

RESUMEN

“Las cartas de Mari y el profetismo bíblico: Similitudes y diferencias – Parte I”— El profetismo bíblico se ha comparado con diferentes manifestaciones proféticas en el antiguo Cercano Oriente. Una de las más importantes se encuentra en las cartas de Mari. Muchos autores consideran estas cartas como el origen del profetismo bíblico. Este artículo es la primera parte de un estudio de dos partes. En esta primera parte, se desarrolla la descripción del profetismo bíblico, su naturaleza y características, con el fin de comprender los conceptos básicos de los fenómenos proféticos. Se describe la terminología utilizada por las Escrituras para descubrir la naturaleza de los profetas bíblicos. En el siguiente artículo, se sigue el mismo procedimiento con las cartas de Mari y se ofrece una comparación entre estos dos registros para establecer su relación, similitudes y diferencias.

Palabras clave: Profetas, cartas de Mari, profetismo bíblico, Antiguo Cercano Oriente

ABSTRACT

“Mari Letters and Biblical Prophetism: Similarities and Differences—Part I”— Biblical prophetism has been equated to different so-called prophetic manifestations in the ancient Near East. One of the most important is found in Mari letters. These letters are considered by many authors as the origin of biblical prophetism. This article is part one of a two-part paper. In this first part, the description of biblical prophetism, its nature, and features, are developed in order to understand the basics of the prophetic phenomena. The terminology used by the Scriptures is described in order to find out the nature of the biblical prophets. In the next article, the same is done with Mari letters and a comparison is offered between these two records in order to establish their relationship, similarities, and differences.

Keywords: Prophets, Mari Letters, biblical prophetism, ancient Near East

MARI LETTERS AND BIBLICAL PROPHECY: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES—PART I

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Introduction

It is very common to associate many practices found in the Biblical record with customs from other nations settled in the ancient Near East (ANE). It is also usually suggested that the biblical ones are derived from their counterparts from ancient times.¹ One of these practices is prophecy, the activity of the OT prophets.²

According to some scholars, biblical prophecy is considered as a way of divination as it happened in other nations.³ That view equates the prophetic manifestations of the Bible with ANE cultures. Moreover, Walter C. Klein has suggested that most of the Hebrew prophetic movement was influenced by Egyptians, Sumerians, and

1. It is well known that not only practices but also events recorded in the biblical text find their parallels in ANE documents. The Creation account (Gen 1), the narration of a flood (Gen 6-8), a prophet named Balaam (Num 22-24), the civil and religious laws (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy), and others have their parallels in extra-biblical records such as the Enuma Elish, the Gilgamesh epic, the story of Balaam, the Code of Hammurabi and others, respectively. There is a list of some other parallels in Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991); W. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958). In many cases, these extra-biblical parallels are seen as the origin of the biblical record and a sociological explanation is given about the origin of Israel as a nation and its customs.

2. About the definition of prophecy, Allan A. MacRae considers that it includes not only the activities but its writings as well. Allan A. MacRae "Prophets and prophecy," *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible (ZEB)*, rev. ed., ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 4:993.

3. Gerda de Villiers does not make any distinction between ANE divination and biblical prophecy. Gerda de Villiers, "The Origin of Prophecy in the Ancient Near East," *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 1-6.

Hittites.⁴ In that sense, he considers that “much of prophecy is purely parapsychological.”⁵

The records used to trace that parallel were found in different places such as Ebla, Emmar, Ugarit, Phoenicia, Aram, Ammon, Anatolia, Uruk, Mari, Ishchali, Assyria and Egypt.⁶ Based on these ancient records, scholars have divided the art of divination into two methods: non-inductive and inductive.⁷ Divination should be understood as the activity of “consulting beings . . . or things” in order to get information about the future.⁸ Furthermore, the inductive method requires specific and technical knowledge by the diviner while the non-inductive method considers a spontaneous manifestation of a certain deity.⁹

Among the different sources of divination, there are some methods listed by W. L. Liefeld as (1) chresmology, the “prognostication by seers and through oracles;” (2) oneiromancy, the “practice of predicting future through the interpretation of dreams;” (3) astrology, by the observation and interpretation of the planets and stars described in the horoscope; (4) necromancy, the “consultation with the dead;” (5) haruspicy, the “study of the entrails of animals;” (6) augury, the “analysis of the movement of animals, and especially the birds;” (7) omens and portents, the interpretation of different events in the natural world; and (8) mechanical means, which include the interpretation of hydromancy, pyromancy, and cleromancy.¹⁰

Most of these ways to find divine information are rejected by the biblical record. Considering Deut 18:9-11, divination, witchcraft, interpretation of omens, sorcery, enchanters, mediums, spiritism, or to

4. Walter C. Klein, “A Broad Survey of Prophetism,” *AThR* 42, no. 4 (1960): 283. He considers some differences but only conceptual ones.

5. *Ibid.*, 299.

6. See H. B. Huffmon, “Prophecy,” *ABD*, 5:477-482.

7. de Villiers, “Origin of Prophetism,” 2. Liefeld considers that there are personal and impersonal methods of divination but this classification is subjective. W. L. Liefeld, “Divination,” *ZEB*, 2:163.

8. Liefeld, “Divination,” *ZEB*, 2:163.

9. de Villiers, “The Origin of Prophetism,” 2-3.

10. Liefeld, “Divination,” *ZEB*, 2:163-164.

talk with the dead, must be rejected. All of these things are detestable to YHWH's sight.

With this in mind, to study the ANE texts involves many documents, and it would be an endless work.¹¹ However, it is possible to select a representative text. The most ancient documents found in the ANE related to prophetism are the letters of Mari. Thus, the purpose of this research paper is to study the letters of Mari in order to establish what the relation between the Bible and Mari letters about the prophetic realm is.¹² In order to fulfill this purpose, Mari letters, which reveal a sort of prophetic manifestations,¹³ will be analyzed and then correlated with the biblical text.

The procedure of this study is as follows. This paper is divided into two articles. First, in this article, the meaning and role of a biblical prophet will be defined. Only by doing that will it be possible to find connections to Mari letters, if there is any. In the second article, the features of Mari prophetism will be shown in order to be compared with the biblical prophetism. Then, the similarities and the differences between biblical and Mari prophetism will be depicted. Finally, some conclusions will be presented providing implications for biblical studies.

Prophetism in the Old Testament

A prophet is usually considered as the one who tells the future and this is assumed as his/her main activity.¹⁴ However, according to the biblical teachings, it is possible to see more than that in the work of a biblical prophet. To better explain what the labor of an OT

11. André Lemaire, "Mari, the Bible and the Northwest Semitic World," *BA* 47, no. 2 (1984): 102.

12. Huffmon has made a brief resume of the documents that show some kind of prophetic manifestation in the ANE, see Huffmon, "Prophecy." *ABD*, 5:477-482.

13. According to Huffmon, there are *prophetic* manifestations connected to the biblical prophets. Nissinen had translated a group of 50 letters from Mari which are related to prophetism in his book Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Writings from the Ancient World*, ed. Peter Machinist (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

14. Jimmie L. Nelson, "His Servants, the Prophets," *SwJT* 24, no. 1 (1981), 87.

prophet was, it is important to check the different Hebrew words used to designate a prophet. Then, it will be possible to give a definition of “prophet,” his/her activity and features.

Hebrew Terminology for the Old Testament Prophets

There are some terms connected to the prophets and their ministry. The terminology used by biblical authors needs to be analyzed in its own context. In that way, Laney stated that “the Old Testament does provide information concerning the precise meaning of the term.”¹⁵ Such an affirmation is suggested as one of the hermeneutical principles for biblical interpretation.¹⁶ Therefore, the meaning of “being a prophet” should be built from the biblical text itself.

The Prophet as נָבִיא

The main Hebrew word used to refer to a prophet in the OT is נָבִיא, “prophet,”¹⁷ and it is used more than 300 times.¹⁸ About the origin of this word, as Jeremias states, it “is still uncertain”¹⁹ and the different possibilities are “a matter of controversy.”²⁰ There are dif-

15. J. Carl Laney, “The Role of the Prophets in God’s Case Against Israel,” *BSac* 138, no. 552 (1981): 314.

16. The text itself should give the objective meaning in biblical research. See David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 179; Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke and Grant I. Lovejoy, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 21-25, 363-364. For further information see Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 67-112; Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 78-79.

17. The basic meaning of this word is attested in dictionaries and lexicons of biblical Hebrew such as Robert D. Culver, “נָבִיא,” *TWOT*, 544; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), s.v. “נָבִיא;” Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament* (2003), s.v. “נָבִיא;” and others.

18. J. Jeremias, “נָבִיא,” *TLOT*, 2:697.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Culver, “נָבִיא,” *TWOT*, 544.

ferent words in ancient languages which have been associated with נְבִיא.²¹ Among the proposals about the origin of the Hebrew word, it is possible to see a passive and an active sense. For some scholars, the word prophet is connected to a passive activity; it means that a prophet is one who *receives a message from God* and for others, but it also has an active sense, giving to the prophet an active role as one who is called to *utter or communicate* a specific message.²² Considering the meaning of this word and its context, both roles are evident in the biblical record.

The active role of the prophet is seen in most of the biblical examples. This word appears in Exod 7:1 where God appointed Aaron as Moses's prophet (נְבִיא) in order to be his speaker. It must be understood as the result of the arguing between God and Moses in the wilderness (cf. Exod 4:10-17). From that biblical event, it is possible to consider a key feature of the biblical prophet. The נְבִיא is established by God with two main tasks, to receive a message from God and to give the message to an intended addressee. At the same time, God is the provider of the message and who chooses the final receiver of the message—in this case, the Pharaoh (Exod 7:1). This event is considered as the best example to define the concept of the OT prophet.²³

Following this feature, the title נְבִיא implies that idea, along with the prophetic books of the OT, and it is reinforced with the concept of being sent. The OT prophet is usually sent by God himself²⁴ and speaks the words which came from the Lord²⁵ in order to fulfill a mis-

21. In order to see the different terms associated with the Hebrew word, see HALOT, s.v. “נְבִיא;” Culver, “נְבִיא,” TWOT, 544; Jeremias, “נְבִיא,” TLOT, 2:697.

22. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 741-742.

23. H. L. Ellison, *The Old Testament Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 14.

24. The Hebrew Bible (HB) describes that the one who sends (שָׁלַח) the prophet is God, using sometimes His personal name, יהוה, and other times as אֱלֹהִים, “God.” (cf. Judg 6:8; 2 Sam 12:24-25; 2 Chr 24:18-19; 25:15; Jer 25:4; Hag 1:12; Zech 7:12).

25. According to the biblical text, the prophet tells the word (דְּבַר) that YHWH or the heavenly messenger spoke (דְּבַר) to him (cf. 1 Kgs 13:18, 26; 14:18; 16:12; 22:23; 2 Kgs 14:25; 17:23; 21:10; 24:2; 2 Chr 18:22; 25:15; Jer 23:28; 37:2; 46:13; 50:1). Even, when a true prophet confronts a false prophet, the way to show that he is a false one

sion. In that sense, the prophet is the “spokesman” of God²⁶ and, in a broad sense, His instrument.

The noun **נְבִיא** is connected with the cognate verb **נָבֵא** in two ways: first, the similarity of the Hebrew root.²⁷ The verb describes the action (**נָבֵא**) of the prophet (**נְבִיא**) that he/she has to perform as part of his/her ministry. The meaning of this verb is basically “to prophesy” but there are some connotations about this verb which help to understand its cognate noun. *To prophesy* means to “speak by . . . a divine power.”²⁸ It implies that the source of the oracles is not human wisdom but God himself. Moreover, this verb is used to express the idea of predicting future events.²⁹

The work of the prophet (**נְבִיא**) is described many times by the verb of the same root (**נָבֵא**), as told previously. Some cases are attested in the prophetic ministries of Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:8), Jeremiah (Jer 28:8) or Ezekiel, who received the order to prophesy using the same Hebrew root, **נָבֵא** (e.g. Ezek 13:2, cf. 4:7; 6:2; 11:4; 11:13; 20:46[21:2]; 21:2[7], 9[14], 14[19]).³⁰ Occasionally, this ability is given to someone who was not called to a prophetic office, like Saul. In that case, the people asked, “Is Saul also among the prophets [**נְבִיאִים**]?” (1 Sam 10:5, 10, 11, NASB). Not only Saul prophesied, but three groups of his messengers prophesied with him on other occasions (1 Sam 19:20-24).³¹

is by asking what did the Lord speak, using the same Hebrew root **דָּבַר** (Jer 23:37).

26. David L. Petersen, *The Roles of Israel Prophets*, JSOTSup 17 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 70-71.

27. In this case, the verbal root **נָבֵא** comes from the noun root **נְבִיא**. This verb is used in relation to the prophetic activity and gives the idea of acting as a **נְבִיא**, namely, to prophecy. See H. P. Müller “**נְבִיא**,” *TDOT*, 9:130, 134.

28. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), s.v. “**נָבֵא**.”

29. Baker and Carpenter, eds., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, s.v. “**נָבֵא**,” James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew Old Testament* CD-ROM (Oak Harbor: Logos Search System, 1997), s.v. “**נָבֵא**.”

30. When the Hebrew text has a different numbering than its English translation, the Hebrew numbering is given between brackets.

31. There are other instances when someone who was not called to the prophetic office also prophesied, as the case of the elders of Israel during the Exodus (Num 11:25-27).

It is important to note that the OT describes not only prophets of God but the work of false prophets. The biblical writers use the same Hebrew root, נבא, for both (Jer 2:8; 5:31, Ezek 13:2, 16, 17). When a prophet did not receive a message or order from God to prophesy (Jer 14:14, 15; 23:13, 16), the Bible declares that they were not sent (שָׁלַח) by the Lord (Jer 14:15; 23:21).³² It means that the word by itself is not enough to evaluate a prophet. It only describes the prophetic activity, either a true one or a false one. Thus, those who claim to be prophets must be tested.

The Prophet as הִזָּה

The Hebrew noun הִזָּה, which means “seer,”³³ appears only 17 times in the OT³⁴ and it is derived from the verb הִזָּה which means basically “to see” or “to prophesy.”³⁵ In comparison to נְבִיא, the occurrence of this word is small but its connection with the prophetic activity of the OT prophets is strong. The first connection between prophet (נְבִיא) and seer (הִזָּה) shows the way in which the biblical text equates these two terms. In 2 Sam 24:11, the prophet (נְבִיא) Gad is qualified as David’s seer (הִזָּה). The same happens when Iddo is named seer (הִזָּה) and later prophet (נְבִיא) (2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; cf. 2 Chr 13:22).³⁶ So, it reveals that these two different terms are used interchangeably. There is only one mention which uses the word הִזָּה in Mic 3:7 and it is applied to a false prophetic manifestation.

These two Hebrew roots, נבא and הזה are related when the noun הִזָּה is used together with the verb נבא in the same verse. The seer (הִזָּה)

32. Other cases are seen in the false prophets of Baal and Aserah at Mount Carmel, in the days of Elijah (1 Kgs 18:29), those who prophesied in front of Ahab (1 Kgs 22:8, 10, 12, 18).

33. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, s.v. “הִזָּה.”

34. Baker and Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, s.v. “הִזָּה.”

35. Robert D. Culver, “הִזָּה,” *TWOT*, 274. It is even suggested that this noun is the participle of the verb הזה. See Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, “הִזָּה.”

36. The same phenomenon happened with Gad who is labeled as prophet (נְבִיא) and later as seer (הִזָּה) in 1 Sam 22:5 (cf. 1 Chr 21:9; 29:29; 2 Chr 29:25).

Amos was rejected by the priest of the temple located at Bethel who asked Amos to prophesy (נְבִיא) in the land of Judah, and not in Israel (Amos 7:12). Another case is when Asaph started to prophesy (נְבִיא), according to 1 Chr 25:2, and later is labeled as אֱזָזָה (2 Chr 29:30).³⁷ The same relation exists between the noun נְבִיא and the verb תְּזַה and it is seen in the case of Habakkuk the prophet (נְבִיא) who saw (תְּזַה) an oracle (Hab 1:1).

Moreover, this connection appears in other cases, although not in the same verse, stressing that idea. The prophet (נְבִיא) Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:2; 20:1, 11, 14; 2 Chr 26:22; 32:20, 32; Isa 37:2; 38:1; 39:3) saw (תְּזַה) visions from the Lord concerning Judah, Israel and even Babylon (Isa 1:1; 2:1; 13:1). Ezekiel, called נְבִיא (Ezek 2:2-5; 33:33), talked against false prophets (נְבִיא, 13:2) who had seen (תְּזַה) false visions (13:6, 7, 8, 9, 16; 13:23; 21:29[34]; 22:28). Interestingly, the false prophets announced that what Ezekiel saw (תְּזַה) was for future times (12:27) dismissing the vision of the true prophet.

The Prophet as רֹאֶה

The third noun used to label a prophet is רֹאֶה, “seer” or “prophet,” and derives from the verb רָאָה, “to see.”³⁸ This Hebrew term is used almost exclusively for Samuel as a seer (1 Sam 9:9, 11, 18, 19; 1 Chr 9:22; 26:28, 29:29). However, רֹאֶה is used twice to talk about Hanani, a seer in the days of Asa (2 Chr 16:7, 10) and once in a general reference to the seers of the people of God (Isa 30:10).

The biblical text connects the two aforementioned words (נְבִיא and תְּזַה) with רֹאֶה. First, according to 1 Sam 9:9, the biblical writer states that in ancient times, the prophet—נְבִיא—of God was called seer—רֹאֶה. Then, the use of this word is equated to נְבִיא. Second, תְּזַה is related to רֹאֶה based on Isa 30:10 which equates these two terms. Finally, 1 Chr 29:29 puts together and equates the three Hebrew words: נְבִיא, תְּזַה, and רֹאֶה.

37. The same occurs in the case of the seer Jeduthun (2 Chr 35:15), who prophesied (2 Chr 25:1-3).

38. D. Vetter, “רֹאֶה,” *TLOT*, 3:1176-1177; Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, s.v. “רֹאֶה.”

The Prophet as אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים

The phrase אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים, “the man of God,” is a very unique expression connected with the ministry of the OT prophets. This expression is used almost exclusively to talk about a prophet and appears 76 times in the OT.³⁹ In every case, the relation between these two nouns is a construct relation. It implies a subjective genitive of possession and denotes that the first noun (אִישׁ) is property of/belongs to God (אֱלֹהִים).⁴⁰ Thus, a characteristic of a prophet in the OT is that he/she belongs to God, working on behalf of the human race.

As a summary of this section, a prophet can be defined as the spokesman of God. It implies that he/she receives the message from God in order to deliver it to an appointed addressee. The words used to refer to a prophet are interchangeable, implying that the three main words נְבִיא, חֹזֶה, and רֹאֶה, are to some extent synonyms, as the Bible itself seems to suggest (1 Sam 9:9; 1 Chr 29:29). In addition to that, the title “the man of God” (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים) is specific and shows the nature of the prophet. He/she was a human being but connected with God in the sense that the prophet belongs to God.

Main Features of the OT Prophets

The first feature of the OT prophets’ ministry is their divine call. There are some cases in the Bible where the calling from God to a person in order to be His prophet is explicit. The prophets were called to fulfill a mission. The first one was Abraham. He is the first character in the Bible to be called נְבִיא (Gen 20:7). He was called to go out of his land and go to a promised land, Canaan (12:1-3).

39. This expression does not use the definite article attached to אֱלֹהִים only 6 times (1 Sam 2:27; 9:6; 1 Kgs 13:1; 17:24; 2 Kgs 1:10; 4:9) and 3 times it refers to the angel of YHWH (Deut 33:1; Jos 14:6; Judg 13:8). The other references are used to refer a prophet (1 Sam 9:7, 8, 10; 1 Kgs 13:4, 5, 6[2x], 7, 8, 11, 12, 14[2x], 21, 26, 29; 17:18; 21:28; 2 Kgs 1:9, 11, 12, 13; 4:7, 16, 21, 22, 25[2x], 27[2x], 40; 5:8, 14, 15, 20; 6:6, 9, 10, 15; 7:2, 17, 18, 19; 8:2, 4, 7, 8, 11; 13:19; 23:16, 17; 1 Chr 23:14; 2 Chr 8:14; 11:2; 25:9[2x]; 30:16; Ezra 3:2; Neh 12:24, 36; Sal 90:1; Jer 35:4).

40. Bruce K. Waltke and M O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 145.

The next character in the Bible to be called מְבִיא is Moses. In Exod 3-4, God appears to Moses and gives him a mission, but first he must accept the calling (קָרָא) from God (3:4). Interestingly, the Bible says that no one was a prophet like Moses (Deut 34:10). In the same way, God called (קָרָא) Samuel to serve Him as prophet (1 Sam 3:1-15). The story of Elijah and Elisha also gives some insights. In 1 Kgs 19:16, Elijah received the order to anoint Elisha as a prophet (מְבִיא). After that, Elijah “threw his mantle on him [Elisha]” (19:19, NASB). This fact shows how Elisha was called by God through Elijah. Later, in 2 Kgs 2, Elisha follows Elijah because he desired to receive the Spirit of God (2:9) as a sign of acceptance of the calling from the Lord. At the end of the story, when Elijah was taken by God, Elisha received the mantle of Elijah (2:13) and was reckoned as מְבִיא (3:11).

Another person who received an invitation from God to be His prophet is Isaiah. His calling is narrated in Isa 6. Something similar is found in the ministry of Jeremiah (Jer 1:1-9) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1-3). When Isaiah and Ezekiel were called by YHWH, the invitation was to send (שָׁלַח) them to His people (Isa 6:8; Ezek 2:4). The answer was positive and explicit in Isaiah (Isa 6:8) but implicit in Ezekiel (Ezek 3:2). Finally, according to Gerhard von Rad, the OT “often tells of how a prophet was called to his office.”⁴¹

The second feature of the OT prophets is the spiritual nature of their ministry. In the OT, those who had prophesied had received the Spirit of God (1 Sam 10:10). An example of this is depicted when the Spirit of God came upon the seventy elders in the wilderness after the Sinai events. They were not called prophets, but they prophesied (Num 11:25). For that reason, the biblical text allows us to establish the relation between the presence of the Holy Spirit and a prophetic manifestation (11:29).⁴² The operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the prophets makes them conscious of their ministry. Such awareness is revealed by the “sense of the divine call” and provokes the prophet to accept the word (דְּבַר) of God as the main form of divine revela-

41. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1976), 33.

42. Nelson, “His Servants, the Prophets,” 91.

tion.⁴³ In that sense, the revelatory character of the prophetic office must be acknowledged. Moreover, as a consequence, the revelatory nature of the prophetic labor leads to the acceptance by the audience of the inspired message that was given by God; it is the Spirit of God the one who guides the prophet.⁴⁴

The biblical record also describes the final receivers of a message given to a prophet. When God invites someone to become His prophet, the addressees are sometimes announced. Jeremiah wrote about himself that God called him as a “prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5, the translation is mine). In the case of Isaiah, after his calling he was directed to talk “to this people,” Judah and Jerusalem (Isa 6:9, the translation is mine; cf. Isa 1:1). In some cases, the prophets are sent to deliver a message to a king, as Nathan was sent to David (2 Sam 12:1). Sometimes the message was directed to the entire people of God (1 Sam 7:3). Moreover, occasionally, the prophet was sent to a pagan nation, like Jonah (Jon 1:1). Those messages were in some cases favorable to the addressee (cf. Isa 37:21-38; 2 Kgs 22:18-20) but mostly against them because they were against God and His law (cf. 2 Sam 12:7; Ezek 13:17; 39:1; Nah 2:13; Dan 4, 5). This fact shows the multifaceted role of the prophet in the OT.

Regarding the means of revelation, the OT shows that God makes Himself known (עֵדִי) through dreams, חֲלוֹם (Num 12:6 cf. Dan 2:1; Joel 2:28) and visions, מַרְאֵה (Num 12:6 cf. 1 Sam 3:15; Ezek 1:1; Dan 10:8).⁴⁵ Sometimes the divine revelation is given only by His voice (Exod 19:9; Num 12:6-8) which is finally His word, דְּבַר (Jer 1:4; Ezek 6:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1).

In summary, the OT prophet was called by God and the Holy Spirit is the one who guides the prophetic activity. In that sense, the

43. For further information about how it works, see *ibid.*, 97-101.

44. For additional information about the nature and the importance of the concept of inspiration, see Peter M. van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration,” *Handbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 22-57. See also George E. Rice, “Spiritual Gifts,” *Handbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 620-623.

45. Sometimes the Hebrew word to refer to a vision is חֲזוֹן (1 Chr 17:15; Isa 1:1; Dan 8:1; etc).

OT prophets received revelations from and about God Himself who is also the source of the inspired messages. Furthermore, the OT prophets talked to kings and/or to the people, whether it is the chosen people of God or not. The delivered messages could be against or in favor of the addressees. Finally, God transmits the message to the prophet by three main sources: visions, dreams and His own voice/word.

By Way of Conclusion

The first part of this paper described biblical prophetism, its nature, and features in order to understand the basics of the prophetic phenomena. The second part of this paper, in the next article, will survey the nature of the so-called prophetism in Mari letters following the same procedure performed in this first article; namely, an exploration of the terminology related to the so-called prophetism found in Mari letters and a description of the role of the personnel involved in that activity. After that, and based on the description of the biblical prophetism and the one in Mari letters, the article will compare the two activities already discussed, pointing out the similarities and differences between them. Finally, such comparison will lead to a reflection on the relationship between these two activities.

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