

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET AND JESUS

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of prophecy is not unique to Israel, but has many historical parallels, not only in the broad history of religions, but specifically in the world of the Ancient Near East. Moreover, there was a great variety of different forms of prophets e.g. cultic, ecstatic, political which functioned in different sociological settings. But, as Brueggemann explains, the emergence of individual persons who speak with an authority beyond their own is indeed, an odd, inexplicable originary happening in Israel.¹

2. General Considerations

Etymologically, “prophet” comes from the greek *pro* (before) and *phemi* (speak) meaning to speak in front of an audience on behalf of someone else. The biblical Hebrew commonly refers to the prophet as *nabi'* (someone who is called). He is sometimes referred to as *ro'eh* (someone who sees what others don't see especially things concerning the divine will), *hozeh* (visionary) or *'iš elohim* (man of God).²

All these words give a description of the biblical prophet as someone who is called by God to be his messenger and speak on his behalf. Having a special relationship with God as a man of God, God shows him what others don't perceive and because of this he can speak on God's behalf.

Barton points out that a distinction regarding the recipient of the messages has sometimes been made that, for some interpreters, marks a dramatic development in the history of Israelite prophecy. Many of the early prophets speak only to individuals, especially Kings or other officials, while the later prophets address large groups of people such as the whole nation of the entire city.³

¹ cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Minneapolis 1997, 622.

² cf. J. Barton, *Prophecy*, ABD 482.

³ cf. J. Barton, *Prophecy*, ABD 482.

Vogels also suggests that there are 2 types of prophets in every religion. Those which are institutionally established by the king and cult, and those who are called not institutionally established but they are called by God. Some of the latter are then linked to the king and cult. Although there seem to be 2 kinds of prophets this cannot be distinguished easily. This theory is not accepted by all. It is a complex reality.

There seems to have been no standard prerequisite for a person to become a prophet in Israel. Indeed, Hawthorne explains that the biblical prophets were of various kinds and from different walks of life. Some were itinerants, holy man and miracle workers e.g. Elijah and Elisha. Some were ecstatics. Some gathered around a prominent person to form a group or schools of prophets. Some were localized, attached even to the Temple in Jerusalem and closely associated with the priesthood. Others stood outside the social structures of their day, acting as reformers who called Israel back to the covenant God had made with them from which they departed.⁴

3. The Prophet and His God

Moses is described as having an unparalleled, special, intimate and direct communion with God. All other prophets have some kind of direct union with God and hence they are prophets like Moses. This experience of God is fundamental to be a prophet for he cannot proclaim in God's name what he has not heard. The prophets speak of their experience of God, which Barton describes as "mystical",⁵ in their vocation narratives.

According to Preuss, the vocation story has a particular pattern exemplified in the call of Moses:⁶

1. God presents Himself (the burning bush)
2. An introductory word which usually foreshadows the mission entrusted to the prophet ("I have listened to the cry of my people...")
3. The mission itself ("Go")
4. Objection on the part of the person called (Moses claims that he is not a good speaker, he does not know who is his interlocutor, asks for someone else to be sent)
5. Reassurance from God ("I am with you")
6. Sign (the people will come to the mountain to worship YHWH)

Some scholars insist that these elements are simply a literary genre present in all prophetic vocation narratives which say nothing about the prophet. Nonetheless, recent scholars insist that in spite of the similarities there are differences which indeed

⁴ cf. G.F. Hawthorne, *Prophets, Prophecy*, in J.B. Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Leicester 1992, 636.

⁵ J. Barton, *Oracles of God*, 261.

⁶ cf. Horst D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology Vol II*, Edinburgh 1992, 79.

say something about the prophet's experience which can hardly be questioned. G. von Rad insists that the very fact that they have been recorded shows that there was something unusual about it because in the ancient East they did not write for the sake of writing.⁷

The prophetic calling is never presented as a tremendous intensification or transcendence of all previous religious experience. Neither previous faith nor any other personal endowment had the slightest part to play in preparing a man for the prophetic vocation. He might by nature be a lover of peace, yet it may be laid upon him to threaten and reprove, even if, as with Jeremiah, it broke his heart to do so.⁸

The experience of the word is defined by a common expression indicating that the origin of the prophet's word is God: "The word of God came to...". In some instances the word also enters the prophet becoming one with him showing no distinction between the mission and identity of the prophet e.g. "I have found your words and I have ate them" (Jer 1:15). This shows that the prophet is not a loudspeaker or an instrument but a partner and an associate of God who he is totally involved in the process itself.⁹

Consequently, the prophet finds his human fulfilment only when he is a prophet. This is encapsulated in the paradox of suffering i.e. he experiences God's word as a fire burning from within that brings suffering without which he cannot do. The experience of God is something beautiful for the prophet but he has to proclaim the word which is not very nice. Hence, the word is sweet in the mouth and bitter in the stomach (Ezech, Rev).

In the prophetic call, YHWH not only claims the prophet's lips but also his eyes for the service of his new task through the visions and for this reason prophets are also referred to as seers (hozeh). The purpose of the vision was not to impart knowledge of higher worlds. It was intended to open the prophet's eyes to coming events regarding both spiritual and concrete historical realities. These visions, accompanied by auditions, came from outside themselves, suddenly and without premeditation.¹⁰

The empowerment for mission by God is described in terms of "the Spirit of the Lord" who overcomes and possess the prophet. For Hawthorne, the hallmark of a prophet i.e. that which enabled him to speak for God, was their inspiration by the Spirit of the Lord. They were a "Spirit-bearing people" (Hos 9:7). The prophet was the one who could say: "I am filled with the power, with the Spirit of the Lord" (Mic 3:8). Thus when the prophets spoke with the Spirit on them or in them, they spoke with the authority of God. This gave significance to their message. Thus that phrase

⁷ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 33.

⁸ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 37.

⁹ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 25.

¹⁰ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 38-9.

that runs throughout their writings: “Thus says the Lord”. It was the Spirit that gave them their prophetic immediacy of insight into the will of God.¹¹

Another expression used is “the hand of the Lord”. G. von Rad insists that behind these notices there is reason for believing that there were experiences which not only shook the soul but also caused bodily disturbances for the prophet. Ezekiel relates how he sat on the ground awe-struck and unable to speak a word for seven days after his call (Ezek 3:15).¹²

A revelation of God received in such an unusual way was not an end in itself. It was neither for the prophet to know that God was near him. Its purpose was to equip him for his office and he never considered this experience as being normative for the people. No prophet ever instructed others to reach out to a direct experience of God such as he himself had. Joel was the first one to look forward to the day when everyone in Israel would be like those rare beings who are endowed with the Spirit (Joel 3:1ff).

These vocation narratives are of a particular importance. According to von Rad, the prophets had been expressly called upon to leave the fixed orders of religion which the majority of the people still considered valid – a tremendous step for a man on the ancient East to take. Because of this, in their new situation, the prophets were faced with the need to justify themselves.¹³ Hence, Sawyer explains that whilst the call commissioned the prophet, recording it justified the prophet and proved the authenticity of his message.¹⁴

Recent studies, such as Long, shifted from the study of this original personal experience of the prophets. They have been informed by sociological readings of the prophetic literature built on the work of Max Weber concluding that the authority of the prophets derived from society itself as the audience of the message.¹⁵ However, Baker remarks that the fact that most of the Israelite society appear not to have recognized prophetic authority as having any practical effect on how they lived leads one to question the sociological emphases on the role society played in recognizing and legitimizing prophetic authority. The prophets regarded their divine commissioning as providing authority that was independent of the response of the people to whom they spoke.¹⁶

In the sociological tradition, Wilson also maintains that these individuals emerged from and were influenced by different theological traditions and their accompanying

¹¹ cf. G.F. Hawthorne, *Pophets, Prophecy*, in J.B. Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Leicester 1992, 636-7.

¹² cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 39.

¹³ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 34.

¹⁴ cf. John F. A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets*, Oxford 1987, 4.

¹⁵ cf. B.O. Long, “Prophetic authority as Social reality”, in B.O. Long – G.W. Coats (eds), *Canon and Authority: Essays on Old Testament Religion and Theology*, Philadelphia 1977, 3-20.

¹⁶ cf. David W. Baker, “Israelite Prophets and Prophecy”, in David W. Baker – Bill T. Arnold (eds), *The Face of Old Testament Studies. A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, Grand Rapids 1999, 270.

social perspectives.¹⁷ However, this does not mean, according to Brueggemann, that they explicitly or intentionally mouth such traditions and perspectives. Rather they have learned over time to perceive and experience the world through a particular prism of memory and interpretation e.g. Hosea and Jeremiah appear to be nurtured in the traditions of Levitical-Deuteronomic covenantalism.¹⁸

4. The Prophet: *Sympaticos*

The result of the prophet's experience of God, according to G. von Rad, is that the prophet is detached from himself and is drawn into the emotions of God himself. It was not only the knowledge of God's design in history that is communicated to him but also the divine pathos i.e. the feelings in God's heart: wrath, love, sorrow, revulsion and even doubt as to what to do and how to do it (Hos 6:4;11:8). Something of YHWH's own emotion is passed over into the prophet's psyche and filled it to bursting point.¹⁹

Hence, according to Heschel, the term "religious experience" hardly conveys what happens in the prophet's soul i.e. the overwhelming impact of the divine pathos upon his mind and heart, completely involving and gripping his personality in its depths, and the unrelieved distress which sprang from his intimate involvement.²⁰

Their peculiar intimate connection with YHWH made them effective channels of communication between YHWH and Israel. In the function as channels, they were heard to deliver YHWH's own utterance to Israel, and as intercessors they were effective in speaking Israel's urgent petitions to YHWH.²¹ Hence, in the presence of God the prophet takes the part of the people. In the presence of the people he takes the part of God.²²

Consequently, it would be wrong to say that the prophet is a person who plays the role of a third party, offering his office to bring reconciliation. His view is oblique. God is the focal point of his thought, and the world is seen as reflected in God. This explains his way of thinking: he is endowed with the insight that enables him to say, not "I love or condemn", but "God loves or condemns". Hence, prophecy proclaims what happens to God and what will happen to the people.²³

In judging human affairs, it unfolds a divine situation. For the prophet, sin is not only a violation of a law, it is as if sin were as much a loss to God as to man. The prophet cannot say "man" without thinking "God". Therefore, the prophetic speeches dwell

¹⁷ cf. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*

¹⁸ cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Minneapolis 1997, 623.

¹⁹ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 42.

²⁰ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 26.

²¹ cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Minneapolis 1997, 622-3.

²² cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 24.

²³ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 24.

upon God's inner motives, not upon His historical decisions. They disclose a divine pathos, not just a divine judgement. This is the key to inspired prophecy. God is involved in the life of man. A personal relation binds Him to Israel and his commandments are not simply recommendations for man, but they express divine concern, which, realized or repudiated, is of personal importance for Him.²⁴

An analysis of prophetic utterances shows that the fundamental experience of the prophets is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with divine pathos, a communion with divine consciousness which becomes about through the prophet's participation in the divine pathos. Sympathy is the prophet's answer to inspiration, the correlative to revelation. Hence, the prophet lives not only his personal life but the life of God. The emotional experience of the prophet becomes the focal point for the prophet's understanding of God. The prophet hears God's voice and feels his heart. He tries to impart the pathos of the message together with its logos. As an imparter his soul overflows, speaking as he does out of the fullness of his sympathy.²⁵

In this light, Vogels describes the prophet as "sympaticos" i.e. the prophet suffers with God for the people as he looks at society's moral evil, and for God because of man's sin rejecting God. The prophet shares God's preoccupation and joy because of man. This generates frustration, solitude, suffering, internal conflict and failure. Jeremiah is typical of this since he went through the exile and not prophesied it as others did. Yet, he cannot be but a prophet.

5. Being a Prophet

Copeland raised an interesting question: the greatest issue at stake in prophetic studies is not "What did God say through the prophets?" but "What does it mean for a prophet to claim that God has spoken to him at all?"²⁶ In my opinion the answer to this question constitutes the identity of the biblical prophet.

Being a prophet was a condition which made deep inroads into a man's outward, as well as his inner life. It is not only the prophet's lips but his whole life that is were conscripted for a special service. The complete absence of a transitional stage between the two conditions is a special characteristic of the situation. The prophetic call meant, even at the sociological level, relinquishing normal social life and all the social and economic activities this offered, and changing over to a condition where a man had nothing to depend upon. None of their social relationships are carried over to the new way of life.²⁷

Flesh and blood can only be forced into such a service. The prophets themselves felt that they had been compelled by a stronger will than theirs. Admittedly, the early

²⁴ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 24.

²⁵ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 26.

²⁶ cf. Paul Copeland, "A Guide to the Study of the Prophets", *Themelios* 10.1 (1984), 8.

²⁷ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 37.

prophets only rarely mention these matters affecting their call. The first to break the silence is Jeremiah: “thou has deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stringer than I, and thou hast prevailed” (Jer 20:7).²⁸ But this is not to deny the prophet’s freedom.

G. von Rad explains that as a result of the divine call the prophet surrenders much of his freedom – occasionally he is completely overwhelmed by an external compulsion: but paradoxically, just because he has received this call he is able to enjoy an entirely new kind of freedom. Drawn into ever closer and closer conversation with God, he is privy to the divine purposes and is thereby given the authority to enter into a unique kind of converse with men.²⁹

In this light, the prophet is not, of course, an integrated personality. He is divided and sorely troubled as God hides himself from him more and more. Yet, as the martyrdom of Jeremiah testifies, he is, in some mysterious way, free to choose suffering and so stand up to God’s test. Their office intensified all the prophets’ personality: they have become persons because God has addressed them and they have had to make a decision in his presence.³⁰

G. von Rad explains that the suffering of the prophet, e.g. Jeremiah, was to be regarded as an integral part of a prophet’s service. There was more to being a prophet than mere speaking. Thus, not only the prophet’s lips but also his whole being were absorbed in the service of prophecy. Consequently, when the prophet’s life entered the vale of deep suffering and abandonment by God, this became a unique kind of witness-bearing. The prophet’s life becomes absorbed in his vocation as a prophet, and made an integral part of the vocation itself.³¹

6. A Portrait of a Prophet

A prophet is someone who is searching – someone who is being sought. Someone who listens – and who is listened to. Someone who sees people as they are, and as they ought to be. Someone who reflects his time, yet lives outside time.

A prophet is forever awake, forever alert; he is never indifferent, lest of all to injustice, be it human or divine, whenever or wherever it may be found. God’s messenger to man, he somehow becomes man’s messenger to God. Restless, he is waiting for a signal, a summons. Asleep, he hears voices and follows visions; his dreams do not belong to him.

Often persecuted, always in anguish, he is alone – even when addressing crowds, when conversing with God or himself, when describing the future or evoking the past.

²⁸ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 37.

²⁹ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 56.

³⁰ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 57.

³¹ cf. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, London 1968, 18.

There is sometimes a theatrical aspect to him; he seems to recite lines written by someone else. And yet, in order for him to be a prophet, he must descend into the very depths of his being. To be invaded by God he must be authentically himself.

The prophet's tragic dimension: having attained the highest degree of self-realization, he gives himself to God. The more he exists, the more he gives himself to God, who speaks through his voice and uses him as a link, a bridge, an instrument. The prophet is at once an irritant and a simplifier. What other will think or learn, he already knows; he is the first to know God. He is God's sounding board.³²

7. The Message of the Prophets

The prophet is more than a messenger: he is a witness. His task is not simply to deliver the word but to bear testimony that the word is divine. Hence, the prophet not only conveys, he reveals. He almost does unto other what God does unto him. In speaking, the prophet reveals God. This is the marvel of the prophet's work: in his words, the invisible God becomes audible. He does not prove or argue. The thought he has to convey is more than language can contain. Divine power bursts in words. The authority of the prophet is in the Presence his words reveal. Indeed, the ultimate object of the prophet's consciousness is not in what the prophet says but of Whom he speaks.³³

The messages of the prophets were transmitted in various forms. *Oracles* whereby the prophet in the first person singular introduced by "Thus says the Lord..." transmits God's message. It denounced a particular situation and was followed by a call for repentance whilst threatening punishment for those who failed to do so. *Lawsuits* were another form dramatizing the relationship between God and his people as if in a court. The *prophetic torah* was used so as to teach moral lessons from the history of Israel. *Visions* were also common in giving the message. *Symbolic actions* brought about what the prophet announced through God's power e.g. Jeremiah breaking a jar. The *prophet himself became a sign* because he is invaded with the message and becomes its incarnation e.g. Jeremiah's celibacy was a personified sign of a barren nation.

In their messages, the prophets denounced idolatry. Israel was to be exclusively faithful to YHWH alone. But this did not exclude that other gods existed. Initially, Israel was monolatric (worship of one God) and not monotheist (belief in the existence of one God). Eventually, during the exile and through the help of the prophets, Israel realizes that YHWH and El Elyon are the same and not other gods exists.

³² cf. E. Wiesel, *Five Biblical Portraits*, London 1981, 38-9.

³³ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 22-3.

The prophets also denounced political alliances since through the covenant Israel became YHWH's vassal and therefore it has to trust Him to protect her and not gain protection from the external powers of Mesopotamia or Egypt. The prophets also saw God as controlling the whole of human history and thereby he also use other kingdoms.

According to Heschel, the prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered and awesome in his criticism of the disparity between the cult and morality.³⁴ When Israel was still a tribe it followed the humanitarian laws of Leviticus and number. But as it formed into a kingdom it modeled itself on other kingdoms distinguishing between the rich and poor. This contradicted the worship in the Temple for the biblical faith is ethical.

The prophets also spoke of the future Davidic king known as the messiah who would inaugurate a new era. He would bring to end the wars, restored peace and prosperity, bring a return from exile and reunited Israel and Judah. For some prophets this had a universal and cosmic dimensions since there was to be a return to the first order of creation. But no historical figure realized the Jewish hope.

Based on the historical experience of Israel, after the exile, Israel expected a definitive intervention in history by God. There will be mediators and various messianic figures e.g. the prophet like Moses, Elijah who would return before the messiah, the messianic priest (son of Aaron), the Son of Man and the Son of David. John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the prophet (like Moses), Messiah or Elijah. The most mysterious, "Son of Man", is put on Christ's lips.

Messianism developed in three stages. At first the messiah was understood in terms of the Davidic succession on the basis of Nathan's promise to David (2 Sam 7). This was not eschatological but an assurance of a Davidic succession. However, the concrete experience of kingship succeeding David was not an ideal one since they defied the temple by introducing pagans in the worship in Jerusalem. Hence, the prophets proclaimed a future ideal king who would really be the representative of God on earth and thereby renewing the House of David. Hezekiah was one. When the House of David was abolished completely in the exile the ancient texts acquired a new meaning to fit a new theology prophesying God's definitive intervention through history through a Son of David. The texts were re-interpreted as the restoration of the House of David. This accounts for the application of the prophets to Jesus in the New Testament as the definitive messianic figure. But the prophets did not have future Messiah. It is only through a re-reading that Jesus appears in this context.

³⁴ cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1962, 10.

8. Moses: The Prototype Prophet

According to the creed of Maimonides, Moses was the father of all prophets before and after him. Hosea is the first to represent Moses as a prophet: “By a prophet YHWH brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved” (Hos 12:13). Nonetheless, Moses is rarely described as a prophet in the Pentateuch, and in some respects he is atypical e.g. infancy and early life narratives, his role as a religious leader and a lawgiver. At the same time, he embodies characteristics of prophets. He was called like Amos from minding his sheep and, like Jeremiah, was conscious of his inability to speak. Like Isaiah and Elijah he performed a long series of miracles. Like Isaiah and Ezekiel he was given a rare glimpse of God in all his glory. He interceded for his people not just occasionally, like Amos and Isaiah, but for all his life. The Moses of the Pentateuch is a kind of identikit picture of the archetypal prophet [Sawyer].³⁵

This was developed by deuteronomy which gives a theology of prophets. Grounds are given for withholding belief in a given prophet i.e. if a prophet tries to lead people away from YHWH and if what the prophet says does not come true. In Deut 18:15-22, a fundamental text which shows who a prophet is, not only is the prophetic office attributed to Moses, but he becomes the prototype by which all later prophets are judged. Moses is referred to as *nabi*.

In this context, the forward-looking dimension of Mosaic prophecy is emphasized. It is stated that YHWH will generate a prophet like Moses. For Driver, this is not a simple individual but a prophetic order whose prophets will do in his time and place what Moses has done paradigmatically for Israel i.e. prophets enable Israel in a particular time and place to be fully and intentionally the covenant people of YHWH.³⁶ Meeks, as attested in both Palestinian and Diaspora materials, take this to refer to a succession of prophetic rulers.³⁷

All the prophets that are raised by God are there to succeed Moses. These prophets are like Moses since as the ones raised up by God they are given God’s word directly, as was Moses at Horeb, which they are to speak with authority i.e. they speak in God’s name, “I will put my words on his mouth”. Like Moses, they are also mediators i.e. the prophet is first chosen amongst the people to have an experience of God on behalf of the people. He is then sent to the people with God’s word.

At the same time, Deut 34:10 affirms Moses superiority and authority: “there has never since arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face” (cf. Ex 33:11). He spends 40 days and night with God at Sinai where he is transformed and consequently his face shines to the extent that he needs to put on a veil. He spoke to God in the same way in which a man speaks to his friend, he wants

³⁵ cf. John F.A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and Biblical Prophets*, 1987, 68.

³⁶ cf. S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 1916, 229.

³⁷ cf. Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 189.

to see God's glory and God shows Himself to him. In another instance God is described as speaking to Moses "mouth to mouth" rather than in dreams, visions and riddles (Num 12:6-9). For Blenkinsopp, superior intimacy affirms a quantitative difference between the epoch of Moses and that of the prophets.³⁸

The OT evidence is ambiguous on whether Moses saw God. Ex 33:18-20 is clear that he did not since God's answer to Moses' quest to see his glory was: "You cannot see the face of God and live". Later rabbinic interpretations reconciled the traditions: the prophets saw God through panes of glass, but Moses saw him through only one.

Moses does not only mediate the law but he also interprets, teaches and administers it. The purpose of the instructions is more than didactic. He tries to elicit obedience from the stubborn people and encourages them to teach the law to their children. This role was delegated to a comprehensive judicial system and in the commissioning of the seventy elders effected by the transfer to them of some of Moses' spirit (Num 11:4-35). For Blenkinsopp, this attachment to Moses is understood as a legitimization of ecstatic prophecy in and outside the institutional framework (cultic sphere) as in the case of Eldad and Medad.³⁹

Within the deuteronomistic context, prophecy is God's answer to Israel's request, made at Sinai, for a mediating presence throughout its history.⁴⁰ Prophecy is a mode of mediating the relationship between YHWH and his people. This refers both to individual persons and to a literary corpus. It has been legitimized by drawing a close relation between prophecy and Moses in the canonizing process even if the prophets, in their individual idiosyncrasies, may have had nothing in common with Moses (the Mosaic tradition may well post-date the prophets) [Brueggemann].⁴¹

Nonetheless, a different tradition suggests that the call of Samuel at Shiloh marked the beginning for the prophetic activity. This is based on firmer historical grounds for prophecy was always intimately connected to the monarchy beginning with Saul living in times of political crisis. Hence, Blenkinsopp concludes that in its early manifestations, Israelite prophecy was essentially an indigenous phenomenon with a character of its own dictated by the unique situation in which the Israelites found themselves.⁴²

³⁸ cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon*, 1977, 89.

³⁹ cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Kentucky 1983, 47.

⁴⁰ cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Kentucky 1983, 47.

⁴¹ cf. Brueggemann, 622. 633.

⁴² cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Kentucky 1983, 48.

9. New Testament

Jesus appears within a tissue of prophetic utterances represented by Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and John the Baptist. Jesus retains a number of prophetic characteristics. The conviction that Jesus was the eschatological prophet like Moses of Deut 18:15,18 shaped portions of the Jesus tradition.

9.1 Luke

Lk has a special interest in portraying Jesus as a prophet. As the one sent by God, Jesus is the one anointed by the Spirit. This is announced by himself in the opening scene in Nazareth where He quotes Isa 61:1-2: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me...”, and then asserts they have been fulfilled in the today of his presence (Lk 4:17,21). This claim is echoed again by Peter in *Acts*. According to Tuckett, the fact that these words belong to an Old Testament prophet and the evidence by Qumran that the Jews used this text for a prophetic figure, suggests that Jesus is the one anointed by the Spirit to be a prophet.⁴³

In lucan Nazareth pericope, where Jesus identifies himself, his words and his work with the prophets, Lk uses the “Amen formula” which is used by Jesus as an introduction to his own words. According to Manson, this is a highly characteristic mode of speech for which there is no parallel. Lk seems to understand this formula as a pattern of speech characteristic of the prophets such as “thus says the Lord”. Such an understanding seems to be confirmed by Mark who first uses this formula at the end of a section where Jesus repeatedly laid claim to being a person who possessed the Spirit (Mk 3:28-29). In the Judaism of Jesus’ time this almost marked a prophetic inspiration. The point is substantiated in the Fourth Gospel insisting that the words that Jesus speaks as not His but the Father’s.

In the same scene in Nazareth Jesus uses the examples of Elijah and Elisha working outside the confines of Israel to illustrate that “no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s own *patris*” (Lk 4:24). This theme of rejection applies to Jesus who as a prophet finds no welcome in his own home place.

The story of the raising of the widow of Nain’s son concludes with the crowd acknowledging Jesus with the words: “a great prophet has risen among us” (Lk 7:16). Hence, in his public ministry Jesus is seen by Lk as a prophet recapitulating the work of the prophets of the past.

Shortly afterwards the story of the sinful woman follows and the Pharisee says that “If this man were a prophet he would have known what kind of woman this is...” (Lk 7:39). Jesus knows this exactly and thereby proves to be a prophet.

⁴³ cf. Christopher M. Tuckett, *Luke*, Sheffield 1996, 82.

In the middle of the long journey to Jerusalem, solemnly announced at Lk 9:51, Jesus claims that he “must” (*dei*) reach his goal in the city of Jerusalem “because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (Lk 13:33).

Redaction criticism also shows that in the speculations by Herod and the crowds about whether John or Jesus might be a prophet, Lk changes the Marcan “prophet” to “one of the ancient prophets has arisen”. Hence, what is then implicitly denied is not that Jesus is a prophet *per se* but that he is an ancient prophet returning. Hence the possibility that he is a prophet is left open.

In *Acts* the prophetic category of Jesus is understood in terms of the prophet like Moses of Deut 18. Like Jesus, Moses is born in a time when the fulfillment of God’s promises came to be; he grew in wisdom and in favour and he visited his brethren giving them salvation.

The Pentecost event as interpreted by Peter citing Joel 2:28-32 makes three changes from this pericope and thereby Lk draws together the elements of an eschatological Spirit of prophesy manifested by signs and wonders, which in the biblical tradition were associated above all with Moses.

The importance of this theme in Lk has been stressed by Johnson who argued that the pattern of Moses as set out in Stephen’s speech provides the structure for Lk-Acts. Moses is sent by God, rejected by the people, and then raised up again, but rejected a second time. So too Jesus, the prophet like Moses, is sent by God, rejected by his people, but raised up by God in the resurrection. The mission goes out a second time through the Church, but is again rejected. This pattern of a double mission and a double rejection finds its logic in a Mosaic typology.

9.2 Jesus’ Prophetic Characteristics

Stanton maintains that for the evangelist the baptism of Jesus stands for the OT prophetic call: Jesus has a visionary experience (He saw the heavens open) and hears a voice from heaven (Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased). But these accounts are not closely similar in the structure of the OT call narratives. Nonetheless sayings introduced by “I came” or “I was sent” reflect the conviction that Jesus is one sent by God.⁴⁴

Visionary experiences, connected to the OT prophets, find a parallel to a vision in which Jesus saw God’s final conquest over Satan (Lk 10:18). As in the OT prophets, this is accompanied by a proclamation. Jesus proclaims that his exorcisms are an indication of the partial presence of the kingly rule of God and that Satan’s power is being assaulted.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ cf. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, Oxford 1993, 180.

⁴⁵ cf. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, Oxford 1993, 182.

Like OT prophets Jesus used symbolic actions as dramatic ways of warning about the future e.g. the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree. These are related to the prophetic sayings which refer to the crisis and disaster which Jerusalem and the temple will face.⁴⁶

All this indicates that his contemporaries regarded Jesus as a prophet. Such a prophet in the times of Jesus was seen to herald the dawn of the promised new era in God's dealing with his people. "Prophet" did not become a title for Jesus in the post-Easter period, perhaps partly because it would not have differentiated Jesus from John the Baptist sufficiently sharply.⁴⁷

The Evangelist, however, was careful not to conclude that Jesus is simply a prophet. Indeed Jesus presents himself as someone greater than the prophet Jonah. Hawthorne concludes that Jesus did understand himself as a prophet – a Spirit-inspired and Spirit empowered person – and his ministry as a prophetic ministry. But Jesus was more than a prophet, he was the unique Son of the Father, the Son of God.⁴⁸

9.3 The Fourth Gospel

This is fully affirmed in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus is referred to as a prophet by the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:19) and the man born blind (Jn 9:17). In both passages the evangelist indicates this as a positive but partial statement of the significance of Jesus. The Samaritan woman and the villages eventually recognize that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world. The man born blind confesses his faith in Jesus as the Son of man and worship him.

The Fourth Gospel also establishes a parallelism between Moses and Jesus as the eschatological prophet of Deut 18 in various respects. Yet it also proclaims that Jesus surpasses Moses. John omits the transfiguration scene because the Johannine Jesus is always in glory for He is the revealer. Indeed, Jn 1:17 implies a comparison and contrast in both the content and means of revelation: for the law was given (*edothē*) through Moses; grace and truth came into being (*eggeneto*) through Jesus Christ. Moses could tell us how to live but only Jesus could give us life [Brown].⁴⁹

John notes two events in Moses' life that foreshadow Jesus' life and work. Moses and the bronze snake (Num 21) parallels Jesus on the cross in that both are lifted up and both yield life from death when they are looked upon – the superiority of Jesus is that gazing upon him gives eternal life (Jn 3). Whilst Moses gave manna to the people, who later died, the Father gives the true bread from heaven which is Jesus and which yields eternal life (Jn 6). Other mosaic motifs such as the Passover lamb whose

⁴⁶ cf. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, Oxford 1993, 183.

⁴⁷ cf. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, Oxford 1993, 178.

⁴⁸ cf. G.F. Hawthorne, *Prophecy*, in J.B. Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Leicester 1992, 641.

⁴⁹ cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, London 1994, 213.

bones are not to be broken (Ex 12) and the blood of the covenant (Ex 24) foreshadow Jesus' sacrificial death, although explicit reference to the person of Moses is lacking.

The authority that Jesus invokes is not from him being made messiah but from his contact with God, just as Moses' authority does not stem from his becoming a king, as in David, but in having come into contact with God. Jn does not deal with this similarity by discounting Moses but proclaimed that God spoke to Moses (Jn 9) and that Moses gave not only the Law and circumcision (Jn 7) but also wrote of Jesus in the Law. From the author's perspective, those who truly believed the writings of Moses (Jn 5) would thereby believe Jesus. Hence, the rejection of Jesus was a rejection of Moses. Eventually, this proclamation brought hostility by the synagogue authorities (Jn 9).

Whereas Moses is said to have seen God, Jn affirms that no one has ever seen God except the Son (Jn 1). Because of this Jesus has an even greater intimacy with God than Moses. Besides, whatever Moses saw and heard from God took place after he went up the mountain but Jesus did not have to go up to meet God but was already there with God (Jn 3). Hence, the Eternal Logos is like the personified wisdom whereas the Incarnate Logos is like Moses [Brown].⁵⁰

10. Conclusion

For Barton, prophets are "non-establishment figures who will not be silenced".⁵¹ These arise in Israel when covenantal modes of existence are endangered. It is the work of the prophet to insist that all of Israel's life is to be lived in relation to and in response to YHWH's will and purposes, and to enunciate the consequences of a life lived without regard to this defining relationship. Thus prophets are to invite a turning in Israel, a turn from pride to trust, from despair to hope, from abusiveness to covenantal neighbourliness.⁵² Nonetheless, the ultimate object of the prophet's consciousness is not in what the prophet says but of Whom he speaks for he sympathizes with God whose emotions he shares and of whom he has become witness. In this line Jesus indeed a prophet and more for He claimed "I and the Father am one". Jesus does not sympathize with the divine pathos. He is the divine pathos, the Word made flesh.

⁵⁰ cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, London 1994, 213.

⁵¹ J. Barton, *Oracles of God*, 261.

⁵² cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Minneapolis 1997, 697.