

# The Fruits of Madness



# The Fruits of Madness:

## *Perspectives on the Prophetic Movements in Three Traditions*

**Essays from the Seminar in Biblical  
Characters in Judaism, Christianity,  
Islam and in Literature**

Edited by

**John Tracy Greene**

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
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Mishael Caspi



John T. Greene

**Friends, Seminar colleagues, family, and dear reader. I come not to** mourn the passing of our leader, Mishael Maswari Caspi, but to honor him in blessed memory. *Zicharon le'olam!* Misha was a person who would have wanted his life and tireless efforts to serve as a consoling and facilitating voice for reasonable and informed dialogue between adherents and scholars of the three traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. To this goal he devoted enormous time. While death has stilled his voice, ours are not impeded from continuing his thrust. We, thus, propose the continuation of this Seminar, which we devote most deservedly to his memory and honor.

While as both a scholar and a Jewish Israeli-American, Misha had numerous, informed differences with the guardians of the three traditions—both religiously and politically—he should be best understood as having been friendly opposition as opposed to adversary. I say ‘friendly opposition’ (as opposed to hostile opposition), for he functioned in his scholarship in a position similar to that of the ancient Israelite prophets opposite the regimes of kings from David to Zedekiah/Mattaniah. While the kingship of Saul is not included here in my comparison because of the nebulous relationship between that king and the priest-prophet Samuel, we may say that that relationship was not friendly, thus its exclusion. There were other unfriendly opponents to several of the subsequent kings of both Israel and Judah. Below, I shall clarify and summarize this relationship, in order to place the friendly, prophetic opposition in context and perspective.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AB</i>	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
A.H.	In the year of the <i>Hijra</i> = A Muslim dating practice
ANErn	Ancient Near Eastern
ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>ApOTC</i>	<i>Apollos Old Testament Commentary</i>
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BASOR	Bulletin American Schools of Oriental Research
B.C.E.	Before the Common Era/ Used instead of B.C. as a secular dating practice
<i>bT</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud (followed by a specific tractate)</i>
<i>BT Meg.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah ([The] Scroll)</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Bulletin Zeitschrift fuer die Altestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
C.E.	The Common Era/ Used instead of A.D. as a secular dating practice
D	A signal concerning the hypothesized Deuteronomic/ Deuteronomistic stratum of the creation of the Pentateuchal story/account
<i>davar</i>	Any communication from a deity uttered by a prophet
<i>DOT</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>DTR/Dtr.</i>	Deuteronomist/ Deuteronomistic Historian
<i>EVZ</i>	<i>Verlag Evangelischen Verlags Zollikon</i>
<i>EVZ</i>	<i>Europa Verlag A.G. Zurich</i>
<i>HS/OT</i>	<i>Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>Int.</i>	<i>Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
<i>IVP</i>	<i>Academic InterVarsity Press</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JBSCE</i>	<i>Jewish and Biblical Studies in Central Europe</i>
<i>Jer.D2</i>	That portion of the <i>Book of Jeremiah</i> contributed by the second Deuteronomic Historian
<i>JPS</i>	<i>Jewish Publication Society Version of the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>KJV</i>	<i>King James Version of the Bible</i>
<i>LXX</i>	A Greek-Language Translation of the <i>Hebrew Scriptures</i>

ME	Middle English
MT	<i>Massoretic (Hebrew Biblical) Text</i>
NAC	<i>New American Commentary</i>
NICOT	<i>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i>
NJPS	<i>New Jewish Publication Society</i>
NCBC	<i>New Century Bible Commentary</i>
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	<i>Old Testament Library</i>
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
OUP	<i>Oxford University Press</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications/Postmodern Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
Radak	Rabbi David Kimchi—A famous medieval commentator on the classics of Judaism
Rashi	Rabbi Shlomo Ben Itzhaki—A famous, medieval commentator on the <i>Talmud</i>
SBLWAW	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World</i>
SCM	<i>SCM Press London</i>
SHBC	<i>Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary</i>
SBCK	<i>Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
WBComp.	<i>Westminster Bible Companion</i>
YHWH/YHWH	The traditional way of writing the name of the Hebrew deity Yahweh
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift fuer die Altestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZThK	<i>Zeitschrift fuer Theologie und Kirche</i>

# PROLEGOMENON

JOHN T. GREENE

## A.

**A unified field theory of prophetic activity has proven to be impossible.** One can study the phenomenon for years and still be at a loss when asked to define the term prophecy. What can be done is to describe certain activity in which some mantic personalities engaged, but that activity does not pass the same muster. Some essays herein explore prophets in an attempt to define prophecy (Greene, Ellens, Douglas, Peleg, and Olojede). Likewise, others herein discuss prophecies in order to say something significant about prophets (Ginio, Wrobel, Crookes, and Spunaugle). But both are inadequate approaches, for many identified as prophets, or suspected as being prophets, have said nothing, nor, as in the case of Eldad and Medad in the exodus tradition,<sup>1</sup> done anything; they are merely said to begin to prophesy like the elders of Israel at the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) (*Numbers* 11:16). But what does that really mean? And we remember, too, the rustic military leader of Israel, Saul, being described as displaying unusual behavior which gave rise to the question being posed: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 *Sam.* 19:23-24) Is a prophet a speaker, a doer, a writer? Our approach to the subject is like a soup: we have thrown everything but the kitchen sink into the pot, but it still needs oregano and basil to make it taste better. The contributors to this volume bring their own seasonings in order to help the soup become even more flavorful.

As a corrective, we must throttle our enthusiasm for the singular term *prophetes*—identified with predictiveness, predicting, and mediated to us from the Mediterranean cultures—and intensify our search for understanding such terms as *nabi'*, *ro'eh*, *hozeh*, and *tzofeh* employed in the *Hebrew Scriptures*. But this is just the beginning. As J. Harold Ellens' chapter herein has discussed, an understanding of the 'prophetic mainstream' runs from the patriarch Abraham, through Moses, to Jesus, i.e., those who are reputed to have had two-way communication with the deity of ancient Israel. He also reminds of a prophetic phenomenon evident at the

Mesopotamian city of Mari that antedated prophecy in ancient Israel by at least 1000 to 1500 years. Therein, he introduces the terms *mahhu* (male), *mahhutum* (female) and *baru* and compares their described activities with similar activities engaged in by certain *Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures* prophetic figures.<sup>2</sup>

The account of the Egyptian envoy Wen-Amon is also relevant here. Having been sent to what is now Lebanon to purchase Cypress and Cedar wood to be used in a funerary boat for an unnamed pharaoh upon his death, Wen-Amon eventually sojourns there for a while. During his stay, he encounters a youth who utters prophecies concerning him.<sup>3</sup>

Mari and Wen-Amon are helpful in informing us that ancient Middle Eastern prophetic phenomena existed outside of ancient Israel: Israelite prophecy is now known to have been a latecomer on that stage; not something unique.

Complicating matters between Middle Eastern developments and ourselves is the greater, Mediterranean world. Let us focus here on a person known as an oracle. The most celebrated of these is a woman/priestess who sat on a platform suspended over a fissure in the earth at the Temple of Apollo in Greece at the Temple of Delphi.<sup>4</sup> It is believed that the god Apollo responded to questions raised by visitors to his temple through a given oracle. Over much usage, however, we westerners speak of an oracle more as a prophetic statement rather the medium who uttered it. This is how we process the Hebrew expression *davar-yhwh*, oracle/word of God.

We still need to address other practitioners who are either addressed as prophets, who are understood as engaging in prophetic activity, or are just grouped with prophets because of the fruit(s) of their activity and world-view. These include, but are not limited to, the augur, the necromancer, and the thaumaturge. But we westerners have also placed faith in the palm-reader, the tea-leaves-reader, the crystal-ball-reader, and the still-popular (California) psychic. We shall soon, no doubt, add to this list the meteorologists/*Wettervorhersager*s! But we shall not tarry and allow them to detain us here.

Before we delve into what is available in our attempt to define, as well as to describe prophecy, we must ask just why humans felt (and feel) the need to deal with such people, as well as to ask why such people felt it necessary to prophesy—whatever that entailed. Humans feel/felt intimidated by that which it does/did not understand. As a result, they show(ed) a cowardly side. Feeling clever, they sought to both propitiate that power that caused them fear, and they sought ways to communicate with this/these fear-causer(s). Priests usually devised sacrifices to propitiate; prophets were understood as those who could communicate

directly with it/them. Yet, some who offered propitiation sometimes prophesied, and some who prophesied also laid either grain, dairy, and/or animal sacrifices on a given altar (Cf. 1 Kg. 36-40). There was no neat and tidy division between priests and prophets, or between prophets and anyone else who seemed to be in touch with what was acknowledged by the majority as ‘the totally and awesome other realm.’

Yet, prophecy, unlike the biblical figure Malkizedek, has a beginning and an end—at least in one form of presentation. We shall discuss this below under the heading Apocalypticism. There is a popular saying—advice, actually--: When you find yourself up to your behind in alligators, it is difficult to remember that your intention was merely to drain the swamp. All of these observations suggest that getting a finger on the pulse of what was prophecy and what was a prophet in the ANE is not simple. The list by scholars of those who should be considered prophets will boggle the mind. In this sense, prophets and prophecy have no moorings and, therefore, no legitimacy. Prophecy appears to be what an investigator wants it to be.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps, these are the wrong questions to raise/ask. Should we ask instead: What is the nature of the human need to first acknowledge another realm of existence? and Why the need to communicate with it? If this is a better approach to explaining the phenomenon of prophecy, perhaps we should explore communication theory and praxis between humans and those who occupy the ‘mystery-but-most-intimidating other realm.’ (Greene 1989)

It becomes slowly evident that many other issues surface when considering prophets and prophecy. One major issue is language usage. It appears that some prophets do not speak at all—thus, prophecy does not necessarily involve speaking. But when prophets are depicted speaking (something altogether different), the categories of speech are informative:

- First, there is inaudible speech, when the prophet is in a deep, ecstatic trance
- Second, when the prophet speaks audibly, but it is not clear to what he/she refers
- Third, when the prophet speaks to specific issues in the marketplace of human existence (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah-of Jerusalem, Jeremiah)
- Fourth, when the prophet speaks, but the message (oracle) can be understood in myriad ways (Compare with the oracle delivered at Delphi)

- Fifth, when the prophet sends one of his disciples to perform some prophetic function (Jeremiah and Elisha)
- Sixth, prophets (as court counselors) who deliver a message indirectly in the form of parables
- Seventh, prophets who deliver their prophecies as ambushes in private (Ahijah of Shiloh and the court prophet Nathan)
- Eighth, prophets (and some of their activities) cast as legends and legendary (Elijah & Elisha)
- Ninth, prophecies written, but delivered orally (Jeremiah & Baruch)
- Tenth, prophecies against other prophets by a prophet who entered heaven (Michaiah son of Imla)
- Eleventh, prophecies that informed of the necessary death of other prophets (Shiloh & Bethel)
- Twelfth, prophets who did not want to prophesy (Jonah)
- Thirteenth, a prophet who prophesied to the nations (Jeremiah)
- Fourteenth, a prophet who prophesied against near nations surrounding Israel (Amos)
- Fifteenth, a prophet about whom we know nothing (Gad)
- Sixteenth, a prophet who delivered a parable to King David, (This recalls the technique of Jesus and disciples, as well as the later rabbis, in terms of disseminating information and teaching points to the unsophisticated.) and who supported Queen-mother Bathsheba and Prince Solomon in their bid to succeed King David: (Nathan)

It becomes clear that we don't have sufficient information to cobble together an acceptable definition, or even description, of what the term 'prophet' meant or means. And, if we simply want to conclude that a prophet speaks/spoke for God/a god, then what about adding Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Daniel, etc.? These persons are also depicted as having spoken with a deity and disseminated communications from the realm of the deity/ies. This is certainly a view taken by the framers of the *Qur'an*. We pose the question again: What does it mean to be a prophet? What are the criteria?

We are on firmer ground when we ask what is meant, not by prophecy, but by what was meant by a *davar-yhwh*=*a communication from God*. Here, we can employ some specificity. It is a command from a specific deity and not a generic expression assigned to deities in general. The *davar-yhwh* is special; it is linked to an idea. The idea is that a deity (for now unnamed) concluded a legal arrangement with a specific people at a specific location, and at a specific time. This specific agreement was

understood as a covenant—a business arrangement with a specific people with legal ramifications. However, not all covenants were/are alike.

This concept of covenant we also know not to be a solely Israelite understanding. Gods in the ancient Near East were notorious for making binding (legally-understood) agreements—with each other, as well as with humans.<sup>6</sup> At some point long before there was an Israel, covenants were a popular way of understanding relationships (and business: religious, political, social, and legal). Since many extant such covenants have been recovered in written form, what is portrayed as a covenant (written) between a deity and a people—through their representative—in this case, Moses) in the form of ten agreements is the most inferior of all such covenants.<sup>7</sup> To rescue this deficiency of characteristic, earlier scholars made a distinction between apodictic (Thou shalt not) and “If-Then” (casuistic/individual case) covenants. (Coogan 2014) We remind that the prophetic-officers-of-the-two-covenants were more rooted in the mosaic tradition, but highly focused on the casuistic outlook and explanation of that covenant outlook. We remind, further, that at Mari, this was nothing new/revolutionary. The reason for framing every covenant within the bounds of the **Ten Words** is the technique of making all subsequent laws, statutes, and ordinances appear to be nothing more than fine-tunings of the (at some point in their existence and usefulness) ten apodictics. By the time this understanding and concomitant developments reached the time of the eighth-century prophets, for instance, it was understood as a given. Here, we need not discuss the interposing ‘Davidic Covenant’.<sup>8</sup> In this understanding, ‘prophets’ became prosecutors on behalf of their deity-covenant-partner. ‘Predicting’ was not their job; they reminded of expected outcomes of abrogating their part of the legal bargain—clairvoyance played no significant or necessary part in their utterances.<sup>9</sup>

### Legendary Prophets

It is impossible to verify the historical veracity of certain prophets and alleged prophetic activity during what was the ninth century B.C.E. A close reading of the activities concerning Ahijah of Shiloh, ‘men of god’ in the shadow of Shiloh and Bethel, and the accounts concerning Elijah and Elisha still challenge the historian. We must therefore distinguish between prophetic history and prophetic legend that contains elements which are historically (near) accurate. When a person appears bigger than life, it is because he or she is *ueber* human, depicted this way by those who wrote and transmitted their story to readers and hearers. Many *Bible* readers fail to understand that ancient Israel enjoyed being entertained just

as much as modern westerners do. The strict division we make between sacred, religious literature (such as the two *Testaments* and the *Qur'an*) and secular literature was not an issue. Thus, while we do not necessarily question the historicity of an Elijah or an Elisha, presented against the backdrop of the ninth century in the region of the northern Kingdom of Israel, we see them depicted as not only mad men, but super men, as well. This appears to have been a popular feature in accounts about prophets operating in the northern kingdom. Thus, we may include in this category Ahijah of Shiloh, the anonymous prophets of Shiloh, and those said to have operated at the national shrines in the Kingdom of Israel. I hasten here to make a distinction between such prophetic depictions and those of the eighth century prophet Isaiah-of-Jerusalem and the sixth century prophet Jeremiah, both of whom manifested bizarre behavior, also.<sup>10</sup>

This question of historical accuracy continues when we attempt to place historically the *devarim* (communications from deity) attributed to the prophets Habakkuk, Joel, Zephaniah, and Malachi, for instance. We must also inquire as to why only this paltry number of prophets was mentioned over what we want to think was such a long period of time. It is obvious, therefore, that an editorial approach and process at the end of the 'prophetic' account has executed a triage, and we read accounts of only those who 'survived.'<sup>11</sup>

It becomes obvious, then, that what is presented to us moderns as 'biblical prophecy' serves only as a thimbleful of activity and purpose that have in common only an attempt to communicate life-giving, people-preserving reminders and advice to a covenant partner who, most always failed to follow the advice and keep his/her part of the covenant bargain. It is a philosophy of history proffered by a sacerdotal+ mentality and *Weltanschauung* on one level.

On another level, and in light of present news headlines, we may compare the prophetic dilemma with the current jihadists and their *Weltanschauung*—"You don't accept my/our way of looking at reality, damn you and suffer, for you are in error—the deity is with us, not you!" In other words and attitude—What My Deity Delivers is What I Maintain that S/he Delivers. When not, s/he delivers it anyway!

### **The Role of Female Prophets**

The presence of female prophets suggests simply that ancient Israel recognized that females were just as capable of contact with the realm of the 'awesome other(s)' as were their male counterparts. Singling out Deborah, we even witness a woman who wore two 'hats', as it were: that



of judge (*shofetet*/chieftain(ess) **and** prophet(ess). Apparently, the two offices did not appear to conflict among those who knew and were led by her. While in my remarks I allude to several *Old* and (one) *New Testament* female prophets, the essay provided by Adrienne Spunaugle herein delves more into the specific reasons why the rabbis decided to include them in their peculiar world-view, yet did not accord them the honors they deserved. The value of Spunaugle's thoughtful essay is to provide a post-biblical perspective on the question of female prophets.

### **Prophets and Blood: Racial Purity**

At this juncture, I am not motivated to saddle the prophets with more racial pride than anyone else, myself included. Their world of reality placed great stock in group/racial/fidelity. However, this—if it existed indeed—never held them back from uttering their scathing oracles and critiques to king, priesthood, and average Judahite/Israelite; they did not play favorites.<sup>12</sup> General Jehu, at first glance, may be seen as a 'favorite' of Elijah. However, a closer look imbeds his having had Jehu anointed by one of the 'sons': a plan that only makes sense within covenant thinking. We may not hold it against the prophets, therefore, if they appear to have been narrow-mindedly and blindly maintaining fidelity to their priestly-prophetic view of a covenanted Israel. Not that there are many, but here we call particular attention to both Amos (eighth century B.C.E.) and Jeremiah (sixth century B.C.E.).

### **Men of God**

A survey of terms used to refer to sacred, mad males who were believed to be in communication directly with the deity (or a deity), include *ro'eh*, *hozeh*, *tzofeh*, and *nabi'*. However, we also read of *bne nevi'im* (sons of the *nevi'im* prophets), as well as 'men of God'. This leads one to consider that within the understanding of communicating madmen there was a division of labor and communication specialty. Thus, the term 'man of God' can be misleading and needs further study and clarification. It is obvious with the lack of language specificity employed by certain chroniclers of prophets and prophetic activity that a distinction is made between court prophets, prophetic bands, 'sons of prophets', priest-prophets, site prophets, and the nebulous term 'men of God'—which prompts one to inquire whether there were also 'women of God'? It is not our intention herein to settle this issue and answer these questions. We point the expression out because it was the most nebulous term employed

by some biblical writers when referring to a group of men whose activities appeared to some as belonging to the club of those who stood in communication with the ‘totally awesome other’.<sup>13</sup>

### **Prophecy as Designing the Future of Human History: Apocalypticism and Post-Apocalypticism**

While prophets of the *Old Testament* are not to be viewed as primarily prognosticating the future, sometimes the outcome(s) of their *devarim* make(s) them appear to have had this skill and gift.<sup>14</sup> This is most unfortunate for the interpreter of the prophetic corpus of the *HS/OT*, for it does them (the prophets, that is) much disservice. One bitter fruit born out of this predictive confusion is apocalypticism. Taking myriad forms simply on the basis of human nature—even now, the apocalyptic mentality indeed wants to know the future, to influence or control it, and employ it as a winnowing tool to separate those to be blessed in the future from those who are ignorant, evil, and doomed. In both types of prophecy there was an element of ‘education’, i.e., the eighth-sixth-centuries B.C.E. prophets held one account to knowledge of what was understood as **the covenant**.<sup>15</sup> Any future reckoning was based solely on the agreement(s) during that past event; it was, as they understood it, the obvious outcome of having abrogated the covenant in specific ways. Furthermore, it had always existed in written form from that day of concord agreement.

Paul D. Hanson in his book *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*<sup>16</sup> makes us aware of a significant shift in thinking about both communication theory and communication praxis in not only ancient Israel, but in the region of the greater, Ancient Near East and Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> While time plays an important role in both these world-views, the Janus-face of apocalypticism that faces toward a normative future certainly moves to the center of importance for its adherents. Moreover, the knowledge factor also changed. ‘Knowledge’ is no less important here, but it is the ‘knowledge’ of intellectuals: in a true sense, it is prophecy of the future with footnotes. It has become academic!

Apocalypticism—for lack of a more precise term—proposes to be a movement aimed at those with library cards, also. One must be able to read, and literature proliferates during this period. This is not Prophecy 101, but an advanced seminar in the role (to be) played by one with prophetic proclivities. Human history, like some recent ‘designer drugs and treatments’, had now been transferred to intellectual eggheads who were not necessarily temple-centered, but rather academy-centered. Prophecy had grown up and changed hair styles and tailors and

seamstresses. Revelations of things shut away, but known from before time by a select/elect few, replace oracles uttered before an audience of one or one thousand uttered by the Israelite great communicators.

There was a period somewhat earlier when such intellectual ability and access to documents was deemed important in ancient Israel. The intellectual pattern was established by the author/editor(s) of the now-edited *Books of Kings*.<sup>18</sup> A certain formula therein was repeated: King A of Judah began to rule during the X<sup>th</sup> regnal year of King B of Israel. And this king did that which was unacceptable according to the covenantal understanding of the writer's/editor's critique. Having stated King A's offense against the covenant, his punishment(s) was/were enumerated, followed by the announcement of his eventual death. Surprisingly for many, the critique was only about the covenantal failings of King A in his role as **highest priest**. As the formula, repeated over and over informed the reader, "If you want to know King A's accomplishments as **king**, you must go to the library archives and read those for yourself! This is literature written by those with library cards for those with library cards. This literature was not written originally for the general public.<sup>19</sup>

### **Prophecy as That Which Allows Us to Realize Our Own Potential**

Are we to just pinch these ancient Israelite prophets into a small space on the stage of human history and narrow politics/religion in those kingdoms? We are thus led to at least ask whether their significance and purpose were greater than just calling Judahite and Israelite monarchs to task, as reflected in 1 & 2 *Kings*, and that *vis-à-vis* a covenant ideal? Why would prophets be interested in just chastising (by the way, not punishing!) their targeted oracle recipients? Because they were the *Vorbilder* for all of their people. These prophets were idealists serving a national deity whose ideal was to facilitate the growth and development of a people capable of surpassing their own views of their capabilities. Prophets were therefore both arch realists (*vis-à-vis* the covenant) and arch idealists (in terms of their understanding of human potential).

## Notes to Section A

1. Eldad and Medad are referenced at *Numbers* 11:24-26; *Numbers* 11: 27-29; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on *Numbers* 11:26; and *Sanhedrin* 17a of the *Babylonian Talmud*.

2. Mari was the *locus* of a collection of correspondence discovered among the royal archives in ancient Mesopotamia on the Middle Euphrates. Destroyed by its rival, Babylon in 1760 B.C.E., its archive provides insight into, among many other things, the prophetic movement and activities there, long before ancient Israel and its prophetic movement(s) came into being. Specific letters/correspondence uncovered revealed that the famous King Zimri-Lim (recipient of the letters) was informed of prophetic activity in his realm. With this information, we are able to study the development of ancient Israel's prophetic movement(s). Three letters are available online at: [homepages.gac.edu/~celledge/MariActivity.htm](http://homepages.gac.edu/~celledge/MariActivity.htm). Numerous maps depicting the location of ancient Mari within its geographical location may be viewed at: [https://images.search.yahoo.com/images/view;\\_ylt=AOLEV](https://images.search.yahoo.com/images/view;_ylt=AOLEV).

See A. Lods, "Une tablette inedite de Mari, interessante pour l'histoire ancienne du prophetisme semitique." pp. 103-110, in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, (New York: Scribner, 1950), A. Malamat, "Prophetic Revelation in New Documents from Mari and the Bible." *Vetus Testamentum Supplement*, Vol. XV (1966): 207-227, A. Malamat, "Prophecy in the Mari Documents." *Eretz-Israel*, (1958): 74-84, and W. L. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica*, 50 (1969): 15-56.

3. The full text of the *Report of Wenamon* is provided by James Henry Breasted of the University of Chicago is available online at: [https://archive.org/stream/jstor-527697/527697\\_djvu.JSTOR=Journal Storage: A digital library containing back and current issues of over 2,000 academic journals](https://archive.org/stream/jstor-527697/527697_djvu.JSTOR=Journal Storage: A digital library containing back and current issues of over 2,000 academic journals).

4. A Doric temple that was built, destroyed, and rebuilt on the Parnassus Mountain was devoted to the beloved god Apollo from ca. fourteenth-eleventh-centuries B.C.E. (Online at Temple of Apollo at Delphi: [ancient-greece.org/architecture/delphi-temple-of-apollo.html](http://ancient-greece.org/architecture/delphi-temple-of-apollo.html)). Inhabited by people who accepted Apollo as the god of light, order, and harmony, the sanctuary is famous for its oracle: a respondent to queries posed to a special priestess. Her oracles were, alas!, open to interpretation, containing dual and opposing meanings simultaneously. An example supplied by the online article at [ancient-greece.org/history/delphi.html](http://ancient-greece.org/history/delphi.html) reads:

You will go you will return not in the battle you will perish.

Two different interpretations are possible depending on where this sentence is punctuated with a comma.

This is quite a difference from the oracles delivered by the ancient Israelite prophets or those at Mari.



The Ruins of Delphi

5. Disagreements pullulate, for instance, around the figure Balaam the son of Beor of *Numbers* 22-24. One of the papers delivered during the Vienna Seminar was entitled "Is Bil'am a Nebi 'Emet?" ("Was Balaam a True Prophet?"). Unfortunately, due to health issues the author, Dr. Azila Talit Reisenberger of the University of Cape Town, was unable to rework her oral presentation into an essay suitable for this publication. Nevertheless, a sustained work that argues for Balaam as a member of the prophetic family is John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions*, Brown Judaic Studies 244 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

6. Numerous covenants from the ancient Middle East are now extant. Among them the *Code of King Lipit-Ishtar*, the *Code of King Ur-Nammu*, the *Code of King Hammurab(p)i*, the *Code from Eshnunna*, and the *Sefire Documents* come readily to mind. The *Hittite Covenant Codes* belong to this list, also.

The *Ur-Nammu Code* is considered the oldest-known law code (ca. 1930 B.C.E.). Discovered in 1901, it contains 32 laws. See the contents online at: [http://realhistorywww.com/world\\_history/ancient/Misc/Sumer/ur-nammu\\_law.htm](http://realhistorywww.com/world_history/ancient/Misc/Sumer/ur-nammu_law.htm).

*The Code of Lipit-Ishtar*, is available in a work by Francis R. Steele, (Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1948), and also available in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. LII, No. 3 (July-September, 1948). The *Laws of Eshnunna and the Books of Moses: Biblical Roots of Classical Philosophy and Mythology* deals adroitly with the existence of important law codes that long predated the time of Moses. A text of these laws is available at: <https://historyancientphilosophy.wordpress.com/2014/07/03/the-laws-of-eshnunna-and-the-books-of-moses>.

The most comprehensive of the legal codes--the *Hammurabi Code*--is available online: Hammurabi's Code of Laws, Translation by L.W. King at: <http://eawc.evansville.edu/anththology/hammurabi.htm>.

Concerning the *Sefire Inscriptions*, Amnon Altman contributed an essay to the *Festschrift in honor of Israel Eph'al* entitled "What Kind of Treaty Tradition Do the Sefire Inscriptions Represent?" It explores whether these treaties/covenants were of the parity or vassal type. Cf. Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn, eds. *Treasures on Camel's Humps: Historical Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008), pp. 26-40. This work is also available online at:

[www.academia.edu/4039008/What\\_kind\\_of\\_treaty\\_tradition\\_do\\_the\\_Sefire\\_inscriptions\\_represent](http://www.academia.edu/4039008/What_kind_of_treaty_tradition_do_the_Sefire_inscriptions_represent) and see also J.A. Fitzmeyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), and see the recently published work by Michael Coogan, *The Ten Commandments: A Short History of an Ancient Text*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

7. A comprehensive treatment of treaty/covenants is found in The Reverend J.A. Thompson, M.A., Ph.D., *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament*, (London: The Tyndale Press, 1964).

8. The so-called Davidic Covenant is unique in the *Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament*, but not in the *Bible* as a whole. First mentioned in 2 *Samuel* 7, it is God's agreement with King David through the Court Prophet Nathan. It is also summarized in 1 *Chronicles* 17: 11-14 and 2 *Chronicles* 6:16. A similar "covenant" through Christ is also mirrored in the entire *Gospel of John*, and there it extends to all humans. *John*, David, and Abraham are related by a common thread of outlook.

9. Were there not an understanding of one relationship between certain prophets and a covenant understanding being in place, the *rib* or covenant lawsuit would be impossible to understand. Scholars hold that while such lawsuits were held under formal, cultic circumstances such as religious festivals, and political/religious, formal occasions, that is not how the *HS/OT* accounts necessarily present them. In various texts they are presented disconnected from their original ambience. The prophet assumed the role of prosecutor and challenger to either a monarch, a specific official group, ancient Israel and/or Judah as a people, speaking on behalf of the plaintiff and wounded partner of the covenant, Yahweh. However, Yahweh was also understood as judge! Some breach of covenant was always the cause of a *rib*. Significant literature attests to this understanding. Consult K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), which provides a study of the roots of the covenant idea in Ancient Israel, George Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955), Walter Brueggemann, "Amos IV. 4-13 and Israel's Covenant Worship," *VT* (1965): 1-15, J. Harvey, "Le Rib-Pattern' requistoire prophetique sur la rupture de l'alliance," *Biblica* 43 (1962): 172-196, Franz Hesse, "Wuerzelt die prophetische Gerichtsrede im Israelitischen Kult?" *ZAW* 65 (1953): 45-53, Moshe Weinfeld, "B'rith," *TDOT* Vol. 2: 252-259, Ernst Wuerthwein, "Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede," *ZThK* 49 (1955): 1-16.

10. Kelly J. Murphy of Emory University offers a course entitled Prophets and Prophecy in the Books of Kings. (Available at [www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/resource/lessonplan\\_9.xhtml](http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/resource/lessonplan_9.xhtml)) The title is most appropriate--distinguished from prophets and prophecy in the *Books of Samuel*, or

in the prophetic books of the eighth century, or post sixth century B.C.E. Murphy approaches the contents of these books within the framework of the *Deuteronomistic History*, a term that refers to the outlook of the contents of the *Book of Deuteronomy* and how that is reflected in the particular philosophy/theology of history read in 1 & 2 *Kings*. Because therein the Prophets Elijah and Elisha are presented as being larger than life, questions of prophetic legend are raised. Unfortunately, one presentation of these prophets as tricksters was not prepared and submitted for inclusion in this volume. It would have added gravitas to the issue of prophetic legends. Consult, however, Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, Book 9 IVP Academic, (Nottingham, U.K.: InterVarsity Press, 2008) and Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, Vol. 8 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2000).

11. We point to the suspicious fact that only 13 prophetic books exist. These range from the pre-great, individual prophets of the ninth century B.C.E.--Elijah and Elisha--to the Assyrian Period--Amos, Hosea, Isaiah of Jerusalem, and Micah--to the Babylonian Period--Jeremiah, *et al.*--to the Exilic- and Post-exilic Periods. Essentially, the most important prophets were those who called on the carpet rebellious acts (legislation, personal conduct, attitude toward God) committed by specific monarchs. When monarchs really disappear, prophets disappear also.

12. To demonstrate this, Nathan-the-prophet criticized King David over his relationship with the wife of his General Uriah, Elijah gave no peace to King Ahab for what he considered the king's foibles and peccadilloes (as well as those of his wife and queen, Jezebel), Michaiah son of Imla who also opposed this king over his decision to attack the border city of Ramoth-Gilead with his Judean, royal colleague, resulting in both their deaths, Elisha ultimately bringing down (King) Athaliah of Judah who appears to have usurped the throne in Judah after the death of her husband at Ramoth-Gilead, and Jeremiah who opposed the final two Judean monarchs for their folly in opposing openly the rulers of neo-Babylonia. We may append to these, the actions of Ahijah of Shiloh against both Solomon and (eventually) Jeroboam I.

13. The expression 'man/men of God'

([www.theholyscriptures.org/alfredbouter/Library/Documents/da1070.pdf](http://www.theholyscriptures.org/alfredbouter/Library/Documents/da1070.pdf)) appears some 75 times in the *H.S./O.T.* and twice in the *N.T.* It embraces and describes numerous relationships between men and God. Some mirror a predictive function, such as the numerous 'angels of God', or the Priest/Prophet Samuel, while others (many anonymous) attempted to inform and correct Israel's waywardness(es). Some men who are acknowledged as prophets are also referred to as 'men of God'. This is certainly the case with Elijah and Elisha, Moses, and several others in the *Books of Kings*.

14. Cf. the examples provided in the discussion conducted by Chrysalis, "Bible Prophecy: Foretelling & Forthtelling," online at: [www.chrysaliscafe.com/2010/11/bible-prophecy-foretelling-forthtelling-html](http://www.chrysaliscafe.com/2010/11/bible-prophecy-foretelling-forthtelling-html).

15. Review the discussion in Note 6A above.

16. Consult Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress

Press, 1975), and see also Paul D. Hanson, "Jewish Apocalyptic Against Its Near Eastern Environment," *RB* 78 (1971): 31-58, Stephen I. Cook, *Prophecy & Apocalypticism: The Post-Exilic Social Setting*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Press, 1995), Stephen I. Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature: Interpreting Biblical Texts*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), and John J. Collins, "Jewish Apocalyptic Against Its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment," *BASOR* 220 (1975): 27-36, and John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or I Enoch*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

17. Extensive discussions on communication theory and praxis are contained throughout John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East: Oral and Written Communication in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures: Communicators and Communiqués in Context*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

18. The Deuteronomistic philosophy/theology of history has already been discussed in Note A9 above. Its internal complexity and challenges presented the reader are further studied by Richard D. Nelson, "Dual Redaction Hypothesis in Kings" as Chapter One in *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History*, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

19. See Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics the Shaped the Old Testament*, (N.Y., N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1971) for the political background to 1 & 2 Kings.

## B.

**What we lack are the contexts in which the so-called writing prophets** delivered the oracles that are collected in their works. Today (12/16/2013), for instance, a Mexican lawmaker addressed the Mexican legislature in full session, wearing only his skivvies in order to illustrate how devastating to his country are the numerous deals politicians are making to bring oil and gas energy to his country. He was not ejected from such public company. 1

## Relevant Quotes

1. The view of the prophetic activity *vis-à-vis* the Covenant is reflected in words attributed to Sir Winston Churchill: "The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you will see."

2. In Dante's *Inferno*, one encounters futurists and prognosticators, whose bodies face forward, while their heads face to the rear. This was punishment for attempting to look ahead of life while alive.



3. “If, indeed, it is prophecy, the people around you do not know that it is right.” (Heard on National Public Radio in a discussion of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* [5/2/2013])

### One More Look at Roots

J. Harold Ellens, in a work presented before the Biblical Archaeological Society in Baltimore, Maryland in autumn 2013, wrote:” Perhaps the most significant development of religious phenomena in Israelite experience was the figure and function of the prophet.” (Ellens 2013, 10 [Private correspondence]) In what he wrote subsequently, he disabused all those who believed and accepted that the prophets of the *HS/OT* were a unique phenomenon: “Exactly the same functioning figure is indicated in the Mari culture as is described in the cuneiform tablets that filled its royal archive.” (p. 10) Mari in northern Mesopotamia was a teeming city between 3500-3100 B.C.E., long before anyone thinks of talking about an ancient Israelite society and culture. Its most illustrious king, Zimri-Lim, dwarfs most other ancient Near Eastern kings in prestige, also. Centuries later, and in the same, general northern area of Upper Mesopotamia, neo-Assyrian prophecy was still an important phenomenon and played an important role in its politics. 2

To either the surprise or shock of many, the major, biblical prophets may be compared to either the *nahash*, serpent, of *Genesis* or *hasatan*, **The Satan**, the adversary (not to be confused with the later Satan of, especially, *New Testament* and early Christian thought), of the *Book of Job*. In certain theologies, the connection between the serpent and **The Satan** has already been made; both have been identified as Satan (bereft of the definite article). This is simple theological convenience and overreach, however. What we design is a comparison wherein contextual and ideational functions are predominant. We focus on the function, not person, of the serpent and **The Satan**. The serpent plays the role not of a tempter to sin/rebellion, but of a challenger to acquire wisdom. His ‘crime’ is that of Prometheus and/or Jonathan, son of King David; humans would be ignorant without the prompting of either. Yet, a significant value judgment concerning these two advisors is evident; the serpent received summary punishment for his counsel, whereas **The Satan** is quite noticeably absent at the end of the *Job Saga*. Many assume that this is because he did not anger, but was given permission by God to act in his capacity. Having done so, his presence was no longer necessary. Thus, we have two examples of invitation to sagacity and wisdom; one is countenanced and one is condemned. But here is an important difference;

the primordial pair did not need an intercessor/intermediary to communicate with the deity; Job never did until he demanded an answer from God. For the former, direct conversation was normal; for the latter, it was temporary and only within an unexplained crisis.

Prophets, as we encounter the majority of them in the *OT/HS*, belong to a period when most ordinary people did not believe that it was possible to communicate directly and verbally with a given deity. Intermediaries were then believed to be a more appropriate (yet distant) way to communicate with the ‘awesome other’. Gone are the days of the primordial pair, their sons, Noah, Abraham, Hagar, and Moses having such direct and immediate conversation with a deity. Only the ninth century Prophet Elijah is depicted as being the exception. So when we speak of prophecy in just ancient Israel, we speak of a most specific understanding of one communication *praxis*.<sup>3</sup> There were many other *praxes*, just as today there exist numerous television channels; and these delivered in local, cable and dish. Even among these, there is competition to bring the same message to the customer. Due to its nature, apparently the same was true of the ancient prophets, and in the case of St. Paul, apostles. We still haven’t removed all of the communication ‘bugs’ in the system.

### Something to Ponder as You Read On

Israelite priests hated kings for having co-opted their duties as defacto community heads, and having been set apart simply by being anointed king(s)=priest-king (the dilemma, for instance, of Samuel the priest-prophet). Prophets were counted among priests who resented this development deeply. They came to form an opposition/adversarial group at court, whose self-appointed/*YHWH*-appointed duty was to critique this priest-king whenever and wherever he stumbled or failed in the priestly side of his responsibilities; prophets, in this light, are agents of checks and balances. Organized priest-prophets accomplished this check and balance in a way that continued through most of the existence of the priest-king in both Judah- and Israel-the Kingdom(s). Nevertheless, there were others, not hereditary nor priestly, who exhibited the same or similar signs of prophetic activity, and it was all nigh impossible to separate one type of mantic activity from another; *anashim meshuga'im* (crazy men) all looked/acted alike to those observing their activities. <sup>4</sup>

## Notes to Section B

1. The image of the ‘crazy’ or ‘mad’ man is pervasive in religious literature. Notable ‘mad men’ appearing in the *HS/OT* are similar to the (above-mentioned) Mexican politician’s actions mirrored in activities of the Prophet Jeremiah (Cha. 13) who doffed his underwear, buried it under a rock and, like the Prophet Isaiah, walked around barefooted and naked heralding an Egyptian captivity (Cha. 20). To stress his point further, Jeremiah wore an oxen yoke on his shoulders until it was removed by another prophet (*Jer.* 27 & 28). The Prophet Hosea (v. 1) married Gomer, a prostitute, to show Israel’s faithlessness and infidelity, and had a child by her whom he named *Lo-Ruhama*—unloved, not pitied (v.3). Ezekiel lay in front of a stone that symbolized Jerusalem, for *YHWH* had instructed him to eat bread baked on human offal. Instead, he used cow dung (4: 9-15). Even the *NT* and early Christianities boast their crazies. The Apostle Paul and the Desert Fathers all share this trait. And the Dervishes and Sufis of Islam (the *Malamatiyya*) belong to those who exhibit such mantic behavior and engage in such activities. Moreover, the phenomenon/phenomena is/are not limited to ‘men religious’ of the three ‘Abrahamic’ traditions, for the *Avadhuta* of Sanskrit literature mentions ‘crazies’, also. See, also, the online article Stephen Beale, “The Crazy Prophets of the Old Testament”: [www.catholicexchange.com/crazy-prophets-old-testament](http://www.catholicexchange.com/crazy-prophets-old-testament).

2. A comprehensive bibliography on Middle Eastern prophets and prophecies is located online at:

[www.courses.missouristate.edu/victormatthews/bib/PROPHET.html](http://www.courses.missouristate.edu/victormatthews/bib/PROPHET.html). Consult V. Christian, “Sum. *lu-an-na-ba-tu*=akkad. *mahhu* ‘*Ekstatiker*.” *Wiener Zeitschrift fuer die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, LIV (1957): 9-10, F. Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari und Israel*, (Herzberg am Harz: Verlag Erwin Jungfer, 1968), J.G. Heintz, “Oracles prophetiques et ‘Guerre sainte’ selon les archives royales de Mari et l’Ancient Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplement*, Vol. XVII (1969): 112-138, H.B. Huffmon, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” *JBL*, 78 (1959): 285-295.

3. A trilogy of works addressing communication theory and praxis in ancient Israel are John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East: Oral and Written Communication in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures: Communicators and Communiqués in Context*, Brown Judaic Studies 169, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions*, Brown Judaic Studies 244, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), and John T. Greene, *The Concept of the Christ in St. Paul’s Thought: The Nature of Communication Among Humans and Between God and Humans*, (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2013).

4. Stephen Beale, “The Crazy Prophets of the Old Testament,” online at: [www.catholicexchange.com/crazy-prophets-old-testament](http://www.catholicexchange.com/crazy-prophets-old-testament). See, also, 2 *Kings* 9:11.



# THE PROPHETS AND THE CITY: A STUDY IN LIMINALITY

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“Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers” (*Jer.* 9:2)



The Bethsaida City-Gate is in the Center Foreground

## Introduction

**Archaeologists are trained to answer questions that begin with the words *how*, or *what*.** Questions such as: How did a certain place appear in a past period of time? Of what is the material of a certain object made? Answers for questions that begin with the word *why* are not usually found in the realm of material culture. Questions of *why* are questions that presuppose an examination of the motivations behind human behavior, their meaning and their cognitive significance. Following similar attempts made by historians, an endeavor suggested for archaeologists to address motivation and meaning was proposed by Sir Collin Renfrew in his work on *cognitive archaeology*. Yet, as enticing as that proposal was, it has not yet captured a niche in archaeological research. This is perhaps in part because cognitive archaeology requires some training in the sciences of human behavior: such as anthropology, sociology, or psychology, and

sometimes the answer may even require acquaintance with the sphere of psychiatry. Finding and seeing dead people is a challenge, reading the mind of dead people is an even more daunting challenge.

By the same token, scholars who research human behavior, those who are trained to work with *why* questions, normally deal with contemporaneous societies and seldom with ancient civilizations. Further, they almost never employ interpretation of archaeological finds or material culture when documents are scarce or altogether absent.

This essay aims to look at a particular *why* question from archaeological research and to deduce a cognitive motivation from precisely this difficult situation, where documentation is rare and the big bulk of data emerges solely from archaeological material.

The questions we shall attempt to answer are these: *Why is the city gate, the threshold to the city, a liminal place and while at the same time the heart of the biblical city? Why isn't the nucleus, the physical center, the hub of the city as in Greco-Roman cities?* The fact that Greco-Roman cities developed in a different fashion indicates that this question is not to be taken for granted. The location of the hub of activity was not simply a natural or organic development, but was something that demonstrated a perception of urban activity and is subject, therefore, to particular constraints.

To examine this phenomenon, I draw upon the model of liminality suggested at the turn of the twentieth century by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (Van Gennep 1960), and later developed by Victor Turner in the latter half of that century (Turner 1969), along with Turner's disciples Bjørn Thomassen (Thomassen 2006) and others.

*Liminality* can be defined as a state or a process of being on a threshold of axis of space and time, being betwixt and between while not entirely on either side. Although this state of liminality is generally a temporary state traversed with suitable rituals, some liminal states can be permanent or quite prolonged. Liminality contains what Victor Turner calls a shift from social structure which contains a particular territorial hierarchy and social grading, to the exact reverse dubbed by Turner as *communitas* (meaning community that is not necessarily territorial), that features important qualities such as the abolition of the old social structure in expectation of a better one, namely egalitarianism, since as differences in social status dissolve, people feel equal with one another. Other important features include the renouncement of physical possession, since in the liminal space people are ready to renounce or exchange properties; uncertainty about the future, and animosity towards whoever is not in the liminal state (Turner 1969, 94-111).