

# Willem A. VanGemerén “INTERPRETING THE PROPHETIC WORD”

## Introduction to Part 1

The prophets of the Old Testament were God's ministers of the Word during the Mosaic administration. They had seen something of the glory of God and expressed in poetic form the vision of God, his kingdom, the messianic age of *shalom* (“peace”), the work of the Spirit, a new community of people, and the transformation of creation and humanity. The prophetic message of salvation (1 Peter 1:10- 12) is rich, embracing the work of the triune God in restoring creation to a state of shalom, in which the children of God live by his order, enjoy his benefits, and will no more be oppressed by Satan, enemies, misunderstanding, or physical distress.

Our Lord explained his mission using these Old Testament writings. To his disciples he said, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). From this we learn that everything in the Old Testament has its proper focus in Jesus Christ. A Christian reading the Old Testament cannot but pay careful attention to the relationship between the Old Testament and our Lord. Each division of the Old Testament, including the prophetic writings, relates to our Lord. These Scriptures are God's Word to his people, and the authority of that Word has not been diminished since the coming of Jesus Christ. The very basis for apostolic preaching was the Old Testament.

The three divisions (the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms) of which our Lord spoke reflect the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh: Torah, Prophets, Writings). The Prophets (*n'bi'im*) consist of the “Former Prophets” (*n'bi'im ri'sonim*: Joshua through 2 Kings, except Ruth) and the “Latter Prophets” (*n'bi'im 'aharonim*: Isaiah to Malachi, except Daniel and Lamentations). (See figure 1)

The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (including Lamentations and Daniel) form the Scriptures of the Jews and are to be treated as God's Word by Christians. The Christian Bible consists of two parts: God's Word *before* the Son and God's Word *after* the Son. The two parts relate to each other similarly to the way we commonly designate 1 and 2 Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

God's messengers before Christ (the prophets) and God's messengers after Christ (the apostles) encourage us to persevere in waiting for the new age of righteousness, justice, and absolute joy. All who respond in faith to the promises of God live both in the grateful enjoyment of his present benefits and in the hope of the realization of the fullness of the new age. The prophetic revelation – as God's Word regarding his Messiah – bridges the era between Moses and our Lord, but as God's Word regarding the salvation to come, it bridges the gap between Moses and the new creation.

**Figure 1. The Books of the Hebrew Old Testament**

<b>Torah</b>	<b>Nevi'im</b>		<b>Ketuvim</b>
	Former	Latter	(Writings)
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges 1-2 Samuel 1-2 Kings	Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel <i>The twelve:</i> Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi	Psalms Proverbs Job <i>5 Scrolls:</i> Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Ecclesiastes Ester Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah 1-2 Chronicles

# CHAPTER 1

## The Development of Prophetism

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## INTRODUCTION

The prophets opened windows to the grand plan of God by which the eye of hope may have a vision of what God has prepared for his people. The prophets spoke *in* time as they were human beings empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak God's word in space and time. Yet the prophets spoke *out of* time as their writings reflect more than the historically and culturally conditioned collection of Israel's prophets. The Lord empowered the prophets by the Spirit to proclaim and write down the revelation he gave them as a witness for future generations.

The prophets were a message of transformation in a historical context to people who were complacent with their abilities and achievements. They spoke of God's imminent judgment on all Humanity, including Israel and Judah, because humankind rebelled against the Lord, the king of glory. They announced the common Kingdom of the Lord, the Judgment, and the transformation of creation.

The prophetic vision of God's glorious Kingdom shattered the reality of human kingdoms and structures but also shape the vision of a remnant then lives in harmony with God. The prophets posited a sharp antithesis between God's kingdom and human kingdoms, divine revelation and human religion. The distinction between Revelation and religion is fundamental in understanding the nature of the prophetic role and in interpreting the prophetic message.

## Revelation

God's revelation was his gift to Israel. He had brought them out of Egypt into Canaan. He has instructed, comforted, fed, guided, disciplined, and promised to be with Israel in prosperity and adversity. He was Israel's King and Warrior, who hit solemnly sworn to take all of the Israel's concerns to the heart! He had also promised to take care of them in the present and to secure the future. It made no sense to seek any other god of power because Yahweh, the Creator of everything, is King, and all things are under his control. But revelation demands a response of absolute loyalty and submission to The God who has spoken. (See figure 2.) Any deviation from the way of revelation, slight as it might be, degrades revelation into religion.

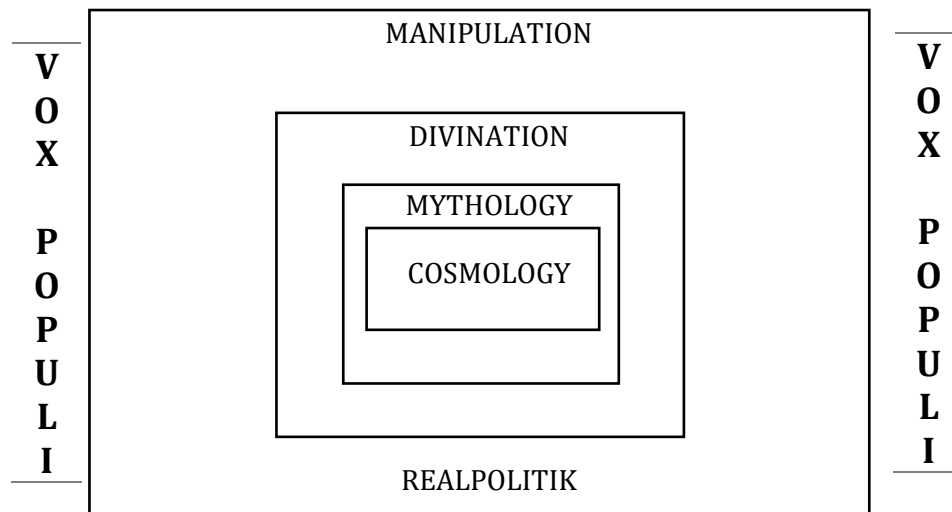
The Nations around Israel the religious. They also sought "divine" guidance. They, also, desire to live in peace and enjoy prosperity. To obtain these ends, they sought to know the will of the gods through professional diviners, magicians, enchanters, and interpreters of dreams. They made every effort to maintain harmony between the society of humans and the world of the gods.

The diagram consists of two side-by-side conceptual models. The left model, titled 'RELIGION', shows a vertical arrow pointing down from 'Self' to a horizontal line. From this line, two arrows point down to 'Man' and 'World'. The word 'god(s)' is positioned in the center of the horizontal line. Below this model is the word 'Manipulation'. The right model, titled 'REVELATION', shows a vertical arrow pointing down from 'God' to a horizontal line. From this line, two arrows point down to 'Man' and 'World'. The word 'Self' is positioned in the center of the horizontal line. Below this model is the word 'Submission'.

Religion is an attempt to explain what has happened, what is happening, and what may happen. In primitive societies people live in constant fear that the gods may become angry. To avoid catastrophe, they endeavour to please the gods through prescribed rituals. In the absence of revelation they depend on professional priests and diviners to ascertain what the gods desire.

Whether in war or in piece, in adversity or in prosperity, they seek to know what they should do to advance their goals and to control the desires outcome. In this, humans are very religious. Though the methods and nature of these religious expressions differ from society to society, humans in the most technological and secularized society have much in common with their fellow humans in the most primitive society. Superstitions, science, techniques, and phobias bring humans to the same basic issue of life: How can I control my destiny?

**Figure 3. Religious Framework of Reference**



Religion is *manipulative*. In their crises humans are very adept at looking for and finding salvation. "Salvation" is that complex of acts, structures, and institutions by which human beings individually and collectively define, determine, and control their happiness. (See figure 2.) Salvation is understood differently by each nation and culture, shaped by their cosmogony, mythology, divination, and magic. (See figure 3.)

Cosmology supplies a structure for understanding how the world came into being, how it is ordered, and how supernatural phenomena relate to it.

Mythology supplies an interpretation of human experience and custom. It is a more comprehensive framework within which individuals and society understand themselves and in terms of which they explain all that is beyond rational explanation.

Divination and Magic provide a bridge between the world of the supernatural and that of humans, one by which humans aim at some special insight or power in controlling their destiny.

### ***Divination***

Divination (the mantic) is the practice of knowing the future; it occurs in two forms: inductive and intuitive. (See figure 4.) When a diviner uses an object ("omen"), divination is of the inductive type. The object or omen may be a natural event (science in the sky), unusual phenomena (the behaviour or noise of animals), or a ritual involving water, oil, fire, arrows, or lots. The intuitive form of divination occurs when an individual acts as a medium to give a word from the gods.

The ancients developed many techniques of divination. In the series and Babylonia the *baru* ("seer") priests, an important case of diviners, specialized in examining the entrails of sacrificial sheep (extispicy). They looked for a sign by seeing the position of the internal organs (liver, gall bladder, stomach, etc). The *baru* were consulted by kings at court and by generals of the battlefield. They wrote manuals and instructed novices in the art of divination.

**Figure 4. Divination and Magic**



Other forms of divination include interpreting dreams, liquids, and fire; casting lots; shooting arrows; throwing sticks; mediums' consulting the dead (*necromancy*); using *theraphim*; watching the behaviour of animals; and observing signs in the heavens (*astrology* or *astromancy*). Regardless of the technique, the diviner believed that the gods gave humans and omen. The diviner did not claim infallibility but offered probability. Therefore, he used a variety of omens and let the final decision to the one who had sought his advice.

Intuitive divination approaches biblical prophetism but was relatively rare among the nations surrounding Israel. The tablets discovered at Mari have given us a closer look at intuitive divination. Forty-six of these tablets provide some insight into two distinctive forms of "prophetism": intuitive prophets and divine-prophets. The intuitive prophets came from a seminomadic background. They were ecstasies who had the message transcribed and sent to a king or official. The diviner prophets were professional or lay diviners. They were closely associated with the King and were expected to speak words of encouragement. The professional prophets different from the lay, is the permitted to "stand" or "rise" when speaking. They spoke only of what they had seen; the lay prophets spoke of what they had dreamed.

Literary prophecies were rare in the ancient Near East. The intuitive prophets give isolated oracles, unlike Israel's Prophets. In this regard the prophetic movement in Israel is unique. The prophets of God spoke God's word at different times and "in various ways" (Heb.1:1), but in their diversity they formed an extensive prophetic tradition.

### ***Magic***

Magic, the practice of occult, was also widely used in the ancient Near East. In Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Canaan, gods and humans alike tried to gain advantage over others by following prescribed rituals. The ancients were very adept in the magic arts and employed them as a powerful "force" in society. For example, the Babylonian story of creation extols the magical power of Ea-Enki, the patron deity of the magic spells in Babylon: "Ea, who understands everything... made and established against it a magical circle for all. He skillfully composed his overpowering, holy incantation. He recited it and thus caused (it) to be upon the water. He poured out sleep upon him."

The magicians were open schooled, especially those in Egypt. They wrote manuals prescribing rituals for casting spells and for warding off the powers of magic by using special colors, amulets, and ceremonies. (See figure 4.) Magic affected mutual relations, business, religions, and international affairs. Magic gave people special powers. Through magic, people gained advantages for themselves (fertility, protection, prosperity, and peace) but also used these same skills in creating disadvantages for the enemies (infertility, destruction, adversity, and war). All these practices were manipulative.

Magic could also be a destructive force when it ruptured relations. Some people lived in fear and others thought that they possessed special powers. Magic was essentially manipulative; it held the promise of individual or national success, even at the cost of others. The popularity of this practices explains the prohibitions in the Bible against engaging in cultic prostitution, wearing the symbols of the opposite sex, having tattoos, cutting one's hair, and displaying charms.

### ***Revelation Contra Religion***

The people of Israel were like the Nations, for they, too, shared in the primeval history of creation and rebellion. For this reason the Lord had given Israel a brief account of their prehistory in Genesis 1-11. This chapters explain God's kingship over creation and human beings acts of rebellion against him. Humankind willingly and consistently rejected God's Kingdom in order to establish its own kingdom.

Genesis 1-11 contrast God's kingdom with the aggressive power of the nations. God inaugurated a rule of harmony, meaning, and joy (chap.1-2), but humans established self-rule by rebellion against God and by the corruption of his order (3:1-11:9). Apart from God's grace to humankind, the kingdom of humans distinguishes itself by autonomy (self-rule without regard of God), dictatorial power, and oppression, resulting in anarchy. It is of the very nature of human kingdoms to be obsolescent. Though a nation may develop and achieve the greatest cultural achievements, the kingdoms of human must fall!

These eleven chapters shed light on how humankind develops its own religious structures. Religion may take many forms: animism, polytheism, monotheism, moralism, or even secularism. All these forms have one element in common: the rejection of the radical claims of the revelation. Religion as a system or frame of reference helps humans to explain their world, define their place in the world, and operate with purpose. All the people in the ancient Near East developed religious systems. Religion is open to every available means (political, economic, social) to bring harmony among people, within society, and within nature, but it is closed to revelation. At the royal courts wise men, religious leaders, and the practitioners of the occult met to give counsel to the king. Diviners and magicians explained the will of the gods, based on the interpretation of dreams, omens, spells, or special rituals. They aimed at one thing: the perpetuation of human structures on earth.

Like those of the nations, their ancestors had worshiped idols (Josh.24:2), but by grace the Lord had established a relation with the people of Israel, better known as covenant. They were chosen from the nation to be his people (Ex.19:5; Deut.7:6; 14:2; 26:18), his kingdom (Ps.114:2), and the recipients of his royal law (Rom.3:2). Yahweh had set them apart from the nations so that they might establish a new order - a countercommunity founded on the charter of his revelation. As revelation opposes religion, so God's people were to distinguish themselves from the cultures of the nations by developing a counterculture. As a counterculture, God's people, motivated and mobilized by the Spirit of God, were called to establish his kingdom on earth. His revelation, internalized by the Spirit, was to shatter the religious ways of the nations. Revelation cannot coexist with religion. (See figure 5.)

The Lord shatters human structures. Israel had witnessed that God is victorious over magic and mantic. In Egypt the Lord had afflicted the economic, social, and religious structures through the ten plagues. Even the Egyptian magicians had to recognize the sovereignty of Israel's God: " the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the Finger of God"" (Ex.8:19). Similarly, Balaam, the diviner from Paddan-aram had to admit,

There is no sorcery against Jacob,  
No divination against Israel.  
It will now be said of Jacob  
End of Israel, "See what God has done!"  
(Num.23:23)

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**Figure 5. Religion and Revelation**

RELIGION	REVELATION
Manipulation	Submission
Divination	Divine guidance and protection
Realpolitik	Divine wisdom
Vox populi	Counterculture

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### ***Forms of Divine Revelation***

Yahweh is opposed to all human forms of religions and human attempts to control the future. He alone sovereignly rules over all things in heaven and earth (Isa.41:4; 44:6), and he is free to reveal his will through any means, whether by lots, dreams, visions, the Urim and Thummim, or his prophets. Casting lots was one form of legitimate divination (Lev.16:8; Josh.18:6,8,10; 1 Sam.14:41; Acts 1:26). The Lord also freely used dreams (Deut.13:1; 1 Kings 3:5-15) and the prophets as his means of revelation. In addition, the Urim in the Thummim were stones by which the priests could consult the will of God (Ex.28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num.27:21; 1 Sam 23:2, 4, 9-12; 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh.7: 65).

### ***Revelation Against Religion***

The many references and allusions to divination and the magic arts in the Old Testament indicate that Israel lived in a pagan context. Because of the attractions inherent in divination and magic, the Lord prohibited his people from mixing paganism with Yahwism: "the Nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But that's for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so" (Deut. 18:14). Apart from the above forms of "legitimate" divination, he prohibited all other forms of divination and magic whether ancient or new (Lev.19:26-29,31; Deut. 18:10-11; 2 Kings 9:22; Isa. 3:2-3; 8:19; Jer. 27:9; Ezek.13:18-20). The prophets, too, uniformly condemned dependency on such religious expressions. For example, Isaiah said, "when men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isa.8:19).

Throughout Israel's history, pagan rituals, including divination and magic, held a special attraction. Saul (1 Sam. 28:3) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:24) attempt to purge those pagan practices. But other kings, such as Manasseh, encouraged all forms of paganism, which encompassed the practices of magic and mantic (2 Chron. 33:6). In the last days of Jerusalem the women of the city thought to avert the Judgment of God by sewing protective charms to ward off the Babylonian threat (Ezek.13:18-23). Of course, their efforts were of no avail!

## ***Realpolitik and Vox Populi***

Yet Israel had grave difficulty in living by the revelation of God alone. She adopted an unhealthy syncretism of revelation and religion. Do perennial dangers reduce revelation to religion: Realpolitik and the Vox populi. (See figure 5.) Realpolitik, or power politics, is a pragmatic application of any technique by which an individual or a group can maintain or enhance life. It is manipulative, works at the expense of others, and undermines the essential nature of revelation. Realpolitik gives coherence to all human structures (power, society, economics, and cult) and is readily adaptable to new situations or crisis. For example, when faced with the coalition of Aram and Israel, king Ahaz of Judah looked to Assyria for a political solution (2 Chron. 28:16) and even worshiped the gods of Aram as a religious fix (verse 23). He believed in the religion of manipulation: The end justifies the means. In realpolitik anything is fair in achieving the goal.

Vox populi ("the voice of the people") is a form of Realpolitik. In search of freedom, prosperity, and happiness, humans in any society establish a sacred alliance of relative values that form the basis of laws, social interaction, politics, economics, cultic expressions, and traditions. Vox populi rewards all who support the common ideals but punishes anyone who challenges them. Vox populi shuns the absolute demands of revelation by softening the radical nature of faith in favor of popular expectations. Israel's false prophets, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees were bound by the vox populi. The true Prophets, our Lord, and the apostles faced the antagonism aroused against them by human commitment to pragmatism (Realpolitik) and to popular views and traditions (vox populi).

## ***Revelation and Wisdom***

Israel did not have to search for God through religious manipulation because the Lord had given them his relation. The revelation of Yahweh in first and foremost a relation of who Yahweh is. He is the great King, the Creator of everything, the God of the Fathers and of promise, and the Redeemer of Israel (Ex.3:15; 19:5; 20:2). He's also the Sovereign King over all nations (15:11-16, 18). He guides and protects his people who submit to his sovereignty, and he gives wisdom to all who seek Him diligently. He rewards all who abandoned the path of Realpolitik and the vox populi for the "paths of righteousness" (Ps.23:3; see Prov.3:5-8). But the Lord condemns anyone who relies on self, divination, magic, human structure (Realpolitik), and human systems of value (vox populi, see Prov.6:16-19).

Daniel's situation illustrates the contrast between revelation and religion. Daniel and his friends were surrounded by practitioners of the magic and mantic arts, but they remind unwaveringly loyal to Yahweh. They trusted him for wisdom while denying that any "wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about" (Dan.2:27). God exalted Daniel to the position of overseer of all "the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners" (4:7; 5:11), but he made the sages of Babylon look foolish and abased king Nebuchadnezzar to leave like an animal.

## ***Conclusion***

The danger of mixing religious ways with a selective interpretation of God's revelation comes naturally in our search for peace with God, our world, and ourselves. We shall see that Israel's problems with syncretism, Realpolitik, and vox populi persist today.



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROPHETISM IN ISRAEL

The development of prophetism in Israel reveals the interweaving of divine and human activity. Through the prophets, people heard their "voice" of God and received a new vision for life. As spokesman for Yahweh, the prophets viewed human activities from God's vantage point. He spoke of judgment, urged repentance, and envisioned a transformed humanity and a new world order: The kingdom of God. The prophets, as heralds of the Kingdom, form one continuous stream from Moses to John the Baptist.

Moses, the beginning of the Stream, is the *fountainhead* of the prophetic movement. The course of the stream through the history of redemption is altered at crucial junctures, or rapids. The prophets were God's spokespersons in crisis, as R.B.Y. Scott expressed so well: "They spoke in the atmosphere of moments which were critical for men because Yahweh's righteous will was present, and his claims were pressing."

The first such critical era was in the days of Samuel when Israel was caught up in immorality, tribal squabbles, and syncretism. Samuel lived during what we may call the "rapids" of Israel's history, and he was instrumental in developing the prophetic model. Elijah faced another crisis situation: The bankruptcy of Israel's faith. His mission was to call out a remnant, and in this regard his ministry determined the message of the prophets. Elijah is the beginning of the prophetic office of *covenant prosecutor* in the sense that he accused God's people of treachery and comforted the remnant with the hope of God's Kingdom. All prophets from Elijah to John the Baptist share a common message of judgment on the self-sufficient end of the hope of all who long for God's Kingdom. Hence, we may think of John the Baptist as the last cataract in the prophetic stream. (See figure 6.)

### ***Moses: The Fountainhead***

Moses has a special place in redemptive history (Heb.3:1-5). In God's administration of his people, which lasted till the coming of the Son of God, Moses was God's servant. He was also the fountainhead of the prophets. The prophetic message was rooted in the Mosaic revelation, just as the apostolic teaching (paradosis or "tradition") was rooted in Jesus' teaching.

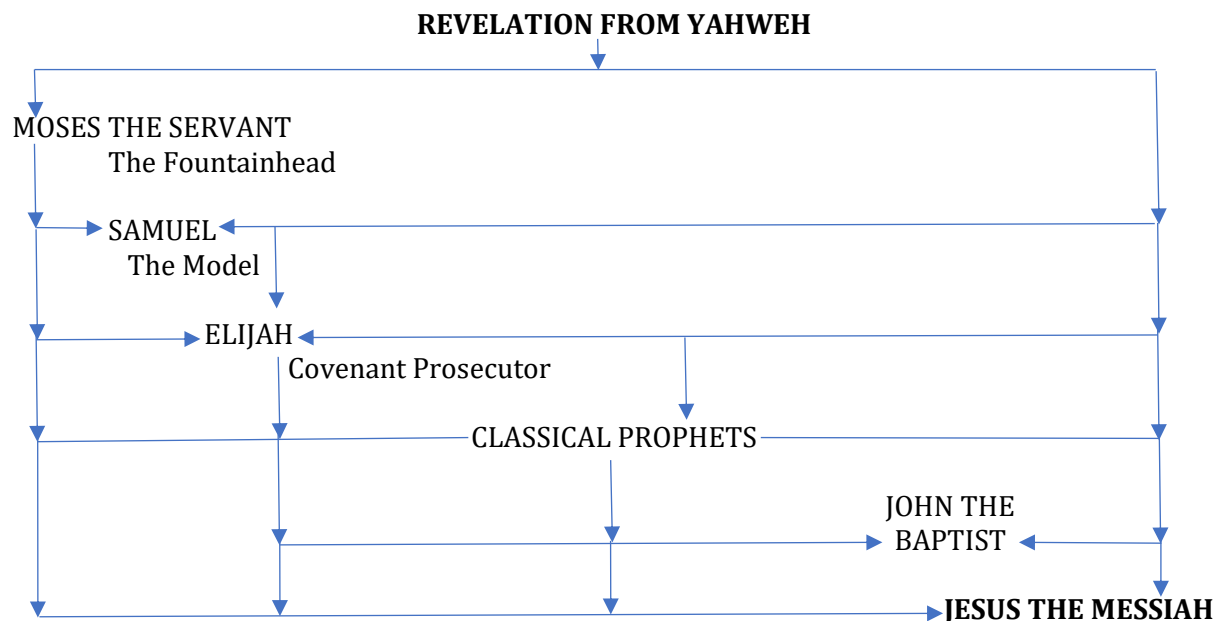
### ***Moses: The Servant of Yahweh***

Moses occupied a unique position in God's covenant Administration. He ministered to Israel as the servant of the Lord and was exalted by his special relationship with the Lord (Num.12:6-8; Deut.34:10-12).

When Aaron and Miriam complained about Moses' exalted position as mediator between Yahweh and Israel, Moses did not respond to the charge (Num.12:3). Instead, the Lord spoke to defend his servant,

When a prophet of the Lord is among you,  
I reveal myself to him in visions,  
I speak 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?  
(vv.6-8)

**Figure 6. The Development of the Prophetic Movement**



The Lord confirmed Moses' authority to be his chosen vehicle of the communication: "I reveal... I speak to him..." (Num. 12:6; see Deut.18:18). He set Moses apart as his servant (Ex.14:31; Deut. 34:5; Josh.1:1-2) - a relationship of confidence and friendship between a superior and an inferior. Moses is unique way remained god's servant, even after his death; he served as there "head" of the Covenant Administration till the new Covenant in our Lord Jesus (Num.12:7; see Heb.3:2,5).

The characteristic difference between Moses and the prophets after him lies in the directness in which the Lord spoke to his trusted servant. Moses as the fountainhead was the first receive, to write down, and to teach the revelation of God. This Revelation extended to all facets of life, including the laws of holiness, purity, rituals, family life, work, and society. Through Moses, the Lord had planned to shape Israel into "a counter-community". God's revelation was to make them immune to the detestable practices of the pagans, including divination and magic. The word of revelation by the power of the Spirit was to transform Israel into mature children.

The last words of the Pentateuch testify to the importance of Moses.

Science then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt - to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel (Deut.34:10-12).

According to this prophetic epitaph of Moses' ministry, Moses occupied a unique place as God's friend. He had enjoyed the privilege of close communion with Lord, "the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with a friend" (Ex.33:11).

Moses' position and revelation foreshadow the unique position of our Lord. Moses served in the God's kingdom is a faithful "servant" (Heb.3:2, 5), whereas "Christ is faithful as a

son over God's house" (v.6). Moses, like our Lord, verified the revelation of God by signs and wonders (Deut.34:12, see also Ex.7:14-11:8; 14:5-15:21).

### ***Moses: The Mediator of the Covenant***

Moses was the mediator of the covenant of Sinai (Ex.19:3-8; 20:18-19). The Old Testament associates Moses with the covenant, the theocracy, and the revelation at Sinai. This Covenant, also known as the Mosaic (or Sinaitic) covenant, *was an administration of grace and promise by which the Lord consecrated a people to himself through the sanctions of divine law.* The Lord dealt with his people graciously, give him promises to all who had faith in him, and consecrated them to order their lives by his holy law. The covenant administration was a concrete expression of God's Kingdom. The Lord was present with his people and extended his special rule over them. The essence of the covenant is the promise, " I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Ex.6:7; Deut.29:13; Ezek.11:20).

Although Moses did not as yet know of the revelation of God in Christ, he saw the "glory" of God (Ex.34:29-35). The Apostle Paul confirmed the grace of God in the Mosaic covenant when he wrote to the church at Rome, " Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (Rom.9:4-5).

### ***Moses: The Eschatological Prophet***

Moses, the greatest prophet before Jesus' incarnation spoke of the ministry of another prophet (Deut.18:15-22). He was God's witness to Israel that a greater fulfilment lay ahead: "Moses was faithful... testifying to what would be said in the future" (Heb.3:5). The nature of that future was nothing less than the rest that comes (4:1-13) in Jesus Christ, for whose sake Moses also suffered (11:26).

The eschatological hope of the Mosaic revelation is the presence of God among his people. Israel's eschatology begins in God's covenant with Abraham and with Israel. Moses - this servant of God, the intercessor, the mediator of the covenant - pointed beyond his administration to an *era of rest*. He spoke of the enjoyment of rest and ordained that all the members of the covenant fellowship should long for the rest-to-come in the celebration of the *Sabbath* ("rest"). The Sabbath is the sign of the covenant (Ex.31:14-17), the sign of Israel's consecration to a holy mission (v.13), and of their being blessed with all God's gifts in creation (Deut.26:18-19; 28:3-14).

Moses painfully realized that the people could not enter into that rest because of his disobedience and because of Israel's rebelliousness (Deut.4:21-26). Yet he spoke of a new era opened up by God's grace, freedom, fidelity (vv.29-31; 30:5-10, 32:39-43). Moses looked forward to an Era of peace; tranquility; and the full enjoyment of God's presence, blessing, and protection in the Promised Land (12:9-10; 25:19; cf. Ex.33:14; Josh.1:13).

This hope, grounded in Yahweh's fidelity (Deut.4:31), is most clearly expressed in Moses' final testimony, "the Song of Moses" (chap.32). In it he recites Yahweh's loving acts and favor to Israel (vv.1-14), warns against Israel's rebellion and their consequent suffering (vv.15-35), and comforts the godly with the hope of Yahweh's vengeance on the enemies and the deliverance of the remnant of Israel and of the nations (vv.36-43). He even alludes to the greatness of Yahweh's love to Gentiles (vv.36-43; Rom.15:10).

The eschatological significance of the Song of Moses reverberates in the prophetic messages of judgment and hope, justice and mercy, exclusion and inclusion, vengeance and deliverance. Moshe Weinfeld assesses the significant place of Moses in the eschatology of the Old Testament: "The belief in the final revelation of God to save the world thus unites all Israelite sources from the prayer of Moses to the contemporary liturgy." the Mosaic Administration, therefore, never intended to be an end in itself. It was a stage in the progress of fulfillment of the promises, and an important stage at that!

## ***Moses: The Fountainhead of the Prophetic Tradition***

As fountainhead of the prophetic tradition, Moses saw more of God's glorious self-revelation than anyone else in the Old Testament (Ex.33:18; 34:29-35). He spoke by God's Authority. Whoever questioned Moses challenges the Lord. Israel could find comfort, grace, and blessing because in Moses the roles of covenant mediator and intercessor (32:1-34:10; Num.14:13-25) came together. He prayed for Israel, spoke boldly at their advocate in the presence of the Lord, and encouraged them to look beyond himself to Yahweh.

The possibility of additional revelation opens the Mosaic "canon" to more revelation from God. Moses was not the end of divine revelation, but the beginning, the fountainhead, of the prophetic movement (see figure 7). He gave specific instructions on the office, role, and message of the prophets (nebi'im). The prophets comprised a class of theocratic officers by whom the Lord guided the covenant community in addition to the priests (and Levites), kings (Deut.17:14-20), tribal and local leadership (elders, leaders, and princes).

The prophets, like the priests and kings, were called and chosen by the Lord to serve as guardians in his kingdom. The prophet was an individual who, unlike the priestly caste and the royal dynasty, could not claim hereditary rights. He received a distinct call, as may be inferred from the promise, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet" (Deut.18:15, 18). As officers in God's kingdom, the prophets were called to shepherd God's people. The prophets in Israel conformed to seven criteria laid down in the Mosaic revelation. (See figure 7.)

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### **Figure 7. Mosaic Definition of a Prophet of God**

#### **WHO IS A PROPHET OF GOD?**

**He is in Israelite, called by God, and empowered by the Spirit**

**Who serves as God's spokesperson**

**Who has received Authority and Revelation from God**

**Who is a Good Shepherd over God's flock**

**Who demonstrates God's word and Mission by signs**

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First, the prophet as an Israelite shared fully in the heritage of the Covenant, the divine revelation, and the promises; therefore, revelation had to be continuous with the Mosaic revelation (Deut.13:1-5). This was true of all prophets, including our Lord (Matt.5:17-19).

Second, the prophet received a distinct call from the Lord. Like Moses, he knew without a doubt that he had been sent with a message by the great King.

Third, the Holy Spirit empowered the servant of God to withstand the pressures of his contemporaries, to speak the word of God, and to discharge his office faithfully. The power of the Spirit, which had characterized the ministry of Moses (Num.11:17), was also present with the prophets. Some underwent a visible change as the Spirit "lifted" them "up" (Ezek.3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5) or "came upon" them (1 Sam.19:20; 2 Chron.20:14; Ezek.11:5). They all experienced an overwhelming sense of the Spirit's presence that left them with no doubt that God has spoken. That feeling explains the prophetic sense of the inner compulsion, as in the case of Amos.

The Sovereign Lord does nothing  
without revealing his plan  
to his servants the prophets...

The Sovereign Lord has spoken -  
who can but prophecy?  
(Amos 3:7-8)

Fourth, the prophets declared God's word in his spokesperson. He did not serve himself; he served his Lord (Deut.18:18-19; cf. Ex.4:10-16; 7:1).

Fifth, the authority of the prophet lay not in his personal credentials but in the privilege of speaking in the name of the Lord (Deut.18:19-20, 22).

Sixth, the prophet was like Moses in that he was a good shepherd for God's people; he loved them and interceded on their behalf.

Seventh, a true prophet might give a sign verifying that the Lord had sent him. The sign (not) verified the prophet's having been sent by the Lord (Ex.3:12; Deut.13:2) and witnessed to the authenticity of his message. Though the signs were diverse - a miracle (1 Kings 13:5; 2 Kings 20:9), a designation of a specified time (1 Sam.12:16-19; Isa.7:14-25), a special event (1 Sam.10:3-7, 9-11; 1 Kings 13:3-5; 2 Kings 19:29), the prophet himself (Isa.8:18; 20:3; Ezek.24:24), or an object lesson (Ezek.4:3) - they signified that the prophet's mission was in the service of the Lord and that the prophet was God's mouthpiece. Whether or not the prophet gave a sign, the veracity of his message was vindicated by fulfillment (1 Kings 13:26; 16:12; 2 Kings 24:2; Jer.28:15-17; Ezek.33:33).

God's people were responsible for "testing" the new revelation by the standard ("canon") of the older revelation and by verifying the "signs" of the prophet (Deut.13:1-5; 18:20-22). The veracity of the prophetic word could also be verified by later generations, as Ezekiel writes, "When all this comes true - and it surely will - then they will know that the prophet has been among them" (Ezek.33:33).

### ***Conclusions***

The prophetic tradition had its origin in the Mosaic revelation, the covenant, law, sanctions, judgments, promises, and eschatology. The Mosaic revelation embodied within it the hope that the Lord would raise up an eschatological prophet like Moses. The final epitaph (Deut.34:10-12) was a reminder that the people were to live in the hope of God's raising up a prophet like Moses to do mighty wonders and be able to lead God's people into the promised rest (Heb.3:1-4:13). The people received encouragement in the prophetic Ministry of Samuel, in the royal counselor-prophets, an Elijah, and in the literary prophets. But Moses finds his counterparts and fulfillment in Jesus, whose words and signs attest that he is greater than Moses (John 1:14-18; 21:25; Heb.3:1-6).

**The text to be continued...**