
A Christian apologetic response to the claim of ‘prophet’ by Muhammad and Joseph Smith, jr. – A truly Biblical prophet

S. Paul Derengowski (Corresponding author)

Research Fellow

Faculty of Theology

North-West University

Potchefstroom Campus

paul.derengowski@yahoo.com

Henk Stoker

Faculty of Theology

North-West University

Potchefstroom Campus

Opsomming

Moslems en Mormone beskou hulle stigters, Mohammed en Joseph Smith jr., as profete van God ooreenkomstig dit wat in die Bybel oor Bybelse profete gestel word. Ten einde 'n basis te kan hê om hierdie aansprake apologeties te oorweeg, fokus hierdie artikel op die Bybelse definisie van 'n profeet, sowel as eienskappe wat 'n ware profeet onderskei van 'n valse. Dit ondersoek wat dit beteken om 'n Bybelse profeet te wees, veral aan die hand van drie persone in die Bybel waarna Moslems en Mormone dikwels verwys en met wie Mohammed en Joseph Smith jr. vergelyk word, naamlik Moses, Johannes die Doper en Jesus. Dit gee die basis vir toekomstige navorsing om die aansprake van Mohammed

en Joseph Smith jr., asook wat hulle bereik het te weeg, om sodoende vas te stel of een of beide van hulle aan die kriteria van 'n Bybelse profeet voldoen.

Abstract

Muslims and Mormons around the world claim that their founders, Muhammad and Joseph Smith, jr. were prophets of God after the order of the biblical prophets and in accordance with the Bible. To deal apologetically with these claims to prophethood this article deals with the biblical definition of a prophet, as well as characteristics of a true prophet in distinction from a false prophet. It defines what it means to be a biblical prophet, with special attention paid to those whom the Muslims and Mormons believe that Muhammad and Joseph Smith, jr. were patterned, Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus. This gives the basis for future research to deal with the claims and accomplishments of Muhammad and Joseph Smith, jr. individually, to determine whether or not they fit the criteria of a biblical prophet established in this article.

Islam and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), as religions, revolve around the spiritual journeys of their founders, Muhammad ibn Abdallah ibn Abd al-Muttalib (hereafter Muhammad) and Joseph Smith, jr. (hereafter Joseph Smith). Those spiritual journeys are considered by their adherents as extraordinary to the degree of completely changing the course of human history.

Muhammad, because of his spirit visitation, is considered by his followers to be the last prophet that God (Allah) sent to warn humankind of its idolatrous ways. By submitting exclusively to Allah and Muhammad as his messenger, humans may then work their way into good favour with Allah, with the aim of potentially earning a place in Paradise (Koran 19:72; 25:15; 61:11-12).¹

1 In a statement similar to that found in Zoroastrianism (see Boyce, 2001:14, 27; Zaehner, 1961:302-ff.). Muhammad Abul Quasem (2011:25) wrote, "All people then will proceed to the Bridge suspended over Hell to be crossed by everyone. It will have hooks and thorns which will catch people at right and left. Those who are declared 'damned' will fall down the gulf of Hell. Others will pass over the Bridge in varying speeds: some like lightning, some like wind, some like a running horse, some will run, some will walk, and some will crawl with much difficulty; *these variations will depend on variations in strength of faith and in the*

Joseph Smith is believed by the Latter-day Saints (LDS), who are also known as Mormons, to be God's special prophet, seer, and revelator. After the inception of the Christian Church and 1800 years of ecclesiastical apostasy, Smith is believed by his faithful followers to be the chosen vessel to restore what had been lost, namely the full gospel of Jesus Christ, along with many of the laws and ordinances that supposedly comprised his message.² That by subscribing fully to Smith's restorative ideas and doctrines, members of the LDS Church may now progress unto godhood in the Celestial abode of heaven, which is the highest aspiration attainable in Mormon thought.³

1. Muhammad's and Smith's claims to Biblical prophethood

To deal apologetically with Muhammad and Joseph Smith's claims to prophethood – a doctrine they proclaim to be in accordance to the Bible – it is first of all necessary to deal with the biblical definition of a prophet, as well as characteristics of a true prophet, in distinction from a false prophet. The articles that follow will focus on the prophetic parallels that seemingly exist between Muhammad and Joseph Smith and will evaluate the claims from Muhammad and Joseph Smith in light of what the Bible has to say about prophethood. The purpose of this article is to determine whether these two very influential men were prophets in the biblical sense of the word, as they and their followers contest. Questions that had to be asked are whether their messages were consistent with the messages of the biblical prophets, as well as whether their lifestyles were exemplary of the persons of Moses and Jesus in whose steps both Muslims and Mormons make special claim that their founders followed. This article wishes to address these questions in a Christian apologetic way, with the ultimate intent of either affirming or disaffirming the Muslim and Mormon claims.⁴

number and types of good works performed [emphasis added]. Having crossed the Bridge all these people will enter into Paradise." Later, Quasem (2011:26) would add, "Opposite to Hell in all respects is Paradise which has eight gates commensurate with the principal acts of obedience to God. There are innumerable grades of happiness in Paradise, depending upon innumerable differences in people's devotions and character-traits."

2 Book of Mormon, 4 Nephi 24-ff.; Hinckley, 1979:31-32; *Gospel Principles*, 2009:91-92, 96-99.

3 *DBY* 1978:87-95; Ludlow, 1992:2.465-66.

4 This article is based on the presuppositional approach to apologetics, meaning that the defense of the Christian faith rests on accepting the reality of God's existence and that he has revealed himself in inspired Christian Scripture. Ultimately, God's revelation has been

Before addressing whether or not Muhammad and Joseph Smith were prophets of the biblical variety, it is important to understand what a biblical prophet was. What did he do and what did he believe that substantiated the fact that he was indeed called of God to speak for God?

While in both Islam and Mormonism there is only passing respect for the Bible, as both religions advocate that the Bible has been corrupted or is defective due to alleged nefarious transmission of the text by unscrupulous scribes and sages,⁵ it is still necessary to appeal to the Bible to garner an understanding of what it means to be a prophet. Muhammad and Joseph Smith, as well as their followers, thought of them as being in the line of the biblical prophets, meaning that they at least accepted those passages of scripture dealing with the office of prophet and gift of prophecy, in general, as authoritative.⁶

2. Old Testament Prophets

Three different Hebrew words are used in the Old Testament to designate a man called of God to speak for God: *nābī'*, *rō'eh*, and *hōzeh*.⁷ Added to those are the expressions the "man of God", "messenger of the Lord," and

manifest in the person of God's Son, Jesus Christ, who is, as the writer of Hebrews argues, "the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). Claims about God and reality that do not comport with his divine revelation and in His Son either are distortions of reality or are falsehoods altogether. Accordingly, Christian apologetics should test the prophetic claims of those making them to be sure they are from God and not simply one of many false prophets that have gone out into the world with the express intent to deceive (Matt. 7:15-ff.; 1 Jn. 4:1-ff.; 2 Pet. 2:1-ff.).

5 Koran 2:59, 75, 79; 4:46; Ali, 2012:149-151; Ajjola, 1984:78-79; Haneef 1996:21. From the Mormons see 1 Nephi 13:26-29, 32, 34, 40; Smith, 1976:10, 310, 327; Matthews, 1990:26.

6 See Ajjola, 1984:119; Rahman, 1989:82-82); Koran, 2:136; 3:84.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Ludlow, 1992:3.1164), "A belief in prophets and their messages lies at the heart of LDS doctrine (A of F 4, 5, 6, 7, 9). Latter-day Saints recognize the biblical and Book of Mormon prophets, as well as latter-day prophets, as servants of Jesus Christ and accept as scripture the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants. They believe that Joseph SMITH and all subsequent PRESIDENTS OF THE CHURCH were and are prophets and representatives of Jesus Christ." See also McConkie, 1985:425.

7 See Isa. 6:8-9; Jer. 1:4-10; Amos 7:14-15, Jon. 1:1-2 for examples of God's call upon those individuals as prophets of God and how they reacted to the call.

“watchman”.⁸ For the sake of space, only *nābīʾ* will be discussed here, since it, by far, is the most common term translated “prophet” in the Old Testament.⁹

Although there is some discrepancy and disagreement over the exact interpretation of *nābīʾ* from an etymological point of view, an Old Testament prophet (*nābīʾ*) was usually a man called of God who spoke for God in respect to either God’s will or Israel’s future.¹⁰ According to Albright (1994:209), “He was, then, a charismatic religious figure without hereditary right or political appointment, but authorized by his vocation to speak or act for Yahweh.” There were some women who were called as prophetesses (*nebi’ah*), but comparatively speaking, they were fewer in number, although not in significance, as to their words and deeds, than their male counterparts.¹¹ God working and speaking through specially chosen individuals became the inspired mode of interaction between the divine and the mundane. As Vos (2012:193) put it, “It marks the religion of the Old Testament as a religion of conscious intercourse between Jehovah and Israel, a religion of revelation, of authority, a religion in which God dominates, and in which man is put into the listening, submissive attitude”. Two individuals, of several, in the Old Testament, serve as prime examples, here, of what it meant to be called as a prophet of God. Those individuals were Moses and Jeremiah.

Moses, in a recorded conversation that took place between him and God, was told by God, “See I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of this land” (Ex. 7:1-2). Moses was to act as God’s representative,

8 See Berkhof, 1941:358. “Man of God”, which emphasized the prophet’s close relationship with God (Routledge, 2008:211), was applied to Moses (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; 1 Chr. 23:14; 2 Chr. 30:16; Ezra 3:2; Psa. 90), the angel of the Lord (Judg. 13:6, 8), a visitor to Eli (1 Sam. 2:27-ff.), Samuel (1 Sam. 9:6-10), Shemaiah (1 Kg. 12:22; 2 Chr. 11:2), a visitor to Jeroboam (1 Kg. 13:1, 4-8, 11-12, 14, 21, 26, 29, 31; 2 Kg. 23:16-17), Elijah (1 Kg. 17:18, 24; 2 Kg. 1:9-13), a visitor to Ahab (1 Kg. 20:28), Elisha (2 Kg. 4:7, 16, 21-22, 25, 27, 40, 42; 5:8, 14-15, 20; 6:6, 9-10, 15; 7:2, 17-19; 8:2, 4, 7-8, 11; 13:19; 2 Chr. 25:7, 9), David (2 Chr. 8:14; Neh. 12:24, 36), Igdaliah (Jer. 35:4).

9 *nābīʾ* (“prophet(s)”=317x); *hōzeh* (“seer”=16x; “prophets”=1x); *rō’eh* (“seer(s)”=13x; “seer’s”=1x) as per *Accordance Bible Software* analysis.

10 Harrison, 1969:742.

11 Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kg. 22:14; 2 Chr. 34:22), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), Anna (Lk. 2:36). There is also one unnamed prophetess in Isa. 8:3 and a “man who had four virgins who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9), and the false prophetess Jezebel (Rev. 2:20).

speaking to his brother the words that God wanted to convey to Pharaoh. This declaration came on the heels of Moses' tenuous pleading that he was not capable of serving in the capacity that the Lord God had called him (Ex. 4:10-ff.). Rather than allow Moses to wither away in self-pity, though, God appoints Moses' brother, Aaron, to the role of speaking God's words that God would inspire Moses to share with Aaron, and that while Moses retained the sobriquet of "prophet" (Deut. 34:10). The God who creates human beings, and enables them to speak, is the same God who sustains their call.¹² Moses, in other words, retained his intimacy and calling *with* God as God, while speaking authoritatively *for* God through Aaron, despite Moses' fear that he would fail (see Num. 12:5-8).

In the Jeremiah example, another conversation took place between Yahweh and the prophet Jeremiah, whereby God informs his prophet of the predestined nature of his calling – he was set apart or "consecrated" (Heb. *hiqdashiti*) and given or "appointed" (Heb. *netatti*).¹³ A similar resistance was encountered by God from Jeremiah, as seen above with Moses.¹⁴ "Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth," argued Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6). God's response, though, is similar through assurance that wherever Jeremiah was sent to represent God, God would be there to both deliver Jeremiah from his enemies and to "put My words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:8-9). God, in other words, preceded the prophet wherever his journey took him and then provided the necessary commentary appeal to those whom the message was designated. As John Frame (2002:83, n.6) succinctly observed, "The prophet's words are God's, and disbelieving or disobeying the prophet's words is the same as disbelieving or disobeying God's own words." There was no compromise or alternative to the prophet's authoritative declarations, since his message came directly from the mouth of God.

Another aspect of being God's prophet was that he had to have a correct theological worldview. It was an imperative for maintenance after becoming an Old Testament prophet. It is what distinguished the true prophet of God from a false prophet, whose desire was not only self-serving, but one of

12 House, 1998:94-95.

13 See *TDOT* 2003:12.528, 538. Jackie A. Naudé (*NIDOTTE* 1997:3.885-86) wrote, "The hi. [hiphil] has the sense of dedication, not with the implication of cultic qualification, but rather of transfer to the possession of God, to whom the person or thing dedicated now exclusively belongs. The hi. focuses on the process of dedication."

14 Moses and Jeremiah may be viewed as exceptions and not the rule when it came to prophets fulfilling their roles as called individuals. On the other hand, it would not be uncommon to consider the fear that most men or women might sense from being called by God to perform any seemingly daunting task.

which led those willing to listen to the false prophet to stray after false gods. In Deuteronomy 13:1-4 this is spelled out as follows:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

The false prophet was not only capable of mimicking the true prophet through the manifestation of dreams and visions (Num. 12:6-8; Isa. 1:1; Dan. 7:1-ff.), but was also able to contrive events involving the miraculous ("sign or wonder"), which made him all the more convincing, at least to some.¹⁵ His point of departure from the true prophet, however, was his lack of knowledge and commitment to the God of Israel. His wish or goal was to pursue and to serve the false pagan deities and not Yahweh at all, while taking as many as would listen with him. God, apparently, was instrumental in rearing the false prophet to serve as a "test" to the Israelites, to see whether or not they loved God. Such testing would not increase what God already knew, but would demonstrate the utter lost condition of those who would turn their back on God. Later, it would be found out that as Israel slowly devolved into sin and idolatry, over the course of 800 years, their love would grow cold and distracted, which would eventuate in them being carried away into captivity. Israel's capture would serve as an example to anyone observant enough to take seriously what God had revealed in this passage concerning commitment to God and those who would come along and attempt to divert that attention away from Him to the service of false gods (see 1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

Another facet of the true prophet of God was his supernatural ability to predict future events relative to the nation of Israel.¹⁶ Typically, this came in the form

15 According to Helfmeyer (*TDOT* 1974:1.177), The anti-Yahwistic prophets "...used signs to establish the credibility of their summons. The signs intended here can be perceived by the senses as confirmations of the prophetic teaching effected by the deity. Such signs are very similar to confirmation signs, which cannot be clearly distinguished from faith signs. However, the primary purpose of the signs mentioned ... is more to motivate the people to follow other gods than to confirm the correctness of the prophetic word." This is in sharp contrast to Yahweh's warnings found in Deut. 10:12-11:31, where Israel was only to fear Him, walk in His ways, and avoid turning away to follow after other gods (11:16, 28).

16 This is not to say that predictions were not made in relationship to the pagan nations that surrounded Israel (see Isa. 13-21, 47; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32; 35; 38:17-39:16; Joel 3:2-17;

of a warning that forecasted impending judgment due to the impropriety and disobedience on the part of God's people. It also often included a pronouncement of restoration based upon God's cleansing, coupled with the people's repentance and obedience. A glimpse of what later biblical prophets would reiterate in accord with more specific events and times was issued by Yahweh in the Deuteronomic covenant found in Deuteronomy, chapter 28. Obedience to God would result in innumerable blessings (28:1-14). Conversely, disobedience to God would result in innumerable curses (28:15-68). It would be the curses, all of which was brought on by Israel's illicit behaviour and obstinacy, that God's prophets would ultimately be alluding to when they predicted Israel's demise at the hands of her enemies.¹⁷ Since God was the one who initiated both the covenant and the prophecy, both would be fulfilled to the letter. Neither would fail, which further meant that the prophet called by God to issue his specific prophecy dealing either with Israel or the nations would not fail either. Such would not be the case with the false prophets who presumed to speak in the name of the Lord.

In Deuteronomy 18:20-22, we have a specific reference to the prophet who attempted to forecast future events, but who would ultimately fail because of his presumption to be called by God, when he, in fact, was not. The indications that such a prophet was not one of God's own is found earlier in the passage when Moses revealed that (1) the true prophet would be like Moses, (2) the prophet would proceed from among "your countrymen", literally "brothers" (Heb. *'ach*), meaning the Israelites, and (3) the prophet would speak *to them* all that God had commanded. Since there is only one Prophet to come after Moses that was actually like and even exceeded him, and since Jesus claimed that Moses wrote about Jesus (Jn. 5:46), even though Moses himself, at the time, probably knew nothing about Jesus, this prediction is seen as pointing to the Messiah.¹⁸ Although the false prophet, in contrast, may have recognized or acknowledged the person of Moses, his motive was not focused on imitating or being *like* him. The false

Amos 1:3-2:3; Obad.; Jonah 1:1-2; Mic. 7:9-13; Nah. 2-3; Zeph. 2:4-15; 3:8-13; Hag. 2:20-23; Zech. 14:12-15). It is that even the predictions that were made about the pagan nations affected Israel as well.

17 Isa. 8:1-8; 10:5-11; Jer. 4:11-13, 23-31; 5:18-19; 6:1-8, 22-26; 9:12-16; 16:10-13; 25:1-11; 27:1-ff.; 30:4-11; Ezek. 4:1-3; 5-7; 11:5-12; 13-ff.; 16:53-59; 17:1-ff.; 21:1-ff.; 22:17-22; 38:1-16; Dan. 7:1-ff.; Hos. 4-5, 8-10, 13; Joel 2:1-17; Amos 2:4-8; 3:11-4:3; 5:1-3; 6; 8:1-3, 7-14; Mic. 1:1-2:5; Zeph. 1:2-18; 3:1-7; Zech. 13:2-14:8; Mal. 4:1-3.

18 Acts 3:22-23; 7:37; O'Toole, 1983:251; Wood, 1966:126; Mare, 1966:146, 148, n.25; Clowney, 1968:49; Scipione, 1974:196; Boyer, 1960:14; Emmrich, 2000:273; Balentine, 1962:38; Baxter, 1999:77, 80; Merrill, 1998:108; Couch, 1999:370.

prophet's arrogance (Heb. *yazid*)¹⁹ misled him to believe he was speaking in God's name, when the reality was that he was speaking for a false deity. The proof for the deception was seen in the outcome. If what the prophet predicted did not happen, then that prophet was not of God. He had spoken "presumptuously" (Heb. *zud*) and no one should literally "sojourn" or "dwell with" him. In fact, "that prophet shall die" (v. 20; Stulman, 1990:621).

3. New Testament Prophets

The exclusive term for prophet in the New Testament is *prophētēs*. Its verbal form is *prophēteuō*. In their various forms, they occur 195 times in the New Testament.²⁰ Generally speaking, *prophētēs* and *prophēteuō* share the same meaning as that found for the Hebrew term *nābī'* or someone who has been specifically called of God to speak for God either as a foreteller of God's will or forth-teller of futuristic events.²¹ According to C. H. Peisker, the term prophet was used in the New Testament in five ways: (1) for the Old Testament prophet, (2) John the Baptist, (3) Jesus Christ, (4) Those Specially Commissioned, and (5) Christian Prophets.²² The adverse of all five was the false prophet, who upon observation helps our understanding of

19 Hiphil imperfect of *zud*, *zid* meaning "to boil [or] cook" (Gen. 25:29, 34; 2 Kg. 4:38-40; Hag. 2:12), "act presumptuously" (Ex. 21:14; Deut. 1:43; 17:13; **18:20**; Ps. 19:14;), "be arrogant" (Ex. 18:11; Neh. 9:10, 16, 29; Ps. 86:14; 119:21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122; Isa. 13:11; Jer. 43:2; 49:16; 50:29, 31-32; Ezek. 7:10; Dan. 5:20; Obad. 3; Mal. 3:15; 4:1), "insolence" (1 Sam. 17:28; Prov. 13:10; 21:24), "raging" (Ps. 124:5), "pride" (Prov. 11:2; 21:24). Both Scharbert (*TDOT* 1986:4.49-50) and Günther (*NIDONTT* 1986:2.92) observe that *zud* is translated in the LXX with *asebein* or *asebēs*, which is a derivative of *sebomai* coupled with an alpha privative, meaning irreverence, unholiness, unworthiness, or indignity. "In the LXX," wrote Günther, the negative compound *asebēs* is used synonymously with *adikos*, unrighteous, unjust, and describes both an individual action and the general attitude of men, in departing from God ... Thus *asebeia* and *adikia* stand very close to *hamartia*, → sin: social order and social justice are inseparable from worship."

20 See *Accordance Bible Software*.

21 Hoehner (2002:441-42) defines the New Testament prophet thusly: "A prophet is one who is endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy for the purpose of edification, comfort, encouragement (1 Cor. 14:3, 31), and the enablement to understand and communicate the mysteries and revelation of God to the church (1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2; 14:22-25, 30-31) and his prophecy may include a predictive element (1 Thess 3:4; 4:6; 14-18; Gal 5:21). Hill (1979:8-9) is a bit more particular when he stresses that, "A Christian prophet is a Christian who functions within the Church, occasionally or regularly, as a divinely called and divinely inspired speaker who receives intelligible and authoritative revelations or messages which he is impelled to deliver publicly, in oral or written form, to Christian individuals and/or the Christian community" [emphasis his].

22 *NIDONTT* 1986:3.81-84.

the importance and role of the true prophet of God. Since the Old Testament prophet has already been discussed above, let us deal briefly with the remaining four prophet types, along with the false prophets, mentioned in the New Testament.

3.1 John the Baptist

All of the references to John, as a prophet, are found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Only four verses (Mt. 14:5; 21:26 cf. Mk. 11:32; Lk. 20:6) specifically address John as a prophet, all of which are mere recognition of what the people thought about John—not that those who wished to do him harm actually believed that he was a prophet. In one passage, Jesus announced that John was “more than a prophet” and identified him as the person of Elijah (Matt. 11:9, 14). Although Luke would forecast that John would be “the prophet” forerunner of the Lord (Lk. 1:76), John is seemingly unaware of his identity and denies his prophetic role when asked, “Are you the prophet?” (Jn. 1:21). Later, as Cullmann (1963:29-30) pointed out, “The Jewish Christians designated Jesus ‘the true Prophet’, and went so far as to picture John the Baptist as the representative of false prophecy. The subject of the first Christological discussions thus took the form not so much of Christology as of ‘Prophetology’, and the battle was fought out not between Jews and Christians, but between the disciples of the Baptist and Christians. This shows the importance of the concept Prophet.”

3.2 Jesus Christ

References to Jesus’ prophetic status are found mainly in the Gospels, with two exceptions already discussed above in respect to Peter’s declaration in Acts 3:22 and Stephen’s in Acts 7:37 that Jesus was the fulfilment of Moses’ prediction pertaining to the prophet whom God would raise up and be like Moses.²³ Phillip, one of Jesus’ earliest disciples, hailed to Nathanael, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn. 1:45 cf. Lk. 24:27). Jesus indirectly claimed to be “a prophet”, but not necessarily “the prophet”; *the* Prophet being the last prophet to come at the end of time (Cullmann, 1963:24).²⁴

²³ Deut. 18:15-ff.; Hill, 1979:53.

²⁴ See Hahn (1963:372-388), for an in-depth discussion about Jesus as the “eschatological prophet” who is the fulfillment of Moses’ prediction found in Deut. 18:15-ff. Thomas Oden (2006:2.280) wrote, “The overarching theme of Christ’s saving work is this: *Jesus first appeared as a teacher in the prophetic office; then as high priest and lamb sacrificed in his suffering and death; and finally by his resurrection received his kingdom and remains active in his office of cosmic governance, as eschatological ruler in this kingdom*” [emphasis his].

Jesus told the multitudes who followed him, “A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his *own* household” (Matt. 13:57 cf. Mk. 6:4; Lk. 4:24; Jn. 4:44) in response to them being offended at his teaching.²⁵ Elsewhere, Jesus in a scathing denunciation of Herod told some Pharisees, who warned of his intent to kill Jesus, “Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next *day*; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem” (Lk. 13:33). Mainly, however, it was people outside the circle of Jesus’ disciples who recognized him as a prophet (Mt. 21:11; Mk. 6:15; Lk. 7:16), which would include a Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:19) and a blind man whom Jesus helped to see (Jn. 9:17). Some of the people referred to Jesus as “the Prophet” (Jn. 6:14; 7:40), even though Jesus never referred to himself by that designation.

3.3 *The specially commissioned*

Peisker (NIDONTT 1986:3.84; see also Kittel & Friedrich, *TDNT*, 6.835-36) mentions four individuals, all found in the Gospel of Luke, that fit the role of being specially commissioned as Prophets or Prophetesses. They were Elizabeth (Lk. 1:41), Zacharias (Lk. 1:67), Simeon (Lk. 2:25), and Anna (Lk. 2:36).

Elizabeth’s implied prophetic occasion came when the Holy Spirit made her aware of Mary’s special condition after Mary greeted her.²⁶ Although it was the desire of Jewish women to carry and bear the Messiah, and Elizabeth was likely informed by her husband that the child she was carrying was his forerunner, meaning that the Saviour could not be far behind, she could not have known that Mary was the one carrying him.²⁷ Then, Elizabeth’s baby “leaped in her womb” and she was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak. At that time she knew that Mary was carrying “[her] Lord” and the fulfilment of what she faithfully knew was complete.

Zacharias is recorded to have “prophesied” (*eprophēteusen*), after being filled with the Holy Spirit, concerning Israel’s redemption in the person of Jesus (Lk. 1:67). Space precludes a comprehensive exegetical effort in respect to Zacharias’ benediction, but it is clear that he understood Jesus to be the Saviour and John to be his forerunner, and that only by divine

25 Kittel, G. and Friedrich, G. (*TDNT* 1968:6.841) points out that while, “It is true that in this saying [Lk. 13:33], as in Mk. 6:4, Jesus is not describing Himself as a prophet but quoting a common view. Nevertheless, by not merely adopting the view but also preparing to exemplify it, Jesus numbers Himself among the prophets.”

26 Pentecost 1981:46.

27 Edersheim n.d.:1.152,

intervention.²⁸ Deeply devotional, Zacharias focuses “especially on the three great covenants: the Davidic, Abrahamic, and New covenants, and thus is a major bridge from the Old Testament to the New”, culminating in the finished work of Christ at Calvary.²⁹

Simeon was “righteous and devout” and looked for the “consolation of Israel”.³⁰ His prophetic stance is realized in the special revelation he received from the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he saw the Lord’s anointed first (Lk. 2:25-32). That prophetic “light” was fulfilled in Christ when he died, not only for “Thy people Israel”, but for the Gentiles as well (v. 32). “The regal, Davidic, messianic Savior-Servant has come to redeem more than the nation of Israel; he has come for the world,” wrote Bock (1994:245). Or, as Luke would record Jesus saying, “Thus is it written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (24:46-47).

Finally, Anna (Gr. Hanna = “grace”) is deemed a *prophētis*, which is simply the female version of the male *prophētēs*.³¹ *Prophētis* is ascribed to only one other individual in the New Testament: Jezebel, the vile wife of King Ahab (1 Kg. 18-19, 21). Anna was an elderly woman of 84 years, widowed, and devoted to temple service, “serving night and day with fastings and prayers” (Lk. 2:37). Upon hearing Simeon’s declaration to Mary, Anna burst out in ecstatic praise, thanking God and making her own pronouncements to those standing by expectantly waiting for the Saviour (v. 30). As Bock (1994:252) argued, “Just as the prophet Simeon testified of Jesus, so this woman, the highest example of female piety, will point to him.”

28 Kittel and Friedrich (*TDNT* 1968:6.835).

29 MacArthur 2009:95.

30 *Consolation* (*paraklēsis*) is the same word later attributed by Jesus to the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

31 Luke makes passing mention of a certain Philip who had four daughters that were “prophetesses,” but nothing beyond that fact is elaborated (Acts 21:9). We do know from Eusebius (1953:1.295) that Philip and his daughters lived at Hierapolis and that the Church Father Papias “was with them and received a wonderful story from the daughters of Philip”. Paul also alludes to women who prophecy with their heads uncovered, but does not name them specifically (2 Cor. 11:5) and Peter recalls an Old Testament prophecy made by Joel fulfilled at Pentecost, when “your daughters will prophecy” (Acts 2:17).

3.4 *Christian prophets*

The New Testament is replete with examples of those who were either prophets or prophetesses in the early church, after Jesus' ascension.³² Acts 11:27-28 identifies "some prophets" from Jerusalem, with Agabus being one of the more outspoken (cf. Acts 21:10). At Antioch, there were at least four prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). Judas and Silas were identified as prophets after the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:32). Philip the evangelist had four daughters that were prophetesses (Acts 21:9). Some even conclude that the Apostle Paul was a prophet because of his close affinity to the Old Testament prophets.³³ Prophets were considered the "foundation" of the Christian faith (Eph. 2:20), receivers of insight into Christ's mystery (Eph. 3:4-5), and equippers of the Church for service (Eph. 4:11-12).³⁴ Elsewhere, especially in the writings of Paul, it is evident that prophecy was alive and well; that there were certain characteristics that accompanied the office that made the "gift" (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2) distinguishable from the false prophet to be discussed below:

- *First*, the gift of prophesying applied to both men and women (1 Cor. 11:4-5).³⁵ Interestingly, the appointment (1 Cor. 12:28) to prophecy was honoured or disgraced when the prophet covered (men) or uncovered (women) the head.³⁶
- *Second*, although prophesying was encouraged for everyone (1 Cor. 14:1), not everyone possessed the gift itself (1 Cor. 12:29). In that respect, exposure of the abuse of another gift – speaking in tongues – is more in focus in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, than a universal reality of prophesying by all Christians.

32 According to Ellis (1977:173), "Christian prophets are not very prominent in the New Testament. Yet there is evidence that they constituted a distinct order in the early Church, an order that remained significant into the second century."

33 Evans in Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid (1993:762); Hill (1979:111); Grudem (1982:53).

34 Hoehner (2002:397, 441, 550); O'Brien (1999:216, 232, 304).

35 Barrett (1968:250) wrote, "The verse [v. 5] is meaningless unless women from time to time moved, in the Christian assembly in Corinth, to pray and prophesy aloud and in public (not simply in family prayers and other small groups)." MacArthur (1984:256-57), though, confines women prophesying to "witnessing" in public and teaching children.

36 Keener (1992:21,31-32) argues that heading covers had to do with the culture in which the men and women lived. Therefore, Paul is making a cultural argument, dealing with the men and women of Corinth and not a transcultural argument dealing with modern-day society.

- *Third*, the gift of prophecy was considered to be partial in the sense of incomplete.³⁷ One day, when love is perfected, prophecy will cease or be done away (1 Cor. 13:9-11; Lenski, 1963:565).
- *Fourth*, as noted above, prophetic utterances were to edify believers (1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 17, 26). It, once again, served as a benchmark between what prophesying could do for the Church, namely edify, as opposed to speaking in tongues, which only edified the individual.³⁸
- *Fifth*, prophesying served as a “sign” to believers (1 Cor. 14:22). Signs were often associated with the miraculous in the New Testament, signifying their divine origin and demonstrating favour with God’s people.³⁹
- *Sixth*, prophesying served to convict the unbeliever or the ignorant (*idiōtēs*), which resulted in the recognition and worship of God (1 Cor. 14:24).⁴⁰ It is reminiscent of Paul’s words, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).
- *Seventh*, prophets were to judge the merits of other prophet’s prophecies (1 Cor. 14:29). Prophets being subject to other prophets (1 Cor. 14:32) is similar to Paul’s command to “examine everything” (1 Thess. 5:21) and John’s imperative to “test the spirits” (1 Jn. 4:1), to see whether or not the revelations were “good” or from God.⁴¹
- *Finally*, the prophets were to take individual turns at declaring their messages (1 Cor. 14:31). Not only was Christian decorum kept, but also those who listened, which included the other prophets prophesying, would learn and be exhorted by the prophecy.⁴²

3.5 *False prophets*

The converse of being a prophet of God was to be a false prophet (*pseudoprophētēs*), which the New Testament addresses as clearly as

37 “It is ‘partial’ because it belongs only to this age, which is but the beginning, not the completion, of the End” (Fee, 1987:645-46; Hodge, 1956:272).

38 Barrett (1968:316) wrote that the prophet is “greater, because he is a better servant”. Later he would add that exercising gifts for self-development purposes was “contrary to the law of love which regulates all Christian behavior” (Barrett, 1968:327). Gordon Fee (1987:667) is even more pointed by stating, “The building up of the community is the basic reason for corporate settings of worship; they should probably not be turned into a corporate gathering for a thousand individual experiences of worship.”

39 Hodge, 1956:295-96; Lenski, 1963:601; Barrett, 1968:326; Fee, 1987:683.

40 Hodge, 1956:298-99; Lenski, 1963:604-5; Fee, 1987:685-87; MacArthur, 1984:384.

41 Robertson and Plummer, 1958:321-22; Hodge, 1956:301-2; Lenski, 1963:610-11; Barrett, 1968:328; Fee, 1987:693-94.

42 Robertson and Plummer, 1958:322-23; Hodge, 1956:302-3; Barrett, 1968:329; Fee, 1987:695-96.

that found in the Old Testament. Cited 11 times in the New Testament, a false prophet was essentially a false teacher whom Jesus identified as having a genuine outward appearance, but inwardly a vicious or destructive demeanour (Mt. 7:15). False prophets were producers of “bad fruit”, which was a by-product of their *bad* (Gr. pl. *ponērous*) or “evil” messages.⁴³ They were messages that alluded to the Lord and could even perform great works of demonic exorcism and the miraculous, but ultimately were adjudged as unrecognized, antinomian, and rejected (vv. 22-23). Later, Jesus would warn of a coming day when there would be a proliferation of false prophets working their wonders and if it was possible, would be even able to deceive Christians (i.e. “the elect”), had not the days been shortened (Mt. 24:24).

Elsewhere, Peter addresses the subject of false prophets and the unsavoury characteristics that gave them their distinction. Peter, first of all, equates them with false teachers who would covertly mingle among believers, introducing “destructive heresies” (*haireseis apōleias*) that amounted to a denial of the Master (i.e. Jesus) who bought them (2 Pet. 2:1). Here, the idea seems to centre on a salvific denial, which could further mean that these renegades would be strong advocates of human autonomy or those who believe in a works-based salvific program, rather than salvation by grace through faith alone. Peter further observed that the false prophet is a(n) habitual sexual pervert, greedy cunning liar, scorner of divine authority, “self-willed and presumptuous” individual,⁴⁴ undaunted blasphemer, irrational animal, extravagant reveller and glutton, habitual adulterer, seducer of the unstable, “child of the curse”,⁴⁵ deserter unto deception, and fanatic of Balaam. Moreover, they are dry springs, a fog whipped up in a tornado, empty, arrogant boasters of vanity, who promise freedom, while being slaves themselves, and ultimately lead those naïve enough to follow them back to the very vomit they previously consumed and pigsty they used to live in before listening to the false prophet in the first place.⁴⁶

Aside from a passing comment by Luke about a false prophet by the name of Bar-Jesus in Acts 13:6, the only other New Testament writer to use the expression “false prophet” is John. He uses it four times (1 Jn. 4:1; Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). In the 1 John 4 reference, the false prophet is linked with an anti-Christ “spirit” that John argues should be tested, like all spirits should, to

43 Kittel and Friedrich (*TDNT* 1968:6.830, 860) contended that they “are liars by nature” that later caused the “early Church a good deal of trouble”.

44 See *TDNT* 1972:8.185 for *tolmētēs*.

45 See *NIDONTT* 1986:1.416 for *katara*.

46 Hiebert 1984:255-ff.

see whether or not what they are confessing is from God. The three-fold test consists of listening to a prophet/spirit “declare” (publicly), or “acknowledge” (BDAG 1979:568) that (1) Jesus has come in the flesh, (2) he is in agreement with Christians in matters pertaining to Jesus (vv. 5-6), and, (3) Jesus is the Son of God (v. 15).⁴⁷ Anyone who failed to make such a *confession* “is not from God” and is of the *spirit* “of the antichrist”, which was already pervasive in the biblical world in which John lived. As Bruce (1983:105) concluded, “No matter how charming, how plausible, how eloquent the prophets in question may be, the test of their witness to Christ and his truth is the test by which they must be judged.” In the Book of Revelation references, the false prophet is associated with Satan, the beastly political system of the last days, and the demonic realm. In fact, the “spirits of demons” (Rev. 16:14) have their derivation, in part, from the false prophet, who enables them to perform the miraculous, whereby they are able to gather the world leaders for war against God. The final two references (Rev. 19:20; 20:10) reveal the hellish reward the false prophet receives for all of his deceptive effort.

4. Conclusion

In this article, an effort was made to describe and define what a prophet of God was from the biblical perspective. It was done to have a measure to determine whether or not Muhammad of Islamic fame and Joseph Smith of Mormon fame fit in with the claims made by them, and their followers, that they were after the order of Moses, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, or Jesus. It was discovered that both the Old and New Testament prophets were men and women called of God to fulfil certain functions that either had to do with propagating doctrinal teaching consistent with the will of God or with making a futuristic pronouncement that had something to do with either the nation of Israel or the Christian church. Anything that managed to lead God’s people astray theologically or failed to happen exactly as uttered was deemed false and consistent with an anti-Christ spirit.

47 Previously, John had argued that due to the number of antichrists in the world, it was an indication of “the last hour” (1 Jn. 2:18). They were former church members that now denied Jesus was the Christ (2:22). Hence, they were liars or persons with an opposing attitude toward God (see *EDNT* 3.499) and in this particular reference, in opposition over the identity of Jesus, as the Christ, and his intimate relationship with the Father. “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.” Conversely, “the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (v. 23).

Bibliography

- ACCORDANCE BIBLE SOFTWARE, Version 12.0.2. Altamonte Springs, FL: Oak Tree Software, Inc.
- AJIJOLA, A.D. 1984. *The Essence of Faith in Islam*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Presidency of Islamic Research.
- ALBRIGHT, W.F. 1994. *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- ALI, M.M. 2012. *The Religion of Islam*. Dublin, OH: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha at Islam,.
- BALENTINE, G.L., 1962. Death of Jesus as a New Exodus. *Review & Expositor*, Winter, 27-41.
- BARRETT, C.K. 1968. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row.
- BAXTER, W.S. 1999. Mosaic Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew., *Trinity Journal*, Spring, 69-93.
- BERKHOF, L. 1941. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,.
- BOCK, D. 1994. *Luke: 1:1-9:50*. Grand Rapids: Baker,
- BOYCE, M., 2001. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London: Routledge.
- BOYER, J.L. 1960. The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times. *Grace Theological Journal*, Spring, 13-20.
- BRUCE, F.F. 1983. *The Gospel & Epistles of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- CLOWNEY, E.P. 1968. Toward a Biblical Doctrine of the Church. *Westminster Theological Journal*, November, 22-81.
- COUCH, M. 1999. The Literary Value of the Book of Matthew. *Conservative Theological Journal*, December, 329-373.
- CULLMANN, O. 1963. *The Christology of the New Testament*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- WIDTSOE, JOHN A. 1978. *Discourses of Brigham Young*. Compiled by John A. Widtsoe. Salt Lake City: Deseret.
- EDERSHEIM, A. (n.d.). *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson,.
- ELLIS, E.E. 1977. *The Gospel of Luke in the New Century Bible*. Greenwood, S.C: The Attic Press Inc.

- EMMRICH, M. 2000. The Lucan Account of the Beelzebul Controversy. *Westminster Theological Journal*, Fall, 267-279.
- EUSEBIUS: THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY*. 1953. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- EVANS, C.A.. 1993. "Prophet, Paul", as in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Hawthorne, G.F., Martin, R.P., and Reid, D.G. (Eds.). Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- EXEGETICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*. 1993. Balz, H. and Schneider, G. (Eds.) Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- FEE, G.D. 1987. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- FRAME, J.M. 2002. *The Doctrine of God*. Phillipsburg: P&R.
- GOSPEL PRINCIPLES*. 2009. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City.
- GRUDEM, W. 1982. *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*. Washington, D.C: University Press of America.
- GÜNTHER, W. 1986. "σέβομαι," in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols., Brown, C. (Ed.). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- HAHN, F. 1963. *The Titles of Jesus in Christology*. New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Company.
- HANEEF, S. 1996. *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims*. USA: Library of Islam.
- HARRISON, R.K. 1969. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- HELPMYER, F.J. 1974. "תוֹרָה" in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 15 vols. Botterweck, G.J. and Ringgren, H.
- HIEBERT, D.E. 1984. Selected Studies from 2 Peter — Part 3: A Portrayal of False Teachers: An Exposition of 2 Peter 2:1-3. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July, 255-263.
- HILL, D. 1979. *New Testament Prophecy*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
- HINCKLEY, G.B. 1979. *Truth Restored*. Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
- HODGE, C. 1956. *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- HOEHNER, H.W. 2002. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

- HOUSE, P.R. 1998. *Old Testament Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- KEENER, C.S. 1992. *Paul, Women & Wives*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- KITTEL, G. & FRIEDRICH, G. (Eds.). 1964-1976. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- LENSKI, R.C.H. 1963. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.
- LUDLOW, D.H. 1992. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. New York: Macmillan.
- MACARTHUR, J. 2009. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke 1-5*. Chicago: Moody.
- MACARTHUR, J. 1984. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody.
- MARE, W.H. 1966. Prophet and Teacher in the New Testament Period, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Summer, 139-148.
- MATTHEWS, R.J. 1990. *A Bible! A Bible!* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.
- MERRILL, E. 1998. Internal Evidence for the Inerrancy of the Pentateuch. *Conservative Theological Journal*, June, 102-122.
- MCCONKIE, B.R. 1985. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret.
- NAUDÉ, J.A. 1997. "שִׁדְדָן" in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols, VanGemeren, W.A. (Ed.). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- O'BRIEN, P.T. 1999. *The letter to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans
- ODEN, T.C. 2006. *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- O'TOOLE, R.F. 1983. Acts 2:30 and the Davidic Covenant of Pentecost. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, June, 245-258.
- PEISKER, C.H. 1986. "Prophet", in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols. Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- PENTECOST, J.D. 1981. *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- RAHMAN, F. 1989. *Major Themes of the Koran*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- ROBERTSON, A. & PLUMMER, A. 1958. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark.
- ROUTLEDGE, R. 2008. *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.

- SCHARBERT, J. 1980. "TIT" in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols., Botterweck, G. J. and Ringgren, H. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- SCIPIONE, G. 1974. The Wonderful Counselor, The Other Counselor, and Christian Counseling. *Westminster Theological Journal*, Winter, 174-197.
- SMITH, J.F. 1976. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret.
- STULMAN, L. 1990. Encroachment in Deuteronomy: An Analysis of the Social World of the D Code. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Winter, 613-632.
- QUASEM, M.A. 2011. *Salvation of the Soul and Islamic Acts of Devotion*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Research Publications,.
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 2003. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- VOS, GEERHARDUS. 2012 reprint. *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*. Edinburgh, UK and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust.
- WOOD, L.J. 1966. Ecstasy and Israel's Early Prophets. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Summer, 125-137.
- ZAEHNER, R.C. 1961. *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*. New York: Phoenix.

Abbreviations used in text:

DBY = *Discourses of Brigham Young*

TDNT = *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

TDOT = *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

NIDONTT = *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*

NIDOTTE = *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*