

Prophets, Kings, and Vulnerability in South Africa Today¹

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ABSTRACT

Can the Bible, specifically, the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, contribute to cultural and socio-political issues prevalent in South Africa today? The struggle today can be linked to the inability of the government to respond to issues such as poverty, unemployment and the provision of basic services, such as water, sanitation and electricity. Can churches make such a contribution, not only by criticising but also by being a part of the solutions to these issues? In seeking answers to the questions posed above, can we learn anything from the tensions between prophets and kings in the time of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible that can be applied to the current situation in South Africa? How, in other words, did they navigate some of their cultural and socio-political differences, and what can we learn or gain from their wisdom and practices? This contribution investigates important passages in Deuteronomy and the interaction between kings and prophets in the different periods in the history of Israel—in the former and latter prophets. It is not the role of churches to engage in politics. They should, however, remain true to their faith and live and preach as a witness in and to society. The safeguarding of the rights of the people, social justice or the lack thereof, must be an important part of this witness.

Keywords: Prophets; Kings; Church and state, Hermeneutics; Vulnerability; Socio-political situation; South Africa; Reformed Churches; Gerrie Snyman

A INTRODUCTION

Can the Bible, specifically the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, contribute to cultural and socio-political issues prevalent in South Africa today? Can churches make such a contribution? When considering our current socio-political situation from a Christian theological perspective, Dietrich² poses an important question

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¹ This contribution is dedicated to my friend and colleague of many years, Gerrie Snyman, with an appreciation for his friendship, honesty, and scholarship.

² Walter Dietrich, *Jesaja und die Politik* (München: Chr Kaiser Verlag, 1976), 7.

for which a satisfactory answer would prove particularly useful and beneficial today: How should one view the relationship between religion, Christianity, church, faith and politics? What should or should not that relationship be? This is perhaps the most fundamental question asked of churches today.

In our appeal to the Holy Scriptures, however, a caveat is crucial to our investigation. Hanson³ rightly cautions against, simply or directly, transferring things from the Bible to today's context. We need to remain cognisant that current presuppositions, the structure of society and the realities of the present time are quite different from those of the ancient world in which the prophets flourished. Davidson⁴ defines prophecy as speaking the truth relevant to the time. As such, the aforementioned prophets interacted with the events of their time.⁵ They can be regarded primarily as speakers or preachers, as can be seen, for example, in the temple speech of Jeremiah in Jer 7.⁶ The prophets spoke as preachers to their current situation.⁷ In this sense, the interaction between prophets and kings in Israel and Judah was very important. The time of the monarchy was indeed the most important period in Israelite prophecy.⁸ When speaking of prophecy and the role of prophets, one must remember that prophecy is not only the interaction between the prophet and the king, priests or the people. It is also a dual-directional phenomenon, starting with the interaction between the prophet and God. The prophet receives his commission from God, and in some instances, the prophet would approach God, for example, to intercede on behalf of the people.⁹

In the interpretation of the texts of the Hebrew Bible and discussing the approaches to such interpretations, Snyman has proposed a hermeneutics of vulnerability in a number of publications.¹⁰ This will be discussed in some detail

³ Paul D. Hanson, "The Origin and Nature of Prophetic Political Engagement in Ancient Israel," *The Drew Gateway* 55/2–3 (1984/5):34.

⁴ Andrew B. Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1904), 98.

⁵ Ernst Jenni, *Die politischen Voraussagen der Propheten* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1956), 5.

⁶ Berend J. Oosterhoff, *Israels Profeten* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, n.d.), 69.

⁷ John De Gruchy, "Kairos Moments and Prophetic Witness: Towards a Prophetic Ecclesiology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), a3414. (2016).

⁸ Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 218.

⁹ See Reuven Kimelman, "Prophecy as Arguing with God and the Ideal of Justice," *Interpretation* 68/1 (2014):17.

¹⁰ For example, Gerrie F. Snyman, "'Ek is Kain': 'n Hermeneutiek van Weerloosheid as Antwoord op 'n Dekoloniale Diskoers," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 55/3, a2738, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i3.2738>; "Empire and a Hermeneutics of Vulnerability," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37 (2011):1–20; and "'n Etiek van Bybellees en 'n Hermeneutiek van Weerloosheid," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 45/2–3 (2011): 259–282.

in the next section of this essay. This contribution explores the vulnerability of prophets and kings in their interaction with one another and with other individuals and the consequences for vulnerability in South Africa today.

B GERRIE SNYMAN AND A HERMENEUTICS OF VULNERABILITY

In his contributions mentioned in footnote 10 and others, Gerrie Snyman frequently discusses and criticises approaches to the interpretation of the Bible as followed and practised by the Reformed Churches of South Africa (Afr.: *die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika*). He refers frequently to decisions taken by these churches regarding women in office, especially at the 2009 Synod,¹¹ which he criticises. Snyman and I share the same denominational background and we have both struggled to come to grips with some of the approaches and decisions by these churches. This contribution does not deal with this ecclesiastical issue but rather with the witness of churches in the current socio-political situation. However, a hermeneutics of vulnerability is still relevant to the witness of churches, and it has two sides. On the one hand, the text is vulnerable to the interpretation of the reader and on the other hand, the reader is vulnerable to the message of the text.¹²

In this context, vulnerability refers to exclusion. Snyman asks whether the results of interpreting the Bible in churches could lead to exclusion.¹³ Where this happens, a hermeneutics of vulnerability will stand in tension with how people in power in churches read and apply the Bible to current situations.¹⁴ When the Bible is read from a perspective of power, the vulnerable in the church are often made to accept the decisions of the powerful, without their input. A hermeneutics of vulnerability should make those in positions of power aware of the impact of their decisions on the vulnerable.¹⁵ This is a plea Gerrie Snyman often directs at the people in power in his own denomination.

C KINGS AND PROPHETS ACCORDING TO DEUTERONOMY

On the evaluation of the role of kings and prophets during the monarchy, two passages from Deuteronomy must be taken into account. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 deals with the election and tasks of a king, while Deut 18:9-22 deals with prophets. The appointment of a king is permitted, not prescribed.¹⁶ The

¹¹ See Snyman, "n Etiek van Bybellees," 263–264.

¹² Snyman, "Ek is Kain," 2.

¹³ Snyman, "Empire and a Hermeneutics of Vulnerability," 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵ See Snyman, "n Etiek van Bybellees," 277.

¹⁶ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 253; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9* (Revised; Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 382.

monarchy, ultimately, was a choice of the people, not a product of divine instruction.¹⁷ The king must be chosen by God, he must be an Israelite and he should not cause the return of the people to Egypt. He may also not have many horses, wives or gold and silver. He must have a copy of the law, read it and keep its instructions. The issue of the dating of the book of Deuteronomy is quite important for the understanding of this passage. As Woods¹⁸ points out, there are different views regarding the dating, with some scholars opting for an early dating, before the institution of the monarchy, while others date it close to the end or even after the cessation of the monarchy. First, this passage offers a prescription for the monarchy, setting some limits for the future king. Second, it could be seen as a commentary on the monarchy itself. As Christensen¹⁹ states, many of the issues mentioned here are present in the reign of Solomon. These instructions are echoed in Samuel's warning to the people in 1 Sam 8:11-18. In the relationship between a king and his subjects, both parties can be vulnerable. The people can quite easily be exploited by a king, as seen often in the history of Israel and Judah. On the other hand, a king can be rejected by his people, as in the case of Rehoboam in 1 Kgs 12 and with more than one of the kings of the Northern Kingdom (see 2 Kgs 15 for some examples).

In addition to the stipulations regarding prophets in Deut 18, Deut 13 is also important. The remarks concerning prophets in Deut 18:15-22 follow instructions that the people may not use the practices of the nations to communicate with supernatural beings. The people of the Lord are forbidden to engage in child sacrifices, divination, sorcery, the interpretation of omens, witchcraft and other related practices (Deut 18:9-14).²⁰ The people must deal with and heed a prophet sent by the Lord. The Lord will put his words in the prophet's mouth, thus, making him the Lord's spokesperson. The test of a true prophet will be the fulfilment of his prophecies, but false prophets will be punished by death.²¹

However, if this instruction to prophets is read in conjunction with Deut 13, fulfilment is not the final test of true prophecy. In Deut 13, a prophet or some other foreteller of the future may make a true prediction but if that person then decides to lead the people to follow other gods, the prediction which came to fulfilment may not be a valid reason to follow those other gods. This is indeed

¹⁷ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 383.

¹⁸ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 27.

¹⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 382.

²⁰ See Christoph W. Stenschke, "The Prophet Like Moses (Dt 18:15–22): Some Trajectories in the History of Interpretation," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(1), a1962 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.1962>: 2.

²¹ Stenschke, "The Prophet Like Moses," provides a detailed discussion of this section of Deuteronomy and its reception in Jewish circles as well as in the New Testament.

prohibited by Deut 18:19-14 as well. Christensen²² states that the prophets had responsibilities in three areas namely matters pertaining to war, matters pertaining to the king and matters pertaining to the people in general. The predictions of a true prophet should come true but the people have to decide whether a message is true even before fulfilment is possible. This makes both the prophet and the people vulnerable. A prophet could become sceptical about his own message when the fulfilment of his prediction is delayed. The people are vulnerable when a prophet claims to bring a message from God, especially in circumstances where other prophets would offer an opposing prediction.

D TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

Deciding whether a message they received originated from a true or a false prophet was for understandable reasons quite challenging, making both the deliverer of a message and the recipients vulnerable. A prophet could be vulnerable when he brings an unpopular message, while the people were vulnerable to being deceived by a popular message. The dilemma is partly related to the fact that the Hebrew Bible does not differentiate, lexically speaking, between true or false prophets or their messages.

As indicated above, Deut 18:9-22 outlines the task of a prophet, with fulfilment being the test for a true prophetic prediction. However, this can only be determined after the fact. Different passages in the Old Testament deal with this issue, for example, 1 Kgs 13; 22:5-14 and Ezek 13.

The Hebrew word for a prophet (נָבִיא) is not used to refer to true prophets alone. It can be noted, for example, that Jeremiah and Ezekiel never referred to themselves as prophets.²³ The book of Ezekiel presents a picture of this diverse use of the noun. In Ezek 13 and 22, the prophets of Israel are criticised, whereas in Ezek 14, prophets are mentioned in a neutral way. The prophet Ezekiel (although not directly by name) is furthermore mentioned in a positive sense in Ezek 2:5; 33:33.²⁴ The noun and the related verb prophesy are used more frequently in Jeremiah than in all the other prophetic books put together. In no less than ten instances in Jeremiah, prophets are criticised²⁵ for not being true prophets.

In 1 Kgs 19, the word prophet is used for Elijah but also for the 400 prophets of Baal. Wilson²⁶ distinguishes between what he calls central and

²² Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 409.

²³ A. Graeme Auld, "Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings," *ZAW* 96/1 (1984):73.

²⁴ Auld, "Prophets and Prophecy," 68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 69–70.

²⁶ Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 39–41.

peripheral intermediaries. Central prophecy is in service of the central cult or the political power, while peripheral prophecy stands outside of the mainstream and indeed criticises it. Hanson discusses this distinction in some detail. The biblical tradition preserved the words of the peripheral prophets. Nonetheless, Hanson²⁷ is not in favour of the term "peripheral prophecy." These prophets had their own view of reality and had a social system with specific values and warrants. They represented a different tradition and judged society from within their own framework.²⁸ They were social critics, speaking on behalf a marginalised people and sharing a vision of an ideal society.²⁹ For Hanson,³⁰ the fact that these prophets criticised the monarchy made them unique in the ancient Near East. Hanson places emphasis on the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22-23:19). The safeguarding of the rights of the members of the society was an important part of the message of the prophets.³¹ It is clear that the prophets intervened in political issues.³² The message of prophets in the ancient Near East usually addressed the well-being and wars of the king³³ as well as the reconciliation of the king with the gods.³⁴ Criticism of the monarchy, however, did not have a place in this kind of message. The message of the false prophets to kings and the people was a message of peace, of well-being, as can clearly be seen in the struggle between Jeremiah and the false prophets of his time. The false prophets predicted that the nation would be delivered from the Babylonians and that Jehoiachin and the temple vessels taken away in 597 would return to Jerusalem in the near future.³⁵

The will of a true prophet of God must be subordinate to the will of God. Oosterhoff³⁶ indicates that Nathan's action in 2 Sam 7 illustrates this principle. The prophet had to proclaim the message the Lord had given to him. Prophets addressed the king when he sinned. Their influence in the earlier time of the

²⁷ Hanson, "The Origin and Nature of Prophetic Political Engagement," 35.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁹ See Susannah Heschel, "A Different Kind of Theo-Politics: Abraham Joshua Heschel, the Prophets and the Civil Rights Movement," *Political Theology* 21/1-2 (2020):32.

³⁰ Hanson, "The Origin and Nature of Prophetic Political Engagement," 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

³² Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 74.

³³ Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 16.

³⁴ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 101.

³⁵ This is discussed in detail by Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Prophets in Jeremiah in the Struggle over Leadership, or Rather over Prophetic Authority," *Biblica* 99/3 (2018):351–372. She summarises the positive message of the false prophets on p.352. See also De Gruchy, "Kairos Moments," 2.

³⁶ Oosterhoff, *Israels Profeten*, 12.

monarchy was to bring their message to the people via the king.³⁷ From the eighth century onwards, they frequently addressed the people directly.³⁸ The prophet was charged with the task of keeping the vision of a godly life alive amidst the ambiguities of a sinful political and social order. This life was linked to the covenant.³⁹ The king's task was to keep order, often by acting harshly. The prophets took the rights of individuals seriously, especially the vulnerable members of the society.⁴⁰ However, the evaluation of the message of a specific prophet (as true or false) remained problematic throughout the history of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, making not only the deliverer of a message vulnerable but also the recipients.

Labuschagne⁴¹ discusses a number of important passages in this regard. In 1 Kgs 22, Ahab of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah discussed the possibility of reclaiming Ramoth Gilead from the king of Aram. To this end, they consulted 400 prophets. Labuschagne regards these prophets as state prophets who depended on the court for their sustenance. These state prophets would usually proclaim what their patron wanted to hear, while Micaiah proclaimed only what he received from God. The same transpired in other examples in the Old Testament.

Dozeman⁴² is of the opinion that the story of 1 Kgs 13 presents an answer to the question whether a prophet is authentically bringing a message from the Lord. He discusses in detail this passage about the man of God from Judah and the old prophet from Bethel. He subsequently offers three criteria that can be used in distinguishing between true and false prophecy.⁴³ The first criterion is indeed fulfilment such as the fulfilment of the words of the old prophet about the death of the man of God from Judah. The second is prophetic confirmation. The man of God from Judah was evaluated by the prophet from Bethlehem and that prophet confirmed the original message. The two utterances were thus co-dependent. In the third place, the deeds and character of a prophet must be taken into consideration when his prophecy is evaluated. However, the people remained vulnerable in circumstances where someone claimed to have brought a message from God.

³⁷ J. Carl Laney, "The Role of the Prophets in God's Case against Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138/552 (1981):314.

³⁸ Laney, "The Role of the Prophets," 315.

³⁹ Hanson, "The Origin and Nature of Prophetic Political Engagement," 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁴¹ See Casper J. Labuschagne, *Israëls ja-broer-profeten: Zes Radiolesingen over Spanningen tussen Ware en valse Profeten in het Oude Testament* (Amsterdam: Bijbelgenootschap, 1971), 14–18.

⁴² Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Way of the Man of God from Judah: True and False Prophecy in the Pre-Deuteronomiac Legend of 1 Kings 13," *CBQ* 44/3 (1982):380.

⁴³ Dozeman, "The Way of the Man of God from Judah," 392–393.

An attempt to distinguish between a true or false message by a person claiming to speak with the authority of God was indeed a problematic issue for the people listening to that message. They were vulnerable to being misled in this process. This also is a problem confronting especially vulnerable people today when they hear an interpretation of the Bible that claims authority. People bringing that message should always think of the impact on the people who are often voiceless.

E PROPHETS AND COVENANT

Nissinen⁴⁴ regards prophecy as the "human transmission of allegedly divine messages." In this process, four elements can be distinguished namely the deity from whom the message comes, the message itself, the person bearing the message and the receiver of the message.⁴⁵

Laney⁴⁶ distinguishes three functions of prophets. They are preachers appointed by the deity, they sometimes predict the future and they function as 'watchmen' over God's people. Their messages must be seen against the backdrop of the covenant, where they function as representatives of God.⁴⁷ The prophets had to remind the kings (and the people) of their covenant relationship with God.⁴⁸

An important principle for a king's actions is that an Israelite king is subject to the stipulations of the covenant.⁴⁹ The king's position does not take away from his obligation to keep these stipulations like every other Israelite.⁵⁰ The monarchy was instituted to serve the people and to enable them to serve the Lord better.⁵¹

The relation between the prophets and the covenant is a critical issue that can only be touched on briefly. Clements⁵² emphasises the importance of the covenant for understanding the message of the prophets. The prophets did not pretend nor profess that they were establishing a new doctrine. At the centre of the traditions of Israel was the idea of a covenant between God and his people. The covenant has a message of mercy, but it also contains divine commands. According to the prophets, the monarchy fell into crisis because the kings did not

⁴⁴ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁶ Laney, "The Role of the Prophets," 315.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 316, 319.

⁴⁸ John N. Oswalt, "Is There Anything Unique?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (2015):75.

⁴⁹ Klaus Seybold, *Das davidische Königtum im Zeugnis der Propheten* (Kiel: Christian-Albrechts-Universität, 1967), 94, 308–309.

⁵⁰ Seybold, *Das davidische Königtum*, 309.

⁵¹ Adam C. Welch, *Kings and Prophets of Israel* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 134.

⁵² Ronald E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM, 1965), 16.

keep the close relation between promise and obligation in mind.⁵³ It later became clear that the monarchy placed Israel's faith in jeopardy.⁵⁴

Israel had to understand its history in the light of the obligations of the covenant. The prophets interpreted history but also with regard to the defeat suffered and the exile of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.⁵⁵ The prophets reckoned that the Lord claimed the whole lives of his people and not just the religious part of their lives.⁵⁶ The prophets acted as divine-human intermediaries. They ultimately wanted to maintain the relationship between the people and the holiness of the Lord.⁵⁷ Brody summarises what the (true) prophets in the Old Testament did (or were supposed to do):⁵⁸ "The prophets of Ancient Israel confronted the social ills of their time, empowered by divine authority to speak out against poverty, tyranny, and injustice."

Snyman correctly points out that the Old Testament always had an eye on the poor, the widows and the orphans and that this was linked to the idea of covenant.⁵⁹ To what extent then does this influence the biblical interpretation of the powerful in churches today?

F THREE MAIN AREAS ADDRESSED BY THE PROPHETS

The message of the prophets touched on three principal areas—ethics, internal politics and external politics. The message of the prophets was thus intricately linked with politics. Gunkel⁶⁰ regards politics as the true sphere of the prophets but then it was an idealistic and religious politics. This message often had an eye on the future.⁶¹ Isaiah frequently delivered messages related to internal and external politics. With regard to internal politics, he regarded the social system

⁵³ Seybold, *Das davidische Königtum*, 328.

⁵⁴ Welch, *Kings and Prophets*, 67.

⁵⁵ Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, 26.

⁵⁶ Norman W. Porteous, "The Prophets and the Problem of Continuity," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage. Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter J. Harrelson; London: SCM, 1962), 25.

⁵⁷ Joshua R. Porter, "The Origins of Prophecy in Israel," in *Israel's Prophetic Traditions: Essays in Honour of Peter R Ackroyd* (ed. Richard J. Coggins, Anthony Phillips and Michael A. Knibb; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 24.

⁵⁸ Samuel H. Brody, "Prophecy and Powerlessness," *Political Theology* 21 (1–2) (2020):43.

⁵⁹ Snyman, "Empire and the Hermeneutics of Vulnerability," 16–17.

⁶⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *Die Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917), 31–32.

⁶¹ Jenni, *Die politischen Voraussagen*, 7.

of his time as prejudiced against the masses but favouring the minority.⁶² As such, the prophets sought an ethical basis for the monarchy.⁶³

Hanson⁶⁴ lists a number of prophets who engaged in politics. Nathan acted against monarchical privilege in the time of David. Elijah proceeded from a sense of justice in the time of Ahab. There was conflict between the prophets who equated religion and patriotism and those who insisted on a religious commitment, being loyal only to God. Prophets frequently were in conflict with their contemporaries—Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, Elijah and others.⁶⁵ In ancient Israel, the prophets exposed the voice of the empire as a sectarian voice.⁶⁶

Prophets frequently addressed individuals directly, also in matters pertaining to the political arena and the military. In this regard one can mention Jeroboam 2 (Hos 1:4; Amos 7:9, 11), Jehoiakim (Jer 22:18-19; 36:29-31), Jehoiachin (Jer 22:24-30) and Zedekiah (Jer 34:1-7; Ezek 12:1-16; 17:1-21).⁶⁷ These prophets were vulnerable frequently, as they were often the bearers of unpopular messages. However, they were courageous to speak out against the powerful in the society, especially the kings.⁶⁸

G DIFFERENT TIMES, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Although prophets are mentioned sporadically before the time of the United Kingdom, the main period of prophetic activity overlaps with the monarchic period. A few prophets appeared after the fall of Jerusalem but prophecy started to diminish in importance during and after the Babylonian exile. The earlier prophets such as Nathan, Gad, Elijah and Elisha appear mainly in historical narratives. The three major and the Twelve Minor Prophets, after whom books were compiled, do not figure much or in some instances do not feature at all in the narratives recorded in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.⁶⁹

In the discussion of the role of the prophets, different periods and arenas must be distinguished namely the time before the monarchy, the united monarchy, the divided kingdoms (differentiating between the Northern and

⁶² Dietrich, *Jesaja*, 54.

⁶³ Welch, *Kings and Prophets*, 98.

⁶⁴ Hanson, "The Origin and Nature of Prophetic Political Engagement," 48–49.

⁶⁵ Knud Jeppesen, "Call and Frustration: A New Understanding of Isaiah 8:21–22," *VT* 32/2 (1982):146.

⁶⁶ Walter Brueggemann, "2 Kings 18–19: The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 7/1 (1985):23.

⁶⁷ Jenni, *Die politischen Voraussagen*, 34.

⁶⁸ See Heschel, "A Different Kind of Theo-Politics," 32.

⁶⁹ Klaus Baltzer, *Die Biographie der Propheten* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), 93.

Southern Kingdom) and the exile and afterwards. The function and role of prophets in Chronicles are also important.

According to Scanlin,⁷⁰ one of the reasons for the transition to writing prophets is the change in the audience of the prophets. The earlier prophets in the time of the United Kingdom and up to the eighth century operated in royal circles. The prophets from the eighth century onwards did move at times in royal circles but they frequently addressed the common people as well. The rise of writing prophets coincided with the rise of the Assyrian Empire.⁷¹ Isaiah was important for the transition of the prophet from royal advisor to communicator of the divine message to the people. He did speak to kings such as Ahaz and Hezekiah⁷² but seeing that he was literate, he also used the written word to communicate his message.⁷³ A second factor distinguishing the prophets in Israel and the prophets of the countries around them is the books of the prophets. Such books are not found in other nations of that time.⁷⁴

1 Prophets in the pre-monarchical era

In the pre-monarchic era and at the transition to the monarchy, Samuel played a vital role. In 1 Sam 3 he was called to be a prophet. He was tasked with delivering a message from the Lord to Eli. This passage serves to lay the basis for Samuel's prophetic reputation.⁷⁵ The chapter ends with the statement that the Lord appeared again in Shiloh and revealed himself to Samuel through his word. Chapter 4 commences with a statement that the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Some commentators⁷⁶ and translators (e.g., NIV, NRSV) indeed regard the first verse of Chapter 4 as a conclusion to the previous section. Tsumura,⁷⁷ in light of 1 Sam 3:19-21, nonetheless states that linking this sentence to the previous section would render it redundant. Frolov⁷⁸ is of the same view and argues that part of the message proclaimed by Samuel would be a message about the campaign against the Philistines. The negative result of this campaign can

⁷⁰ Harold P. Scanlin, "Emergence of the Writing Prophets in Israel in the Mid-Eighth Century," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21/4 (1978):306.

⁷¹ Scanlin, "Emergence of the Writing Prophets," 308.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 311.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁷⁴ Oswalt, "Is There Anything Unique?" 72.

⁷⁵ Serge Frolov, "1 Samuel 1–8. The Prophet as Agent Provocateur," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts* (ed. Lester Grabbe and Martti Nissinen, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 78–79.

⁷⁶ See Ralph W. Klein *1 Samuel* (Dallas: Word, 1983), 30, with an addition from the Septuagint.

⁷⁷ David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 187.

⁷⁸ Frolov, "1 Samuel 1–8," 80–81.

subsequently be regarded as one of the reasons the people asked for a king.⁷⁹ They listened to the prophet but his words were not fulfilled.

In this regard, 1 Sam 8 is especially important for the transition to the monarchy. Samuel became old but his sons, whom he had made judges over Israel, did not follow their father's righteous ways. This caused the people to ask that a king be appointed just as the other nations who had kings (verse 5). Samuel was nonetheless displeased by this request and prayed unto God for guidance. The Lord responded that the people had not rejected Samuel but the Lord himself. This was typical of their actions since the Exodus. God instructed Samuel to grant them their request but to warn them and explain to them the rights of a king. When Samuel spoke to the people, he did not tell them that they were rejecting the Lord in this request. The rights of a king were what were typical of kings at that time. They were absolute monarchs and the people were subjected to the desires and actions of the king.

2 The United Monarchy

Prophets played a key role at the beginning of the united monarchy, as can be seen in Samuel's anointing of Saul and David. It is clear from 1 Sam 15 that kings and prophets performed distinct roles.⁸⁰ Saul was a king but he had to listen to the prophet. David was the heir to the judges in their military role but Nathan spoke on behalf of God and was thus also heir to the judges but in a different role. David's kingship received divine legitimation but God spoke to him through the prophets, as can be seen in 2 Sam 7.⁸¹ At the time of David, the distinction between worldly and spiritual authority became clear.⁸² At the beginning of the monarchy, the prophets had begun to play a role in matters of public concern, as the historical narratives in the books of Samuel and Kings show.⁸³ At the time of David, Nathan and Gad could be regarded as David's court prophets.⁸⁴ One of the factors that distinguished Israelite prophecy from the prophets of the surrounding nations is that the prophets in Israel often had direct access to the king.⁸⁵

In the struggles between kings and prophets from the time of David onwards, the dynastic promise of 2 Sam 7 played a key role. It lies at the heart of the so-called Zion theology that seems to be in conflict with the Sinai covenant. The promise to David seems to be unconditional while the Sinai

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Baltzer, *Die Biographie der Propheten*, 82–83.

⁸¹ Ibid., 85.

⁸² Ibid., 87.

⁸³ Porter, "The Origins of Prophecy in Israel," 25.

⁸⁴ Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 76.

⁸⁵ Oswalt, "Is There Anything Unique?" 72.

covenant includes the Ten Commandments and other stipulations for the people to obey, otherwise punishment would follow.⁸⁶

When a king acted wrongly, as David did in 2 Sam 11, the Lord would become displeased and judge such the actions negatively (2 Sam 11:27). In David's case, a messenger was sent to convince him of his guilt.⁸⁷ An important aspect of the message to the king was that he gave the enemies of the Lord reasons to show contempt for the Lord.⁸⁸ David also interfered with the rights of Urijah.⁸⁹

In this regard, it is also important to contemplate the role of the prophet Shemaiah after the secession of the Northern Kingdom. After Jeroboam became king of the Northern Kingdom, Rehoboam began preparations for a campaign against the Northern Kingdom (1 Kgs 12:21).⁹⁰ Shemaiah instructed him to abandon this plan. God gave this instruction to Shemaiah, making it clear that the split of the kingdom came from the Lord. It was the consequence of Solomon's sin. This is a good example of a prophet acting against a king, making it clear that the king must first obey the Lord, especially when the Lord's instructions were contrary to the plans of the king.⁹¹

3 The Kingdom of Israel

Ellison gave special attention to the role of prophets in the Northern Kingdom. In a monarchy, priests were usually more important than prophets. However, in the Kingdom of Israel, the prophets became more important. In Israel, the people, in principle, had revolted against the Lord while in Judah, the people were, in principle, in a true relationship with the Lord. In the South, the prophets emphasised reformation but in the North they preached repentance and judgment.⁹² This distinction is particularly important with regard to the prophets who operated in the North such as Amos and Hosea. In the North, the priests were established by the state⁹³ and they supported the monarchy, making the prophets more important than the priests, as they were bringing a message from the Lord to counter the wrongdoings of the kings and the priests alike.

⁸⁶ See Moshe Reiss, "The Prophet versus the King," *JBQ* 30 (2002): 48–49.

⁸⁷ Seybold, *Das davidische Königtum*, 98.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸⁹ Welch, *Kings and Prophets*, 99.

⁹⁰ Amos Frisch, "Shemaiah the Prophet versus King Rehoboam: Two Opposed Interpretations of the Schism (I Kings XII 21–4)," *VT* 38/5 (1988):466.

⁹¹ Walter Vogels, "Les Prophètes et la Division du Royaume," *Studies in Religion* 8/1 (1979):21–22.

⁹² Henry L. Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel from Abijah to Hosea* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1969), 15.

⁹³ Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel*, 27.

An important figure in the secession of the Northern Kingdom is the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh. In 1 Kgs 11:29-39, he performed a symbolic action to indicate that Jeroboam would become the ruler of the Northern Kingdom.⁹⁴ In this way, Ahijah provided divine legitimation for the schism. However, in 1 Kgs 14:1-18, the same prophet condemned the actions of Jeroboam and pronounced judgment on his dynasty.⁹⁵ This shows that the message of a prophet was not linked to a specific king's fortunes but that he could pronounce judgment on a king whose ascension to the throne he had predicted.

In the North, pre-classical prophets such as Elijah and Elisha played a significant role. This is also true of early classical prophets such as Amos and Hosea. At the time of Ahab, Elijah was the prominent prophet.⁹⁶ In 1 Kgs 17-18, he announced a drought to Ahab. At the end of the drought and after speaking to Ahab, he confronted the prophets of Baal. Ahab called him the troubler of Israel (1 Kgs 18:16). After the death of the prophets of Baal, Elijah made it clear that the Lord was the one who would bring rain to the parched land. Elijah brought the word of the Lord to Ahab in 1 Kgs 21 because of Ahab's wrongful acquisition of Naboth's vineyard. Jezebel devised a scheme to get rid of Naboth, trampling on his rights as one of the Lord's people. Following the wrongful death of Naboth by stoning, Ahab took possession of the vineyard, thinking that this was his right as king (as predicted by Samuel in 1 Sam 8). The Lord then sent Elijah to pronounce judgement on Ahab. He was guilty of murder and the illegal grabbing of the hereditary property of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:19). Ahab regarded Elijah as his enemy but he was actually the messenger of the Lord. Olley⁹⁷ indicates that the driving force behind Elijah was his passion for the worship and service of Yahweh alone. He was opposed to the service of other gods and addressed unjust practices, as in the case of Naboth's vineyard. However, the focus in 1 and 2 Kings is not on the prophet but on the Lord. He is announcing his word and keeping his promises. He thus requires obedience to Him alone.⁹⁸

In some instances, prophets of that time interacted with kings of Israel in a positive way, as Elisha in 2 Kgs 3, 6-7 and 14 but more often they opposed the kings. After the death of Elisha, a prophet by the name of Jonah is mentioned at the time of Jeroboam 2 (2 Kgs 14:25) but no other prophet from the North was mentioned before the collapse of the Kingdom of Israel. Whether this Jonah is the same as the prophet of the book of Jonah is disputed. In 2 Kgs 14:25, he is mentioned with regards to a prophecy about the extension of the borders of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam 2. In the last decades of the kingdom, the first of

⁹⁴ Vogels, "Les Prophètes et la Division du Royaume," 19–20.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁹⁶ See John W. Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet: The Presentation of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings," *JSOT* 80 (1998):25–51, for a discussion of the important passages on Elijah.

⁹⁷ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet," 47.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

the classical prophets appeared in the North. However, the prophets Isaiah, Micah, Amos and Hosea are never mentioned in 2 Kings in connection with the last days of the Kingdom of Israel.

Amos and Hosea are important for the proclamation of messages from the Lord to the Northern Kingdom. Amos came from Judah but prophesied in the North probably at the time of Jeroboam 2 (Amos 1:1). In the first two chapters, oracles against different nations are pronounced including Judah. In Amos 2:6-16, Israel is the subject of the oracles. A king is not mentioned by name but the message is clear and unambiguous. The Lord brought the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land but the powerful exploited the poor and weak in the society. Social justice and the lack thereof lie at the heart of the message of Amos. King Jeroboam is mentioned in Amos 1:1 and thereafter only in Amos 7. Amos 7:1 refers to the king's mowing (NRSV), perhaps the mowing of hay. The name of Jeroboam is mentioned three times namely in Amos 7:9, 10 and 11. In Amos 7:9, judgement is pronounced on the house of Jeroboam, linked to sanctuaries that will be destroyed. In 7:10, Amaziah sent a message to king Jeroboam, quoting the words of the oracle in 7:11. In 7:13, Amaziah refers to Bethel as the king's sanctuary while instructing the prophet to return to Judah. Amos makes it clear that he is no professional prophet but that the Lord called him to prophesy against Israel.

Jeroboam is only mentioned once in Hos 1:1, thus, dating the words of the prophet to the time of Jeroboam. A king, however, is mentioned several times in the book. In 5:1, the priests, the house of Israel and the house of the king are called to attend to an oracle of judgement. Their idolatry is equated to the actions and dealings of a prostitute. Their feasts and fields would suffer because of the judgement.

Hosea 3 looks forward to a time when the Israelites will not have a king. Afterwards, however, they will return from exile, they will seek the Lord and there will be a Davidic king. Hosea 7:3-7 mentions kings three times although a king is not addressed in this section. Hosea 7:3 indicates that the people make a king glad through their evil. Some commentators such as Stuart choose to follow the Septuagint and render the statement as, "The kings rejoice in their evil."⁹⁹ In any event, the king or kings accept evil as normal. Hosea 7:5 refers to the day of the king, probably the day of his coronation, as a day of drunkenness and Hosea 7:7 mentions the fall of different kings, probably a reference to the many coups at the end of the Northern Kingdom. Hosea 10 refers to the end of the Northern Kingdom when Samaria will be destroyed and kings will no longer reign over Israel. Hosea proclaims the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the end of that monarchy (cf. vv. 3, 6, 7 and 15). Hos 13:10 also alludes to a deposed king, probably, by the Assyrians. Verse 11, however, refers back to inter alia 1 Sam 8.

⁹⁹ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Dallas: Word, 1987), 114.

The Lord says that at that time he granted the people their wish to have a king, but that it was actually a negative development. At the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Lord was still in command and he used the Assyrians to punish the Northern Kingdom. Although Hosea did not address kings directly, his evaluation of them is extremely negative, with the end of the kingdom seen as punishment for the evil perpetrated by the king, the priests and the people.

Furthermore, 2 Kgs 17 is especially important as regards the role of prophets in the Kingdom of Israel. Verse 7 states that the Israelites were taken into captivity because they sinned against the Lord and in verse 13, the Lord warned the people through his prophets and seers. The prophets were the servants of the Lord (vv. 13 and 23) but the king and his people took no heed of them. Near the end of the Northern Kingdom, prophets appeared who are not mentioned in the narratives of 1 and 2 Kings but who stand at the emergence of the writing prophets. Amos and Hosea acted in the North and their message survived the expatriation of Israel by the Assyrians. These prophets spoke in the North but their words also had an impact on the Southern Kingdom through the edited versions of their prophecies.

4 The Kingdom of Judah

Under Davidic rule, the state was a monarchy ruled by a divinely supported royal family. This family relied on a divinatory-prophetic establishment.¹⁰⁰ However, the three Major Prophets were reserved about the monarchy even though they would link a future hope to the monarchy.¹⁰¹

Before discussing some important examples, it is interesting to note the references to the classical prophets in 1 and 2 Kings as well as the references to kings in the books of the prophets. Only one of these prophets is mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings namely Isaiah in 2 Kgs 19 and 20. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets are not mentioned at all. As regards kings, kings of Judah are mentioned in the date formulas or introductions of some prophetic books:

- Isaiah 1:1 – Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah
- Jeremiah 1:1-3 – Josiah (son of Amon), Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) and Zedekiah (son of Josiah)
- Ezekiel 1:2 and often: Jehoiachin
- Hosea 1:1 – Uzziah
- Amos 1:1 – Uzziah
- Micah 1:1 – Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Ben-Dov, "Some Precedents for the Religion of the Book: Josiah's Book and Ancient Revelatory Literature," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts* (ed. Lester Grabbe and Martti Nissinen; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 62.

¹⁰¹ Baltzer, *Die Biographie der Propheten*, 157.

- Zephaniah 1:1 – Josiah (son of Amon)

Kings are mentioned in some of the prophetic books in other instances than in the date formulas or introductions (in some instances related to dates as well):

- Jotham – Isa 7:1
- Uzziah – Isa 6:1 and 7:1
- Ahaz – Isa 7:1, 3, 10, 12; 14:28 and 38:8
- Hezekiah is frequently mentioned in the historical sections of Isa 36-39 as well as in Jer 15:4; 26:18 and 19
- Manasseh – Jer 15:4
- Amon – Jer 25:3
- Josiah – frequently in Jeremiah
- Jehoiakim – frequently in Jeremiah
- Jehoiachin – frequently in Jeremiah
- Zedekiah – frequently in Jeremiah and in Ezekiel (although not mentioned by name)

Jeremiah is the exception to the rule that the classical prophets did not often refer to a king of Judah by name. The noun for a prophet occurs frequently in 1 and 2 Kings. Many of the instances are related to prophets acting in the Kingdom of Israel (almost all the instances in 1 Kings except Nathan at the time of Solomon). In 2 Kgs 2-9, the prophet Elisha is present, also acting in the Northern Kingdom.

In 2 Kgs 19 and 20, Isaiah is present and at the time of Manasseh, the prophets were also referred to as the servants of the Lord (2 Kgs 20:10) who warned the people. In 2 Kgs 22, the prophetess Huldah is mentioned in conjunction with the law scroll found in the temple. References to prophets by name are thus very scarce in the narratives about the Kingdom of Judah.

In the message of the prophets, the traditions of Israel were important especially the traditions related to the covenant.¹⁰² This was already evident in 2 Kgs 17 where the stipulations of the covenant were ignored or violated.

Additionally, the interaction between Isaiah and Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 19 and 20 and his message to Ahaz in Isa 7 are significant. The traditions were also especially important to Isaiah but his messages were often concrete, directed at

¹⁰² Ronald E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition: Growing Points in Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 8.

the historical and political situation of his time.¹⁰³ Isaiah believed in a God that wanted to safeguard the rights of the weak against the powerful.¹⁰⁴

In Isa 7, the prophet approaches King Ahaz and not the other way round.¹⁰⁵ He is sent to the king to bring to him a personal message from the Lord, as is often the case in prophetic narratives.¹⁰⁶ The prophet brings a message of hope as well as a challenge to trust God and not to become involved with the Assyrians or the Northern alliance.¹⁰⁷ Will the king trust God or the nations?¹⁰⁸ During the reign of Hezekiah, the prophet encouraged the king not to be afraid. The Lord will cause the Assyrian king to return to his own land. The king accepted the message, and the Assyrian army did indeed leave.¹⁰⁹ The honour of God was of prime importance to Hezekiah.¹¹⁰

As mentioned above, Jeremiah was the prophet who most frequently mentioned kings by name. He was critical of the kings especially following the death of Josiah. He would also suffer at the hands of different kings. He was accused of being a traitor (cf. Jer 38). Jeremiah's message was negative as the kings were practising evil.¹¹¹ However, neither was Jeremiah on the side of Babylon nor of Judah; he was on God's side, proclaiming the message he was instructed to deliver.¹¹² Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah in Jer 34:8-22 is a good example.¹¹³ Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem agreed to free all the slaves. However, they did not keep their word and would yet again enslave the freed slaves. Jeremiah proclaimed the defeat of Judah by the Babylonians, not as a spokesperson for Babylon, but as a spokesperson for the Lord.

When evaluating the message of the prophets in the Kingdom of Judah, Zion theology, also called Jerusalemite royal theology, is critical. This theology departed from the belief that the Lord has elected Jerusalem/Zion and the house of David in perpetuity. This was accepted to mean that the city and the dynasty

¹⁰³ Dietrich, *Jesaja*, 218.

Ibid., 268.

¹⁰⁵ Brian O. Banwell, "Prophets of Non-Violence," *JTSA* 20 (1977):55–56.

¹⁰⁶ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 125.

¹⁰⁷ Banwell, "Prophets of Non-Violence," 56; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 193.

¹⁰⁹ Banwell, "Prophets of Non-Violence," 56.

¹¹⁰ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 646.

¹¹¹ Mark Leuchter, "Cult of Personality: The Eclipse of Pre-exilic Judahite Cultic Structures in the Book of Jeremiah," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts* (ed. Lester Grabbe and Martti Nissinen; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 102.

¹¹² See Banwell, "Prophets of Non-Violence," 58.

¹¹³ See Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 152.

were inviolable.¹¹⁴ A detailed discussion of the origin and development of this theology falls outside the scope of the present inquiry.¹¹⁵ It is nonetheless clear that Isaiah accepted this ideology but modified it by indicating that judgment was a possibility.¹¹⁶ Jeremiah 14 infers that Jeremiah rejected the Jerusalemite theology of his time, thereby, indicating that the Jerusalem of his time would be judged.¹¹⁷ Ezekiel never mentions Zion by name but he uses elements of Zion theology in his book.¹¹⁸ The idea of the restoration of the people and even a future Davidic king functions especially in Ezek 33 and onwards. At that point, Jerusalem had already been destroyed, making it clear that the old Zion theology was neither valid nor accurate. Jerusalem is judged and destroyed but the idea of Zion still has a future.

A passage similar to the one in 2 Kgs 17—detailing the fall of the Northern Kingdom—is not included at the end of 2 Kings. The release of Jehoiachin from prison is mentioned, bringing a message of hope to the people during the exile. Indeed, many of the exilic and post-exilic prophets also brought a message of hope. The covenant is still valid, God is still powerful and restoration and return are still possible.¹¹⁹ The writings of the prophets were vital for the survival of the exilic community.¹²⁰ Even in a time of crisis, the church still also has to bring this message of hope.

Prophets are treated quite differently in 1 and 2 Chronicles from Samuel and Kings. Of the Major Prophets, only Isaiah and Jeremiah are mentioned in 2 Chronicles. In the case of Isaiah, he is mentioned in connection with sources referred to in 2 Chr 26:22 and 32:32 and for a prayer with Hezekiah in 2 Chr 32:20. Whereas 2 Chr 35:25 refers to laments composed by Jeremiah for Josiah, 2 Chr 36:12 states that Zedekiah did not humble himself before Jeremiah. Moreover, 2 Chr 36:21–22 refers to the fulfilment of words spoken by Jeremiah. Of the pre-classical prophets mentioned in I Samuel and Kings, Elijah is mentioned in relation to a letter sent to Jehoram in 2 Chr 21. This interaction between Elijah and a king of Judah is not mentioned in Kings. The letter contains a message of judgement for the Judean king. Elisha is not once mentioned in Chronicles.

The two prophets, who played a significant role in the time of David—Nathan and Gad—are each mentioned in only a few chapters in Chronicles.

¹¹⁴ See Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 217.

¹¹⁵ See Otto, "יִיָּוֹן *šîyôn*," *TDOT* 12:34–36; Stolz, "יִיָּוֹן *šîyyôn* Zion," *TLOT* 1073–1075; and Strong, "Zion (יִיָּוֹן [*šîyôn*]), Zion," *NIDOTTE* IV: 1314–1321.

¹¹⁶ See Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 270–274.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 238–240.

¹¹⁸ See Stolz, "יִיָּוֹן *šîyyôn* Zion," *TLOT* 1074.

¹¹⁹ See Vien V. Nguyen, "Resisting Despair. Prophetic Hope in Times of Crisis," *The Priest* (December 2019), 36–39, especially 36.

¹²⁰ Oswalt, "Is There Anything Unique?," 80.

Nathan is mentioned in 1 Chr 17 in relation to David's desire to build a temple and the promise of God to build a dynasty for David. Gad is mentioned in 1 Chr 21 in relation to the census ordered by David. These two episodes about the dynastic promise and the site of the temple are important for the Chronicler. Apart from these two episodes, Nathan and Gad are only mentioned in 1 Chr 29:29, in 2 Chr 9:29 and in 2 Chr 29:25. In 1 Chr 19:29, their works are mentioned as sources for the history of David. Nathan is mentioned as a source for the time of Solomon in 2 Chr 9:29. They are both mentioned together with David in 2 Chr 29:25 at the time of Hezekiah and with regard to the place of the Levites in the temple.

This is in agreement with the statement made by Beentjes¹²¹ that some of the prophets well known from Samuel and Kings are not mentioned often or even at all in Chronicles. On the other hand, prophets and messengers that are not mentioned in the rest of the Old Testament often appear in Chronicles. Very few of the prophetic addresses in Samuel and Kings were retained in Chronicles.¹²² Prophets in Chronicles are often seen as keepers of the royal archives.¹²³

What can be noted about the prophets with no parallel mention in Kings is that their words are primarily directed at the king. They also depart from a theological view that trust in the Lord is rewarded by blessing while mistrust brings judgment.¹²⁴ In Chronicles, prophecy is also frequently linked with the Levites.¹²⁵ The predictions in Chronicles are mostly short-term, making it easier to see its potential fulfilment.

In the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the struggles between kings and prophets are mentioned in the Former and Latter Prophets. In some instances, kings and prophets had a positive relationship, like David and Nathan and Hezekiah and Isaiah. Often, kings were more likely to heed the prophecies of the court or temple prophets than those of prophets who operated outside the royal circles. In many instances, the kings rejected the message of the prophets sent by God. Isaiah is one of the classical prophets who interacted with different kings quite often. Jeremiah did as well, but in his case, he was frequently in danger of negative reactions from kings, especially Jehoiakim. When prophets brought unpopular messages, they were vulnerable to retaliation directed at them by the kings. Some kings were willing to listen to prophets, as is the case with Isaiah,

¹²¹ Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Constructs of Prophets and Prophecy in the Book of Chronicles," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts* (ed. Lester Grabbe and Martti Nissinen; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 21.

¹²² Beentjes, "Constructs of Prophets and Prophecy," 2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²⁴ See Rosemarie Micheel, *Die Seher- und Prophetenüberlieferungen in der Chronik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1983), 67–71.

¹²⁵ See Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 293.

but they often were inclined to listen only to favourable messages, making them and the people vulnerable to the judgement of the Lord. The message of the prophets touched on internal and external politics as well as ethical issues. Social justice became a critical issue, for example, during the time of Amos and Hosea. In the North, the prophets proclaimed judgement and repentance and in the South, reform. The message is clear that the Lord wanted to maintain the rights of the vulnerable against the mighty.

Dietrich¹²⁶ made a statement that should be considered when speaking of the role of churches and believers in the modern situation. Although there are many differences between then and now, Christians must take a clear, concrete and understandable position and bear witness against repressive politics and the political shape of sin.¹²⁷ They must not be afraid to take an unpopular position where necessary and confront the authorities with a message of justice for all based on principles that will stand the test of time. This witness must be done, to use a cliché, without fear or favour. Churches and believers alike should not be enticed by, lured into nor fall prey to an unjust establishment but should direct their criticism, where necessary, to those in positions of power. When churches fail in this task, they may become vulnerable to being regarded as part of the support system of a potentially ever-more repressive and exploitative regime, a regime in which, regrettably, justice, equity and equality are—as has happened so many times throughout history—again slipping from our grasp. This was often the case with Afrikaans-speaking churches before 1990. When those churches endeavoured to interact critically with the government of the day, they became vulnerable to the criticism that they were uncritical of the apartheid government, causing their message to be ignored. In spite of this, churches still have the responsibility to support or critique government, again making them vulnerable to criticism. It is not the task of churches to engage in politics. They should, however, remain true to their faith and live and preach as a witness in and to society. Safeguarding the rights of the people and social justice or the lack thereof must be an important part of this witness as it was in the times of the prophets, for example, Amos and Hosea. Many voices are asking why the church is silent in South Africa at this critical time.¹²⁸ We also must listen and act, as we are always confronted by choices.¹²⁹ Even in a time of crisis, the church must continue to bring a message of hope.

¹²⁶ Dietrich, *Jesaja*, 280.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Johan Cilliers, "Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Perspectives on Political Preaching," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1/2 (2015):367–383; De Gruchy, "Kairos Moments," 4–6; Mookgo S. Kgatle, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches: A Weak Voice in Post-1994 South Africa," *HTS Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 74/1 a5153 (2018).

¹²⁹ See Heschel, "A Different Kind of Theo-Politics," 35.

H CONCLUSION

This contribution investigated the relationship between kings and prophets in the Hebrew Bible in the light of a hermeneutics of vulnerability. Important passages in Deuteronomy and the interaction between kings and prophets in the different periods in the history of Israel—in the former and latter prophets—were investigated to see whether they can shed some light on the role of churches in South Africa today. It is not the task of the churches to engage in politics. They should, however, remain true to their faith and live and preach as a witness in and to society. Safeguarding the rights of the people and social justice, or the lack thereof, must be an important part of this witness.

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