FRANCESCO ARENA

Prophetic Conflicts in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah

Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe

Mohr Siebeck

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121

Francesco Arena

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How Post-Exilic Ideologies Created the False (and the True) Prophets

Mohr Siebeck

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To Elisa,
For always being there.

Superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est

Preface

This book is a revision of my doctoral dissertation, which was presented to the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh (UK) in 2019. When I was accepted as a candidate in Hebrew and Old Testament Studies at New College, my research ideas were quite nebulous (this, I am sure, will not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with doctoral research). I knew my project had to deal with the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and their textual relations, and at least that much was clear. However, these two books are such a good source of ideas and insights that it has not been an easy task to select just one to investigate. The epiphany (because there is always an epiphany in research) came to me, somewhere, somehow in December 2015, when I came across these words written by Giovanni Garbini about some aspects of the book of Ezekiel, "the exegetical inconsistency of those who would see in these verses [Ezek 22:26, 28], as in many others, an allusion to 'false prophets' instead of 'true' ones is shown by the coupling of these prophets with the priests, both united with the 'princes' to indicate the whole ruling class of Jerusalem" (*History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, p.115). That, to me, represented the first piece of the mosaic: is it possible to tell apart a "true" prophet from a "false" one? On what grounds? Is there an objective truth behind prophecy? Is this even a concern of the biblical editors?

From then on, I started to focus on the false promises of peace made by the prophets (Jer 6:14 and Ezek 13:10 are the first verses that come to mind) because many scholars had argued that only the false prophets could promise peace and well-being to a disobedient people. That has brought the book of Micah into the equation (Mic 3:5–8) and so the second piece of the mosaic had been found. For the third and final piece, the most relevant one, to fall into place I had to wait a little bit longer. During my reading of a fair share of books and articles on (false) prophecy and (false) prophets, in my second year of research, I stumbled across a series of articles from JSOT 27 – "Prophets Through the Looking Glass", by A. Graeme Auld, and "Poets not Prophets", by Robert P. Carroll. On reading these articles, the range of my research question broadened enormously. If the writing prophets (and so Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah) were not even prophets (as surmised by Auld and Carroll), how should we deal with their quarrels with the alleged "false" prophets? Can we still consider prophetic conflicts to be a socio-religious phenomenon of ancient Israel? Little by little, my project came together thanks to the brilliant insight of these three scholars.

Nihil sub sole novum, says Qohelet, and yet the problem of "false" prophecy remains challenging and very much an open question, as this book seeks to demonstrate. Bernard of Chartres said, *nos esse quasi nanos gigantium humeris insidentes* (as is quoted by John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, III, 4). So, while I was struggling to find a pathway for my research, I discovered I had all along been seated on the strong shoulders of some giants, whose exceptional work has allowed me to look further into an old problem in Biblical Studies. If the results do not live up to these premises, this writer only is to blame.

I am grateful to dr. Anja Klein, who acted as my supervisor in Edinburgh. I have been lucky to have worked under her supervision, as her guidance has been nothing short of excellent and replete with invaluable suggestions. The final form of this book owes much to the advice of prof. John Sawyer and dr. Jonathan Stökl, who acted as examiners when I defended my doctoral thesis. Among my friends and colleagues, I wish to single out dr. Clara Soudan and dr. Hannah Clardy. The former for sharing a glimpse of her deep understanding of life with me (you truly are wise beyond your years) and the latter for her passion in sharing her views about the Prophets and the Bible and for her patience in listening to mine. Special thanks to Ciaran Ward, who helped revise the form and style of the manuscript. I have dedicated this book to Elisa, to whom I owe the most – she has always been there for me.

Mondovì (Italy), Spring 2020 *Francesco Arena*

Table of Contents

Preface VII
List of Abbreviations...XIII

Chapter 1: Assessing the Problem 1

A. Of Peace and Falsehood 1

I. Trusting Divination (Deut 13:1–5; 18:18–22) 4
II. Ideology of Prophetic Conflicts 8

B. Methodology of Investigation..17

I. The editing of the Bible 17
II. Defining Relations between Texts 21
III. Establishing Relations between Texts.....................................28
IV. Outline of Investigation 31

Chapter 2: False Promises of Peace in the Book of Jeremiah......35

A. The Priests, the Prophets and the Foe from the North....................35

I. About the Book of Jeremiah 38
II. Peace but There Is No Peace (Jer 6:13–15; 10b–12) 44
1. Jeremiah 6:13–15 and 10b–12 as Secondary Additions.........................44
2. Translation, Critical Notes and Textual Comparison..........................46
3. Peace and Shame: The Clergy and the Demise of Jerusalem.....................48
III. What Will You Do When the End Comes (Jer 5:30–31)? 51
1. Translation, Critical Notes and Redaction History...........................53
2. Prophesying Falsehood 54
3. Priests at the Hands of the Prophets..55
IV. I Have Not Sent Them (Jer 14:11–16) 58
1. Translation, Critical Notes and Redaction History...........................61
2. The Origin of Prophetic Conflicts...64
V. The Priests, the Prophets and the Foe from the North: Observations........67

B. The Prophets and the Community 68

I. Prophets of Samaria and Prophets of Jerusalem (Jer 23:13–15) 70
II. There Will Be Peace to You (Jer 23:16–22) 72
III. Dreams of Falsehood (Jer 23:25–32) 76
IV. The Prophets ad the Community: Observations 78

C. The Prophets and the King of Babylon 79

I. The Cycle Jer 27–29 79
II. Do Not Serve the King of Babylon (Jer 27:1–21) 82
1. Redaction History of Jeremiah 27...84
2. New Prophets and New Messages..86
III. Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jer 28:1–17) 90
1. Redaction History of Jeremiah 29 92
2. Jeremiah vs. Hananiah: A *Non-Stricly* Prophetic Conflict...............96
IV. Prophets in Babylon (Jer 29:8–9, 21–23, 30–32) 99
1. What is the Falsehood Spread by the Prophets (Jer 29:8–9)?..........101
2. Were Ahab and Zedekiah Prophets (Jer 29:21–23)? 103
3. Was Shemaiah a Prophet of Falsehood (Jer 29:30–32)? 106
V. The King of Babylon Will Not Attack You (Jer 37:17–21) 108
1. Translation, Critical Notes and Redaction History 110
2. Jeremiah and King Zedekiah 111
VI. The Prophets and the King of Babylon: Observations 112

D. Pashhur Among the Prophets 113

I. Translation, Critical Notes and Redaction History..........................122
II. Creating a Prophetic Antagonist 125

E. Promising Peace and Prophesying Falsehood 118

Chapter 3: False Promises of Peace in the Book of Ezekiel 123

A. Ezekiel, His Book and the Prophets 123

I. The Book as Product of Later Times 125
II. The Prophets in the Book of Ezekiel 126

B. Vacuity and Lying Divination (Ezek 13:1–16) 128

I. The Core Oracle 130
II. Latest Editorial Developments 133
III. The Prophets of Israel and Their Excision from the Community 134

IV. The Land After 587 and the Return(s) from Babylon……………………..138

C. The Motif of Promising False Peace ……………………………………144

I. Similarities Between Jeremiah and Ezekiel ……………………………144
II. Establishing Priority between Jeremiah and Ezekiel …………………..147
III. From Jeremiah to Ezekiel ………………………………………………149

Chapter 4: False Promises of Peace in the Book of Micah ……...153

A. Preliminary Remarks on the Composition of the book of Micah ……….153

I. Micah and the Book of the Twelve ……………………………….........155
II. Blaming the Prophets in Micah …………………………………………...157

B. Prophets, Seers and Diviners in Micah 3 ………………………………158

I. Translation and Critical Notes ……………………………………........160
II. The Secondary Character of Micah 3:5–8 ……………………………..163
III. Peace or War: Micah and the (False?) Prophets ………………………..166

C. Textual Relations between Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah ………………171

I. Establishing Priority between Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah …………..172
II. From Jeremiah to Micah Bypassing Ezekiel …………………………..174

Chapter 5: Conclusion ……………………………………………………177

A. Promises of Peace: Origins, Development and Transmission …………177

B. The "False" Prophets …………………………………………………...181

I. No Criteria to Separate "True" and "False" Prophets …………………181
II. The *Shalom* or Optimistic Prophets ……………………………………182
III. Falsehood and Circular Reasoning……………………………………..183
IV. Accusations Aimed at All the Prophets ………………………………..183

C. Prophetic Conflicts as Ideological Conflicts ……………………………185

I. The Prophetic Antagonists of Jeremiah ………………………………..185
II. History and Ideology..…………………………………………………186
III. The Persian Period (at Least)…………………………………………188
IV. In the End ………………………………………………………........189

Bibliography…..………………………………………………………....191

Index of References ……………………………………………………...205

Index of Modern Authors…………………………………………………207

Index of Subjects …………………………………………………………209

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABC	*Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. A. K. Grayson. TCS 5. Locust Valley: J. J. Augustin, 1975.
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AIL	Ancient Israel and its Literature
AJS	American Journal of Semiotics
Ant. Iud.	Josephus Flavius' *Antiquitates Iudaicae*
ASTI	Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BL	Bible and Liberation
BS	The Biblical Seminar
BWANT	Beitrage zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CIS	Copenhagen International Seminar
CSHB	Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible
CurBS	Currents in Research: Biblical Studies
EBib	Etudes Bibliques
ETL	Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FZB	Forschung zur Bibel
G	*Septuagint*
GCS	Goucher College Series
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Ed. by Emil Kautzsch. Transl. by Arthur E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament

HeBAI	Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel
Hen	Henoch
Hist.	Herodotus' *Historiae*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JD	Jews and other Differences
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements Series
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew/Old Testament Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NCI	The New Critical Idiom
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library Commentary Series
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PSBL	Proceedings from the Society of Biblical Literature
RdQ	Revue de Qumrân
SBL	Studies in Biblical Literature Series (Society of Biblical Literature)
SBLDS	Dissertation Series (Society of Biblical Literature)
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
SJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
SLS	Studies in Language Series
SOTI	Studies in Old Testament Interpretation
Syr	Peshitta
T	Targum
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
V	Jerome's *Vulgate*
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTS	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentaries
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZSystTh	Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie

Chapter 1

Assessing the Problem

This study looks at a peculiar form of blaming the religious class that appears exclusively in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah. In these three books, the prophets (who are coupled with priests on two occasions but only in the book of Jeremiah) are accused of having promised peace (שלום) to the nation. This promise is exposed as being a blatant falsehood (שקר) and the prophets who uttered it are dismissed as liars who lead the people astray from YHWH. This accusation is repeated with minor variations in several texts throughout these books.

Moreover, especially in the book of Jeremiah, the reader finds a connection between "falsehood" and the idea of "promising peace". The present study aims to explore this *motif*, to explain the reasons for such peculiar allegations and to investigate the textual relations between the three prophetic books. The present study aims to explore this motif, to explain the reasons for such peculiar allegations and to investigate the textual relations between the three prophetic books. Therefore, this is a research on prophetic literature and prophets in biblical context.

A. Of Peace and Falsehood

The term "prophet" translates a specific Hebrew word, namely נביא, but there are many more terms in the Bible which identify those specialists who engage in the prediction of future events.[1] However, it is interesting to notice that נביא is also the designation given to the "writing" prophets; and that *Nevi'im* is also the Hebrew title for that part of the *Tanakh* that goes from the book of Joshua

[1] For a list and a detailed examination of the Hebrew terms which refer to prophetic gifts and divination in the Bible, see David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Lousiville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 5–8; Reinhardt G. Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel* (trans. by Anselm C. Hagedorn and Nathan MacDonald. CSHB 2; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 19–20. For a thorough analysis of the roles of religious officials in ancient Israel, including "prophets/נבאים", see Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio–Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 66–118.

to the book of Malachi.[2] Nevertheless, it seems that although they are called "prophets" themselves, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah are ruthlessly outspoken in their criticism of their own cultic class.

The book of Jeremiah frequently mentions prophets, either singly (Jer 5:13; 7:25; 14:13–15; 23:9–40; 25:4; 26:5; 27:14–22; 35:15; 37:19; 44:4), or with the priests (Jer 2:8; 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 14:18; 18:18), or with other groups of foretellers (Jer 27:9–10; 29: 8–9) or with the king, the people and other leaders of the community who represent the whole society (Jer 2:26–30; 4:9; 8:1–3; 13:13; 26:6–11, 16; 32:32).[3] In Jeremiah, the prophets are considered positively only in five passages, which all use a stereotypical imagery, namely, YHWH has sent his servants the prophets (אשלח אליכם את־כל־עבדי הנביאים) but the people have ignored them and refused to repent (Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; 44:4). Conversely, most of what is said of the prophets is negative. In addition to their constant plotting to kill Jeremiah (Jer 18:18; 26:6–11), the prophets are accused of idolatry (Jer 2:8, 26; 23:13), adultery (Jer 23:14–15; 29:23) apostasy (Jer 23:11), vanity (Jer 5:13) and, above all, falsehood (Jer 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 14:13–15; 27:10, 14; 28:15; 29:9, 21). Moreover, with regard to falsehood, the prophets (sometimes coupled with the priests) are accused of having promised peace to the people, at a moment in the nations' history when peace was not possible (Jer 6:14; 8:11; 14:13).

When compared with the book of Jeremiah, the book of Ezekiel is less concerned with prophets and prophetic gifts. The prophetic class is rarely mentioned (Ezek 13; 14:1–9; 22:28; 38:17) but, as in the book of Jeremiah, even on these limited occasions a generally hostile attitude is registered. Whereas Ezek 12:21–28 defends the importance of visions as a means of truthful divination, Ezek 14:7–9 admits that YHWH may deceive his own prophets and cause them to speak in favour of other deities, and Ezek 22:28 accuses the prophets of having had false visions and of proclaiming dishonest divination. Moreover, the entirety of Ezek 13 comprises oracles against prophets (Ezek

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[2] This is not an element to be overlooked; we should consider that the redaction of prophetic books at some point accompained the redaction of an entire section of the Hebrew Bible. This raises questions as regards the textual relations between prophetic books and the formation of the canon; see Ronald E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 10.

[3] When it comes to the role of priests and prophets in the book of Jeremiah, scholars generally work with similar selections of texts. In his classic study as regards the theological meaning of the term שקר (falsehood) in Jeremiah, Overholt works with Jer 5:12–13; 6:13–15; 8:10–12; 23:9–40; 27–29; see Thomas Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood* (SBT Second Series 16; London: SCM Press, 1970). When analysing the attitudes towards the priests and the temple in Jeremiah, Tiemeyer examines Jer 2:8, 26–28; 4:9; 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 14:18; 18:18; 23:11, 33–40; see Lena S. Tiemeyer, "The Priests and the Temple Cult in the Book of Jeremiah", in Hans M. Barstad and Reinhardt G. Kratz (eds.), *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 388; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 233–64.

13:1–16) and women prophets (Ezek 13:17–23), who communicated empty visions to the people, leading them astray from YHWH. Interestingly enough, one of the pivotal accusations aimed at the prophets in Ezek 13 is that they promised peace when there was no peace (Ezek 13:10).

Furthermore, the book of Micah only mentions prophets in ch. 3 (Mic 3:5, 11) and presents them in quite a negative light. Along with other leaders of the community (namely, judges and priests), the prophets are firstly blamed for practising divination for money (Mic 3:11) and then are held responsible for the demise of Jerusalem, that will be "ploughed like a field" (Mic 3:12). Besides, in Mic 3:5, the prophets are also accused of being greedy, which prompts them to promise peace to whoever gives them something to eat.

This brief overview is useful to narrow down the subject of this research. Three main aspects were considered in order to produce a selection of texts. The first one is the mention of "peace" and "falsehood"; these are two key-elements that point to promises that can never be fulfilled (they are, in fact, "false" promises of peace). The second one is represented by the active role of "other" prophets; therefore, said promises of peace must not be uttered by the protagonists of the prophetic books. Finally, the third and last aspect pertains to the relations between the texts, and thus it examines recurring vocabulary and concepts in them (e.g. the words vision, divination, dream, and the fact that "peace" is, in the heart of these prophets, YHWH's message to his people). Given these criteria, numerous passages about promises of peace in prophetic books have been excluded (e.g. Isa 9:1–6; 26:3, 12; 32:17–18; 38:17; 54:10; 57:18–21; Nah 1:15; Hag 2:9; Zech 8:12–19). Indeed, the aim of this research is not to provide an analysis of promises of peace that the prophets of the tradition (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Zechariah and the others) have uttered, but rather to address the false promises of peace that have been spoken by other – less virtuous – members of the religious class. Furthermore, given the recurrence of analogous concepts and vocabulary, this study aims to highlight the development of a literary motif within texts that have evidently drawn from the same source materials. This motif seems to underlie the structuring of prophetic conflicts as the opposition between "true" and "false" prophets. It is a common belief in the guild of biblical scholars that in ancient Israel there were righteous prophets who worked for the sake of the people, and there were sinful ones, who, on the other hand, were mostly interested in achieving personal gain. "True" and "false" prophets were seemingly always at loggerheads regarding the future of Judah and its inhabitants. In the light of the results of this study, this division appears to be unfounded, but before we can proceed further, we need to address how the biblical tradition establishes the legitimacy of prophetic gifts.

I. Trusting Divination (Deut 13:1–5; 18:18–22)

When it comes to diviners (seen as mediators of the will of the gods),[4] the Hebrew Bible deals in some detail with which of them are legitimate and which of them instead should not be trusted by the people. As regards this, much emphasis is put on the techniques that a diviner uses. As stated above, the class of the נביאים represents only one expression of divination, as the Hebrew Bible introduces several groups of professional mediators, such as soothsayers, sorcerers, dream-interpreters, fortune-tellers, necromancers, and diviners.[5] The Mosaic and Priestly laws prohibit all these forms of divination (Lev 19:26–31; 20:6; Deut 18:9–14).[6] The only technique that normally appears to be legitimate is that represented by the verb נבא, "to prophesy"; thus, to some extent, those who resort to using forbidden *media* of divination should not be followed, while "prophecy" is a legitimate *medium* which connects the human and the divine.

Nonetheless, in the Bible, not even prophets (as in the Hebrew נביאים) are always to be trusted, which leads to the issue of how the people are supposed to know if a prophet and his message are legitimate or not. Outside prophetic literature, this element is addressed in Deut 13:1–5 and 18:18–22. The text of Deut 13:1–5 reads as follows,

1 If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he said to you in these terms, "Let us now follow foreign gods" – which you have not known – "and let us serve them", 3 do not listen to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, because YHWH your god is testing you to know if you love YHWH your god with all your heart and soul. 4 You shall follow YHWH your god and fear him, you shall listen his voice and serve him, and hold fast to him. 5 And that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken to make you turn away from YHWH your god, who brought you out of Egypt

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[4] With reference to divination as human–divine communication, and prophecy as a form of divination, a thorough analysis is found in Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 4–54.

[5] The biblical tradition does not trace any clear boundaries between each of these groups. We may assume that each of these professional techniques of divination had its own specificity, but the Bible is often more peremptory, by grouping all of them together as dangerous sorcery that should be avoided, mostly because they represent foreign practices. However, some overlapping should be assumed (e.g. 1 Sam 9:9). For further details, see Joanne K. Kuemmerlin–McKlean, "Magic (OT)", ABD 4, 468–69; Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 30–31.

[6] As well as by the Mosaic Law, Necromancy was later banned also by King Saul, even though the king himself at some point resolved to break his own rule and asked a necromancer to summon the spirit of Samuel (1 Sam 28:3–25). Similarly, although they are sometimes attacked as illegitimate sources of foreseeing (Jer 23:25–29), dreams are more often considered as rightful means of communication with YHWH (Gen 28:10–22; Gen 41:25–31). The Hebrew Bible has evidently a more ambivalent attitude towards most of these practices than it may appear from the reading of Leviticus and Deuteronomy; see Kuemmerlin–McKlean, "Magic (OT)", 469.

and delivered you from the house of the slaves, to guide you on the path that YHWH your god command you to walk. Thus, you will eradicate evil from your midst.

In this passage, any prophet (נביא) who speaks on behalf of gods other than YHWH deceives the people and must be put to death. Hence, not surprisingly, the first requirement to be taken seriously as a prophet is to be a Yahwistic prophet (the diatribe between Elijah and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, in 1 Kgs 18:20–44, offers a good example of this principle). This, however, still does not resolve the matter. In fact, not even all the prophets who speak in the name of YHWH can be believed. This issue is addressed directly in Deut 18:18–22, which represents one of the most exhaustive treatments of the issue of legitimacy of prophets and prophecy in the Bible. The passage reads as follows,

18 A prophet I shall raise up for them among their brothers, like you,[7] and shall put my words on his lips, so that he shall speak to them all I command. 19 And if one will not listen to my words, which he speaks in my name, I shall hold him accountable for it. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet will die. 21 And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word that YHWH has not spoken?" 22 When a prophet speaks in the name of YHWH, if the prediction does not happen or come to pass, that is a prediction that YHWH has not spoken; the prophet has spoken in presumption and you shall not be afraid of him.

This text presents a very clear depiction of what a legitimate prophet should do, and, conversely, what an illegitimate one generally does. Like Moses, a legitimate prophet shall only speak the words that YHWH puts in his mouth and, because he is endorsed with YHWH's authority, he is authorized to speak in his name.[8] On the contrary, the illegitimate prophet, aside from being associated with idolatry, is identified as one who will only speak his own message and misuse the name of YHWH. Finally, the coming to pass of what is foretold should be able to settle any arguments as to the legitimacy of a prophetic word (Deut 18:22). At first, this may seem a reasonable way to tell truthful prophets apart from liars; however, this "wait and see" attitude presents some insurmountable difficulties which make this criterion impractical.

Fulfilment is only interpreted *negatively* in Deut 18:22, which means that, although it can prove a prophet to be "false", a fulfilled prophecy does not, *ipso*

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[7] This reference is to Moses (Deut 18:15).

[8] This is the interpretation given by Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdemans, 1976), 262; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (NIBC 4; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 217–18. Brueggemann, however, considers the reference to Moses as the sign that every "true" prophet should act as a mediator of the covenant who is responsible for keeping the people loyal to it; see Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 192.

facto, prove that a prophet is "true" (Deut 13:1–5).[9] In addition, this criterion focuses exclusively on the predictive element of prophecy, which, however, would apply only to a small minority of the prophetic oracles found in the Bible. In fact, in the biblical tradition, prophets mostly criticized the community for their sins, by presenting within their messages warnings and threats to make the people repent, and were not simply predictors of the future.[10] Hence, the ability to foresee distant events appears to be a neglectable trait in establishing the authenticity of the prophetic gifts.[11]

Likewise, even when the sayings of the prophets are predictive, they are often extremely general, vaguely foreseeing, on one hand, war, famine, disaster and pestilence; on the other, prosperity and fertility.[12] In addition, given their vague nature, prophecies are generally open to interpretation, and this complicates the matter of identifying their fulfilment, because it can only be recognized retrospectively.[13] Similarly, prophetic words are often conditional and predict a certain outcome (divine punishment or deliverance) only when the characters involved resolve to adhere or not to a certain type of behaviour (e.g. Gen 20:7; Deut 15:4–6, 28:1–9; 1 Sam 7:3, 12:25; 1 Kgs 3:14, 6:12, 11:38; Isa 1:18–20; Jer 12:14–17). In such cases, the predictive nature of prophecy is absent, because whatever the expectations for the future are, they will always be subject to human actions and cannot be falsified.[14] Finally, there are prophecies that apply to distant times from that of the utterance (e.g. Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of exile in Jer 29:10–14), which evidently affects the fulfilment criterion, because a prophet could not have based his credibility on words that none of his contemporaries could have realistically hoped to see fulfilled.

[9] Wright, who acknowledges the problems in the prediction–fulfilment matter, states that the only reliable sign of a "true" prophet, in Deuteronomic terms, is to be "like Moses"; see Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 218.

[10] Brueggemann is right in stating that the emphasis on the ability to foresee is anomalous, as generally, in Deuteronomy, the role of a prophet is that of preserving the covenant and following YHWH; see Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 195.

[11] As Carroll rightly points out, this element is connected to the conviction that YHWH knows the future and thus can communicate it to his servants, which is part of the ideology of the Deuteronomists, who see history as the unfolding of the prophetic word; see Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 29.

[12] Given the generalised nature of the language of predictive texts, Carroll provocatively summarizes all biblical prophecies in, "there will be a period of destruction or there will be a period of well–being", in Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 35.

[13] As observed by Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 36; James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflicts: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion* (BZAW 124; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 50–1. By way of example, one should consider that the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem may be fulfilled either by Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of the city (587 BCE) or Titus' (70 CE).

[14] As explained by Carroll, "Ancient Israelite Prophecy and Dissonance Theory", Numen 24 (1977), 142.

It seems clear that the legitimacy of a prophet, in the terms expressed by Deuteronomy, is a literary matter, and not a practical one. These criteria are expression of a theological reflection on YHWH's role in the history of Israel and do not represent a collection of objective instructions that would help the people to distinguish between good and bad prophets.

However, as said above, the Hebrew Bible quite often presents dynamics of prophetic conflict, in which a good prophet, who is loyal to YHWH, is called on to oppose dishonest prophets, who claim to be entitled to speak in the name of the deity. In such cases, fulfilment appears as the decisive element to establish the legitimacy of prophetic words. The story of Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22 is exemplary of this attitude. This text does not present the legalistic tone of Deuteronomy but articulates similar points in a narrative. The context is that of a military campaign that the kings of Israel and Judah, Ahab and Jehoshaphat, wish to undertake against Aram (1 Kgs 22:2–4). The two kings have received favourable omens from all the four hundred court prophets they consult (1 Kgs 22:6, 11–12) but Micaiah, the son of Imlah, an independent prophet who is not connected to the royal palace (1 Kgs 22:8), dares to contradict their predictions and claims he has received quite a different message from YHWH (1 Kgs 22:17). When confronted by the king of Israel, whose death he foresaw in battle, Micaiah declares that YHWH has deliberately deceived the court prophets by putting a lying spirit (רוח שקר) into their mouths (1 Kgs 22:20–22). He then states that, were the king of Israel to come back safely after the battle, then he would not speak the word of YHWH (1 Kgs 22:28). The story of Micaiah implies that only the fulfilment of a prophecy establishes if the message came from YHWH. Since the king of Israel did die in battle (1 Kgs 22:35), the legitimacy of Micaiah's prophetic gift is sanctioned.

As we see, the terms of the conflict of prophet vs. prophet are often expressed, in the tradition and in scholarship, as "true" prophets vs. "false" prophets. These labels are however ambiguous, because even the prophet who tells the truth at times should be ignored by the people (Deut 13:2–4). In a similar way, not all the prophets that are unreliable are "false", as they may not be lying or pretending to be prophets but may rather be resorting to forbidden techniques of divination (Deut 18:9–14). Besides, within the Masoretic text, the expression "false prophet" never occurs, while it is used only in the Greek version of the book of Jeremiah (ψευδοπροφήτης). Therefore, some precautions must be taken when using expressions such as "false" prophets and "false" prophecy, because they do not refer to any prophetic group which has defined and homogeneous characteristics but rather point to the ideology of some redactors. Similarly, prophetic conflicts in the Bible for the most part present the traits of literary constructions and are not historical witnesses of socio-historical phenomena of ancient Israel. Given that, in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah, the dynamics of prophets of the book vs. other prophets often arise, and they seem to be intertwined with the motif of having

promised a false peace. Due to some radical changes in the trajectory of studies on biblical prophecies, a new analysis of this motif is needed, to gain new insights into the standings of the prophetic conflict and into its historical and literary development within the prophetic tradition.

II. The Ideology of Prophetic Conflicts

The dichotomy between "true" and "false" prophets has received considerable attention from the guild of Biblical Studies over the years. Scholars have often been sceptical about the validity of the criteria set out in Deuteronomy to separate "true" and "false" prophets,[15] but they have rarely questioned the assumption that, within the Hebrew Bible, some prophets were intrinsically virtuous, while others were irremediably corrupt. An ongoing prophetic conflict has long been considered an integral part of the religious development of Yahwism in ancient Israel to which the biblical texts bear witness. Therefore, scholars have developed different arguments and explanations to account for prophetic conflicts.[16]

In his article "Die falschen Propheten" (1933),[17] Gerhard von Rad argues that the "false" prophets who have fiercely antagonized the legitimate prophets (e.g. Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22 and Jeremiah *passim*) were the cultic prophets who were connected to the temple and the royal palace. These cultic officials had so much confidence in YHWH's election of the Israelites that they did not even bother to make the people repent from their evil so as to avoid divine judgement, but simply promised to the nation that the future of Judah would be bright no matter what (e.g. Jer 6:13–15; 14:13–16).[18] Von Rad also assumes that proof that the opponents of Jeremiah belonged to the establishment is found in their concern with the temple (they the promise that peace will come במקום הזה, "in this place", allegedly the temple, in Jer 14:13) and in the return of the temple vessels (Jer 27:16–22).[19] Similar positions have later been taken up by Thomas Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood* (1970), who considers that the accusations of falsehood in Jeremiah mainly point to the false sense of security

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[15] See Johannes Hempel, "Vom irrenden Glauben", ZSystTh 7 (1930), 631–60, who already questioned the validity of these criteria. The article was later reprinted in Hempel, *Apoxysmata: Vorarbeiten zu einer Religionsgeschichte und Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1961), 174–97.

[16] The short list of scholarly works that follows is not exhaustive by any means and is merely intended to delineate the trajectory in the studies on "false" prophecy and prophetic conflicts, and to highlight the major positions expressed up to the present day. For an exhaustive assessment of the discussion up to the late '60s, see Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 13–22.

[17] See Gerhard von Rad, "Die falschen Propheten", ZAW 51 (1933), 109–20.

[18] See von Rad, "Die falschen Propheten", 112.

[19] See von Rad, "Die falschen Propheten", 114.

which was spread throughout the nation by those prophets who considered the temple an enduring sign of national security.[20]

Conversely, in his *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (1962),[21] Johannes Lindblom opposes the identification of the "false" prophets with the temple personnel, especially because some of them are obviously not attached to any sanctuaries (e.g. the "daughters of your people" in Ezek 13:17–23). Lindblom takes at face value the definitions of illegitimate prophecy given by the books of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and he states that the "false" prophets, although they are entitled to prophesy, have never been commissioned by YHWH, so their words of peace and well-being had no chances of coming true.[22] At the same time, he considers that "true" prophets were not interested in providing a precise characterization of "false" prophecy, because they were sure that their call was genuine, while that of their opponents was not.[23]

In the same years, other scholars have rejected, as Lindblom did, the socio-religious dichotomy between temple and peripheral prophets and have reverted to an argument that we may call "fideistic". Eva Osswald's *Falsche Prophetie im Alten Testament* (1962)[24] dismisses the idea that an objective criterion of differentiation is traceable, and she considers the distinction between prophetic messages a matter of faith for the people. Osswald acknowledges that a "true" prophet is the one who manages to understand the historical moment of his nation, so that only he can interpret YHWH's will and instruct the people accordingly.[25] Like Osswald, Hans Joachim Kraus' study of the book of Jeremiah, *Prophetie in der Krisis* (1964),[26] resolves the problem of legitimacy by assuming that the closeness to YHWH is the essential requirement for "true" prophecy. Kraus explains his hypothesis in his analysis of Micaiah's confrontation with the court prophets in 1 Kgs 22.[27] Various sources enable cultic specialists and prophets to understand YHWH's will, but what really guarantees their reliability is the proximity of the intermediator to the deity. In the episode of 1 Kgs 22, Micaiah receives his message directly from YHWH, while the court prophets received a false vision from a subordinate spirit.[28]

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[20] See Overholt, *Falsehood*, 4–5.

[21] See Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

[22] See Lindblom, *Prophecy*, 211–12.

[23] See Lindblom, *Prophecy*, 214.

[24] See Eva Osswald, *Falsche Prophetie im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1962).

[25] See Osswald, *Falsche Prophetie*, 22.

[26] See Hans–Joachim Kraus, *Prophetie in der Krisis: Studien zu Texten aus dem Buch Jeremia* (Biblische Studien 43; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1964).

[27] See Kraus, *Prophetie in der Krisis*, 106.

[28] In a similar way, Kraus also takes the episode in Num 12:6–8 to be emblematic of "true" prophecy, as Moses is said to have spoken with YHWH "face to face" and not through visions or dreams; see Kraus, *Prophetie in der Krisis*, 110.

A different point of view is expressed in James L. Crenshaw's *Prophetic Conflict* (1971). In his study, Crenshaw looks at the dynamics of the opposition between prophets as it appears in the biblical texts and tries to place it in the context of the development of the religion of ancient Israel. It is Crenshaw's opinion that the call to prophesy created concurrently the opportunity for the development of "false" prophets and "false" prophecy.[29] On the one hand, to gain the favour of the people, many prophets ignored their call to urge repentance in the nation and reassured the people to secure their approval. On the other, it is part of the biblical tradition that YHWH himself may tempt the prophets with false visions to test Israel's fidelity.[30] Thus, the conflict between prophets appears inevitable and to some extent may even be considered part of YHWH's plan for Israel. Based on this, Crenshaw argues that after the return from the exile the Israelites had to accept that it is impossible to tell reliable and unreliable diviners apart on the spot, because the accomplishment of a prophecy can be established only *after* the event.[31] Given its uncertain nature, prophecy ceased to be trusted as it was unable to clarify doubts and to respond to the spiritual needs of the people. The community abandoned prophecy and turned to apocalyptic and wisdom literature as a more consolatory form of guidance, but they maintained the veneration for the "true" prophets of the tradition.[32]

Another study that aims to trace the origins of prophetic conflicts is Simon J. De Vries' *Prophet against Prophet* (1978).[33] De Vries considers them to be peculiar to Israelite prophecy in comparison with the rest of the ancient Near East and argues that they represent the cause of Israel's and Judah's ultimate breakdown.[34] To prove his point, De Vries analyses 1 Kgs 22 by using different methodological approaches to Old Testament criticism (text criticism, literary analysis, form criticism, tradition history and redaction history).[35] He concludes that 1 Kgs 22 is a combination of two separated narratives, the first in 1 Kgs 22:2b–4a, 4b, 3–9, 15–18, 26–28a, 29–35a, 36, and the second one in vv.10–12, 19–20a, 20b–25.[36] This latter was originally a disputation between a prophet (Micaiah) and a king (Zedekiah) but was inserted in the former to serve a new ideology of prophet against prophet.[37] De Vries presents the final form of 1 Kgs 22 as evidence that at some point pre-classic prophecy became

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[29] See Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 62.

[30] See Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 47–52.

[31] See Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 92–3.

[32] See Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 111.

[33] See Simon J. De Vries, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (I Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

[34] See De Vries, *Prophet against Prophet*, vii–viii.

[35] See De Vries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 25–136.

[36] See De Vries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 126–27.

[37] See De Vries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 129.

Index of References

Old Testament

Deuteronomy
13:1–5 4, 6
18:18–22 4–5, 67–68, 177, 182

1 Kings
22 7–10
22:18 97

Jeremiah
1:1–3 37
1:1 183
4:5–6:30 35–37, 87, 146, 177
5:26–29 53–55
5:30–31 32, 35–37, 51–55, 63, 65, 67–68, 71, 79, 118, 120, 177–178, 183–185, 188
6:13–15 8, 32, 35, 37, 44–51, 55, 58, 63, 65, 67, 69, 7, 79, 96, 114, 118–120, 145–150, 172, 174, 177–180, 183–185
6:14 2, 46–47, 49–50, 64, 74, 87, 112, 119, 144, 147–148, 150, 180
8:10a 45–47, 51
8:10b–12 46
14:12 60, 63–64, 177
14:13–16 8, 63–69, 75, 79, 96, 112, 118–120, 145–150, 172, 174, 178–181, 183–185, 188
14:14 65–67, 71, 77, 112, 144, 148–149, 171
19:1–13 113, 115–116
19:14–20:6 35, 113, 115–118, 120–121, 179, 183, 185–186, 188
23:13–15 69–71, 73
23:16–17 74–75, 78, 119–120, 145, 173–174, 178, 180, 184, 189
27–29 79–82, 97, 102, 107, 112–113, 117–118, 120–121, 149, 167, 179, 183, 185–186, 189
27:12–15 111–112
28:1–17 23, 34, 45, 56, 78–79, 112, 114
28:1–17 91–96
28:1 80–81, 91
29:8–9 99, 101–102, 138
29:21–23 103, 105, 112
29:30–32 106–107, 138
37–44 108
37:17–21 35, 79, 108, 110, 112
37:19 111–112

Ezekiel
13:1–16 3, 32, 127–128, 131, 135, 144, 146, 149
13:1–11a* 132, 143, 146–148, 150, 172, 180
13:9 131–132, 134–137, 143, 149–150

13:12 133–134

13:13–15 134
13:17–23 3, 9, 127

Micah
2:6–11 157–158
3:1–3 163–164
3:5–8 29, 32, 157–158, 160, 163–167, 169–175, 179–180, 183–185, 189
3:12 3, 164, 175

Zechariah
13:2–6 131, 171

Job
6:6 129, 133

Lamentations
2:14 129, 133

Index of Authors

Albertz, R. 126
Allen, L.C. 36, 124
Auld, G. 11–15, 171, 184

Bakhtin, M. M. 22–23
Barstad, H. M. 2, 14–16, 126, 139–141, 143, 187
Barthes, R. 22–24, 26–28
Block, D. I. 124–125, 127–138, 146
Bright, J. 109
Brueggemann, W. 5–6, 35, 44, 50, 54, 79, 94–99, 109, 115

Carroll, R. P. 6, 11–12, 14–16, 18–19, 36–37, 40–41, 43–45, 47–49, 52–53, 55–56, 59–62, 64, 66, 79–82, 90–99, 140, 142, 166, 168, 171, 179, 182, 184, 188.
Catastini, A. 13, 170
Cha, J.-H 20, 173
Collins, T. 18, 33
Cooke, G. A. 123
Crenshaw, J. L. 6, 8, 10, 97, 171, 182, 185

De Vries, S. J. 10–11, 171, 184
Duhm, B. 37–39, 45, 56, 62, 70, 73, 76, 85, 99, 101, 107–108

Eichrodt, W. 124
Ewald, H. 153–154

Finkelstein, I. 139–140, 143
Fishbane, M. 25–26, 28, 30

Garbini, G. 12–13, 16, 65, 114, 119, 184
Genette, G. 24–27
Grabbe, L. L. 1, 57, 126, 139–143
Greenberg, M. 125, 128, 130–133

Hermann, S. 39
Holladay, W. L. 20, 36–37, 40
Hossfeld, F. L. 85, 91, 171, 184
Hyatt, J. 39–41

Kratz, R. 1–2, 15, 18, 43, 157, 160, 185, 187–188
Kristeva, J. 22–24, 26–28
Krüger, T. 124

Leene, H. 149
Lindblom, J. 9

McKane, W. 36–37, 41, 60, 63, 89, 95, 155
Mowinckel, S. 38–39

Nicholson, E. W. 40–41
Nissinen, M. 15
Nogalski, J. D. 28–30, 147, 155–157
Noth, M. 39
Nurmela, R. 27–28

Osswald, E. 9
Overholt, T. 8–9, 14

Pohlmann, K.-F 42, 88, 109, 125–126

Renaud, B. 154
Römer, T. 42

Saussure, F. de 22
Stade, B. 153–154
Sweeney, M. A. 167

Thiel, W. 20–21, 40–42, 64, 73, 84, 92, 99–100, 103, 118
Thompson, T. L. 140
Tiemeyer, L. S. 2, 56–57
Tov, E. 19–20

van der Woude, A. 160, 165–166, 169
Vieweger, D. 21
Von Rad, G. 8

Weippert, H. 40–41, 63
Wellhausen, J. 153–154
Wevers, J. W. 124, 131, 146
Wolff, H. W. 145, 154, 160, 163, 169–170

Zimmerli, W. 20–21, 124

Index of Subjects

Baal 55, 71, 76, 78
Book of the Twelve 155–157

Community 47, 68–72, 75, 78, 89, 98,134–138, 141, 143–144
Council of YWHW 73–74, 129, 136, 138
Cyrus 141–142, 188

Deuteronomistic History 39–40
Deuteronomistic Redaction 38–44, 154
Dialogism 22–23
Divination 1–4, 7, 14, 61, 66, 77, 87, 94, 128, 145–146, 148, 150, 161, 164–165, 169, 180–181

Exile and Return from Babylon 64–66, 79–81, 84, 95–96, 98, 112, 132, 135, 137, 139–144, 147, 150, 154, 185, 188

Falsehood 2–3, 8, 30, 54–55, 101–13, 118–121, 183
– False Prophecy 1–4, 48–50, 101, 118–120, 166, 183
– False Prophets 7, 95–98, 106–107, 112, 117–119, 173, 175, 183
Foe from the North 35–37, 43–44, 49,51, 55, 58, 64, 67, 88–89, 118–120, 146, 148, 183

Golah 42, 88, 99, 101

Hananiah 79, 80, 86, 90–98, 105, 107, 117, 121, 182–183, 185–186
Heavenly Book 137
Historiography 187
History of Israel 138–144, 188

Ideology 7–8, 10–13, 21, 23, 65, 67, 91, 95, 98, 141–142, 151, 171, 186–189
Inner-biblical Allusion 27–28
Inner-biblical Exegesis 25–26, 28, 30
Intertextuality 22–26, 28
Ipsissima Verba 17, 38, 153

Jeconiah 81, 84, 88, 90, 92, 95, 102, 139, 179

Literary Dependency 20, 28, 75, 78, 102, 120, 137, 180, 189

Nebuchadnezzar II 51, 81, 87–89, 93, 102, 105–106, 108–109, 118, 120, 139, 179

Pashhur 35, 107, 113–118, 120, 179, 183, 188
Peace 1–4, 20, 27–31, 36, 44, 48–51, 65, 67–68, 72–75, 78, 95–96, 112–113, 118–121, 127, 144–149, 166–171, 182
Prophetic Conflicts 3, 7–8, 10–11, 16, 63–67, 94, 96–99, 120–121, 151, 169, 173, 181, 185–188

Redaction Criticism 17–18, 31
Register/כתב 132, 136–139

Shame 50
Shemaiah 113, 118, 121, 138, 183, 186

Urtext 18–20

Zedekiah 84–85, 90–91, 95–98, 107–113
Zephaniah 101, 106–107