

WERE ISRAEL'S PROPHETS UNIQUE AND NOT TO BE PARALLELED IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

There are phenomena in many lands which bear a strong superficial similarity to biblical prophecy. A careful analysis, however, will reveal their essential dissimilarity, and compel us to qualify these statements. Indeed, most of the phenomena usually cited fail to corroborate them. The belief in possession by spirits or demons, soul journeys, telepathic communication, forewarnings of death and disaster, crystal-gazing in which all lands and events are disclosed in the translucent stone; talking skull-bones; predictions by means of a dish concerning the coming harvest and the cattle-breeding, are not parallels to biblical prophecy. (Heschel, p. 448)

A careful analysis of the various phenomena will prevent us from hastily identifying the great prophets of Israel and the corresponding figures in other religions of antiquity. (Heschel, p. 449-450)

Footnote 17 We must not compare the prophets of the Bible with the men of subsequent ages who have claimed to be inspired. The latter were obviously influenced by biblical examples, and, significantly, the spiritually powerful in their message was inspired by the Bible, and what was original with them was hardly of great power. (Heschel, p. 450)

For a time the claim was made that a number of Egyptian texts show such a close kinship to biblical prophecy that they must be regarded as a source and model for biblical prophecy.⁶⁵ Today the prophetic character of these texts is generally denied.⁶⁶

Footnote 65. E. Meyer, Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstaemme (Halle, 1906), pp. 451 ff.; J. H. Breasted, The Dawn of Conscience (New York, 1933), pp. 193-200.

Footnote 66 H. Bonnet, Realexikon der Aegyptischen Religionsgeschichte (Berlin, 1952), pp. 608 f. Cf., however, G. Lanczkowski, "Aegyptischer Prophetismus in Lichte des alttestamentlichen," ZAW, LXX (1958, NF, 29), pp. 31 ff. (Heschel, p. 465)

Heschel mentions the French excavations at Tel-el-harire, the seat of the ancient kingdom of Mari and three texts which seem to contain parallels to biblical prophecy.... The striking feature in these documents is the use of the expression "the god has sent me," "Dagan has sent me," reminiscent of Moses's statement to Pharaoh: "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you" (Exod. 7.16) and of Jeremiah saying; "The Lord sent me" (Jer. 26.12) (Heschel, p. 470)

The Mari "prophet" is the extension of an institution rather than the spokesman of a transcendent Deity. His inspiration is devoid of the sublime. There is no intrusion of the transcendent in his experience. . . .

The prophet of Mari speaks for the god and for the benefit of the god; the prophets of Israel speak for God, but for the benefit of the people. Both claim to be sent, to be messengers, but there is a radical difference between the consciousness of being sent by the god Dagan and the consciousness of being sent by the Holy One of Israel.⁸³ The man of Mari is sent because of the god's impotence and dependence upon man for food, information, and prestige. The prophet of Israel is sent because of man's sins and total dependence upon God Who demands righteousness. (Heschel, pp. 471-2)

Footnote 83 I do not agree with the view of M. Noth, op. cit., p. 200, that the difference "lies not in the manner of occurrence, but in the content of that which is announced as the divine message . . . The message deals with cult and political matters of very limited and ephemeral importance."