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B. How the Prophet Gave His Message.

1. Brief Oral Statements and Rejoinders.

On various occasions a prophet was directed by God to confront a king or other leader and present to him a brief message of rebuke or encouragement, or a specific order to be carried out. Thus Deborah gave a divine command to Barak (Judg 4:6-7). An unnamed man of God rebuked Eli (I Sam 2:27-36). Shemaiah the man of God told Rehoboam to stop fighting against Israel (II Chron 11:3-4). Jehu the son of Hanani pronounced doom on Baasha (I Kings 16:7). Azariah the son of Oded encouraged Asa (II Chron 15:1-2). Jehu the son of Hanani rebuked Jehoshaphat (II Chron 19:2-3). Elijah suddenly appeared before Ahab, predicted a disastrous drought and disappeared (I Kings 17:1). After Naboth had been a victim of judicial murder Elijah met Ahab and gave him a terrible rebuke (I Kings 21:17-24). Other similar incidents might be cited.

In addition to the brief oral statements, the prophets sometimes answered questions or made rejoinders, giving further Divine messages. Thus when, at a time of great national danger, an unnamed prophet promised Ahab victory over

1 Syria (I Kings 20:13), the king of Israel asked
2 about the conduct of the battle, and the prophet
3 went on to give God's answer to the king's ques-
4 tions. A little later, when a king of Israel's
5 aide declared impossible the almost unbelievable
6 deliverance that Elisha had promised, the
7 prophet proceeded to depict the fate in store
8 for that ungodly man (II Kings 7:1-2). When God
9 directed Isaiah to deliver a message of hope to
10 Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3-9) and Ahaz showed an attitude
11 of contemptuous unbelief, the Lord gave the
12 prophet a further message of terrible rebuke
13 (v.10-25).

14 The traditio-historical school of critics
15 holds that all the work of the prophets con-
16 sisted of short pithy statements that were
17 remembered, enlarged and added to by their fol-
18 lowers in subsequent generations. This,
19 however, is quite in contradiction to the Scrip-
20 tural record which declares that the prophets
21 also delivered many messages of considerable
22 length.

23 2. Longer Oral Messages. An early
24 instance in the Scripture of long oral messages
25 given by a prophet is found in the long state-

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1 ments of the law that God gave to Moses and that
2 Moses passed on to the people (e.g., Exod 20:22-
3 23:33). In Numbers Balaam gave four rather long
4 messages (Num 23:5-10, 16-24; 24:3-9, 15-24)
5 declaring God's favor upon Israel, after Balak
6 had hired him to curse it. No long discourses
7 have been preserved from Samuel or from Jonah,
8 but this is no proof that they did not make any.
9 In fact the contrary is doubtless the case.

10 The books known as the Major and Minor
11 Prophets contain many long messages that were
12 delivered orally.

13 3. Patriarchal Blessing. A peculiar
14 type of divine message occurs in the book of
15 Genesis, where certain patriarchs make declara-
16 tions regarding the future of their descendants.
17 Sometimes such a speaker uses language that
18 might sound as if he had some control over what
19 would happen to his descendants in the future.
20 However, to draw such an inference from his
21 words would, of course, be incorrect. In these
22 instances recorded in the Bible, it is evident
23 that the patriarch was strictly watched over by
24 the Divine Spirit and permitted to say only what
25 was in accord with God's plan for the future.

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1 Even though not explained in the Scripture it
2 is clearly implied that sometimes at a particular
3 crisis or when death seemed to be approaching
4 the Lord enabled a patriarch to catch a glimpse
5 of the future of his descendants, and to state
6 truly what was ahead for them.

7 After the undescribed sin of Ham's younger
8 son, Canaan (Gen 9:22,24), Noah declared a curse
9 upon him, which was fulfilled in the subjugation
10 of the Canaanites at the time of the Israelite
11 conquest. At the same time the patriarch was
12 permitted a glimpse of the blessings that lay in
13 store for some of the descendants of Shem and
14 Japheth in days to come.

15 A rather similar instance of a prophetic
16 blessing occurred when Isaac, old and nearly
17 blind, thought death was approaching (Gen 27:2,
18 41). Although God revealed to the patriarchs
19 many aspects of His plan, they were human beings
20 with fallible minds. Isaac knew that when Esau
21 and Jacob were born God had declared that the
22 older would serve the younger. Yet the foolish
23 thought may have entered his mind that he could
24 change the situation by giving Esau the blessing
25 that God intended for Jacob. One kind-hearted

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1 interpreter has suggested that, since the sub-
 2 ject and object might sometimes be confused in
 3 Hebrew, Isaac may have tried to convince himself
 4 that the divine prediction regarding Jacob and
 5 Israel should be so interpreted as to mean that
 6 the younger would serve the elder. When Jacob
 7 stood before Isaac God allowed him to glimpse
 8 the future of Jacob's descendants and to give a
 9 true prediction of their predominance, even
 10 though Isaac himself thought he was blessing
 11 Esau. When Isaac learned his mistake he was
 12 greatly disappointed, but recognized that
 13 nothing could be done to change it. God had
 14 overruled Isaac's personal wishes.

15 When Esau returned Isaac gave him a lesser
 16 blessing, telling what God then revealed to him
 17 about the future of Esau's descendants.

18 When Jacob thought his end was near Joseph
 19 brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to
 20 see their grandfather. Jacob declared that
 21 these two sons of Joseph would have a position
 22 among Jacob's own sons as progenitors of tribes
 23 (Gen 48:5). Jacob crossed his hands so as to
 24 put the right hand on the younger son instead of
 25 on the older, as Joseph had intended. When

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1 Joseph remonstrated Jacob pointed out that
2 though each of them would be the progenitor of a
3 whole tribe, the tribe descended from the
4 younger brother would be the greater of the two
5 (Gen 48:13-20).

6 The following chapter (Gen 49) tells of the
7 blessing that Jacob gave his own sons when death
8 seemed near. Although he spoke of individual
9 sons, it is clear that he had their descendants
10 in mind.

11 4. Description of Visions. There were
12 a few times when a considerable portion of a
13 prophet's message consisted of describing some-
14 thing he had seen in a vision. This method was
15 used effectively by Micaiah when he faced the
16 wicked king Ahab and his counterfeit prophets.
17 Micaiah presented a figurative picture of the
18 fate that was ahead for Israel (I Kings 22:17)
19 and then depicted a vision of events in the
20 heavenly courts (vv.19-23). In Dan 7-12 the
21 prophet described a series of visions, foretel-
22 ling great future events. Ezekiel told how he
23 was carried in a vision to Jerusalem where he
24 saw various events taking place, and was then
25 brought back to Chaldea (Ezek 8-11). The last

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1 nine chapters of Ezek are a long description of
2 a vision in which he saw the land of Israel at a
3 future time. There is probably more of this
4 sort of prophecy in Zechariah than in any other
5 of the OT prophetic books. The Apostle John had
6 a marvelous vision which he described in the
7 book of Revelation. There are only a few addi-
8 tional instances where the prophetic message
9 consists in the description of a vision that the
10 prophet had, though there may be some that are
11 not identified as such.

12 5. Symbolic Actions. More common than
13 accounts of visions are descriptions of the per-
14 formance of prophetic actions intended to drive
15 home an important thought. These actions should
16 be clearly distinguished from the prophetic
17 visions mentioned above, which are quite differ-
18 ent in nature. Thus the prophet Ahijah tore a
19 garment into twelve pieces and handed ten of
20 them to Jeroboam to illustrate the fact that the
21 kingdom of Solomon would be broken, and ten
22 tribes given to Jeroboam (I Kings 11:29-30).
23 This was reminiscent of the fact that when Saul
24 had laid hold of Samuel's robe and had acciden-
25 tally torn it, Samuel immediately seized upon

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1 this as an illustration of the fact that Saul's
2 kingdom would be torn away from him and given
3 "to a neighbour of thine, that is better than
4 thou" (I Sam 15:27-28). After Elisha, on his
5 deathbed, had made Joash shoot "the arrow of
6 the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliv-
7 erance from Syria," he ordered the king to smite
8 the ground with some arrows. When the king
9 lackadaisically hit the ground three times,
10 Elisha pointed out that the failure of Joash to
11 be more enthusiastic in carrying out God's com-
12 mand would result in his victory over Syria
13 being only partial (II Kings 13:15-19).

14 When Jeremiah and Ezekiel were required to
15 deliver a message that would be very unpalatable
16 to their listeners, they made frequent use of
17 symbolic acts in order to arouse the people's
18 curiosity and induce them to listen when other-
19 wise they might have refused to give heed. Thus
20 Jeremiah was directed by the Lord to buy a linen
21 girdle and wear it for a time, without putting
22 it in water. Then he was told to "go to Euphra-
23 tes, and hide it there in a hole of the rock."
24 After many days he was again instructed to go to
25 Euphrates and dig up the girdle. The deteriora-

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tion that had set in was used as a vivid sign of the way the house of Israel, once so near the Lord, had ceased to be profitable to Him (Jer 13:1-11). A little later Jeremiah went to the potter's house and saw a clay vessel that had been marred in the hand of the potter and was therefore made over into something different. This he used to illustrate God's sovereign power (ch.18:1-10). On another occasion he broke an earthen flask at the valley of Hinnom and declared that God would similarly destroy Judah (ch.19:1-13). One day he held up two baskets of figs, one full of very good figs and the other full of figs so bad that they could not be eaten (ch.24:1-3). Pointing to the difference between the two he declared that the good figs were like the people who had already been taken into exile, and the bad ones like those still in Jerusalem.

Many of Jeremiah's prophecies were uttered in Jerusalem during the interval between the first deportation and the final siege and destruction of the city, when he had the difficult task of telling people who were determined to believe that the Lord would deliver their land that it

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1 was God's will that the city should be destroyed
2 and that they would be taken into captivity.
3 Ezekiel faced an even more hostile audience.
4 The group of exiles among whom he lived were
5 thoroughly convinced that Jerusalem would not be
6 destroyed and were unwilling even to listen to a
7 contrary opinion. It was necessary for Ezekiel,
8 like Jeremiah, to allow himself to be considered
9 unpatriotic or even treasonable.

10 Under these circumstances Ezekiel made even
11 more extensive use of symbolic actions than
12 Jeremiah did. When the people had become so
13 irritated at his message that they refused to
14 listen further, God told him no longer to
15 reprove them (Ezek 3:26) but to perform a series
16 of actions that would arouse their curiosity and
17 eventually make them listen. He was to make a
18 picture of Jerusalem on a tile and pretend to
19 lay siege against it (Ezek 4:1-3). He was to
20 lie on his left side a certain number of hours
21 every day for 390 days, to illustrate the
22 iniquity of the house of Israel, and then to lie
23 on his right side forty days to illustrate the
24 iniquity of the house of Judah (vv.4-6). He was
25 to measure out food and water to illustrate the

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1 scarcity of these items in a city under siege
2 (vv.9-11). Then he was to cut off some of his
3 hair and to burn part of it, to strike part of
4 it with a knife, and to scatter the remainder,
5 illustrating the coming fate of the people in
6 Jerusalem (Ezek 5:1-4). When the time for the
7 siege was drawing near he was ordered to dig a
8 hole under the wall of his house and carry his
9 household goods out through it, to illustrate
10 the coming flight of the refugees from
11 Jerusalem (Ezek 12:1-16).

12 The use of symbolic acts was not limited to
13 the true prophets. One of the men who tried to
14 please Ahab by giving the messages the king
15 desired to hear made horns of iron and said:
16 "Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push
17 the Syrians, until thou have consumed them"
18 (I Kings 22:11). Similarly, after Jeremiah had
19 put yokes around his neck to illustrate the
20 coming subjection of the nations to the king of
21 Babylon (Jer 27:1-11), Hananiah the son of Azur,
22 who pretended to be a prophet, publicly took the
23 yoke off Jeremiah's neck and broke it, declaring
24 that God would free the nations from Nebuchad-
25 nezzar within two years (Jer 28:10-11).

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1 Some interpreters insist that most of the
2 symbolic acts described in the books of Isa, Jer
3 and Ezek are merely visions. They say, for
4 instance, that Isaiah could not actually have
5 gone "naked and barefoot" for three years,
6 because this would have been indecent; there-
7 fore, he must simply have had a vision in which
8 he did so. They say that Jeremiah could not
9 possibly have taken his girdle all the distance
10 to Euphrates to bury it and then returned all
11 that distance to dig it up. They say that
12 Ezekiel could not actually have lain beside a
13 tile for 390 days because it would have been
14 impossible to lie still so long. These and
15 similar arguments are sometimes elaborated at
16 length. However, a little reflection will show
17 that to consider these symbolic acts as merely
18 visions would defeat their purpose, which was
19 not to give the prophet a new understanding, but
20 to seize the attention of the people. To hear
21 Isaiah say that he had walked naked and barefoot
22 for three years in a vision would add little to
23 the effect of his messages. To see the prophet
24 walking around in a state of dress quite unbe-
25 coming his station in life would arouse interest

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1 and lead people to inquire what it meant. It
2 would have little effect for Jeremiah to say:
3 "In a vision I buried a girdle for many days and
4 then I dug it up and saw how deteriorated it
5 was." But for him to hold before his hearers
6 the actual girdle that they had seen him wearing
7 and let them observe its deteriorated condition
8 might be very effective in driving home his
9 message. For Ezekiel to say that in a vision he
10 had lain for 390 days facing a tile on which he
11 had drawn a picture of Jerusalem would add
12 nothing to the effect of his message. It would
13 be quite different if he were to lie in the
14 public square a few hours each day, perhaps with
15 a sign beside him saying "Day 1," "Day 2," "Day
16 3," etc. People thinking of their homeland and
17 longing to return, would quickly notice the
18 similarity of the picture on the tile to the
19 place they so wished to see again. Parents
20 would point out its details to their children,
21 and the children would ask why Ezekiel was
22 lying there in that way. Thus attention would
23 be attracted and curiosity aroused. When the
24 Lord would again direct Ezekiel to present the
25 message orally (Ezek 6:11) the people would be

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1 ready to listen.

2 Moreover, such arguments rest upon interpre-
3 tations of the text that are hermeneutically
4 unsound. It is recognized by many commentators
5 (e.g., G. B. Gray in ICG and E. H. Plumptre in
6 Ellicott) that the statement that Isaiah walked
7 naked may well mean that he simply laid aside
8 his outer garment. The command to Ezekiel to
9 lie before the tile 390 days to represent the
10 iniquity of Israel would not necessarily
11 require that he lie there 24 hours at a time.
12 A few hours each day would satisfy all the
13 requirements of the symbolic act. Some of the
14 precise references to Babylon in the book of
15 Jeremiah and the fact that when Nebuchadnezzar
16 conquered Jerusalem he seemed already to know
17 about Jeremiah has led many interpreters to
18 think that Jeremiah could well have made a visit
19 to Babylon during the years of comparative
20 peace. On such a trip he might have buried his
21 girdle near a part of the river that is much
22 nearer to Jerusalem than Babylon itself, and
23 then have dug it up on his return journey. Even
24 this assumption is not necessary, for a number
25 of interpreters suggest that the word

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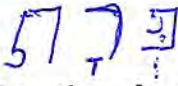
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1  pērāth, which ordinarily stands
2 for the river Euphrates, might here designate a
3 place not far from Jerusalem. In support of
4 this idea they point out that in nearly all the
5 instances where the term occurs in the OT it is
6 used with the word "river" (including three
7 instances in the book of Jer itself), but not in
8 these four usages (Jer 13:4-7). To interpret
9 these symbolic actions as simply visions is to
10 destroy their effectiveness for conveying a
11 message and to add nothing to their purpose so
12 far as the prophets themselves are concerned.
13 As noted above there are occasions mentioned in
14 the OT where God gave the prophet a vision which
15 he might describe to others, but the driving
16 home of messages through symbolic actions is in
17 an entirely different category and the two
18 should not be confused.

19 Symbolic actions occur less frequently in the
20 NT. One instance is the Lord's command to the
21 disciples that when they were not received in a
22 city they should shake off its dust from their
23 feet. Another is His action in washing the
24 disciples' feet. The use of bread and wine in
25 the institution of the Lord's supper constitutes

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1 a symbolic action for vivid remembrance of the
2 redemptive work of Christ.

3 C. The Place of Emotion in the Work of a
4 Prophet. Many of the prophetic messages were
5 addressed not merely to the head but also to the
6 heart of the listeners. They abound in pictures
7 calculated to arouse strong feelings of sorrow
8 for sin, of gratitude to God, or of determina-
9 tion to follow as the Lord leads. No one could
10 have such an influence upon his hearers without
11 himself being emotionally moved. This is
12 strikingly illustrated in the words of Samuel to
13 Saul in I Sam 15:22,23 and 28:18-19, and in
14 those of Elijah to Ahab in I Kings 18:18 and in
15 21:19-21. When Elisha was asked to help the
16 three kings in their desperate situation

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17 (II Kings 3:10-15) he was so moved by detesta-
18 tion of the wicked king Jehoram that it was
19 necessary to call for a minstrel in order to
20 quiet his spirit before he could listen to the
21 voice of God. The NT calls Elijah "a man
22 subject to like passions as we are" (James 5:17).

23 It is quite natural that there should be
24 evidence of strong emotion on the part of the
25 prophets and also of their hearers. This,

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1 however, is very different from saying that the
 2 prophet was controlled by his feelings or that
 3 his message was produced by his emotions. It is
 4 quite common among critical interpreters in
 5 recent years to allege that most of the pro-
 6 phetic ideas were the result of their being in a
 7 state of "ecstasy." This will be discussed
 8 below under IV H.

9 D. Schools of Prophets and Sons of
 10 Prophets. The term "school of the prophets" has
 11 come into wide use through a strange error. In
 12 his later years Samuel lived in a section of the
 13 town of Ramah called Naioth (I Sam 19:18-20:1).
 14 The term literally means "habitation." In later
 15 Jewish tradition it came to be thought that this
 16 represented a school where Samuel taught. Most
 17 interpreters now agree that it is only the name
 18 of a section of the town. The idea of a school
 19 of the prophets was further strengthened by a
 20 statement in II Kings 22:14 and II Chron 34:22
 21 that Huldah the prophetess dwelt "in the Jeru-
 22 salem college." The word that some translators
 23 have rendered "college" in this one place is
 24 מִשְׁנֶה mishneh, which is usually trans-
 25 lated "second" or "double." It is never

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1 translated "college" in any other occurrence
2 in the Bible. Here it probably refers to the
3 second quarter of the city.

4 There is no Biblical evidence that groups of
5 men were ever trained to become prophets. God
6 called the prophets as individuals. This was
7 true of Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and in
8 all other cases where there is record of such a
9 call. The prophetic work was an individual
10 activity, in which one man received a message
11 from God and passed it on to God's people. Only
12 in an extended sense is the term "prophet"
13 applied to groups of people.

14 While there are occasional references to
15 large groups of pretended prophets of false
16 gods, such as the prophets of Baal in I Kings
17 18, or to groups of men who falsely pretended
18 to be prophets of the LORD, as in I Kings 22:6
19 and Jer 5:31 and 14:14, none of these were real
20 prophets in the Biblical sense of the term.

21 The word was sometimes loosely applied to
22 individuals desiring to serve the Lord and
23 therefore attaching themselves to men recognized
24 as God's prophets so as to join them in reli-
25 gious activities. References to such men are

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1 rarely found in the prophetic books, but occas-
 2 ionally occur in the historical books. Thus in
 3 I Sam 10 it is said that Saul met a company of
 4 prophets. I Sam 19 tells of a group of men
 5 popularly called prophets, who met under
 6 Samuel's direction. These two passages will be
 7 discussed further in IV H. Obadiah, the servant
 8 of Ahab, declared that he had saved the lives of
 9 "an hundred men of the Lord's prophets" (I Kings
 10 18:13). Later an unnamed prophet, who brought
 11 Ahab a divine rebuke, was recognized by Ahab as
 12 belonging to the prophetic group (I Kings 20:41).
 13 In view of the great body of evidence of the
 14 unique and individual character of the prophet's
 15 task none of these passages prove that the term
 16 in its fullest sense could be applied to groups
 17 of men.

18 The term "sons of the prophets" occurs seven
 19 times in the OT (aside from the negative state-
 20 ment in Amos 7:14 where Amos declared that he
 21 had not been a prophet's son). All these occur-
 22 rences are found between I Kings 20 and II Kings
 23 9. In Biblical use the term "son" means (1)
 24 male child, (2) descendant (cf. Matt 1:1 "Jesus
 25 Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham"),

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(3) member of a group, (4) an apprentice or learner (cf. Prov 1:8; 2:1; 3:1, etc.).

The picture of the "sons of the prophets" in II Kings 2 is not a pleasant one. They are depicted as men with a complete lack of understanding of the nature of the divine work and with superstitious ideas (v.16). There is no evidence that Elijah ever looked upon them in any way other than with indifference and scorn. At first Elisha showed little interest in them (II Kings 2:3,5,16-18), though later on he established friendly relations with them (chs. 4-6) and even, on one occasion, deputed one of them to do an important errand (9:1-10). From among these men, who doubtless had a sincere desire to serve the Lord, God might occasionally choose an individual to perform the prophetic function, but there is no evidence that this was often the case.

E. Cessation of OT Prophecy. Until about 400 B.C. the prophetic movement was very prominent in Israel. Time and again an individual came forward declaring the Word of God, boldly facing political leaders and denouncing them for their sins, giving encouragement to God's

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1 people, or announcing God's will as the next
 2 step to be taken. After about 400 B.C. the
 3 prophets ceased to appear. There was no decla-
 4 ration that prophecy was ending, nor did anyone
 5 realize that this had occurred. Only after a
 6 time did realization dawn upon the people. The
 7 book of I Maccabees, which is on the whole a
 8 sober history of events during the Jewish revolt
 9 against Antiochus Epiphanes, brings out clearly
 10 in three places the fact that it was felt that
 11 there then was no prophet in Israel and that
 12 this had been true for a considerable length of
 13 time (I Macc 9:27). This situation was not
 14 accepted as final (I Macc 4:46; 14:41). When
 15 the Jews did not know what to do with the altar
 16 that had been so desecrated by the Syrians, they
 17 showed their expectation of the coming of new
 18 prophets by deciding to keep it in a safe place
 19 until a prophet should appear and tell them
 20 what was God's will in the matter (4:46). At
 21 about A.D. 90 Josephus, discussing the beliefs
 22 of his people, said that at about the time of
 23 Artaxerses of Persia "the exact succession of
 24 the prophets" had ceased (Contra Apionem, I 8).
 25 Since that time no individual has been generally

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1 recognized by the Jews as a divine prophet.

2 It was God's plan that a period of about 400
3 years should thus elapse between the great
4 prophetic movement of the OT and the new
5 prophets connected with the coming of Christ and
6 described in the NT.

7 Critical books suggest a reason for the end
8 of the prophetic movement. They say that the
9 prophetic movement came to an end because its
10 predictions that God would protect His land and
11 not allow the people to be taken into exile had
12 been proven false. This theory is contradicted
13 by the following facts: (1) Although false
14 prophets did indeed predict that God would not
15 permit His people to go into exile, such an
16 attitude can hardly be said to be characteristic
17 of the prophetic movement. In fact, Jeremiah
18 and Ezekiel who have always been recognized as
19 two of the greatest prophets, repeatedly
20 declared that the nation would go into exile and
21 that Jerusalem would be destroyed. (2) The
22 prophetic movement was active and vital for a
23 considerable time after the return from exile
24 and the rebuilding of the temple was facilitated
25 by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra

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1 5:1-2; cf. Hag 1:1-14).

2 It is easy to see why God caused the OT pro-
3 phetic movement to come to an end: (1) The
4 entire OT had been written and its books were
5 available as a guide for God's people. (2) It
6 was God's will that an interval of about 400
7 years should elapse between the prophecies of
8 the Messiah and His actual coming. Although
9 critics may assert that Daniel's prophecies were
10 not written until after most of the events that
11 he so clearly predicted, no one can say that the
12 many OT prophecies of Christ were written after
13 the time when they were fulfilled.

14 III. True and False Prophets.

15 A. False Prophets. Wherever there is
16 something good counterfeits are apt to appear.
17 There is no evidence of any movement outside of
18 Israel that is more than slightly similar to the
19 prophetic movement described in the Bible, but a
20 certain amount of imitation might be expected
21 among peoples in the neighborhood, both in other
22 nations and in Israel itself.

23 1. Men who Prophesied in the Name of a
24 False God or Idol. Jeremiah twice speaks of men
25 who prophesied by Baal (Jer 2:8; 23:13). When

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1 Jezebel introduced Baal worship into Israel
2 groups of men appeared who were called "prophets
3 of Baal." There is no evidence in the Bible as
4 to whether any of these men claimed actually to
5 present messages from Baal. There is no reason
6 to think that they ever expressed independent
7 views, as was so often done by the prophets of
8 the Lord. Prophets of Baal and of an associated
9 deity are mentioned a number of times in I Kings
10 18, and once in connection with the destruction
11 of the Baal worship by Jehu (II Kings 10:19).

12 2. Men who Falsely Claimed to Receive
13 Messages from the Lord. It was only natural
14 that the acclaim given the true prophets by good
15 kings should lead individuals to seek advance-
16 ment by pretending to be prophets of the Lord,
17 and evil rulers might well support such men in
18 order to win the support of the godly. In
19 I Kings 22 an incident is described which brings
20 into clear relief the difference between false
21 prophets and true prophets. When Ahab wished
22 Jehoshaphat to join with him in attacking
23 Ramoth-gilead, the good king Jehoshaphat desired
24 to know whether God would give an indication as
25 to the result of the expedition. So Ahab called

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1 in a great number of his men who claimed to be
2 prophets and all of them proceeded to give the
3 message that they knew the wicked king desired
4 (vv.5-12). Since their hypocrisy was evident,
5 Jehoshaphat asked whether there was not an addi-
6 tional prophet of the Lord whom they could ask,
7 and Ahab reluctantly mentioned Micaiah. The
8 messenger who summoned Micaiah advised him to
9 give a message similar to that of the others.
10 He proceeded to do so, but evidently delivered
11 it in such a tone of voice as to make it obvious
12 that he was merely saying what was desired and
13 did not really mean any of it. Under the cir-
14 cumstances there was nothing for Ahab to do but
15 demand that Micaiah tell truly what the Lord had
16 revealed to him. Then Micaiah proceeded to give
17 the true message. Thus in this instance an
18 individual who received and delivered a message
19 from the Lord is brought into sharp contrast
20 with a number of so-called prophets who were
21 actually hypocrites.

22 3. Men who Ceased to be True Prophets.

23 The prophets, like all men except the Lord Jesus
24 Christ, were fallible and sinful. In their
25 human capacity they were apt to err. It was

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1 only when directly presenting a message that God
 2 chose to give them that their words were free
 3 from error. Thus a man like Balaam or like the
 4 prophet at Bethel described in I Kings 13 might
 5 truly give the Word of God and then might be led
 6 astray into wicked acts or even into presenting
 7 false messages. One can be sure that in such a
 8 case the message, if false, would not be
 9 included in the Scripture unless it were
 10 definitely so labeled.

11 B. Tests of a Prophet. Sometimes it was
 12 very difficult to know who was a true prophet
 13 and who was a deceiver. Jer 28 describes a
 14 situation in which godly people might have been
 15 greatly puzzled. Jeremiah had just declared
 16 that it was God's intention to permit the king
 17 of Babylon to conquer Israel and to take its
 18 people into exile. Hananiah, the son of Azur,
 19 publicly rebuked Jeremiah and gave a message
 20 similar to that which Isaiah had given about 100
 21 years before, declaring that God would marvel-
 22 ously protect Jerusalem and would not allow it
 23 to be taken. After Hananiah gave this purported
 24 message, Jeremiah withdrew (v.11). At this
 25 point the true people of God could have been

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1 greatly puzzled to know which of the two was the
2 true prophet.

3 In answer to the question, "How shall we know
4 the word which the LORD hath not spoken?" (Deut
5 18:21), Moses had recorded certain tests in Deut
6 13:1-5 and 18:20-22 as follows:-

7 1. A True Prophet Must Speak in the
8 Name of the LORD (Deut 18:20-22). If a prophet
9 speaks in the name of other gods or claims to be
10 a representative of heathen deities, he is very
11 clearly not a true prophet. While good ideas
12 may be obtained from many different sources,
13 such truths are always mixed with error. The
14 true prophet gives a message directly from God,
15 and his message therefore can be considered
16 entirely trustworthy. No such claim can be made
17 for any alleged revelation not given specifi-
18 cally in the name of the LORD.

19 2. A Prophet May Produce a Sign or a
20 Wonder (Deut 13:1-2). God enabled Moses to per-
21 form certain miracles in order to show the
22 Israelites that God had sent him (Exod 4:1-5)
23 and also to prove to Pharaoh that he represented
24 the Deity. This sort of authentication of the
25 prophet's ministry was particularly evident in

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1 the work of Elijah and Elisha. However, it was
 2 the exception rather than the rule. Compara-
 3 tively few of the many prophets mentioned in the
 4 Bible ever performed miracles. Persons unfam-
 5 ilar with the Bible often think it is filled
 6 from cover to cover with unbelievable supernat-
 7 ural events. Actually God has used unusual
 8 powers of this type only sparingly in authenti-
 9 cating His messengers. Providentially directed
 10 events are far more common than acts that would
 11 be considered miraculous by the observers. Most
 12 of the miracles recorded in the Bible are gath-
 13 ered around a few main crises in the relation of
 14 God to humanity. Elsewhere they seldom occur.

15 3. A Prediction Given by a Prophet May
 16 be Visibly Fulfilled. This test is specifically
 17 contained in Deut 18:22: "if the thing follow
 18 not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which
 19 the LORD hath not spoken." In the case men-
 20 tioned above God enabled Jeremiah to present
 21 this type of proof that he was the true prophet
 22 and Hananiah the false one. First, Jeremiah
 23 repeated the Lord's definite message specifical-
 24 ly denying what Hananiah had declared (Jer 28:
 25 13-14). Then Jeremiah proceeded to make a

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1 further prediction, that Hananiah would die that
2 very year (vv.15-16). Two months later this
3 prediction was fulfilled (v.17), giving evidence
4 that Jeremiah was the true prophet and Hananiah
5 the false one.

6 Sometimes a prediction referred to the
7 distant future, and therefore a prophet's con-
8 temporaries could not form an immediate judg-
9 ment. Thus there is an account in I Kings 13 of
10 a prophet who traveled from Judah to Bethel to
11 denounce the type of worship that Jeroboam had
12 introduced by setting up the golden calves. He
13 declared that a king from Judah, which was only
14 about a third as strong as Jeroboam's kingdom,
15 called Josiah, and belonging to the house of
16 David, would defile the altar that Jeroboam had
17 built. Nearly 300 years passed before this
18 occurred. Then a king, bearing the name the
19 prophet had predicted 300 years in advance, per-
20 formed the deed that had been foretold. People
21 living at that later time would have striking
22 evidence that the prophet described in I Kings
23 13 was a true prophet and that the worship of
24 the golden calves was wrong.

25 In this particular case an additional proof

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1 was given to the prophet's contemporaries. The
2 man of God followed up his distant prediction
3 (v.2) with one that would be fulfilled that very
4 day (v.3;cf.v.5).

5 More than a century before the destruction of
6 Jerusalem Isaiah predicted that after the people
7 had been in distant exile for many years a new
8 conqueror named Cyrus would set them free and
9 would make it possible for Jerusalem to be
10 rebuilt (Isa 44:28; 45:13). When this occurred
11 it produced further evidence that Isaiah was
12 indeed a true prophet.

13 4. The Most Important Test of All--
14 Agreement with Previous Revelations. It is
15 clearly brought out in Deut 13:1-5 that a man
16 might claim to speak for the Lord, might perform
17 what appeared to be a miracle, and might make a
18 prediction that would come true, and still might
19 be a false prophet. It is the duty of God's
20 people carefully to check the content of any
21 revelation and see whether it is in line with
22 what God has previously revealed. Paul brought
23 out this truth very clearly in Gal 1:8 where he
24 said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven,
25 preach any other gospel unto you than that which

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1 we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

2 Yet this test also is not always easy to
3 apply. Sometimes a true prophet might give a
4 message that at first seemed to contradict a
5 portion of God's revelation that had previously
6 been given, and it might require very careful
7 study to enable one to see that the two were
8 merely different facets of the same truth.

9 C. The Negative Nature of the Tests Given
10 by Moses. The tests described above were real
11 tests and would rule out many imposters. Yet an
12 imposter might seem to fulfill all of these
13 tests. He might perform an act that would
14 appear to be miraculous. He might make a lucky
15 guess about the future. It might not be pos-
16 sible to find any clear contradiction between
17 his teaching and the ideas contained in the Word
18 of God. In spite of all this he might actually
19 be a false prophet.

20 Moreover, some true prophets did not perform
21 any miracle. Some did not predict anything that
22 would happen soon enough for those who heard to
23 be able to judge whether the prediction was ful-
24 filled or not. Sometimes a true instrument of
25 divine revelation would use words in a different

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sense than had been done by an earlier prophet,
thus seeming to contradict the earlier statement
of truth (cf. the difference in meaning of the
word "faith" as used by James and as used by
Paul). The tests that Moses gave, while they
would rule out many imposters, would not always
enable the observer to be sure who were the
false prophets and who the true ones.

Thus the tests are largely negative rather
than positive. Absolute certainty as to which
were the true prophets was often difficult to
attain. In Jeremiah's time many good people
must have found it difficult to decide between
the alleged prophets on the one hand, who said
that God would protect His land, and thus seemed
to be directly in line with the teaching of
Isaiah a century earlier, and Jeremiah and Ezek-
iel on the other, who declared that God would
cause the nation to be destroyed and the people
to be taken into exile.

In His providence God caused His people to
honor the writings of the true prophets. Chris-
tians can be certain that no mistake was made by
those who preserved these books, because the
Lord Jesus Christ set the seal of His approval

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1 upon them, declaring that His people should
2 "believe all that the prophets have spoken"
3 (Luke 24:25). It is the authentication by the
4 Lord Jesus Christ that enables a Christian to
5 know that those who are described in the OT as
6 true prophets were indeed prophets of God.

7 IV. Naturalistic Explanations of the Pro-
8 phetic Movement. In recent years many books
9 have been written from a viewpoint that is quite
10 contrary to the picture of the prophets that the
11 Bible gives. These books attempt to explain the
12 whole prophetic movement on a strictly
13 naturalistic basis.

14 The writing of books of this type is the
15 result of the adoption of certain presupposi-
16 tions. The Bible clearly teaches that there is
17 a great God who created the world and who con-
18 trols all things, and that this God has communi-
19 cated with sinful men. When there were compara-
20 tively few men on earth He communicated directly
21 to them. Then when the number of men had
22 greatly increased and confusion and misunder-
23 standing became widespread He selected certain
24 individuals through whom He sent messages to
25 humanity, calling on them to acknowledge Him as

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1 the great Creator, to turn away from sin, and to
2 receive the salvation that He offered. Some-
3 times the prophets were instructed to use
4 methods of attracting attention to their teach-
5 ings that would impress many today as very
6 bizarre and strange. The Bible teaches that
7 these messages, written down by the prophets,
8 and combined with their observations of God's
9 actions in history and of the actions of God's
10 people, were put together in a book that the
11 Holy Spirit has kept from error and has caused
12 to be preserved for the guidance of God's
13 people.

14 A. The Naturalistic Presuppositions.
15 Those who deny this view of the prophetic move-
16 ment fall roughly into three categories: 1)
17 There are many interpreters who assume that
18 everything in the universe can be explained on a
19 purely mechanistic or naturalistic basis, and
20 that all human ideas about God are purely myth-
21 ical, fanciful and imaginary. God as an
22 actually existing Being who exerts any sort of
23 direct influence on human events appears to be
24 completely absent from their thinking. This
25 category of interpreters is much larger at

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1 present than half a century ago. 2) There is a
2 second class of interpreters that was quite
3 large fifty years ago but is now much smaller
4 than it was then. Those in this group theoretic-
5 cally believed that God exists, and many of them
6 even accepted as true the basic teachings of the
7 NT about the reality of sin and the necessity of
8 salvation through Christ. Yet their fundamental
9 attitude toward the prophetic movement and the
10 prophetic books did not really differ greatly
11 from that of those in the first category. Their
12 underlying though perhaps largely subconscious
13 assumption was that God, though great and impor-
14 tant, is really a factor like the sun which we
15 can look at and examine but which will neither
16 directly communicate with us nor actively inter-
17 vene in the life of humanity. 3) A third cate-
18 gory, consisting of a smaller number than the
19 first two, but yet with some rather able expon-
20 ents, has reacted against the present tendency
21 of shifting from the second category into the
22 first, by moving a very short distance in the
23 opposite direction. Its proponents declare that
24 God exists, that He takes an interest in human
25 life, and that He reveals Himself through great

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1 actions and through the course of history. Yet
2 in all their thinking they constantly assume
3 that God has never revealed Himself through
4 words. To many of them, as to some of those in
5 the other two categories, the prophets were
6 simply great thinkers who either deduced or
7 intuitively discovered important truths. To
8 others, particularly in the first two cate-
9 gories, the activities of the prophets were
10 either the result of peculiar psychological
11 quirks, or a by-product of the clash of various
12 political, religious or social forces.

13 Any one of these three assumptions makes it
14 impossible to take the words of the prophets at
15 their face value or to believe that God actually
16 communicated messages to them which they in turn
17 passed on. These interpreters, however, are
18 interested in determining the forces that
19 brought these books into existence. They are
20 interested in determining whether the prophets
21 were men who interpreted events through their
22 own reasoning or whether they were individuals
23 who were influenced by emotional vagaries to
24 take certain attitudes or to utter certain
25 expressions. A great amount of erudition has

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1 been devoted to this effort.

2 The naturalistic explanations of the pro-
3 phetic books have been made from a variety of
4 different and sometimes contradictory viewpoints.
5 While the interpreter of the prophetic books
6 must always keep in mind the inherent difficulty
7 of conveying divine thoughts to finite, fallible
8 and sinful human beings, there is no solid basis
9 for denying the simple teaching of the Bible
10 that God spoke to the prophets and that the
11 prophets passed on His messages.

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12 B. Denial that Biblical Prophets have been
13 Able to Predict the Future. One of the first to
14 try to explain the prophetic movement from a
15 naturalistic basis was Celsus, a writer who
16 attacked Christianity in the 2nd cent. A. D.
17 Celsus denied that the prophets had truly pre-
18 dicted the future. He dealt particularly with
19 the book of Daniel, claiming that its rather
20 detailed predictions of Alexander the Great and
21 his successors were not actually written until
22 after the events had occurred, so that the
23 alleged predictions were really based upon a
24 later knowledge of what had actually happened.
25 This attitude toward the prophetic predictions

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1 has continued to the present time and has been a
2 prominent factor in the attempts of modern
3 critics to date many of the books much later
4 than the time at which they claim to have been
5 written. It was doubtless in order to forestall
6 this sort of interpretation in relation to the
7 most important predictions of the OT, those
8 relating to the life and death of Christ, that
9 God caused that the OT should be completed some
10 centuries before the time of Christ, so that it
11 would be obvious that the OT predictions of
12 Christ were made long before His time.

13 A second method that is sometimes used to
14 discount prophecy is to assert that predictions
15 have been intentionally fulfilled, as in the
16 case of Jehoram's death in II Kings 9:14-26, and
17 perhaps, of Josiah's actions in II Kings 23:
18 16-17. Thus it is pointed out that Jehu remem-
19 bered Elijah's prediction and deliberately ful-
20 filled it (vv.22-26). However, this does not
21 really destroy the force of the authentication.
22 No one could have predicted that at the time of
23 Jehu's rebellion Jehoram would have returned to
24 Jezreel to be healed of his wounds, or that
25 their encounter would take place at the very

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1 spot where Elijah had declared that the blood of
2 Naboth would be avenged (II Kings 9:21). In
3 addition the fact that Jehu would desire to ful-
4 fill the prediction was an authentication rather
5 than the reverse.

6 There are also a number of elements that
7 clearly show the divine foreknowledge and con-
8 trol in connection with Josiah's fulfillment of
9 the prediction in I Kings 13:2. In Israel
10 several dynasties had replaced one another
11 during the three centuries between Jeroboam and
12 Josiah. Only divine knowledge could have
13 declared that the house of David would continue
14 to rule Judah during all that time. Only divine
15 knowledge could have shown that the man who
16 would be king of Judah at this time would bear
17 the name Josiah. Only God could have known that
18 before Josiah's reign the Assyrian conqueror
19 would have destroyed the northern kingdom and
20 thus made it possible for Judah, formerly pos-
21 sessing only about one third as much strength as
22 Israel, to enter the area of the northern king-
23 dom and carry out the predictions that the man
24 of God had given. It was part of the divine
25 providence that Josiah would see the tomb and

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1 inquire whose it was, and be reminded of the
2 prediction. The fact that at this time the king
3 of Judah would be one who would desire to see
4 prophecy fulfilled, rather than one who, like
5 Constantine the Great's nephew, would desire to
6 cause prophecy to be proven false, is another
7 evidence of the divine foreknowledge.

8 The converse of this situation occurred in
9 A.D. 362 when Julian the Apostate, after becoming
10 Roman emperor, desired to reestablish paganism
11 and destroy Christianity. Knowing that fulfill-
12 ment of prophecy was one of the accepted argu-
13 ments in favor of Christianity, Julian deliber-
14 ately undertook to disprove the statement in
15 Luke 21:24 that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down
16 of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles
17 be fulfilled." Julian sent word throughout the
18 empire that imperial help would be given the
19 Jews to rebuild their temple. Wealthy Jews came
20 from all over the empire, bringing spades of
21 gold to excavate for the great edifice on the
22 site of Solomon's temple. Julian rejoiced to
23 think that soon the prophecies of Jesus would be
24 shown to be false, and it would be demonstrated
25 that Jesus was Himself an imposter. Yet the

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1 result was the direct opposite of what Julian
2 expected. The excavation had proceeded only a
3 short time when fire shot out from the earth
4 and a series of explosions occurred. The
5 frightened workmen rushed from the spot and no
6 entreaty or offer could persuade them to con-
7 tinue the work. The death of Julian, a few
8 months later, prevented any second attempt.

9 Even the cynical and antichristian writer,
10 Gibbon, was convinced by the historical evidence
11 that this event occurred. However, he proceeded
12 to assert that it was not a supernatural act,
13 but simply the result of the fact that the gases
14 imprisoned for many years in the subterranean
15 chambers under the temple had become so com-
16 pressed that when they were released by the
17 beginning of the excavation explosions occurred.

18 Yet Jesus had made no claim that divine inter-
19 vention in supernatural form would cause the
20 fulfillment of the prophecy. Regardless of
21 whether the occurrence was a miracle or a purely
22 natural event, the fact remains that in the
23 providence of God many centuries passed during
24 which Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles
25 and the site of Solomon's temple remained in the

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1 hands of those hostile to the Jews. Thus
2 Julian's attempt intentionally to cause prophecy
3 not to be fulfilled came to nothing.

4 Another method used in the effort to prove
5 that the prophets were not really messengers
6 from God is to assert that certain prophecies in
7 the Scripture were not actually fulfilled.

8 Sometimes much is made of the prediction by
9 Jeremiah that Jehoiakim would "be buried with
10 the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth
11 beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer 22:19). It

12 has been pointed out that there is no statement
13 in II Kings that Jehoiakim's body was thrown out
14 unburied or that he died through violence, but
15 merely that he "slept with his fathers"

16 (II Kings 24:6). It is sometimes alleged that
17 the statement that a king "slept with his
18 fathers" indicates a ceremonial burial. Such an
19 argument, however, rests on no factual founda-

20 tion. In most of the many instances where this
21 phrase is used of a king it is followed by the
22 statement "and he was buried" or by "and they
23 buried him," thus showing that this phrase

24 merely indicates death and not burial. II Kings
25 24:6 is one of the few instances where the

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1 phrase "slept with his fathers" is not followed
2 with a definite statement about burial. It is
3 true that the book of Kings does not give any
4 information about the manner of Jehoiakim's
5 death. Chronicles gives little more information,
6 but does contain the words: "Against him came
7 up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him
8 in fetters, to carry him to Babylon" (II Chron
9 36:6). The following verses tell nothing about
10 Jehoiakim's death or burial, but merely add a
11 summary reference to "the rest of the acts of
12 Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did,
13 and that which was found in him" (v.8). It must
14 be admitted that there is no available informa-
15 tion as to the manner of Jehoiakim's death.

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16 Under the circumstances, however, a little
17 thought will show that it is quite unrealistic
18 to assume that the book of Jeremiah contains a
19 false prophecy regarding Jehoiakim's death.
20 Jerusalem remained under Jewish control for
21 eleven years after the death of Jehoiakim, and
22 every Jew would have known whether he was buried
23 with the usual ceremony attending the death of a
24 king, whether he suffered a tragic fate through
25 some conspiracy, or whether Nebuchadnezzar

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1 treated him with such indignity that his body
2 was thrown out into the wilderness for a time
3 before being buried, perhaps even remaining
4 unburied. If Jehoiakim had died a natural death
5 and been buried with the customary pomp attend-
6 ing the death of a king, Jeremiah's many enemies
7 would have had no difficulty in persuading
8 everyone that he was a false prophet. Even on
9 the unlikely assumption that the followers of a
10 pretended prophet whose prediction had proved to
11 be so completely wrong still supported him, it
12 can be safely assumed that so demonstrably false
13 a prediction about the king's death would not
14 have been included in his book.

15 There are many prophecies in the Scripture
16 that have been fulfilled in remarkable fashion.
17 To reconstruct history on the basis of imagina-
18 tion at points where there is no evidence and
19 then to use this as a means of declaring that
20 some of the prophecies were not fulfilled is
21 hardly a proper way to treat God's Word.

22 C. The Rise of the Higher Criticism. When
23 the higher criticism was applied to the OT and
24 scholars began to divide the Pentateuch into
25 various alleged sources supposedly written at

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AUTHOR

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different times, a new dimension was added to the naturalistic efforts to explain the origin of the prophetic books. In 1789 Doederlein declared that Isaiah 40-66, which predicts the coming of Cyrus and the return of the Jews from exile, had been written more than a century after the time of Isaiah. Some of the same arguments that alleged that Isaiah could not have written chapters 40-66 were extended to various passages in the previous 39 chapters. Eventually many critics divided the entire book of Isaiah into great numbers of separate sections, allegedly written by a great variety of authors who were said to have lived at various times. This approach was soon extended to nearly all the other prophetic books. It was long held by most critical scholars that Ezekiel was a unit though a few questioned it, but early in the 20th century critics began to divide this book also into many sections supposed to have been written by a variety of authors.

Most of these higher critical approaches to the prophets result from two causes: (1) unwillingness to believe that the prophecies could

1 actually have been made in advance of the times
 2 when the events occurred; (2) application to the
 3 Bible of a method of literary study generally
 4 applied by 19th century critics to nearly all
 5 ancient or medieval writings, but by the middle
 6 of the 20th century abandoned by most literary
 7 critics in non-Biblical fields.

8 D. Form Criticism and the Traditio-
 9 Historical Approach. Early in the 20th century
 10 Hermann Gunkel introduced a new approach based
 11 not like the previous higher criticism upon
 12 theories of literary development and composition,
 13 but upon seeking a popular origin for statements
 14 or ceremonial forms adapted to particular situa-
 15 tions. He laid great stress on trying to dis-
 16 cover the particular type of situation that
 17 would have given rise to a particular statement
 18 or to a particular type of literature, and
 19 assumed a subsequent long period of oral trans-
 20 mission before the results would be written
 21 down. This approach has been greatly extended
 22 by a group of Scandinavian scholars who have
 23 developed it into what is now called the
 24 traditio-historical approach. These men insist
 25 that little or nothing of the prophetic writings

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1 (or perhaps of the rest of the OT) was in writ-
2 ten form until after the exile. They hold that
3 the prophets uttered mostly short gnomic sayings
4 that were passed on by word of mouth. These
5 statements were enlarged and added to by their
6 followers during many generations and thus the
7 material gradually assumed a definite form.
8 According to this view comparatively little of
9 what is attributed to the various prophetic
10 writers was actually composed by them.

11 Some members of the traditio-historical
12 school have strongly opposed many of the ideas
13 of the documentary analysis approach which is
14 typical of the higher criticism. For a time the
15 followers of the documentary analysis strongly
16 retaliated in kind. In recent years, however, a
17 synthesis has been developing in which critics
18 tend to combine both approaches, denying the
19 idea taught in the Bible that the prophet
20 actually received messages from God and passed
21 them on, and also completely abandoning the idea
22 that the Bible is an infallible rule of faith
23 and practice.

24 E. Relation to the Ceremonies of the
25 Temple. The Wellhausen school of criticism

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1 which succeeded in gaining wide acceptance of
2 its ideas regarding the Pentateuch and the
3 extension of these ideas to the rest of the OT,
4 laid great stress on Hegelian principles of
5 synthesis growing out of division and competi-
6 tion between opposing views. Its followers
7 selected a few passages in the prophets which
8 used strong language against dependence on
9 formalism or ceremonial observances. It drew
10 from these the idea that the prophets were a
11 group that favored a return to the simple life
12 of the desert in contrast to the highly devel-
13 oped ceremonial described in the book of Levit-
14 icus and supported by the priests. Thus the
15 Wellhausenists tended to praise the prophets as
16 great opponents of the complex ceremonial (or
17 cult) and to hold that the eventual development
18 of the Pentateuch proceeded from a synthesis of
19 the views of these two opposing groups. For
20 several decades most of the critical literature
21 tended to praise the prophets and to speak
22 derogatorily of the priests, and to consider the
23 two groups as being in complete opposition.
24 A change in this attitude was introduced by
25 G. Hölscher with his book Die Propheten (1914)

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1 in which he pointed to statements in the pro-
2 phetic books expressing interest in the temple
3 ceremonies and sympathy with their purposes.
4 From this there developed a widespread attitude
5 among naturalistic critics that maintained that
6 the prophets were actually a group of temple
7 servants, receiving their support from the
8 temple and supporting its ceremonial, though at
9 times opposing corrupt elements that had crept
10 in. This attitude has been greatly stressed in
11 recent years.

12 An altered view has been advanced by a few
13 scholars who have maintained that the prophets
14 could be divided into two groups: (1) the
15 "popular prophets" who received their income
16 from the temple and supported the status quo,
17 and (2) the "reforming prophets" who opposed
18 them and were not connected with the cult. Com-
19 paratively few scholars have as yet espoused
20 this later view.

21 F. The Sociological Approach. During the
22 first part of the 20th cent. many popular
23 writers, affected by the critical attitude of
24 considering the prophets as supporters of the
25 simple life of the desert, wrote books

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1 depicting the prophets simply as social
2 reformers and alleging them to be prototypes of
3 those in our day who stand for great sociologi-
4 cal changes. This approach to the prophets,
5 greatly emphasized for a time, seems now to be
6 somewhat in abeyance.

7 G. Derivation of the Prophetic Movement
8 from the Culture of Other Ancient Nations.
9 During the past two centuries the knowledge of
10 the ancient Orient has been greatly extended.
11 New discoveries in Egypt and in Mesopotamia have
12 made available thousands of ancient records
13 giving considerable information about the life
14 and thought of people who lived centuries before
15 the time of Moses. Discoveries in Syria have
16 greatly increased the knowledge of the ancient
17 Canaanites. Instead of being an isolated pic-
18 ture of ancient life, the historical events in
19 the Bible take their place in an extensive his-
20 tory that is far better known than ever before.

21 Under these circumstances it is not surpris-
22 ing that there has been a search for antecedents
23 of the prophets in other lands. Some of the
24 students of these ancient cultures have been
25 carried away by enthusiasm for their area of

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1 specialization. Early in the 20th cent. Fried-
2 rich Delitzsch gave his famous "Babylon and
3 Bible" lectures before the German Kaiser, aiming
4 to show that everything of value in Biblical
5 teaching was merely a pale reflection of Baby-
6 lonian ideas. In 1933 the noted American arch-
7 aeologist, James Henry Breasted wrote his book,
8 The Dawn of Conscience, to prove that ethical
9 understanding really began in ancient Egypt.

10 Attempts have been made to show that the
11 Israelite prophets were merely examples of a
12 type of activity that was common at that period.
13 Some critics have held that they were a reflec-
14 tion of a phenomenon that occurred among the
15 Canaanites but not elsewhere. Others have held
16 that they represent an influence that was wide-
17 spread throughout the Near East.

18 Before looking at the alleged similarities a
19 few points should be noted. The Hebrew prophet
20 was one who claimed to speak for God. He was in
21 most cases quite independent of any direct con-
22 trol by a king or by ecclesiastical officials.
23 He delivered the message that God had given him.
24 Very frequently this was a message of denuncia-
25 tion of the people, the king, or the priests for

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1 disobedience to the divine orders or to God's
 2 moral law. He sometimes gave great promises of
 3 blessing for the future. Sometimes he gave
 4 directions as to specific actions to be taken at
 5 a particular time. He did not hesitate to come
 6 into sharp conflict with the king or even to
 7 accuse him of wrongdoing and to declare that
 8 God would punish him for his deeds.

9 Prediction enters into many of these activi-
 10 ties but in a rather incidental way. The pro-
 11 phet is not primarily a foreteller, diviner, or
 12 soothsayer, though there were probably some in
 13 ancient Israel, particularly in the times
 14 described in I Sam, who had this false impres-
 15 sion. In regard to this aspect of the prophet's
 16 work, superficial resemblances can be found in
 17 every culture. People everywhere desire to
 18 learn about the future. Among the Babylonians
 19 there was a highly sophisticated pseudo-science
 20 of examining the livers of slaughtered animals
 21 in order to foretell the future (alluded to in
 22 Ezek 21:21). In ancient Greece and Rome obser-
 23 vation of birds and other types of augury were
 24 regularly conducted before making important
 25 decisions. Modern nations have their astrolo-

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1 gers and fortune tellers, occasionally patron-
2 ized even by seemingly sophisticated leaders, so
3 great is the desire to know what is ahead. The
4 mere fact that individuals in many lands have
5 claimed to predict the future is hardly evidence
6 of the existence of a movement at all comparable
7 to the activity of the prophets.

8 On examination of the thousands of ancient
9 records that have been discovered one finds that
10 the amount of material that can be presented in
11 support of the claim that there existed in any
12 of these countries a movement really similar to
13 the prophetic movement in Israel is extremely
14 meagre. Although the Ugaritic material tells
15 much about the Canaanite religion and culture in
16 the period prior to the Israelite entrance into
17 Canaan, it has as yet yielded very little that
18 could be considered as in any way supplying a
19 background for Heb. prophetism. Among all the
20 archaeological discoveries that have been made,
21 just about the only one that has been alleged to
22 show a Canaanite background for the Heb. pro-
23 phets is not a document from Canaan, but one
24 from Egypt. Much has been made of this Egyptian
25 papyrus written in the 11th cent. B.C. in which

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1 Wen-Amon, an official of an Egyptian temple,
 2 tells how he was sent to Byblos on the Syrian
 3 coast to obtain lumber for a ceremonial barge.
 4 For many weeks the prince of Byblos refused even
 5 to see him. Then one day as the prince "was
 6 making offering to his gods, the god seized one
 7 of his youths and made him possessed." In his
 8 frenzy the youth called out that the prince
 9 should see the messenger from Egypt. Some
 10 writers have called this "a prophetic frenzy,"
 11 and compared it with the so-called ecstatic
 12 behavior of the Heb. prophets (see II below for
 13 discussion of the idea that the Heb. prophets
 14 behaved ecstatically). All that the account
 15 really says is that when this man was in his
 16 trance he said that Wen-Amon represented the god
 17 Amon and should be allowed to present his mes-
 18 sage, and that the king of Byblos then gave the
 19 Egyptian messenger a hearing. Nothing further
 20 is said about the man who had the trance. There
 21 is no evidence that he made any prediction about
 22 the future, or that the prince of Byblos consid-
 23 ered his behavior as having any great importance;
 24 in fact, all that the prince did was to allow
 25 the messenger the opportunity for a conference.

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1 He refused to admit any obligation to Egypt, and
 2 would not supply the lumber that was requested
 3 until Wen-Amon had sent to Egypt for additional
 4 money. Peculiar events such as this occur in
 5 many lands from time to time, but have really
 6 little in common with the Biblical account of
 7 the work of the prophets.

8 Babylonian tablets from Mari and elsewhere
 9 include a few alleged letters from a god to a
 10 king. Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria in the lat-
 11 ter part of the 7th cent. B.C., tells of a dream
 12 in which the goddess Ishtar promised to give him
 13 victory. Dreams of this type are occasionally
 14 described in ancient records, but such experi-
 15 ences have occurred in most countries, and
 16 present only a superficial similarity to one
 17 small phase of Heb. prophetism.

18 In the great mass of available Egyptian
 19 material only a very few documents purport to
 20 contain anything similar to the work of the Heb.
 21 prophets. The two that are most frequently men-
 22 tioned are called "the Prophecy of Nefer-Rohu"
 23 and "the Admonition of Ipu-wer." Each of these
 24 is contained in a papyrus that was made during
 25 the New Kingdom (18th to 20th dynasty), but they

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1 are thought to be copies of writings originally
 2 produced several centuries earlier. The first
 3 of them tells how at the time of the 4th dynasty
 4 a man predicted the coming period of anarchy and
 5 the rise of a great pharaoh who would stabilize
 6 conditions. Most scholars think that it actually
 7 originated during the 12th dynasty, as a story
 8 in praise of its first king. The other
 9 describes the terrible conditions in the land
 10 during the period of chaos before the Middle
 11 Kingdom and blames the negligence of the rulers.
 12 It has been said that this was similar to the
 13 denunciation by an Israelite prophet of a wicked
 14 king.

15 In the search for an origin for the Heb. pro-
 16 phet^{ic} movement both of these documents have been
 17 said to show the existence of something similar
 18 in Egypt. Yet even if the alleged similarity
 19 were to be accepted to its fullest extent, it
 20 would be in reality a very slight basis on which
 21 to construct a theory of anything having existed
 22 in Egypt at all comparable to the long-
 23 continuing prophetic movement in Israel.

24 H. Ecstasy and the Prophet. It is often
 25 asserted by naturalistic-minded interpreters that

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1 one of the most characteristic features of the
2 activity of the Heb. prophets was a state of
3 ecstasy that would tend to produce unnatural
4 visions and ideas, and that their belief that
5 they were divinely directed was simply the
6 result of an emotional state. The activity of
7 the prophets has even been compared to that of
8 the whirling dervishes of Islam, more than a
9 thousand years after their time.

10 The strongest evidence adduced from the Bible
11 for the existence of a state of ecstasy among
12 prophets is found in I Kings 18 in the account
13 of the activities of the prophets of Baal who
14 "called on the name of Baal from morning even
15 until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us...And they
16 leaped upon the altar...And they cried aloud,
17 and cut themselves after their manner with
18 knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out
19 upon them" (vv.26-28).

20 It should be noticed that this is not an
21 account of Heb. prophets at all. The quiet and
22 dignified attitude of Elijah, the true prophet
23 of God (cf.vv.30-37) is quite in contrast to the
24 orgiastic and ecstatic activities attributed to
25 these prophets of Baal. It is not at all

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1 impossible that among the Canaanites there were
2 groups of religious votaries who frequently
3 engaged in such ecstatic practices, although
4 evidence is not at present available to prove
5 that this was the case. It may be that the
6 Israelite writer called these heathen religion-
7 ists "prophets" simply because of a superficial
8 analogy to the religious leaders of his own land.

9 Actually there is very little evidence in the
10 historical books or in the prophetic books them-
11 selves that the Heb. prophets were subject to
12 any state of ecstasy or unnatural enthusiasm.
13 Assertions that Israelite prophets behaved in a
14 manner similar to the prophets of Baal have been
15 based on very few verses, since most references
16 to the prophets contain no suggestion whatever

17 of such an attitude. The principal passages on
18 which such assertions are based are Num 11:24-30,
19 I Sam 10:5-11, 19:20-24, and Ezek 8-11. It
20 should be noticed that only one of these relates
21 to the writer of any one of the prophetic books.

22 Examination of these passages in the order in
23 which they occur would begin with Num 11:24-30,
24 although this passage is not usually much
25 stressed by those who advance such a theory.

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1 The passage states that seventy elders prophe-
2 sied in a group by themselves and that two men
3 prophesied within the camp. Thereupon Moses'
4 servant was filled with jealousy for Moses' sake
5 and asked Moses to rebuke them, but Moses
6 answered, 'Would God that all the LORD's people
7 were prophets.'

8 It would hardly fit with the rest of what is
9 told in the Pentateuch about the character and
10 attitudes of Moses to think that he was refer-
11 ring with commendation to an activity that could
12 be described as orgiastic or ecstatic. From the
13 context it seems much more likely that the men
14 were praising God and extolling His goodness in
15 a way that would arouse the admiration of the
16 rest of the people.

17 Much more is generally made of certain
18 passages from I Samuel. A recent writer speaks
19 of "the numerous references in I Samuel to bands
20 of prophets who, dancing and singing to the
21 accompaniment of musical instruments, worked
22 themselves up into a frenzy, and then fell into
23 trances." Actually there are very few passages
24 in I Sam that could possibly be interpreted as
25 warrant for such a statement.

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1 The first of these passages is in I Sam 10.
2 Here Samuel says to Saul: "And it shall come to
3 pass, when thou art come thither to the city,
4 that thou shalt meet a company of prophets
5 coming down from the high place with a psaltery,
6 and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before
7 them; and they shall prophesy: And the Spirit
8 of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt
9 prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into
10 another man" (vv.5b-6). The fulfillment of this
11 prediction is described in vv.10-11: "And when
12 they came thither to the hill, behold, a company
13 of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came
14 upon him, and he prophesied among them. And it
15 came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime
16 saw that, behold, he prophesied among the pro-
17 phets, then the people said one to another, What
18 is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is
19 Saul also among the prophets?"

20 It is reading a great deal into the passage to
21 say that it describes a group of prophets as
22 singing wildly, dancing like dervishes, or fall-
23 ing into a trance. All that is said is that
24 they moved down the hill in a procession, proph-
25 esying, preceded by instruments of music. The

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1 only really unnatural circumstance described in
2 the passage is the fact that Saul joined with
3 them. This will be discussed below.

4 The work of the prophet is generally repre-
5 sented as an individual activity. At this time
6 Samuel is the only individual who is described
7 as performing the true prophetic function of
8 receiving messages from God and passing them on,
9 but it would be quite natural that other individ-
10 uals might join together to follow him and to
11 spread the message that he presented. At this
12 period of Philistine oppression it would be par-
13 ticularly natural that such activities, partly
14 religious and partly nationalistic, should
15 develop. In a loose way the term "company of
16 the prophets" might be applied to such groups.
17 It is reading into the passage something that is
18 not there to say that these men were giving evi-
19 dence of an abnormal psychological condition.
20 Even if they had been doing so it would prove
21 nothing as to the attitude of Samuel and the
22 many other individual prophets, both before and
23 after, of whom ^hnoting at all similar is ever
24 stated.

25 Another passage cited in this connection is

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1 I Sam 19:18-24. All that is said here about the
2 prophets is that Saul's messengers "saw the com-
3 pany of the prophets prophesying and Samuel
4 standing as appointed over them." Jewish tradi-
5 tion saw in this account a group of men studying
6 under the direction of Samuel as the great pro-
7 phetic teacher. Whether this was the situation,
8 or whether the prophets were merely praising God
9 in various ways, there is nothing in the state-
10 ment to suggest that they were engaged in highly
11 emotional or ecstatic activities. The ground
12 for reaching such conclusions is based upon what
13 was done by the three groups of messengers that
14 Saul sent, and more particularly on what was
15 done by Saul himself.

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16 Verse 20 says that when Saul's messengers
17 "saw the company of the prophets prophesying,
18 and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the
19 Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul,
20 and they also prophesied." This also happened
21 in the case of the second and third groups of
22 messengers. It should be noticed, however, that
23 there is here no clear evidence of anything psy-
24 chologically strange or ecstatic. These messen-
25 gers may well have been men who truly believed

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1 in the God of Israel and knew how Saul was
 2 departing from the principles of justice that
 3 God had commanded through the prophet Samuel,
 4 who had anointed Saul to be king. When they
 5 stood in the presence of Samuel and his associ-
 6 ates, and saw them praising God, they might well
 7 have felt strongly impelled to show their one-
 8 ness with the followers of the Lord. There is
 9 no statement that any of the messengers fell
 10 into a trance. What is said about them does not
 11 necessarily prove any ecstatic characteristics
 12 of the followers of Samuel.

13 The only really forceful argument that can be
 14 drawn from either of these passages to support
 15 the idea that ecstasy was characteristic of the
 16 prophets relates exclusively to what is said
 17 about Saul. The first passage (ch.10) relates
 18 that Samuel told Saul that when he would meet
 19 the company of the prophets the Spirit of the
 20 Lord would come upon him and he would join with
 21 them and prophesy, and says that he did so.

22 This was so contrary to people's general impres-
 23 sion of Saul that they said, "Is Saul among the
 24 prophets?" The second instance is somewhat dif-
 25 ferent. When Saul came to Samuel's home to see

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1 what had happened to his messengers he was evi-
2 dently so carried away with the enthusiasm of
3 the gathering that he removed his outer garments
4 and joined in the songs of praise, staying there
5 for many hours and finally falling asleep from
6 sheer exhaustion, forgetting altogether for the
7 time being his hatred against David who was thus
8 afforded an opportunity to escape.

9 While the description of Saul's actions does
10 give the impression of a highly unnatural mental
11 state it should be observed that it is not the
12 prophets but Saul who is involved in this des-
13 cription. This king, who was turning against
14 the God who had placed him upon the throne, had
15 always been highly emotional, and at this time
16 he was in a neurotic condition, moving rapidly
17 from one extreme of emotion to the other. Rapid
18 changes of emotion, or even highly ecstatic
19 states of mind, might well be typical of Saul,
20 but this is no proof that they characterized the
21 prophetic movement.

22 Two other passages from I Sam and two from II
23 Kings might be mentioned, although with far less
24 reason than in the case of the two passages from
25 I Sam already discussed. The first of these is

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1 in I Sam 18:8-11. Saul sometimes found relief
 2 for his highly strung nerves through listening
 3 to the playing of David on the harp. When the
 4 populace praised David's exploits as a warrior
 5 it filled Saul with jealousy and added to his
 6 nervousness. One day an evil spirit came upon
 7 Saul "and he prophesied in the midst of the
 8 house: and David played with his hand, as at
 9 other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's
 10 hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I
 11 will smite David even to the wall with it" (vv.
 12 10-11). There is nothing unique about Saul's
 13 irrational and changeable actions. The only
 14 problem in the passage is the use of the word
 15 "prophecy" in connection with Saul, which may
 16 have been used to mean that he poured out words
 17 in a way that might have sounded to others like
 18 the speaking of the followers of the prophets,
 19 or, more likely, that it was felt that the evil
 20 spirit was expressing its ideas through Saul's
 21 mouth. In either case it can hardly be taken as
 22 throwing much light on the characteristics of
 23 God's true prophets.

24 The other passage in I Sam is in ch. 28 where
 25 Saul, who had strictly forbidden the people to

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1 patronize those who claimed to have relations
 2 with evil spirits, sought a woman with a famil-
 3 iar spirit in order to learn the outcome of the
 4 imminent battle with the Philistines. The woman
 5 claimed to be able to bring back the spirits of
 6 the dead. Saul asked her to bring up Samuel.
 7 Verse 12 says, "And when the woman saw Samuel,
 8 she cried with a loud voice: and the woman
 9 spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived
 10 me? for thou art Saul." The context would seem
 11 to make it evident that the woman, accustomed to
 12 pretending to bring up the spirits of the dead,
 13 either through some fraud or because evil
 14 spirits impersonated them, was surprised and
 15 terrified when Samuel actually appeared. God
 16 had chosen, in this one instance, to cause Sam-
 17 uel's spirit to return in order to pronounce a
 18 final judgment against Saul. It is a strange
 19 episode, quite out of line with usual human
 20 experience, but hardly such as to support the
 21 description of the ecstasy of the prophets
 22 quoted above.

23 Those describing the alleged ecstatic charac-
 24 ter of the Hebrew prophets cite the fact that on
 25 one occasion Elisha called for a minstrel before

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1 he would declare the will of God. II Kings 3:15
 2 says: "And it came to pass, when the minstrel
 3 played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him."
 4 This has been quoted as evidence that a Hebrew
 5 prophet required the stimulus of music to pro-
 6 duce an ecstatic state and thus enable him to
 7 prophesy. Actually the incident is quite iso-
 8 lated and in addition, can be explained far more
 9 reasonably in a different way. The context
 10 makes it very clear that Elisha was so disgusted
 11 at being asked to give help to the wicked son of
 12 Ahab that it was difficult for him to compose
 13 his thoughts. He said, "As the LORD of hosts
 14 liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not
 15 that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the
 16 king of Judah, I would not look toward thee nor
 17 see thee" (v.14). Music was a help to Elisha in
 18 composing his spirit so that he could listen to
 19 the quiet voice of the Lord and overcome his
 20 antipathy at facing the wicked Jehoram.

21 Reference is sometimes made to a statement in
 22 II Kings where Elisha sent one of the sons of
 23 the prophets to pour oil on the head of Jehu and
 24 thus start his revolt against the successors of
 25 Ahab. The representative of Elisha asked to

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1 speak privately with Jehu and went with him into
2 an inner chamber. There he poured the oil over
3 Jehu's head declaring that God had anointed him
4 king over Israel, and then rushed out of the
5 house (II Kings 9:1-10). Jehu's associates said
6 to him, "Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?"
7 The use of the word meshuggah
8 in reference to the prophet has been taken by
9 some as showing that the prophets engaged in
10 orgiastic ecstasy. However, under the circum-
11 stances, this would be a very natural way for
12 the onlookers to speak of the messenger who
13 talked privately to Jehu and then rushed out of
14 the house, and does not necessarily throw any
15 light on the real nature of the prophets. It is
16 quite common for God's spokesmen to be considered
17 mad. Even the Apostle Paul was called "mad" on
18 occasion (Acts 26:24-25).

19 It is thus evident how very few are the
20 references to the prophets that could give the
21 slightest suggestion that they engaged in orgi-
22 astic activities or fell into trances. When one
23 of the most generally reliable of the critical
24 writers can make the unfounded statement quoted
25 above about the activities of the prophets in

1 I Sam, it is not at all strange that other
 2 critics should make extremely dogmatic asser-
 3 tions about the alleged ecstasy of the prophets,
 4 going far beyond any evidence that can be drawn
 5 from the Biblical data.

6 The only evidence of any importance that can
 7 be drawn from the prophetic books themselves to
 8 support the idea of an unnatural psychological
 9 state of the prophets is taken from the book of
 10 Ezekiel. This book describes a number of
 11 peculiar acts which have already been discussed
 12 above under "Symbolic Actions" in II B 5. In a
 13 situation very different from that of modern
 14 western nations Ezekiel used peculiar methods to
 15 attract attention. These, however, are hardly
 16 evidence that the prophet was in a distorted
 17 mental state. More particularly, claims about
 18 the alleged ecstatic character of Ezekiel's
 19 activities are based upon Ezek 8-11 where it is
 20 said that Ezekiel was transported across the
 21 desert to Jerusalem in a vision and saw strange
 22 events there which he recounted after being
 23 again brought back to Chaldea in a vision. That
 24 the prophet, while having this vision, was in a
 25 very unusual mental situation cannot be denied.

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That it was ecstatic, however, is highly questionable, and that it was characteristic of the prophets in general is very improbable.

Conclusion. This section has included a cursory examination of the various antisupernaturalistic explanations given to the activities of the prophets. These explanations often strikingly contradict one another. Since most of the writers holding these views feel free to accept as genuine or to cast out as spurious whatever portions of the Bible seem to fit their theories, their conclusions rest on no solid ground. Even where, as in the argument regarding the alleged ecstasy of the prophets, the conclusions are said to be based on the Biblical data, examination of the data proves such conclusions to be unwarranted. If one believes in a personal God there is no difficulty in accepting the Biblical claim that He spoke to the prophets and gave them messages to pass on. If one a priori rejects such a possibility there is no end to the variety of possible explanations which human ingenuity may devise, but for which no solid basis exists.

V. The Interpretation of Prophecy.

A. Basic Considerations.

1. An Unusual Type of Literature. One of the first considerations in examining any written material is to determine what sort of literature it is. It might be a narrative, a love letter, or a poem celebrating a victory or mourning a death. Many of the types of literature that are common today can be found in almost every period of history, but prophecy is a type of literature that is rarely found outside of the Bible. It claims to be the presentation of a divine message through the mouth of a divinely selected spokesman. The Christian believes that the writers of the Bible were divinely commissioned to write material that should infallibly present the Word of God, but does not believe that anyone else has ever been given a similar task. The parts of the Bible that consist almost entirely of divine messages for God's people are quite different in nature from literature outside of the Bible or in most other parts of the Bible. Many other sections of the Bible deal with situations that can be paralleled wherever human beings have lived. They describe rejoicing at birth and at weddings,

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and sorrow at death. They describe the enthronement of rulers and the shouts of victory after deliverance in battle. These parts of the Bible have many analogies in other literature. Such analogies can rarely be found for the prophetic books. Therefore interpretation of prophecy, to be dependable, requires very special preparation.

2. Prophecy Not Necessarily Prediction.

In line with the present common use of the word prophecy, there are those who consider all prophecy as simply prediction, and this brings confusion into the understanding of the prophets. In reaction against this approach other writers have attempted to reduce the element of prediction almost to nothing. Both errors should be carefully avoided. Prediction has so important a place in prophecy that its part will be specifically discussed under C below, yet it should be remembered that there is far more to prophecy than merely prediction, and that many important prophecies include little or no prediction.

3. Importance of the Historical Background.

In the last few decades much attention has been directed by students of ancient writ-

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ings to the importance of finding the "situation
in life" which led to the production of a cer-
tain piece of literature. This principle
applies in a modified way to the study of the
prophets. The prophecies were not given simply
in order to write a book that should be of help
for future ages. Everything that God caused to
be included in the Bible is of real importance
for His people throughout the ages, yet the pro-
phets spoke directly to men of their time. In
interpreting any part of the prophetic books
it is very important to consider whatever can be
learned of its historical background. The his-
torical books contain accounts of the activities
of various prophets and quote many of their mes-
sages. In the prophetic books the historical
background must frequently be ascertained by
careful examination of incidental statements, or
learned from other parts of the Bible. Thus
knowledge of the historical background described
in II Kings 16:5-9 is essential to the under-
standing of Isa 7 and Isa 28. These and various
other sections of the prophetic writings cannot
be properly interpreted without first determin-
ing their historical background. However, an

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important caution in this regard will be noted below under sec. 9.

4. Relation to the Specific Divine Purpose. It is most important in the understanding of the "situation in life" of the prophetic books to determine the divine purpose in the giving of each portion of the prophecy. This is so important that section B below will be devoted to an inductive examination of the purposes of the various types of prophetic messages.

5. Special Problems Regarding Prediction. There are certain principles in connection with the interpretation of prediction that need special treatment. Some of them will be examined under heading D below.

6. The Need of Starting at the Right Place. In examining the prophetic books one should observe a principle that is important in almost any field of study, but that is more neglected in Bible study than in most other areas. This is the principle that one should advance his learning by proceeding from the simple to the less simple and from the clear to the less clear. It is all too common to try to

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make an exhaustive study of a difficult passage in the prophetical books and then to take this as a basis on which to interpret other passages, and in some cases even to explain away the obvious intent of these other passages. Proper method requires that the passages that are fairly obvious or quite simple to interpret should first be carefully examined, and principles drawn from them in the light of which the more difficult passages can be understood. For this reason, and also because of the importance of understanding the historical background, much of which in the case of many of the prophetical books has to be inferred from careful study of their contents, it is advisable that any careful study of the prophetical books, and particularly of their predictive sections, should begin with an exhaustive study of the life, activities and messages of Elijah and Elisha. Here the historical situation is clearly set forth and easily understood. Here the purpose of each prophetic message is usually quite easily deduced from the nearer or larger context. Here in most cases the fulfillment of the prediction is described, and it is therefore easy to see exactly how the

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prediction should be interpreted in the light of its actual fulfillment. From careful study of the material between I Kings 17 and II Kings 13 a proper foundation can be laid for the understanding of much of the material in the prophetic books, and no extensive study of the prophetic books should be undertaken without having been preceded by this reasonable preparation.

7. Recognition of Figurative Language.

Like all literature, prophecy contains figures of speech. This does not mean that it is necessarily obscure. When one says that a man was "a lion in the fight," he does not mean that the man was transformed into a physical lion or that he chewed up the enemy with his teeth, but that he showed the qualities of bravery and tenacity that are considered typical of a lion. The language is definitely figurative but its meaning is perfectly clear--perhaps even clearer than a literal statement would be.

If prophecy is so interpreted as to pile figure upon figure and thus to take practically nothing as literal, it becomes meaningless. Such a method of interpretation is quite mis-

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leading. Figures of speech are like salt on a dish. A little is good, but if a whole bucketful is poured on the food is ruined.

In the Bible figures of speech are usually quite clear from the context. Thus when Isa 10: 28-32 describes the failure of an imaginary Assyrian attempt to conquer Jerusalem and then declares that the Assyrian empire itself will be destroyed, this prediction is given by the figure of speech of the cutting down of a forest (vv. 33-34), and a similar figure is used in the next verse (11:1) to portray the later rise from obscurity of the house of David: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." It is obvious that this verse predicts a time when the kingdom of the descendants of Jesse will seem to have been cut down almost to nothing, paralleling the destruction of the Assyrian empire described in the previous verses, but that out of what seemed to be almost destroyed a new branch will grow up and become powerful. This is followed by the prediction of the greatness of the coming Messiah. The meaning of the figurative language is perfectly clear. Vivid-

ness and beauty of expression are greatly increased, but no obscurity is introduced. There is no difficulty in deciding what is literal and what is figurative.

A similar figure is used in Ezek 31:3:

"Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches."

Most of the words in any meaningful passage must be literal. In interpreting prophecy it is a safe rule to consider the literal meaning first and see whether it gives a clear idea, or whether a figurative interpretation of one or more words might convey a better sense. In the latter case it is always well to look for uses of a similar figure elsewhere in the Scripture as a precautionary measure against misinterpretation. Yet one should not assume that a particular figure will always be used in the same way. Interpretation of figures sometimes requires careful study.

The term "spiritualization" is sometimes used to mean interpreting a passage in such a way that everything in it is taken figuratively. There is really nothing "spiritual" about such an approach. Usually its result is to cause a

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passage to mean anything at all that the interpreter may desire. There are even commentaries that assert that a certain book or portion of a book is to be taken entirely figuratively so that everything in it is a symbol of something else. The result of such an approach is to make it possible for any reader to draw from the passage anything that he might desire. Thus a portion of Scripture is made practically useless. Such an approach is dishonoring to the Word of God.

It is sometimes difficult to know exactly what a portion of the Bible means. It may be impossible, at a particular point in history, to be sure of interpreting a passage correctly. Yet if one moves forward carefully and cautiously, interpreting the obscure and the difficult in the light of what is plain and clear, definite results can be attained in most portions of the prophetic writings.

8. Realization of the Principle of Progressive Revelation. The Bible is not simply a book of rules, or of theological propositions. It sets forth the way in which God presented His truth to human beings who had

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tried to shut Him out of their minds. Little by little He revealed great and important truths as He led people into the understanding of what He desired them to know. The principle of progressive revelation needs to be recognized if Scripture is to be correctly interpreted.

Effective communication of precise ideas from one mind to another is difficult. Communication of the ideas of the infinite God to finite man is even more difficult. Sometimes an idea is lightly touched upon, then suggested more clearly, then expressed rather fully, then misunderstandings are corrected, and finally the idea is reiterated. Thus an idea can be traced through Scripture and one's understanding of it can be gradually increased and clarified.

Several times during His earthly ministry Jesus told His disciples that He would be crucified and raised from the dead, but His words sounded so strange that they made no impression. After His resurrection, when the disciples were surprised that these events had occurred, instead of rebuking them for not having remembered what He had said while He was with them, He criticized them for not having studied the

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prophetic writings more carefully, and therefore not being ready "to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25).

Before He was crucified Jesus said to His disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). Until they fully realized the fact of His death and resurrection many important ideas would have been meaningless to them. It was necessary that much be left to be revealed to them by the Holy Spirit after His ascension.

Later portions of revelation may be more complete than earlier ones, but not more true. God never reveals anything that is contrary to fact. He may avoid dealing with certain aspects of a problem. He may give a mere hint which could be interpreted in more than one way. Then He may add another hint, and then a fuller statement, then perhaps a rather complete discussion of a matter, and then, later on, a correction of false views regarding it. Early portions of revelation on a certain matter may be incomplete. They are never untrue.

In connection with this one must always keep in mind the fact that God's will may be differ-

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ent regarding different situations. Thus a whole series of forms and ceremonies looked forward to the crucifixion of Christ, and taught about His first coming in figurative or symbolic form. There were a considerable number of these, since they looked forward to something that could as yet be only vaguely understood. After the fact became visible it was no longer necessary to continue these ceremonies, but a much smaller number could be substituted that would look back to the first coming and forward to the second coming. Thus God's will for men in one situation may be different from what it was in another, but God's truth never changes.

9. Recognition of Divine Oversight of the Contents of the Bible. Any study of the prophetic books that is to unlock their true message must have this as a basic principle. God inspired the writers in such a way that what was written down for permanent retention as part of His enduring message to His people should be complete in itself. Proper interpretation of the prophetic messages requires comparison of Scripture with Scripture. Everything that can possibly be learned from the Bible itself about

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the historical background of the prophetic messages is important for their interpretation, but it is not necessary, in order properly to understand these messages, to have additional knowledge beyond what can be safely gathered from the statements in the Word of God itself. All the principles necessary for correct interpretation of prophecy can be found in the Bible. To ascertain them may require a great deal of careful study. External material can be helpful, but is not essential for understanding the divine message. Knowledge gained from study of other ancient writings or from archaeological material may throw light on certain events or on certain aspects of interpretation, but the correct understanding of the messages that God has placed here for His people through the ages can be correctly and completely gathered from the Bible as it stands. This recognition of the divine preparation is a necessary prerequisite to proper interpretation of the prophetical books.

B. The Purposes of Prophecy.

1. Rebuke. On examining the prophetic declarations contained in the historical books

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and the longer messages in the major and minor prophets, it soon becomes apparent that more than half of what is said comes under the heading of rebuke for sin and call to repentance. This activity evidently consumed far more of the prophet's time than any other feature of his work. There is a tendency among Bible students to pass rapidly over these sections, but in so doing a great part of the message of the prophets is missed. God caused these long messages of rebuke to be written down and preserved because He desired His people during all the later centuries to apply to their hearts and lives these stern warnings against sin.

2. Encouragement to the People of God.

Though occupying much less space than rebuke, this is a very important part of the prophetic activity, and these are the passages which receive most attention today.

In a great many cases such passages come immediately after the passages of rebuke. Very often, particularly in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah, there are passages of fairly great length composed almost entirely of rebuke, followed by a rather sharp transition to declar-

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ations of coming blessing and encouragement for the people of God. Among the many instances of such sharp transition the following might be noted: Isa 1:31 to 2:1-5; 4:1 to vv.2-6; 42:24-25 to 43:1ff; Micah 2:11 to vv. 12-13; 3:12 to 4:1. It is as if the prophet addressed the nation as a whole, declaring God's wrath upon its sin and failure, and then turned His attention to the small group of the godly. These were members of the nation and realized themselves to be implicated in its sin. Their hearts were burdened by the general attitude and they knew that they also were culpable, yet they longed to turn to God with their whole hearts and wished that the entire nation might be won back to God. Hearing the prophet's rebuke and knowing how well deserved it was, they tended to give way to despair. It is particularly to these people and to their counterpart in future ages that God addresses Himself in assuring them that, though the punishment for sin is bound to come, God has ultimate purposes of great blessing for His people. Most of the great Messianic passages are found in sections of this type.

3. Revelation of Facts about God and

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His Creation. While this might seem to be the most important aspect of the prophetic work, it rarely occurs entirely by itself. Usually the important facts that the prophet reveals about God's character and purposes are contained in passages presenting rebuke or giving encouragement. The work of the prophet is intensely practical. The words of all the different prophets taken together provide a great source of knowledge of these important facts, but their messages rarely consist entirely of information of this type.

4. Information as to the Action to be Taken on a Specific Occasion. This aspect of the prophets' work represents a comparatively small part of their total message, but it is the part that often seemed most important to their contemporaries. During the wilderness journey Moses was frequently given directions as to the immediate actions that the people should take (e.g., Exod 16:4-34; 17:1-7; Num 11:16-24; 15:32-36; 17:1-13; 21:8-9). While Joshua is not listed as a prophet, his work being that of leading God's people, God gave him specific revelations at many points in his career as to the

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particular action to be taken. A number of similar instances occur in Judges and in I Sam and II Sam. Rehoboam was told by the prophet to discontinue attempts to reconquer Israel (I Kings 12:22-24). Isaiah informed Ahaz that he need not worry about the coming attack from Samaria and Syria because God would soon remove both of these kings (Isa 7:5-8). Isaiah told Hezekiah that he could safely wait out the attack of Sennacherib, since God would prevent this invader from capturing Jerusalem. On the other hand, Jeremiah urged Zedekiah to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, since it was God's will to allow this Babylonian conqueror to overwhelm Judah (Jer 38:17-21).

In view of the fact that there were times when God caused a prophet to give information as to the proper policy to be performed in a certain situation, it was easy for uninformed people to gain the false impression that the prophet was primarily a soothsayer or diviner. It is always easy for superstitious ideas to develop. In the period of the Judges such ideas gained wide circulation. I Sam shows that many people had this false impression of Samuel, but there

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is no reason to think that Samuel himself had such an idea, or that it was his intention that people should thus misunderstand his true role.

5. Authenticating a Divinely Appointed Leader or Prophet. Occasionally the prophet made predictions for the direct purpose of authenticating his authority, as in I Sam 3: 19-21, 10:2-9, I Kings 13:3, II Kings 7:2 and Jer 28:15-17.

It was encouraging to the Israelites to know, many years in advance, that Cyrus would release them from the Babylonian captivity (Isa 44:28-45:1). Fulfillment of the prediction authenticated the fact that Isaiah had spoken from God and led to renewed confidence in other vital portions of his message.

Under this head might be placed certain of the predictions about the Lord Jesus Christ which did not bear directly upon the vital aspects of His mission, but which served to identify Him as the One actually predicted in the OT by the prophet (cf. Ps 22:18 and Isa 53:9).

6. Laying a Foundation for the Climax of All the Divine Activities in the Work of the

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Future Messiah. This was a very important part of the work of the OT prophets. Such declarations were generally given in relation to a background involving the immediate situation. Thus when Ahaz showed himself an unbelieving and unworthy head of the house of David, Isaiah declared that God would in His own time provide a new head for the house of David, who would indeed be "God with us" (Isa 7:14). While Isaiah clearly predicted God's future mercy in bringing the people back from Babylonian exile (Isa 40-52) he gradually developed the vital point that the exile was the result of sin, so that deliverance from one exile would be only a very temporary help, unless a full and satisfactory solution to the sin question were ^{to be} provided. Then he showed God's wonderful answer to the sin question, by presenting the marvelous description of the expiatory work of Christ in Isa 52:13-53:12.

Although these Messianic predictions are thus usually tied in with immediate situations, they form a constantly growing witness to the great climax that God would bring about through the sending of His Son to earth. The prophets

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were aware of this part of their work, but often realized that they themselves knew only a small part of the truth that God planned eventually to reveal. Peter declares that they often longed to know more about the whole situation than they yet understood (cf. I Pet 1:10-11). Since the Holy Spirit so inspired the writers of the Bible as to protect their words from error, the messages of the prophets contain more vital information than they themselves understood, and the comparison of one prophecy with another can often yield greater understanding than was known to the author of either passage.

C. The Place of Prediction in Prophecy.

Although the primary work of the prophet was not to satisfy curiosity about the future but to declare whatever message God gave him, it is not at all strange that these messages should contain a great deal about the future. Since God controls everything and knows all the future, it would be strange indeed if the messages He gave did not reveal many glimpses of what is ahead. How great a part prediction of the future plays in the forthtelling of divine messages becomes quickly apparent if one relates it to the

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purposes of prophecy.

As noted above, the purpose that relates to a larger portion of the words spoken or written by the prophets than any other does, is rebuke for sin and unfaithfulness. Such rebuke is often driven home by predictions about the punishment that God intends to send. Many of these predictions are conditional in nature and consist of declarations as to what will happen to the nation if it does not turn away from its sin. There were many occasions, however, when the prophet spoke to people whose disobedience to God had reached the point where punishment was inevitable. As a result the prophecies contain many direct and unconditional predictions about coming disasters. An interesting instance occurred where Samuel, after his death, appeared to Saul, who was seeking advice in the greatest crisis of his life, and gave the king an unconditional prediction of God's punishment (I Sam 28:18-19). Many similar predictions were given: e.g., I Sam 3:11-14; II Sam 12:10-12; I Kings 13:1-3; 21:19-24; II Kings 7:2b; Jer 29:32; 51:37; Ezek 30:22-23; Luke 19:43-44; II Thess 1:8-9; 2:8.

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Prediction also has a great part in the second purpose of prophecy, that of encouragement to the true people of God. Men who saw their nation tottering to ruin, and knew that its sin was such that escape from disaster was impossible, might easily tend to give way to despair, and the best way to comfort them was to give specific information about continuing blessing that God would provide after the punishment had run its course. Thus in the dark days when the golden calves had been erected in the northern kingdom, an unnamed prophet encouraged God's people by predicting a specific event that would occur some three centuries later (I Kings 13:1-3). (As noted above, this same prediction served as a rebuke to the ungodly.) Many of the most beloved sections of the prophetic writings belong to this second category.

In connection with the third purpose of prophecy, that of revealing important facts about God's nature, predictions would inevitably occur. There was no simpler way of showing God's control over all the nations than to predict His future actions. When Elijah at Mt. Horeb, during the terrible reaction that fol-

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lowed his contest with the prophets of Baal, seemed about to give way to utter despair, God used this method of reassuring him of the divine control over all the nations. The predictions were given in the form of commands to Elijah to do what no mere prophet without political power or physical force at his disposal could possibly bring about (I Kings 18:15-16). Although they were not fulfilled during Elijah's lifetime, the assurance that these great changes of dynasty would occur in two important nations served to strengthen the prophet's realization of God's supreme power and control.

In connection with the fourth purpose of prophecy, that of informing God's people of the next step to take in a particular situation, prediction naturally plays a great part. Any such divine command is apt to contain either implicitly or explicitly a reference to some future event.

The important part that prediction occupies in relation to the other two purposes of prophecy is quite obvious.

Thus prediction, while not the major portion of prophecy, plays a very important part in it,

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and it is not at all strange that today the word prophecy in popular usage has come largely to be restricted to the idea of prediction.

D. Special Problems in the Interpretation of Predictions. In addition to the important principles of prophetic interpretation that have already been discussed, certain matters particularly related to prediction require consideration.

1. Conditional Predictions. Sometimes two parallel predictions are given with opposite conditions attached to them. One of the earliest instances of this is found in Lev 26. Verse 3 gives the first condition: "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them." Verses 14-15 give the opposite condition: "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; . . .". Verses 4-12 describe the wonderful ways in which the Lord will bless the people if they fulfill the conditions expressed in v. 3. Verses 16-39 describe the terrible punishments that God will give to those who meet the opposite conditions expressed in vv. 14-15. In the book of Jeremiah such parallel predictions are particularly

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common.

Individual conditional predictions also occur. Thus when Ahijah promised Jeroboam that he would become king of Israel (I Kings 11) he predicted that God would build him a sure house, as He had done for David. However, this part of the promise was connected with a condition: "If thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did" (v.38a). Since Jeroboam did not fulfill the conditions this prediction was not fulfilled; instead Jeroboam's house was totally destroyed (I Kings 15: 29-30). There are many other instances in the Scripture where a prediction is clearly indicated as conditional. When no condition is clearly expressed a prediction should normally be considered as unconditional.

Sometimes one feature of a prediction may involve a condition though the prediction as a whole is unconditional. Thus when the forms of legality had been so carried out as to make the murder of Naboth seem like a proper execution, Elijah met Ahab and solemnly pronounced his

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doom: "Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (I Kings 21:19). When Ahab humbled himself (v.27) the Lord said to Elijah: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" (v.29). The complete destruction of the dynasty of Ahab was brought about during the reign of his second son, whose dead body was cast onto the plot of ground that had been stolen from Naboth (II Kings 9:26). Thus the terrible prediction of doom to Ahab and his house was unconditionally fulfilled, but the time element was changed in view of Ahab's brief period of repentance.

Probably a similar situation exists in the book of **Jonah** where the prophet walked through Nineveh declaring, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4). The people of Nineveh repented in sackcloth and ashes. Forty days passed and the city was not destroyed. The time element would seem to have been conditional but the prediction of destruction was uncondi-

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tional. Eventually Nineveh suffered one of the greatest destructions recorded in history. The disaster was so complete that one of the greatest cities of the ancient world became a mere heap of ruins. Within a few centuries after Nineveh's destruction no one even knew where the city had been. It is hardly likely that God would have caused Jonah to make such a forthright prediction of Nineveh's overthrow if the destruction had not been a definite part of the divine plan. The aspect of time was conditional; in view of the immediate repentance the destruction did not occur until a later period.

2. Occasional Ambiguity of the Person Addressed. There are cases where it is obvious that the prophet shifted his vision, speaking for a time to one person, and then turning to another, or speaking to the nation as a whole and then turning his attention to the godly portion of the nation.

3. General Principle or Specific Prediction. Sometimes a prophetic message declares what will happen when certain circumstances occur. In such cases a general principle is presented which may be fulfilled over and over.

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This is true of the passages in Lev 26 discussed above. Another instance is found in Isa 6:10 where the hardened condition of a large portion of the nation is described. These words are quoted by Christ in Matt 13:14 and Mark 7:6 and by Paul in Acts 28:25-27 as showing the condition of a part of Israel at this later period.

4. Single or Multiple Fulfillment.

Usually it is not difficult to determine whether a prediction describes a specific event or whether it is referring to a series of events. Thus the statement that foreign armies will overrun a land may refer to a number of occasions on which this will happen. But if the statement is made in the singular, e.g., that a foreign army will overrun the land, it should almost always be understood as pointing to an individual event. When that event has occurred the prediction has been fulfilled.

There are a very few cases where the context shows clearly that a prediction in which a singular term is used actually looks forward to a series of events. The outstanding instance is Deut 18:9-22, where the vital question of divine guidance after Moses' death is discussed. In

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vv. 9-14 the people are warned not to inquire from diviners or necromancers, which are an abomination to the Lord. The rest of the passage tells how the people are to receive their guidance in the days ahead, before the entire Scripture has been given as a guide book for their lives. Verse 15 declares: "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." Verse 18 reiterates the promise: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." Thus vv. 15-19 tell where they are to receive their guidance during the long period ahead and stress the fact that God will provide a means of revelation similar to that which had been available through Moses. Verses 20-22 show the danger of listening to false prophets and point out means of identifying those who falsely claim to be instruments of revelation.

Thus the context makes it clear that vv.15-18 predict a series of prophets who will convey God's messages to His people, even though the

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singular form of the word "prophet" is used. This series of prophets is to point forward to the One who will be the greatest of all the prophets. The passage was so understood by the Jews. When a committee was sent to ask John the Baptist who he was (John 1:14-25), one of the questions asked was whether he was "that prophet"--a clear reference to the passage in Deut 18. In Acts 3:22 and 7:37 the passage was quoted to show the Jewish hearers that Jesus was the prophet whom Moses had predicted, the One who would be the climax of the great series of prophets.

Unless plural terms are used (or there is a clear indication in the context that a series of events is involved) each prediction should be understood as pointing to one specific event. Recognition of this principle is helpful in understanding the prophecies in Isa 7. The background of this chapter is made clear in II Kings 16:5-8. Ahaz is attacked by the king of Israel (also called Ephraim), which is far larger and stronger than Judah. Allied with Ephraim is Syria, a kingdom considerably stronger than Israel. In the face of this

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difficulty Ahaz does not look to God for help but sends tribute to the ungodly Assyrian emperor and asks for his protection. Ahaz is confident that his clever but ungodly scheme will save him from the two neighboring powers, but God sends Isaiah to meet him in a public place and there assure him that God will protect the kingdom if he will place his trust in Him. The Assyrian alliance can give deliverance from the immediate threat but in the end will bring far greater dangers than those already in view. Isaiah declares that Syria and Israel will not be able to conquer Judah but will themselves perish, and says, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (vv. 4-9). Verses 10-11 contain the divine answer to the cynical look on Ahaz' face. He is offered proof that he can trust God. In v. 12 Ahaz gives a reply that sounds very pious but is actually an evasion. His words arouse the divine anger, not so much because of what he says as because of the evident tone in which he speaks. In his rejoinder (vv. 13-14) Isaiah expresses a strong rebuke, not simply to Ahaz, but to the entire house of David, of which Ahaz was a very unsatis-

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factory representative. He speaks to the whole house of David, giving assurance that it will not always have such unworthy representatives as Ahaz, but that God Himself will provide, as the true head of the house of David, One born of a virgin, whose name can properly be called Immanuel (Heb. for "God with us").

In vv. 15ff. the prophet turns his attention away from the house of David as a whole and back to Ahaz. No statement had been made as to when Immanuel will come. On the assumption that He might be born immediately, the time that would be involved in His growth is used as a measuring stick to show how soon God will cause Ahaz' faithless scheme to produce results quite different from what he had expected. Supposing that the child were to be born right at that time, before he would reach the age when he would be able to make simple choices the two kings who were menacing Judah would have disappeared (v.16), and the great depopulation caused by the Assyrian invasion would have resulted in a situation where crops that require human labor would be greatly diminished. Much of the land would revert to thorns and thistles for lack of

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men to cultivate it (vv. 23-25), but pasture land would be so abundant that everyone left could have an abundant supply of such products as butter and honey (clearly stated in vv.21-22, but already suggested in v.15).

Thus v.14 points to a single event which would occur 700 years later while vv. 15ff. describe the situation that would develop in the immediate future. Each part of the prediction has a single fulfillment, and any attempt to consider them as having a "double fulfillment" simply leads to obfuscation and obscurity.

5. The Perspective of Prophecy. In most cases predictions relate clearly to one or more of the purposes of prophecy (cf. B above). Mere satisfaction of curiosity about the future is not one of these purposes. God gives His people encouragement and teaches them the great truths of His plan of redemption, but does not choose to reveal all the details of the sequence of events in the working out of His plan. The arrangement of the predictions is to a great extent purposeful rather than chronological. This was illustrated in Isa 7 (discussed above) where a distant prediction, given for encourage-

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ment to the house of David and to the people of God and, at the same time, for rebuke to Ahaz, is followed by an immediate prediction mainly involving rebuke to Ahaz.

Usually predictions are given with a definite relation to an immediate situation. In a certain passage the prophet may rebuke the nation for its errors and then go on to encourage the people of God by showing something of the wonderful blessings that God will bring in the future for those who are true to Him. Next a different element of the wickedness or mistakes of the prophet's contemporaries may be described and its punishment foretold, and this may be followed by a description of a corresponding portion of God's future blessing.

An illustration that is quite apropos will be easily understood by anyone who has lived in a region where a series of high mountain ranges is visible, one behind the other. At some points a mountain in the first range is most prominent. Next to it one may see a peak from the third range back, and next to that one from the second range. Then a peak in the front range may again be most prominent while a high peak in the

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fourth range back may appear so great as to seem almost to touch it. Thus it is not always possible fully to discern the order of events, since the presentation is often arranged according to subjects instead of according to chronology.

There is no way to know exactly how much the prophets themselves understood of the details of God's plan for the future or of the chronological arrangement of these details. One can be sure that they were curious to know more than was actually revealed to them because Peter says that they were "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (I Pet 1:11).

VI. Prophets and Prophecy in the NT

A. The New Period of Prophecy. As indicated above (cf. II E) the OT prophetic movement came to an end about 400 years before the time of Christ. Josephus states that many Jewish books were written after the end of the OT, but that none of them were considered as infallible because "the exact succession of the prophets had ceased" (Contra Apionem I, 8). Prophets were

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sent to God's people not only to give them that guidance which was needed before the entire Bible was available as the infallible source of knowledge of God's will, but also to present the revelations that would ultimately be included in the Word of God. Since it was God's will to give another Testament, presenting new revelations of His will and character, and depicting the most important events in history, those pertaining to the accomplishment of the redemption predicted in the OT, it would be natural to expect a new period of prophecy. This new period would differ from the first in that it would extend over a much shorter period of time, and would not generally relate to an entire nation, but specifically to the development of a church. The function of acting as a prophet would seem to be overshadowed to a considerable extent by that of the officers appointed for the development and direction of the church of Christ and would therefore be much less conspicuous than the former prophetic movement.

B. Importance of Prophets and Prophecy in the NT. The casual Bible reader is not apt to realize that the NT contains as many references

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to prophets and prophecy in proportion to its length as the OT does. This is natural because it is not only itself a new period of revelation, but has many references to the former period of revelation. The most important character in the NT, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the greatest prophet of all (cf. Deut 18:15-19). His offices as priest and king may assume greater proportions in the mind of the average reader, but His prophetic activity should not be overlooked. The term 'prophet' is applied to Him about a dozen times.

In His capacity as prophet Jesus Christ gave His teachings which exposed the sin of mankind, showed the way of salvation through trust in the Saviour, encouraged God's people, revealed the nature of God to an extent never before approached, and made clear God's pattern for the lives of those who are saved. Actually more space in the Gospels is taken up by the account of His prophetic activities, that is, His revealing of God's truth, than by His other actions. "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt 7:29).

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ,

was a prophet in the true OT sense. A great part of his activity consisted in rebuking men for sin, declaring the punishment that would come, warning them of the wrath to come, and urging them to repent. He spoke unhesitatingly of sin in high places, in ways reminiscent of the activities of Elijah and Isaiah, and lost his life as a direct consequence (Mark 6:18-27).

Many of those who exercised the prophetic function in NT times were more conspicuous in other activities, such as the task of the apostles in overseeing the establishment of the church. Yet, in addition to the dozen or so times when the term is applied to Christ, and the five times it is used of John the Baptist, the NT occasionally designates other individuals as prophets or prophetesses, or says that they prophesy. These include Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:67), Agabus (Acts 11:28 and 21:10), Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen (Acts 13:1), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and the daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9).

Caiaphas, the high priest, is described in John 11:51 as uttering prophecy. This brings

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out the clear distinction between the character of a man and his position as a mouthpiece for God's revelation, for in this case the Lord caused one of the wicked opponents of Christ to utter words that would convey a vital truth that was quite different from anything Caiaphas intended to express.

Eph 2:20, 3:5 and 4:11 speak of apostles and prophets as God's gift to His church in its early days. I Cor 11-14 refers many times to men and women as prophesying in the church gatherings, thus describing individuals in the church who either claimed to be acting as mouthpieces of God or who were simply giving forth the true message of God which they had received through a portion of His Word.

A false prophet named Bar-jesus is mentioned in Acts 13:6. Rev 2:20 speaks of "that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess." The Apostle John urged that believers "try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).

C. NT References to OT Prophets. Since the NT recognizes the OT as the foundation for under-

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standing the great events connected with the life of Christ, it is natural that there should be many references to the OT prophets. Jesus rebuked the disciples for not believing "all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). He designated the OT as "the law and the prophets" (Matt 5:17; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45) or as "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29,31; 24:27). In the NT many OT individuals are specifically called prophets, or described as prophesying. These include Balaam (II Pet 2:15-16), David (Acts 2:29-30), Daniel (Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14), Elisha (Luke 4:27), Enoch (Jude 14), Isaiah (8 passages), Jeremiah (Matt 2:17; 27:9), Joel (Acts 2:16), Jonah (Matt 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29), and Samuel (Acts 13:20).

D. Prediction in the NT. In the NT as in the OT, prediction plays a considerable part in the prophetic work. It accomplishes the same purposes as those described above (cf. V B). Sometimes it authenticated a speaker as being indeed God's representative. Sometimes it enabled God's people to know what to do under particular circumstances. Jesus Christ gave many important predictions about the consumma-

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tion of the age and promised that after His departure the Holy Spirit would reveal to His followers further information about God's plan for the future: "and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13). One book of the NT, the Revelation of John, is mainly devoted to predicting the great events that will occur at the consummation of the age.

E. The Cessation of NT Prophecy. The new period of prophecy, like the earlier one (cf. II E), came to an end when this portion of God's Word was completed. Paul predicted that this would occur: "whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (I Cor 13:8-10). The end of the period when new divine revelations would be given was not immediately apparent. As in the case of the OT, they simply ceased. The entire Bible was now available. Thereafter men in the church were called prophets only in the extended sense of presenting to God's people truths received,



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PROPHETS AND PROPHECY
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B. How the Prophet Gave His Message.

1. Brief Oral Statements and Rejoinders.

On various occasions a prophet was directed by God to confront a king or other leader and present to him a brief message of rebuke or encouragement, or a specific order to be carried out. Thus Deborah gave a divine command to Barak (Judg 4:6-7). An unnamed man of God rebuked Eli (I Sam 2:27-36). Shemaiah the man of God told Rehoboam to stop fighting against Israel (II Chron 11:3-4). Jehu the son of Hanani pronounced doom on Baasha (I Kings 16:7). Azariah the son of Oded encouraged Asa (II Chron 15:1-2). Jehu the son of Hanani rebuked Jehoshaphat (II Chron 19:2-3). Elijah suddenly appeared before Ahab, predicted a disastrous drought and disappeared (I Kings 17:1). After Naboth had been a victim of judicial murder Elijah met Ahab and gave him a terrible rebuke (I Kings 21:17-24). Other similar incidents might be cited.

In addition to the brief oral statements, the prophets sometimes answered questions or made rejoinders, giving further Divine messages. Thus when, at a time of great national danger, an unnamed prophet promised Ahab victory over

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