronts the prophets and points them to God's word which will authenticate itself when Jerusalem will be overcome.

In addition to the theological differences between the prophets, Ezekiel challenges the inspiration of those prophets who speak from their own hearts or imagination (Ezk 13:1-23). Even though they claim to be speaking for Yahweh, they present deceiving visions and lying oracles. This is a serious matter and since they lead God's people astray by false messages of peace, they will be excommunicated from the community. Not only were prophets doing this, but prophetesses were involved in the same game. Prophetesses are mentioned in Israel where they appear to be involved in a variety of roles (Miriam, Ex 15:20; Deborah, Jdg 4:4; Huldah, 2 Ki 22:14; Noadiah, Neh 6:14). The problem in Ezekiel 13:17, however, is that they employed the use

of charms and magical arts to obtain and communicate their message (Blenkinsopp 1983:182). Such services were made available for those who wanted protection and insight, but since they employed witchcraft, they profaned the name of Yahweh to give strength to their message. By doing so they obscured God's will and complicated it with evil forces (Eichrodt 1970:172). They are threatened with destruction by God for their deceit. Like Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah, Ezekiel confronts the false prophets with his spiritual authority and power.

Yahweh challenges these prophets who are prophets of Israel but speak unauthorized messages. They are actually called foolish prophets for following their own spirits (Ezk 12:3). By exceeding their commission and giving their own visions, they are deceitful liars. They soothe the populace with their talk of peace and well-being. It was the role of the true prophet to identify present perils and prepare the people of God for impending danger. The reality was that judgment was soon to fall on Jerusalem and Ezekiel was trying to warn Israel of the events that ultimately came upon them in 587 BC. In these passages it is evident that the prophets are under a great deal of pressure to prophesy messages that are positive and popular with the people. In Ezekiel 14:1-11 the elders come to Ezekiel to request a word from Yahweh. However, these are called idolators who in addition to using other gods for guidance, desire to hear from Yahweh also. Yet, reliance on other gods was prohibited in Israel (Ex 20:3-5,23; Lv 19:4; 26:1; Dt 5:8; 12:3). Entertaining such requests was not appropriate for true prophets and those who spoke for Yahweh. The reply for the idolatrous elders was, "Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!" Furthermore, if a prophet through complicity wanted to entertain and service such requests, they too would be deceived by Yahweh and be judged for such--"the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults" (Ezk 14:10).

Another text in Ezekiel reflects a serious degeneration in the social context of Israel. The prophet addresses the leaders of the people who are abusing their roles in the nation. Princes,

priests, nobles, citizens and prophets have corrupted their positions of influence through greed, abuse of cultus, and failure of teaching truth (Ezk 22:23-31). Specifically, the wicked deeds of leaders are supported by the prophets. “Her prophets whitewash these deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations. They say, “this is what the Sovereign Lord says’--when the Lord has not spoken” (Ezk 22:28). Therefore, Ezekiel exposes the false prophets for what they do and implicitly for what they do not do. The difference between Ezekiel and false prophets is indicated in several passages. Ezekiel’s commission was clear, “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them” (Ezk 3:4; 3:11). He is also the watchman whose role and duty is to be aware of Israel’s situation and impending doom. Yahweh appointed him to be watchman for Israel to determine when judgment would come and to deliver the appropriate word (Ezk 3:20-21; 33:1-9).

3.4 THE BOOK OF TWELVE

During the eighth to fifth century, issues concerning valid and false prophecy arose and are noted in several of the minor prophets. Some prophets exhibit various theological opinions which contradict the message of the canonical prophets. Additionally, allegations about greed, lying, and social injustice are made against the false prophets. However, as in the case of the other prophets, certain individuals deal with this matter more than others. Specific references to conflict in the minor prophets arise in Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah.

3.4.1 HOSEA 4:5; 6:5; 9:7-9; 12:11-14

A key theme in Hosea is the unfaithfulness of Israel to the covenant. His prophecy is to be read in the context of 750-522 BC during the reign of Jeroboam II. The people in general and the leaders specifically, have gone astray from their relationship with Yahweh (Hs 4:5). Yahweh’s

main way of resolving this situation was to send clear messages through his prophets. Hosea confidently speaks his oracles of judgment in the first person of divine speech (Hs 2:2-23; 4:1-14; 5:10-15; Mays 1969b:6). And these messages were often severe: “I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you” (Hs 6:5).

Hosea speaks positively about the prophetic role, although the popular conception may be that “the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac” (Hs 9:7b). The people express their irritation at the presence of the prophet at their festival. Their caricature of the prophet is of one who babbles unintelligibly (2 Ki 9:11; Jr 29:26) and is out of control. By referring to Hosea as a man of the “Spirit,” they place him in the same category as Elijah (1 Ki 19:11), Micaiah (1 Ki 22:21-25), and Elisha (2 Ki 2:9, 16). Most likely they refer to Hosea derogatorily for ecstatic behavior (Wolff 1974:157). Hosea’s defense indicates that the prophet along with God is the “watchman” over the nation (Hs 9:8; Jr 6:17; Ezk 3:17). Like Moses before him, the prophet provides leadership and provision for God’s people (Hs 12:13). The prophet is deeply concerned for the spiritual health of the nation and tries to convince people that Yahweh alone can provide for them.

Hosea does not identify his opponents directly, but the reason for his strong opposition to them is that they recognize Baal more than Yahweh (Hs 2:13, 16-17; 9:10b; 11:2). The polemical content is directed towards those who lead Israel astray. “Basic to polemics is controversy and in Hosea the controversy primarily concerns the religion of his contemporaries” (Boshoff 1992:18). At the heart of the problem, is the “gross misconception of the real nature of Yahweh”(Boshoff 1992:19). Against this situation, Hosea fights with “prophetic fervor.” He is a key proponent of “Yahweh alone” for Israel and one of the prophets who promoted the governing orthodoxy in

Israel—“all those who proclaimed the worship of other gods, or the worship of Yahweh in a manner that had come to be regarded as unacceptable, were now to be dismissed as false” (Coggins 1993:83-84). Granted, this process took time but the true prophets of Yahweh were the main proponents of monotheistic Yahwism in Israel.

3.4.2 AMOS 7:10-17

Amos' message is in keeping with the characteristic prophecy of judgment and the call for repentance. In his book, Amos indicates that his conflict is between priest and king, not another prophet. He names his main opponent, Amaziah the priest of Bethel. The allegation against Amos made by Amaziah to the king is that, “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words” (Am 7:10). Amaziah then instructs Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom” (Am 7:12-13). Amos exposes the tension between the institutional support given to the monarchy by the priesthood. Amos comes against the cultic centers that were established by Jeroboam at Dan and Bethel (1 Ki 12:26-33). Rather than opposing the development of Jeroboam's idolatrous system, many priests and even prophets, supported the religious reforms. Amaziah seeks to change the import of Amos' message by reducing the nature of the message to political opinion (Mays 1969:136). Amos appeals to his call and commission as verification of his messages from Yahweh: “The Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’” (Am 7:15). While Amos seems to depreciate the term *nabi*' as a title, probably due to the diminishing reputation of the office caused by the false prophets, he nevertheless functions in true prophetic form (Am 7:14).

3.4.3 MICAH 2:6-11; 3:5-12

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah who prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (742-686 BC). Perhaps his most difficult assignment was dealing with the corruption among the leaders of Israel, the priests, and prophets. Micah quotes his opponents who basically contradict his prophetic message with a major difference in theological opinion. They reject Micah's message of judgment and the thought that God's wrath might be visited on his people. Micah quotes their incredulous query, "Is the Spirit of the Lord angry? Does he do such things?" (Mi 2:7). In fact, his opponents appeal to God's patience, character, and presence among them (Mi 3:11). Therefore, disaster is not to be anticipated. In short, they have a false reliance on Yahweh's blessings and presence.

Furthermore, they insist that Micah stops his prophesying—a typical request of the false prophets (Am 7:12-16; Hs 9:7-9)! In the light of their demand that Micah stops his "preaching," the prophet "draws into the argument the whole record of the rejection of YHWH's messengers of judgment. All had been resisted by the leaders of the nation" (Am 2:12; 7:16; 1 Ki 13:4; 18:4; 19:2; 22:8; 2 Ki 6:31; cf. Mays 1976:69). In other words, Micah categorizes them with those who oppose Yahweh and lead his people astray (Mi 3:5). In this way Micah characterizes the false prophets as those who reject Yahweh and his true prophets. They are those who support injustice by taking advantage of the poor and evict them from their homes and inheritance. They are collaborators with the wealthy and support them with prophecies of blessing in the form of wine and beer (Mi 2:8-9; 3:1-3, 9-11). They consider their wealth and blessings as external signs of Yahweh's blessings upon them, and exact payment for their own prophetic services (Mi 3:11). For these abuses of the prophetic office, Micah makes it clear that only punishment and not blessing can come upon them. For their sin they will not receive answers nor visions from Yahweh—Jerusalem will ultimately be destroyed (Mi 3:4, 6-7, 12).

On the other hand, Micah offers a defense and proof of his own calling and veracity. "But

as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” (Mi 3:8). Micah claims to have credentials that qualify him as the true representative of Yahweh who gave him authority to speak (Allen 1976:313). In effect this is Micah’s call reference and claim to an authentic message (Mays 1976:84). Micah claims to be full of power from Yahweh who fills him with the presence and inspiration of the Spirit to enable him to bring the genuine message of Yahweh to Israel. The attributes given to him strengthen him in the face of opposition and verify his prophecy (Mowinckel 1934:223).

3.4.4 ZEPHANIAH 3:4

Zephaniah presents a strong message of judgment against Israel for breach of covenant and idolatry. As in the other prophets, he blames the leaders for their lack of responsibility and sin (Zph 3:1-4). Specifically, he claims, “Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men” (Zph 3:4). No details are presented regarding the false prophet’s message but they are implicated along with the other leaders. The tenor of his characterization of prophets in general is very negative and indicates the low esteem in which some of them were held at this time.

3.4.5 ZECHARIAH 13:2-6

Zechariah begins his book with a positive summary of the prophetic role. He is Yahweh’s messenger to remind the nation that he spoke to his people in times past. To the forefathers, came warnings and pleas for repentance by the prophets which were not heeded (Zch 1:4). Then the question regarding the nature of the prophetic word is asked. “Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live for ever?” “But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers?” (Zch 1:5-6). The implication is

that the prophetic word calling for repentance was from Yahweh and true prophets proclaimed this message. However, near the end of the Book of Zechariah, a very serious invective against prophets in general is issued which indicates the damage that false prophets inflicted on the nation at certain times. The passage indicates how serious this breach of the prophetic role was. In fact, Greene (1989:174) refers to this reference as indicating the death knell of prophecy. “So much had prophecy deteriorated as a viable, marginal, social option for influencing national policy that Deutero-Zechariah can write of prophets and unclean spirits in the same sentence” (Greene 1989:174). Rhea (1995:289) argues that these verses “attack and satirize the tradition of Hebrew prophecy as they seek to legitimize a formal ban on prophetic activity.”

The importance of this text is indicated by Rhea (1995:288) in his observation that “Specifically with regard to Zechariah 13:1-6, it has long been the consensus that this passage serves as a proof-text for the demise of prophecy as well as evidence that there may have been a general ban on prophetic activity accepted by the cultic establishment.” The actual text states,

I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, ‘You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord’s name.’ When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him.” On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet’s garment of hair in order to deceive. He will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.’ If someone asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ he will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.’

(Zechariah 13:2-6)

This passage is a judgmental oracle against the prophets themselves. Petersen (1977:36) says, “The unit is a devastating polemic against everything prophetic.” According to him the passage uses allusions to literary sources in order to discredit prophecy. The particular allusions are to

ecstatic practices, the mantle of Elijah, and the call of Amos.

The self infliction of wounds in the process of Canaanite prophecy as depicted in 1 Kings 18:28 is alluded to in the question regarding the wounds. The practices of Israel's prophets had eroded and thus compromised their reputation. Even the prophetic mantle used by Elijah and Elisha, could no longer verify the truth of the words spoken by those who wore such a mantle (1 Ki 19:19; 2 Ki 2:13). Prophets will be ashamed of the title because of the disrespect their role had earned (Am 7:14). The threat of death for these prophets is heightened due to the participation of the prophet's parents. They will act as prosecutor, judge and executioner since the consequences of the prophet's role has greater implications than a disobedient son (Dt 21:18-21). Thus, the denunciation of false prophets comes to a scathing climax in Zechariah.

4 TRUE PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE WRITINGS

Books included in the Writings occasionally mention prophets and their roles but usually in regard to the lack of prophetic activity (Ps 74:9; 77:9-10; 79:10; 83:14-18). No specific comments are made in regards to false prophecy. Only Nehemiah indicates a specific encounter with prophets and enemies.

4.1 NEHEMIAH 6:1-4

Nehemiah notes the work of certain prophets who supported the opposition to the rebuilding projects in Jerusalem. They were hired by Sanballat and Geshem to intimidate and discredit Nehemiah (Neh 6:5-7, 10-13). Interestingly, Sanballat accuses Nehemiah of appointing prophets to proclaim that Nehemiah is king! Shemaiah son of Delaiah prophesied against Nehemiah and tried to entrap him. In addition, the prophetess Noadiah and other unnamed

prophets tried to intimidate Nehemiah and turn him away from his task. Clearly these prophets were supporting those who paid them for “so called” prophetic services. The role of true prophets is presented in another passage. “By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets” (Neh 9:29-30). That is, Yahweh warned and called the people to repentance. Furthermore, Ezra provides the example of Haggai and Zechariah who remained true to their prophetic calling. Ezra asserts that, “The prophets of God were with them, helping them” (Ezr 5:2b). Furthermore, “The elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo” (Neh 6:14a; Zch 8:9).

5 TRUE AND FALSE PROPHECY ISSUES

This overview of passages which presents some tension and disputes between prophets, people, and other leaders, features a number of important themes related to the development of “false prophecy.” It is important to note, however, that false prophets should be categorized into different levels of error. There is a range of “falsehood” that could characterize certain prophets. Payne (1962:56) observes that there were “Jezebel’s outrightly pagan prophets, who served Baal and Asherah (1 Ki 18:19); there were the hypocritical charlatans of Ahab’s court (22:6-7), prophets for pay, a disgrace to the name of the Lord (Mi 3:11; cf Am 7:12); and there were sincere prophets, who were well-meaning but still revelationless, and hence mistaken” (1 Ki 13:11-18). We could conclude that some false prophets were worse than others! While it is difficult to make definitive statements about the causes leading to this problem, the following summary of matters arising from the texts clearly indicates that prophecy requires evaluation and verification by the community of God’s people. Not only is evaluation required but the prophetic task must be deemed accurate and inspired by Yahweh in order to protect the function from degeneration, syncretism, and ultimate failure. Failure would lead to the cessation of prophecy because it would no longer be an adequate way of communicating the divine will.

5.1 HUMAN FRAILTY

The problem of knowing the actual word of Yahweh arises due to the mediation process. In answer to Israel's call for mediation. "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" (Ex 20:19; Dt 5:22-33), Yahweh commits himself to raising up prophets to communicate the divine purpose, will, and message to his people. "I will raise up 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). This is a good solution but, human nature lends itself to the possibility of a communication breakdown in the mediation process. There are several areas of potential disruption in the mediation process. One is the character and moral behavior of the prophet as illustrated in the case of Balaam. Other allegations can be made for disobedience (1 Ki 13), greed (prophecy for returns), deceit, morality in general, and adultery. Some prophets were ineffective due to substance abuse (wine and beer), incompetence, and perhaps ignorance and lack of knowledge. Another factor is the possible confusion regarding religion and truth. Some prophets were apparently confused about the nature of Yahweh and his attributes. This caused them to lead many people astray. Related to this problem is the prophet's personal belief concerning sacrifice and divination used to manipulate an answer, direction or even an oracle. These elements highlight the problem of human frailty and expose the need for prophets to be careful and sober regarding their task.

5.2 CALL, COMMISSION, AND AUTHORITY

The claim to a specific call and commission in order to establish a prophet's authority is often evident in prophetic writings. Granted, anyone can make such a claim but it is only a certain number of prophets who claim such authority and actually have their call and commission recorded in Scripture. Moses is established as God's spokesman after his call and when challenged

by Miriam and Aaron (Nm 12), God protects Moses and indicates that he has a special relationship with him (Nm 12:6). This type of authentication is evident in the case of several prophets. Samuel (1 Sm 3:4, 20), Isaiah (Is 6), Jeremiah (Jr 1), Ezekiel (Ezk 4), Amos (Am 7:15), and Micah (Mi 3:8), are called and commissioned for their role as prophets. Call narratives at the beginning of a prophetic book may be placed there due to the intense conflicts they have with other prophets (Carroll 1981:52). But this is perhaps not the main way of authenticating a true prophet. Ultimately the writings that are received and canonized by the community are evidence of the authority the true prophets achieved. Those who did not achieve this recognition are challenged by Yahweh. Prophets whose messages are not authorized are actually called foolish for following their own spirits (Ezk 12:3). By assuming a commission and then giving their own visions, they are deceitful liars. They forfeit the opportunity and authority to speak on behalf of Yahweh.

5.3 INSPIRATION: YAHWEH OR BAAL?

Another major area of concern for Israel's prophets was the matter of reception--a prophet should only speak what Yahweh inspires. Failure to do so could be fatal. "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything in the name of other gods, must be put to death" (Dt 18:20). It was crucial for Israel to evaluate whether the message was inspired by Yahweh in order to recognize the true prophetic word, and to reject the presumptuous word. But this is easier said than done! Crenshaw (1971:3) gives this general summary of the four stages that the prophetic message undergoes. First, there is the secret experience with God that is sometimes followed by an ecstatic reaction. Secondly, the prophet interprets his encounter according to his faith and past experiences with Yahweh. Third, there is the stage of intellectual revision. The last stage involves the artistic development and adaptation of the message to ancient rhetorical form. He concludes, "Within the twofold task of the reception of the word of God in the experience of divine mystery,

and the articulation of the word to man in all its nuances and with persuasive cogency, rest multiple possibilities for error and disbelief.” And these errors are evident when the prophets allege that false prophets are inspired by a lying spirit, by Baal, or by their own imagination.

In the example of Micaiah, inspiration by the Spirit of Yahweh and access to the heavenly court are important factors in prophetic reception. This claim of access to the heavenly court served to indicate his authority not only for his oracle but also for his interpretation of the events occurring in the king’s court (Is 6:1-4; Jr 23:22; Am 3:7). Although this narrative has complicated elements regarding the lying spirit and the inspiration by the Spirit, Micaiah indicates that the future outcome of the spoken word will vindicate his oracle. He emphasizes his prophetic word: “Mark my words, all you people!” The fulfillment of Micaiah’s prophecy is brought to pass just as he said and this validates its authenticity (1 Ki 22:33-34). The narrative shows that Yahweh is able to control the prophets by inspiring them with his Spirit and then accomplish the divine plan. Yahweh can even use false prophets to further his plans!

Jeremiah emphasizes the issue of inspiration with more detail than other prophets and speaks from experience. Yahweh is the one who puts words in the prophet’s mouth (Jr 1:1-3, 9). Prophets must be inspired to say whatever Yahweh commands. His opponents, however, prophesy by Baal (Jr 2:8) or claim to have new oracles from Yahweh (Carroll 1981:61-63; 160). False prophets claim to receive revelation through dreams (Jr 23:25, 32) and then attribute their inspiration to Yahweh. They claim to speak on behalf of Yahweh and in his name (Jr 14:15; 23:25; 27:15; 29:8-9; 21). Yet, this was self-induced inspiration which indicates their deception, boldness, and casual approach to the name of Yahweh. Their prophecies are a delusion of their own minds or their imagination (Jr 23:26) and they should not be proclaimed.

Ezekiel challenges the inspiration of those prophets who speak from their own hearts or

imagination (Ezk 13:1-23). Even though they claim to be speaking for Yahweh, they present deceiving visions and lying oracles. Even prophetesses were using charms and magical arts to obtain a message. The claim of being inspired, therefore, was a claim not to be taken lightly. Discernment and evaluation was necessary to determine divine inspiration.

5.4 PROPHECY AND FULFILMENT

An important criteria for true prophecy is indicated in Deuteronomy: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously” (Dt 18:22). Thus, the aspect of prediction becomes an important factor in assessing true prophecy. Yet the assessment of fulfillment is difficult, as Carroll (1995:377) claims, “the salvation oracles, their positive hopes for the future, were a complete failure to foresee the long term prospects with any degree of accuracy.” Furthermore, he asserts that the Deuteronomists knew who the true prophets were in hindsight—the community did not recognize them until after the fact (Carroll 1981:172-173; 187-188). However, the Old Testament claim is that God announces his purposes to his prophets before hand and that he is able to bring them to reality. “Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you” (Is 48:5a; cf. Am 3:7). The word of the Lord proclaimed by the true prophet is capable of being fulfilled, as is frequently portrayed in the Former Prophets (1 Ki 13; 22; 2 Ki 23; Zevit 2001:481-486).

Moses’ role was also substantiated by his prediction of events that would then be realized by the people of God (Coggins 1993:88). Though the process took time, Yahweh superintended the working out of his word in history. This is a particularly strong theme in Isaiah where the prophet uses the terms “first and last” and the “former and latter things” (cf. Williamson 1993:99-

101). “See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you” (Is 42:9 cf. 41:22-23; 43:18-19; 45:21b; 48:3-16). The ability to prophesy things that are to come is relegated to God and no one else is comparable in this. “Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come--yes, let him foretell what will come” (Is 44:7). In reference to God raising up his agent Cyrus it is said, “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (Is 46:9-10a). God’s ability is, therefore, not a problem! The issue is whether the prophet accurately receives and communicates the divine word which Yahweh then brings into reality.

Of course the criterion of fulfilment is the most difficult to verify because of the delayed time factor involved in the fulfillment of prophecy. Not only so, but prophetic fulfillment is usually only recognized after its realization. Probably the prophets did not anticipate a very distant realization of their message but looked for a more immediate fulfillment. For most prophets, “the immediate future was the stage on which would be played out the consequences of Israel’s response to the prophetic message” (Carroll 1995:382). Adding to the complication, a word of judgment could be unfulfilled if repentance was effected and punishment averted. In fact, prophecy was meant to create a response and influence people’s behavior (Jr 18:7-10). This is illustrated in the case of Micah who announced the destruction of Jerusalem (Mi 3:12; cf. Jonah). Even though the destruction had not yet taken place, Micah was not rejected as a false prophet because of a lack of fulfilment (cf. Jr 26:18-19). “Rather, the claim is made that Hezekiah’s repentance had led Yahweh to change his mind and spare the city, and such a claim cannot readily be refuted. For those accepted as being within the true prophetic succession ideological support could be provided, and non-fulfilment of a particular prophecy was not an insuperable barrier for those who were so accepted” (Coggins 1993:90; cf. Carroll 1995:383).⁴ As the Hebrew canon

was compiled, it became evident that the Old Testament history verified what was prophetically said. It usually indicates circumstances that lead to certain events, and presents the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of a prophetic word. This is the pattern set out by Deuteronomy 29-31 where the actions of God in judgment are made clear. Israel is forewarned that they will be punished for polytheism and idolatry. They will lose their land and be taken into exile. Proclaiming this kind of warning in a more detailed way is the work of prophets. “God had sent prophets early and often to explain how it really is in the divine economy. And those prophets made their points about God’s using foreign powers to execute judgment against his own people well before it happened. One cannot escape into theories about *vaticinia post eventum* to explain how the prophets could speak in advance of God’s use of Assyria and Babylonia” (Sanders 1997:44). Therefore, in the canon, the true prophets come to light as the fulfillment of their words is revealed and the false prophets are presented as such due to their inadequate prophecies.⁵

5.5 MONARCHY AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES

At times the majority of prophets who are appointed by the king oppose individuals who present a different message. This problem is exacerbated because of the conflicting interests between the king and the prophet as well as the tensions between prophet and priest (1 Ki 22; Am 7:10-17). Samuel clearly presents the temptations of the king who would be on the take (1 Sm 8:10-18). The prophet charged with the role of confronting the flagrant abuses of kingship during the monarchy would be hard-pressed to keep his place in the royal court for denouncing the false practices of the king. This led to continual tensions between supporters of the king and individual prophets who went against the status quo, such as the man of God from Judah, Elijah, Micaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah. Oracles by independent prophets were frequently unfavorable (Is 30:3; Jr 21:2; 23:33-37; 38:14-23; Ezk 20:1) and often went against the policies and designs of the monarchy, as well as against the majority of prophets! Independent prophets often served to

expose false religious practices (1 Ki 19) and the idolatrous religious system set up by Jeroboam in the north (1 Ki 13). Interestingly, during the monarchy, prophetic functions were often absorbed by the cult and this began to inhibit some forms of prophecy (Blenkinsopp 1983:182).

In relation to the sacrificial system, the prophetic word denounced flagrant abuses of the cultus that subsequently brought the prophets into disputation with the priests, not only in Bethel and Dan but also in Jerusalem (Is 1:10-20; Jr 7:6-19; Am 5:21-24; Hs 8:11-14; Mc 6:6-8; Ml 1:6-13). Also, the development of prophecy into the regular cultus and institutions of Israel poses a problem for many prophets who compromised their independence for state supported services (Eichrodt 1961:332-334). While there may not be much explicit information on the actual role of prophets in the temple, there was definitely interaction in the temple between priests and prophets (Albertz 1994a:88). Jeremiah had access to the temple which was often the venue for the proclamation of oracles and messages which would then be debated (Jr 23:11; 26:1, 7; 28:5; 29:26; 35:2-4). In fact, prophets with disputes could receive a hearing before a priest (Long 1995:321).

5.6 SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

Another element that may give rise to disputes between prophets is in regards to their social background and their representation of beliefs held by certain groups in society (Wilson, R R 1980:45-50). As in most societies, people hold to different perspectives and opinions that are forged in a specific cultural context. Often these views may be diametrically opposed to those from other backgrounds. One thing that complicates the assessment of prophecy as being either true or false is the regional and time-conditioned role expectations that support groups had for their prophets, because in Israel's historical development criteria and prophetic functions changed (Sheppard 1988:268). Different perspectives are to be expected in the Old Testament records

which cover an extensive period of history. Different views can lead to various levels of conflict depending on the issue at stake. In Israel, these views were often communicated by the prophets, or “intermediaries,” who communicated God’s messages to the people (Wilson, R R 1980:27-28). In order to expose some of these backgrounds, scholars have realized the importance of social and anthropological study (Overholt 1989:26-66). Also, consideration of the audience response in passages as regards their actions and words gives a good indication of the social situation in which disputations are recorded (Manahan 1980:84-85). Not only do these investigations compare Israel’s experience with other cultures that have similar traditions, but they often analyze the social issues which arise in Old Testament texts. Long (1995:328) indicates the value of this type of study. “Anthropological studies help us realize that conflict is a vital element in prophetic activity, and that it is both deeper and broader than disputes over religious beliefs. Thus, anthropological study helps us compensate for distortions which arise from isolating religious ideology from other forms of social expression.”⁶

Sheppard (1988:268) claims that in the Bible there is no such thing as biblical prophecy. “Instead, we find in the Bible instances of changing prophetic phenomena to which pertain a variety of regional and social-historical differences regarding the criteria for prophetic role performance and the audience’s discernment of legitimate prophecy.” The value of the anthropological approach to specific texts dealing with prophetic conflict in Jeremiah is summarized by Long (1995:323). He supposes that the conflict was “highly situational, highly geared towards particular events and circumstances to which all of these prophets addressed themselves.” The ideological disagreements on issues were presented according to the editorial choices made by the editors. However, whatever choices were made by the editors still represent the views of people and finally the consensus of the community which received the text. An important consideration is that, “Socially disruptive claims of a prophet emerge only when the continued existence or economic well-being of one group with its own terms of morality and/or

political destiny conflicts with another group that seeks to limit or actively oppose it” (Sheppard 1988:266). To evaluate specific cases of errant prophecy, one should do so from within the domain of a socially defined support group and its marginal sympathizers, with their own recognized “true” prophets and idiosyncratic role expectations” (Sheppard 1988: 267). These considerations must be applied in the process of discerning and evaluating true and false prophecy.

5.7 POPULAR THEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY

Confrontation between prophets often arises due to a difference of opinion regarding the actual message of Yahweh. This may be referred to as “ideology” which summarizes certain tenets that undergird the prophetic message. Gottwald (1996:139) asserts that the main tenets have to do with Yahweh’s sovereignty, Israel’s obligation to obey Yahweh’s instructions (yet their predominate failure to do so), the withdrawal of divine protection, and the eventual implementation of judgment and restoration. Sanders (1986:87) contends that another important criteria has to do with the understanding of God communicated by prophets as the Creator God of all peoples as well as Israel’s Redeemer God. These tenets then, form the main ideology of true prophets against which false prophecy may be compared. Some themes are more popular than others! Usually the theme of prophetic messages has to do with either weal or woe. Prophets of judgment and doom are often rejected by the populace on ideological grounds, and an inadequate theological understanding. They prefer positive messages of blessing, peace and security, since they are the chosen people of God. Nevertheless, false prophets are accused of wickedness due to their deception of the populace. Jeremiah refers to them as liars and deceivers in many texts (Jr 8:10; 14:14-15; 20:6; 23:14, 32; 27:10, 14, 16; 28:15). They have mis-diagnosed Israel’s relationship with Yahweh and proclaim the opposite of what Yahweh has indicated will come about. The theological views are not just in regards to personal blessings, but they also represent

various political opinions and interpretations of circumstances in the nation. In the end, “It represents ideological reconstruction and informs us about the deuteronomistic perspective on prophecy” (Carroll 1981:187; Gottwald 1996:139).

“Popular theology” is an appropriate description of the kind of messages the majority of people wanted to hear. A complicity is evident in that the people seem to find prophets who will speak messages that are positive and appealing, but not truthful. Yahweh refers to this as horrible and shocking. “The prophets prophesy lies...and my people love it this way” (Jr 5:31). The true prophet’s preaching is often confrontational and negative in comparison to other prophets. Crenshaw (1971:24-25) summarizes the *vox populi* of the prophets which were confronted by canonical prophets as (1) confidence in God’s faithfulness, (2) satisfaction with traditional religion, (3) defiance in the face of prophets who hold a different view, (4) despair when hope seems dead, (5) doubt as to the justice of God, and (6) historical pragmatism. The popular message is often summarized in various quotes and reflects polytheistic idolatry where the people view idols as representing the creator and have a belief that such gods could save them (Jr 2:26-27; 3:6-13; 7:17-19, 30-32). Contrary to covenantal prohibitions against this, some prophets are accused of leading people to other gods. In addition, the prophets promoted complacency in the nation by contradicting words of judgment. They claimed there would be peace, security, and well being for God’s people (Jr 6:14; 8:11; 23:17). They claimed there would be no famine or sword, nor would they be oppressed by foreign kings (Jr 14:15; 27:9, 14-16; 28:2-4, 11). Their apparent confidence was due to the presence of the temple in Jerusalem (Jr 7:4). This theology was focused on covenantal promises which neglected the implementation of Yahweh’s demands. Similar confrontations and views are observed in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Micah.

6 CHAPTER FOUR SUMMARY

All of these potential mine fields arose due to the mediation process which could not only undermine the value of prophecy but lead to its complete rejection in Israel. Whereas some may claim that prophecy was a complete failure (because truth was hard to determine at the right time; Carroll 1981:172-173), prophecy had a vital function in the nation throughout Israel's history. False prophecy was exposed by true prophets, and in time, the true prophet was able to be authenticated by the community of God's people, as the community received authorized documents into the Hebrew canon. The assessment of prophets took time and they were not always recognized as true or false during their ministry. A paradox is evident in some passages in that both true and false prophets, at times, met a bitter end to their vocation. Some true prophets were despised and even killed because they dared to consistently present God's word as inspired (Neh 9:26), while some false prophets died as a direct result of God's judgment against them (Hananiah). Although many scholars claim there are few or no adequate criteria for distinguishing "true" prophecy, this chapter presents many such criteria that assisted Israel in the evaluation of prophets and of God's inspired word. They were able to identify true prophets and true prophecy in contrast to false prophets and false prophecy.

Although false prophecy was a serious threat to the communication of the divine will in Israel, the Old Testament presents such conflicts in order to show that discernment and assessment was required. If false prophecy was viewed as a development which could destroy the function of prophecy in Israel, surely the editors could have reduced the intensity of conflict in the narrative. Instead, they presented the issue in clear and unmistakable terms to show that Yahweh would still use prophecy to communicate his message to Israel. The Scriptures retain both the positive and negative features of prophecy and in doing so, present the resilience of the prophetic word in Israel's history. In the end, texts show that the consensus of opinion prevailed and false prophecy was recognized for what it was. Yahweh always had his remnant of faithful prophets who would fulfil their call and commission to speak on behalf of God to Israel. The canonization

of the Scriptures was essential to assist the community in this development. False prophecy was clearly a problem in Israel but it was not the reason that prophecy in Israel would cease or radically change in its main function.

CHAPTER FOUR ENDNOTES

1. The term *pseudoprophet* is used to translate *nabi* in Jeremiah 6:13; 26:7, 8, 11, 16; 27:9; 28:1; 29:1, 8.
2. Sanders (1987:89) notes the importance of the context when evaluating prophecy. Context refers to the “historical, cultural, social, political, economic, national, and international situations to which prophets applied the “texts.” By texts, he means “the common authoritative traditions employed and brought forward (re-presented) by the prophet to bear upon the situation to which he or she spoke in antiquity.” For Sanders the hermeneutics applied to a text could indicate whether the application was to be viewed as true or false.
3. “The conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah was therefore not only a conflict between different theological positions but was a confrontation between two prophets having different social locations and different supporters” (Wilson, R R 1995:244). Jeremiah resolves this situation by accusing Hananiah of false prophecy (Jr 23:16-22).
4. This comment is generally optimistic since Carroll (1995:385) reminds us of the possibility that “the editing of the prophetic tradition has removed so many oracles from their social setting that it is extremely difficult to reconstruct any possible interaction between the prophet and environment.” In addition to this, he claims that the dissonance theory and its principles handles the problem of prophetic failure by hermeneutic. “In order to avoid the failure of prophecy or because there is a strong belief that prophecy cannot fail it becomes necessary to construct a system of explanation showing how various examples of supposedly failed predictions can be

rescued by reinterpretation and re-application” (Carroll 1995:389).

5. Zevit (2001:508) asserts that “Early in the exile, a certain circle of devoted Yahwists may have started to compile lists of whom they considered *bona fide* prophets.” He bases this on Ezekiel 13:9 which refers to false prophets and believes it is “an allusion to a list of prophets whose words were being preserved by a pious fraternity of which Ezekiel apparently approve.” “My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.” (Ezk 38:17). Therefore, the compilers of the Hebrew canon were involved in the assessment of the words and traditions of the prophets, and preserved the records accordingly.

6. Long’s summary (1995:316-317) of comments indicates the positive value of comparing Israel’s experience with other cultures. “First, conflict among intermediaries is obviously a complex, little studied, incompletely understood social phenomenon. Second, conflict is highly situational—that is, related to and expressive of social dynamics in particular societies. Full understanding requires more information than we usually have for a given example. Third, conflict in the mediatorial process is certainly normal, if not inevitable. The potential for disputes lies in the claim to supernatural mediation—spirit possession, manipulation of the spirits, disputes over the value of, and interpretations given to, messages from these spirits. The potential for conflict lies also in the social components of such ideological matters” competition for status, influence, and power in situations where religious authority tends to be pragmatically given and removed by public consensus (Fry). Fourth, it is important to conceive of such conflicts in both their ideological and social aspects....Finally, conflict may, but need not, undermine public acceptance of the mediation process (Shirokogoroff), although it may have something to do with an individuals’ credibility among his peers (Fry).”