

Chapter 4

Reception of Prophetic Oracles in Ancient Israel and the Nigerian Context

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ABSTRACT

Scholars in biblical studies are divided into camps on the source(s) of prophetic oracles by prophets in ancient Israel and contemporary Nigerian society. This is because the prophets at one time or the other labeled one another true or false prophets based on the claim that the oracles of some of their colleagues did not come from God. Biblically speaking, an oracle is a divine message to a person or a group of persons through an appointed person. The thrust of the chapter is to investigate the source(s) of prophetic oracles in ancient Israel with the view of establishing its parallel in the prophetic ministry in the contemporary Nigerian society. Historical method was used for the research. It was discovered that prophets in both contexts claimed to have received their oracles from Yahweh. Also, true and false prophets are found in both contexts. Other sources of prophetic oracles are Satan, self, and circumstances. It is crucial that a prophet as God's mouthpiece receives his oracles from God before delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Prophecy is communication between God and Man. God was always eager to disclose something of himself, his will or his ways to his people, as they also were willing to receive from him. The channels through which God communicate his mind to

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humans are the prophets. Prophecy is a divine message from God transmitted to humans through his appointed human agent called prophets. Prophecy cut across all the religions in the world. In ancient Israel, the prophets do not belong to the same group and this is one of the reasons for conflict among them. They attack one another openly (Jer. 28:1-13). They inform the audience that some prophets were not called by Yahweh and as such God is not the source of their oracles. The question is: how do we differentiate between oracles that came from God and the one that did not come from God? This paper focus primarily on how prophets receive oracles. The question is: was there an approved method for reception of prophetic oracles in ancient Israel? Is God the source of all prophetic oracles? These and other relevant questions will be answered in this piece.

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

Prophets were regarded as distinct people called to their vocation by Yahweh with a definite message. Prophets are considered as Yahweh's mouthpiece and bearers of His message. The prophets have the responsibility of delivering the message as received. However, prophets who delivered messages that did not come to pass were called false prophets. In the Bible, God gave specific instructions to prophets for specific audience. Those who disobeyed instructions from the prophet faced serious consequences while those who obeyed were always blessed. However, there were prophets who compromised divine message on the altar of pecuniary benefits.

A careful study of texts such as Exodus 7:1 and Deuteronomy 18:18 revealed that there are two elements in prophetic operations. One is passive while the other is active. The prophet receives oracles in dreams, visions or verbal communications and passes these on to the audience, either orally or visibly in prophetic actions. (cf. Num 12:6-8; Isa. 6; Jer. 1:4-10; Eze. 3:1-4, 17). Out of the two functional elements, the most important is the passive, because it controls or regulates the active element. Without reception of oracles there is no delivery. As mentioned earlier, a true prophet of Yahweh is that individual who receives oracle from him and delivers without editing. The prophets were obliged to reveal the will of God to the people. This in most cases came in form of instruction, admonition and exhortation, promises or stern rebukes. The prophets as it were, were the ministerial monitors of the people and the interpreters of the law. In ancient Israel prophets were known to have protested against mere formalism, stressed moral duty, encourage spiritual services and promote truth and righteousness. They had the responsibility of calling the backsliding nations to Yahweh. It was their duty to intimate the people of the future promises from God. They give their audience the picture of what the future holds. There are indications from the biblical literature that the true prophets of Yahweh

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