

True and False Prophets/esses in the Light of Prophets/esses and Wonders in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The question of making a distinction between true and false prophets/esses has been controversial for a long time. This is despite the fact that, prophets/esses in the Ancient Near East (ANE), Israel, Palestine, during Jesus' time and contemporary Zimbabwe are associated with the performance of wonders/miracles. Should the performance of miracles on its own, as in the case of Zimbabwean prophets/esses, be regarded as a sign of true prophecy? Zimbabwe has of late witnessed an upsurge of prophets/esses claiming to speak for God, and their wondrous miracles daily appear in both electronic and print media. This article attempts to qualitatively investigate the manifestation of prophecy in Zimbabwe against the controversially set biblical criteria to distinguish true from false prophets/esses.

Keywords: African Religion, Zimbabwe, Contemporary Prophets/esses, Biblical History.

Introduction

Whenever there is discussion on prophecy, people often tend to focus more on either its origin, history, genealogy or relating prophecy to the surrounding nations of the time. This could be as a result of various factors as noted by M. Nissinen that, "*the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible is the result of centuries of selecting, editing and interpreting thereby giving a partial and somewhat distorted view of the phenomenon of prophecy*".¹ J. Blenkinsopp rightly argues that, "*the important questions, however, have to do not with origins, but with the development of prophecy*".² A. Catastini adds that:

¹Martti Nissinen, "The Socio-religious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets", *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspective* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 89-114.

²Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, 1996), 46.

Biblical prophecy is the result of a long tradition and of a deeply ideological elaboration, often realized many centuries afterwards whereby what we call “biblical prophecy” is in fact a great deal of phenomena, with different natures, different forms, through different periods and in different geographical and social backgrounds.³

For Bastard, Biblical history and Israelite history are two different things where through the Old Testament; we are able to study Biblical prophecy, which is surely not exactly the same thing as Israelite prophecy.⁴ Israelite prophecy has developed with time and adapted to the different contexts. In this paper, we are interested in prophecy as portrayed in the Bible and it's understanding in contemporary Zimbabwe. The understanding of prophecy in the Ancient Near East, Ancient Israel, and Palestine during Jesus' time and the contemporary situation in Zimbabwe has received mixed reactions and varied views. Due to the controversial nature of prophecy in the various contexts and of special mention, the Jewish tradition where both true and false prophets operated, a decision was reached to solve such a dilemma by developing the following criteria that distinguished true from false prophecy, for example, the call of a prophet, ecstasy, professionalism, performance of miracles, prediction and fulfilment, blind nationalism against realism, morality and the teaching of obedience. Prophetic conflicts have been part and parcel of the Israelite society as far back as when prophecy appeared, although the problem became clearer at the end of the Judean kingdom in the sixth century BCE.⁵ This culminated from an environment where several prophets/esses operated, all claiming to receive revelation from Yahweh, yet the words and actions were often contradicted.⁶ The society was therefore circumstantially pushed to make a decision as to which prophet/ess was to be regarded as true or false. Prophetic conflicts were not an ultimately new concept when one reads certain biblical prophetic narratives. The Deuteronomist historians/editors (Deut 13:1-5; 18:15-22), Jeremiah (23:9-22) and Ezekiel (13) have tried to proffer some criteria to be taken when distinguishing true from false prophets/esses. In fact, the Deuteronomist historian provides us with a window into the challenges that were faced by the society of Judah in trying to

³A. Catastini, *“Old Babylonian Prophecy between the Oral and the Written”* (JNSL 24, 1998), 54-70.

⁴Hermann Bastard, *“Compare necesse est? Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy in a Comparative Perspective”*, in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical and Arabian Perspectives* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 3-11.

⁵Lovemore Togarasei, *Old Testament Studies-Module BRST 203* (Harare: Zimbabwe Open University, 2011), 94.

⁶ Ibid.

separate false from true prophets/esses. There are some particularly interesting prophetic biblical incidences to consider in our discussion. Firstly, in 1 Kings 18:20^{ff}, there was a clash at Mount Horeb/Sinai between Elijah and the four hundred Baal prophets.⁷ Secondly, in 1 Kings 22:1^{ff}, there was a clash between Micah ben Imlah and Zedekiah ben Chenainah.⁸ Thirdly, in Jeremiah 28:1^{ff}, there was a clash between Jeremiah ben Hilkiah and Hananiah ben Azzur.⁹ In all the textual evidences, both prophets claimed to be messengers of Yahweh, although their actions and messages contradicted one another.

It is in such experiences or circumstances that communities of faith would consult the set criteria to make a distinction between true and false prophets/esses. The two critical questions are: who was a true or false prophet? How do we distinguish a true from a false prophet/ess? As a result, various criteria are going to be examined to establish whether modern-day Pentecostal prophets/esses match the tag of true prophets/esses as portrayed in the Bible.

True or false! Criteria for the distinction of terms

Two preliminary remarks are crucial to mention as one venture into the discussion on the criteria. The criteria are not explicitly spelt out in the Tanak (Hebrew Bible), and there is heterogeneity in the usage of terms in different scholarly works.¹⁰ The criteria of distinction between true and false prophecy include its call, ecstasy, professionalism, miracles, prediction and fulfilment, blind nationalism versus realism, morality and teaching obedience to Yahweh.¹¹

⁷David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy: A Guide to Theories on the Origins of Israelite Prophecy and the Pre-canonical Prophets* (Harare: Lleonon, 2010), 50.

⁸Henry Mckeating, *Studying the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1979), 75.

⁹Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25.

¹⁰Musa Wenkosi Dube, 'The Prophetic Method in the New Testament' in *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum* (Geneva: WCC, 2003), 45.

¹¹David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 50.

Robert Wilson observed that, throughout the centuries the biblical prophets/esses have served as models with which other types of religious specialists have been compared. For him, anthropologists seldom made reference to the word “prophet/ess” in their writings because of two reasons: Firstly, when the title “prophet/ess” is given to contemporary figures, a comparison with the biblical prophets/esses is virtually inevitable.¹² The anthropologists usually seek to avoid this sort of comparison because of the danger in distorting the understanding of the contemporary figures by forcing them into the classical prophetic biblical mould. Secondly, the English word “prophet” is ambiguous, when it is seen against its biblical background. The word “prophet” comes from the Greek word *prophetes*, an agent-noun which appears in classical Greek texts as early as the fifth century B.C.E.¹³ The *prophetes* in this case seems to have taken a mediating role between the people and the gods.

The *prophetes* was later understood to mean one whom “*speaks of the future*”, or one who “*speaks before*” events actually take place.¹⁴ The earliest descriptions of the activities of the *prophetes* thus retain a certain ambiguity, which recurs as one analyses the role of the diviner and medium respectively. The ambiguity in usage of the term *prophetes* in the classical Greek extends to its usage in the Septuagint-the Hebrew translation into the Greek for the consistent rendering of the Hebrew word *nabi*, most common prophetic title used in the Hebrew text. Unfortunately, the title *nabi* itself indicates very little about the tenets of the figures to which it was applied, and so the definition of prophecy should not only be modelled on the Biblical evidence. This is made complex by the etymology of the word *nabi*, which is shrouded with uncertainty, either having a passive or active meaning. This was further complicated by the interchangeable usage of the term to mean *roeh* and *hozeh*. In light of the difficulties associated with the word *prophetes* and its English derivative “prophet”; it is prudent for this study to come up with a working definition of the term “prophet”. A prophet/ess means someone who is identified as a religious figure or sacred practitioner who receives a special call from the deity (Yahweh/God) to speak the message to the people. Therefore, a prophet/ess is one who communicates the divine will. He or she

¹²Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 33-34.

¹³David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 50.

¹⁴Ibid.

acts as a bridge between Yahweh/God and the people; similarly to the role of a middleman/woman (*sadombo*) in a marriage ritual in the contemporary Shona culture in Zimbabwe.¹⁵ A prophet/ess facilitates that communication of the divine will to the people.

The Call of the Prophet/ess

One key criterion, which determined whether a prophet was true or false, was a call of a prophet/ess. The definite prophetic call was one of the most distinguishing tenets between true and false prophets/esses. If a prophet/ess was not called by Yahweh to prophesy, then such an individual was considered false. For the Deuteronomist historian (Deut 13:1-6), a true prophet/ess was supposed to speak or predict in the name of Yahweh.¹⁶ A call was an emblem of a person who has a prophetic gift and prophetic authority. So, in this regard, a call was that which legitimated a prophet's/ess' claim to authority. The call pre-supposed that Yahweh called a prophet/ess to perform the duty as per mandate and so any prophet/ess who spoke in the name of another god or gods was then declared false. The criterion is questioned when all the prophets/esses claim to speak for Yahweh yet deliver contradictory messages. The prophet/ess derived prophetic power and authority from Yahweh, the source of all revelation and inspiration. The call of the prophet/ess was central to determine whether a prophet/ess was to be regarded true or false. However, there was a scholarly jigsaw puzzle on the nature of a typical call narrative of both pre-canonical and canonical prophets in the Old Testament as they are typically heterogeneous.

There is a trend with most Old Testament prophets/esses that were called against their wish, for example individuals such as Moses (Deut 18:15; Exodus 4:15-7:10); Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21; Micah 4:4); Deborah (Judges 4:4); Huldah (1Kings22:14); Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14); Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4; 20:7-8) and Isaiah (6:1ff;8:3). This was the same with Hosea, Amos, Ezekiel and others. For Bernhard Anderson, form critics discovered that a definite call narrative followed a five-tier structure that corresponded to the five stages of a call of a prophet/ess, namely: (i) the theophany, (ii) resistance from the prophet/ess, (iii) pressure from the deity,(iv) acceptance by the prophet/ess, and (v) commissioning of the prophet/ess

¹⁵Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well-being* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2007), 14.

¹⁶David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 2.

by the deity.¹⁷ When the deity outlined the reasons for appearing and the mission of the prophet/ess, the prophet resisted the call citing reasons which revealed the prophet's own personal defects; Moses argued that he was a stammerer (Exodus 4:10), Isaiah said he was a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5), while Jeremiah argued that he was only a youth (1:6). However, the pressure from the deity enabled the prophet to accept the call. The pressure usually took two forms respectively, either by force or compulsion (Jeremiah 1:7) or persuasion complemented by a sign or miracle (Exodus 3 & 4, Isaiah 6). The prophet finally accepted the call. The last stage of the call was the commissioning of the prophet and further assurance given (Jeremiah 1:10; 1:18-19). Most of the Zimbabwean prophets/esses have elaborate and definite call narratives, which make them, true prophets/esses (Makandiwa, Angel, Magaya, Passion and Uebert Angel) if we were to go by this criterion.

Ecstasy as a Criterion of Prophecy

Germany scholars like Gunkel takes ecstasy as the hallmark of prophecy¹⁸, a position supported by T H Robinson (one of the British scholars) and R Pfeiffer (one of the American scholar).¹⁹ According to this school, prophets delivered their oracles whilst in ecstasy where, in certain instances, they would perform frenzied dances, as in the case of Saul in 1 Samuel 10:5, 6, 11. However, there is a scholarly divide: the *pro-ecstasy* and *anti-ecstasy* school. The *pro-ecstasy* school takes ecstasy as a distinctive mark of true prophecy whereas the *anti-ecstasy* school takes an opposite view.²⁰ The problem of ecstasy as a distinct measurement between true and false prophets has also divided contemporary Zimbabwean churches. Ecstasy amongst Pentecostals is related to their emphasis on glossolalia, although Pentecostals regard their form of ecstasy as under the control of the glossolalists. There are counter-accusations between these two Christian groups with AICs on the receiving end

¹⁷The proponent of form criticism is Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), who proposed that a text's Genre is indicated by its structural form and is bound to a particular social setting and function. As a result, Gunkel attempted to organize the writings of the Bible according to their genre. In this endeavour, Gunkel was highly influenced by the Brothers Grimm, who had collected German folk traditions and classified them into specific categories such as fairy tale, myth, saga, and legend. Bernhard Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (London: Westminster, 1956), 247-252.

¹⁸Hermann Gunkel, *The Secret Experiences of the Prophets, The Expositor, 9th Series, Number 1'* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1924), 356-66.

¹⁹Theodore Robinson, *The Ecstatic Element in Old Testament Prophecy'* (The Expositor, 8th Series, XXI, 1921), 217-238.

²⁰ Bernhard Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, 250.

when it comes to what is regarded as glossolalia. Pentecostals always dismiss anything to do with AICs prophets/esses as false hence regarding them as agents of darkness. The contention is solely based on the place of ecstasy in prophecy. There are prophets such as Uebert Angel and Emmanuel Makandiwa who are shown claiming to have had visions of heaven and speaking in tongues.

The *pro-ecstasy* school argues that, since both ANE and Israelite prophets were ecstatic, it follows that true prophets/esses should be ecstatic.²¹ Ecstasy was regarded as an emblem of true prophecy. One may ask however, “What is ecstasy?” Etymologically speaking, the term ‘ecstasy’ is derived from the Greek verb ekstasis.²² This Greek noun seems to have been further derived from the Greek verb existemi which means “I put out of place”.²³ The term refers to the mental condition of an individual in which consciousness is wholly suspended or partially in suspension where thought and volition cease and the Spirit of God (ruach) directs and controls the subject.²⁴ For this school, to be called a ‘prophet/ess’ signifies someone who has the ability to say certain predictions while in an ecstatic frenzy. The fact that the mental faculty is suspended and the Spirit of God takes charge and reigns supreme because the supernatural power takes control over the individual are physical, spiritual, emotional and rational. In ANE, the Wen Amon story of Egypt, Zimri-lim legend of Mesopotamia, stele of Zakir and Mari prophetic evidence takes centre stage.²⁵ The *pro-ecstasy* school believes that her neighbours could have influenced Israel holistically. For Israel, pre-canonical prophets-Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah and canonical prophets-Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were ecstatics who lost consciousness under the divine visitation.²⁶ Examples of scriptural texts on the ecstatic view of prophecy include: Genesis 15:12^{ff}, Number 11:25^{ff} 1 Samuel 10:10^{ff}, 1 Samuel 19:18-24, 1 Kings 18:20, 2 Kings 9:2, 11:1, Isaiah 6:1, 20:3 and Jeremiah 27:2, 29:26.

²¹ Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 34.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lovemore Togarasei, *Old Testament Studies*, 94.

²⁶ Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 34.

Did all prophets prophesise ecstatically by suspending their mental faculties? This question leads us to the *anti-ecstasy* school view that ecstasy was a tenet of false prophecy (Deut 18:15; Num 11:25-29; 1 Sam 10 and 19). Moses, Nathan (2 Samuel 7:21; 12:25) and Gad (2 Sam 24:11) are provided as examples.²⁷ This school argues that the ANE prophets were associated with ecstatic Baalism and Canaanite culture, and so were false.²⁸ The *anti-ecstasy* school also refers to a religious clash between the prophets of Baal and Elijah (1 Kings 18:20ff), whereby the defeat of the Baal prophets by Elijah marked the superiority of Yahweh over Baal prophets.²⁹ Such prophets were diviners and polytheists. Divination is an act of discovering or learning about future events through the use of natural objects, inspiration or guessing in order to achieve ecstasy with polytheism as involving the worship of gods.³⁰ Pre-canonical and canonical prophets were agents of Yahweh.³¹ However, the dismissal of ecstasy by the *anti-ecstasy* school is not convincing. Once a prophet became ecstatic, he/she would be regarded as false (1Kings 18:20ff). Ecstatic frenzy was linked to madness,³² and Yahwists heavily disregarded any frenzy or trance.³³

Pentecostal “prophets” make prophetic declarations in their mental stability; Uebert Angel once predicted the results between Stoke City and Manchester United.³⁴ Angel insisted that he did not like football but was going to watch the particular match and return on Sunday morning, several hours before the match kicked off, to tell them the result. Makandiwa is on record prophetically saying peoples’ identity numbers, dates of births and names.³⁵

The Criterion of Professionalism

True prophets/esses took their call as a vocation and not as a profession associated with any result of payments or rewards. The criterion of professionalism is also known as the

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Lovemore Togarasei, *Old Testament Studies*, 94.

²⁹ Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 34.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid, 35.

³²Leon Woods, ‘Ecstasy and Israel’s Early Prophets’ (Bulletin of Evangelical Theological Society, 1996), 125-135.

³³Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 36.

³⁴Prophet Angel prophesy on Manchester United win, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-10841-Video+Angel+prophecy+on+Man+United+win/news.aspx>.

³⁵Prophecy 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?V=-A3L9cT0mgK>.

criterion of remuneration.³⁶ Any prophet/prophetess who then received payment for his/her services was labelled 'false' Based on the assumption that if prophecy is a profession for earning a living, it is highly probable that the prophets would seek to please their clients. This confirms what Micah says in 3:5, that:

Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths..."

Such prophets/esses took prophecy as a profession and not a vocation;³⁷ they prophesize in a partisan way and they curse the powerless.³⁸ The same accusation has been levelled against prophets in Zimbabwe who are earning a living through the services' collections and gifts they receive from their followers. However, this criterion does not especially help if one considers how some prominent prophets/esses earned their living. There are pre-canonical and canonical prophets who seem to have been remunerated for their services (Samuel: 1 Sam 9:2, Nathan: 2 Sam 7, Amos: Amos 7:12). All the above-mentioned prophets never ceased to be true prophets. Court prophets/esses earned their living from the state treasury. Therefore, we cannot simply use the Bible to dismiss the modern day Zimbabwean prophets/esses as false, although some of them have been accused of 'empire building' at the expense of the poor.³⁹ These prophets/esses are emerging in a context characterised by unemployment, poverty, disease, cultural, political, social and economic turmoil. Their message of prosperity automatically appeals to the broader population's suffering and squalor. Mainline Churches' influence that used to give services, hope and an alternative voice to the government seem to have declined. It is not surprising that the new Pentecostal movement has occupied that void left by traditional churches. Critics dismiss modern day Zimbabwean prophets/esses like Makandiwa, Magaya, Passion, Eubert and Beverly Angel as fake money making prophets/esses who take advantage of the level of poverty, unemployment, and disease in Zimbabwe and become prosperity 'gospelers' for self-

³⁶David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 51.

³⁷ Lovemore Togarasei, *Old Testament Studies*, 94.

³⁸Nyasha Madzokere, *The Divine Preferential option for the Oppressed: the Liberation topos behind Exodus* (Saarbrücken: Lambert, 2010), 11

³⁹Makandiwa acquires gold mine, *Dailynews*, 18 August 2014,9; Cyprian Ndawana, Stop greedy Church leaders, *Herald*, 11 January 2013. 14; Xolani Ncube, Mugabe takes dig at 'prophets'. *Newsday*, 17 September 2015, 11.

aggrandizement.⁴⁰ Besides miraculously putting gold nuggets in the congregants' pockets, they still collect offerings, tithes and groceries from the poor. Surprisingly they never condemn corruption, mismanagement of resources and violence that is witnessed daily in Zimbabwe.⁴¹ **Congregants give monies** that benefit prophets/esses.⁴² The prophets/esses are not accountable to anybody.⁴³ As already indicated, we need to be cautious when using this criterion as prophets/esses like Samuel, Miriam, Nathan, Huldah and Isaiah seem to have been remunerated in one way or the other.⁴⁴

The Criterion of Miracles

The criterion of miracles has attracted much attention in the Zimbabwean context in the assessment of true and false prophet/esses. Most of the contemporary prophets/esses are associated with the performance of miracles, and many people have tended to use this criterion as a sign that "Zimbabwe has at last been remembered by God, by sending many prophets/esses in the right season". This comes after a decade of economic, social and political crisis. It is now common in Zimbabwe to have men/women of God with titles like "prophet/ess". Floral posters on both private and public vehicles, in offices, on trees and upon public buildings are emblazoned with onomastics like: bishop, doctor, professor, teacher, pastor, apostle but the most preferred "prophet/ess". It is not surprising that the titles communicate power. To authenticate their calling, most of prophets/esses like Makandiwa, Magaya, and Angel are known for performing wonders such as having gold nuggets in peoples' pockets or having mothers not expecting give birth to children in 'three' days,⁴⁵ as well as inducing weight loss to those who are overweight.⁴⁶ The Pentecostal prophets/esses have marketed their claims through testimonies made by people who are broadcasted locally and internationally on both electronic and print media.

⁴⁰Francis Machingura, *Prosperity Gospel as an Empire Building Project: A Critical look at Zimbabwean Pentecostal Churches, Pastoral und Geld: Theologische Gesellschaftliche und Kirchliche Herausforderungen* (Berlin: Lit Verlag GmbH and Co Kg, 2011), 209-230.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³Vincent Langa, "Bigwigs plunder national resources", *Newsday*, 13 December, 2012.

⁴⁴Takura Rukwati, "Prosperity about blessings, not cash", *The Herald*, 22 May, 2012.

⁴⁵Justin Makombe, "Mystery feeds Zimbabweans' belief in superstition", *The Standard*, 03 February, 2013.

⁴⁶Victoria Ruzvidzo, "Makandiwa dares pastors for public demo", *The Herald*, 19 February, 2013.

The publicity gives such prophets/esses power, status, and recognition, as well as financial proceeds. When situations like this occur, as in the case of Zimbabwe where there are unprecedented levels of poverty, unemployment and disease, it attracts many followers. The 'miracle baby' episode automatically attracts many couples struggling for many years with barrenness.⁴⁷ However, this is nothing new in Zimbabwe as AICs prophets also claim to miraculously remove bodily objects.⁴⁸ Jesus warned his disciples to beware of false prophets who perform wonders to lure people as a result of miracles.⁴⁹ Interestingly, every prophet/ess claims to derive power and authority from God. Deuteronomy 13:1ff, Isaiah 7:10ff, Exodus 4:1-8 stipulates that performed miracles acted as a way of vindicating and legitimizing a prophet/ess as true. The performed miracle was a confirmation that a person had been sent by Yahweh.⁵⁰ The Greek terms are used to define the word 'miracle' are: *dunamis* (power), *terata* (wonders), *erga* (work) and *semeia* (signs).⁵¹ The Greek terms were used mainly to illustrate the miraculous existence of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry. With this criterion, it then follows that the contemporary prophets/esses by virtue of performing miracles are true prophetic figures. However, there is need for caution when dealing with this criterion as Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and Jeremiah 23:9-15 call for another criterion to qualify this: prediction and fulfilment.

Prediction and Fulfilment

The criterion of prediction and fulfilment of prophecy works on the assumption that the predictions of any prophet/ess must become a historical event, and it must come to pass.⁵² What did not come to pass was not spoken of by the Lord, so in this criterion of prediction and fulfilment, it becomes a standard measure of separating true from false prophecy. The prediction and fulfilment criterion is premised on Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:21-22; for the Deuteronomist, whatever the prophet speaks and predicts in the name of Yahweh must come to pass. If it did not, such a prophet/ess deserved to be stoned to death (Deut. 13:5; 18:20). The prophets/esses would become worried when the prophecy did not come to

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸"Branding People witches lands 4 prophets in trouble", *The Herald*, 16 November, 2011.

⁴⁹Musa Wenkosi Dube, 'The Prophetic Method in the New Testament', 45.

⁵⁰Hermann Hendrickx, *The Miracle Stories*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 10.

⁵¹ Lovemore Togarasei, *Old Testament Studies*, 96.

⁵² Ibid.

fruition, as in the case of Moses in Exodus 5:22-23. Moses' worry was that his prophecy would fail and would be regarded a false prophet.⁵³ Carroll regards this criterion as putting prophecy into simplicity since it caters for short-term predictions rather than long-term ones, which progressed for generations. Elijah predicted (1 Kings 21-29) what would happen to Ahab and his house, but this was fulfilled after the prophet's death (2 Kings 9:14-10:36). In 2 Kings 13:15-19, Elisha made a prediction that was not fulfilled in his lifetime (2 Kings 13:20), making Elisha die a false prophet. Interestingly, Hosea (1:4), who was one of the Israelite prophets, condemns Jehu's behaviour although Jehu was fulfilling prophecies made by Elijah and Elisha. Who then was a true prophet amongst Hosea, Elijah and Elisha?

Prophecy would not only come to pass when the prophet was alive but even after his lifetime ceases, as in the case of Micah (5:5) and Isaiah (10:5) who predicted the Assyrians' destruction of Jerusalem in the eighth century. Ironically, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in the sixth century (587 BCE). This would again make Micah and Isaiah become false prophets. Therefore, this criterion must be viewed in tandem with other criteria if we are to avoid problems.⁵⁴ The other problem of this criterion is that it makes prediction and fulfilment a sine qua non of true prophecy, yet prophets/esses were mostly preachers of the word whose focus was to change society for the better. Prophecy has to do with the here and now, although problems occur in the sense that a false prophet can say things which are historical but come to pass.⁵⁵ The sign was supposed to come to pass.⁵⁶ However, a prophet may say something that comes to pass but encourages a person to serve other deities (gods), which thus makes them false (Deut 13:1ff, Jer. 26:6-9).⁵⁷ In the case of Zimbabwean prophets/esses, some have made prophecies that have come to pass but their morality leaves a lot to be desired. Their followers may have only taken their predictions and fulfilments as an indicator that they were true prophets/esses. What follows is the criterion of blind nationalism, which can be helpful in this debate.

⁵³Bernhard Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, 250.

⁵⁴David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 51.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶Herbert Bess, 'The office of the Prophet in Old Testament Times', (Grace Journal, Volume 1, Number 1, 1960), 7-12.

⁵⁷Lovemore Togarasei, *Old Testament Studies*, 97.

Blind Nationalism versus Realism

This criterion has divided the Zimbabwean Christian community whereby any men or women of the cloth who supports the State (pro-status quo) are labelled false, and those that criticise the State are regarded as 'true' prophets/esses (anti-status quo). False prophets/esses pleased political figures of the day, whereas true prophets/esses focused on moral issues. Promising peace in such a situation meant that one was a false prophet.⁵⁸ In most cases, the clash between Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jer. 28) is cited to show that true prophets do not generally support the ruling elite, whereas false prophets/esses agree with the governments of their time. Both Jeremiah and Hananiah claim to speak for God, however Hananiah's optimism conflicts with Jeremiah's message of doom. They both perform symbolic acts (Jer. 27:1-7, 28:10-12), and it is likely that the two prophets were influenced by the theological traditions of their time. Hananiah and Isaiah both held the belief that Yahweh would protect Jerusalem forever (2 Sam. 7.) This confidence about Jerusalem is exposed in Psalms 46 and 132, as Isaiah (740-700 BCE) promised God's protections of Judah (Isaiah 7:7) when a coalition of nations threatened Judah. Jeremiah on the other hand, subscribed to the theology of Deuteronomy that took the election of Jerusalem and house of David as tipped on conditional obedience. Both prophets appealed to traditions known to their audience. According to Bracke, whilst Jeremiah's response to Hananiah in verse 9 may be his own words, the response may reflect the perspective of persons who edited and shaped the book of Jeremiah after 587 BCE.⁵⁹ For Bracke, these persons knew that Jeremiah's message of doom had been fulfilled, and from the editors' perspective, the exile proved that Jeremiah was a prophet sent by God. The tradition in Jeremiah has subsequently been reformed by Babylonian *gola* traditionalists using the narrative of Jeremiah 28, so that 28:8 seems to be tilting against the preaching of peace 'too soon.'⁶⁰ Any resistance to that pro-*gola* platform is neutralised through the reshaping of this Jeremianic tradition. Ultimately, the weight of history favoured Jeremiah against Hananiah.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ John Martin Bracke, *Jeremiah 1-29* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 217.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Sharp adds that Jeremiah 28:8 represents a Judah-based traditionist's position that resists the pro-gola platform by insisting that a true prophet preaches only doom.⁶¹ It is possible that only Hananiah's optimistic word had come true, for his claim to speak for God could have stuck and made sense. This also explains the clash between Micaiah ben Imlah and Zedekiah (1 Kings 22:1-40. Jeremiah (28:1ff) observed that the society had turned evil and Yahweh was going to use Babylon and exile to punish Judah.⁶² So, despite the strong nationalistic feeling born out of the Zion tradition promoted by Isaiah, destruction was certainly going to come. Hananiah, out of his blind nationalism, was misguided by reading the Zion ideology, perhaps out of context of obedience to Yahweh by promising peace, and for that reason became a false prophet.⁶³ It is from this context that Zimbabwean Christians have been divided when it comes to contemporary prophets/esses, where most of them preach peace where there is violence. They preach prosperity where there is hunger, poverty, disease and unemployment although the elite rich enjoy themselves.⁶⁴ In the eyes of these "prophets, apostles and preachers"; poverty, disease and unemployment are a result of sin or the devil. Yet those looting the resources of the nation are not put to task for the suffering and poverty of the voiceless, weak and hungry populace. Critics have found this criterion convincing as ammunition against those men and women of the cloth who are pro-government policies and programmes, for example Makandiwa, Angel and Mwazha, and those men or women of the cloth who criticised the government become the true prophets/esses.

Morality and Teaching obedience to Yahweh

Morality is a virtue expected of every prophets/esses and religious believer. In Jeremiah 13, even if what a prophet/ess predicted came to pass, if a prophet led an immoral life then that prophet was branded a false prophet;⁶⁵ true prophets/esses for Jeremiah are supposed to be paragons of morality. A true prophet/ess followed specific standards and sought to

⁶¹Carolyn Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero- Jeremianic Prose*, (London: T and T Clark International, 2003), 147-155.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Francis Machingura, "Prosperity Gospel as an Empire Building Project", in *Pastoral und Geld: Theologische, Gesellschaftliche und kirchliche Herausforderungen* (2011), 209-230.

⁶⁵David Bishau and Christopher Mazodze, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 52.

turn people away from the evil ways. We have problems interpreting the marriage of Hosea, based on various theories that take it as allegory, parable, legend, history or memorabilia.⁶⁶ Essentially, a true prophet should teach only obedience to Yahweh (Deuteronomy 13:1ff). Teaching rebellion to Yahweh was a mark of a false prophet/ess, as prophets/esses were expected to condemn sin and exploitation of the poor by the rich. The prophet/ess was supposed to interrogate how people acquired their wealth to assure of its legitimacy. Purity, justice and righteousness were central to their message (Exodus 2:24, 6:6). What is interesting is that all miracle prophets/esses in Zimbabwe claim to teach obedience to God, although their prosperity gospel does not question how the rich acquire their wealth.⁶⁷ This leaves them clearly as false prophets. In fact, the rich elite are presented in that gospel as favoured by God yet moral integrity should be the guiding principle of the life of the prophet/ess and the message that he/she preaches should not be that which takes people as prospective clients to reap financial benefits. In Zimbabwe, what brings awe is the ecclesiastical folk, particularly the prophets/esses who are in a holy liaison with the state functionaries against the poor populace.⁶⁸ The powerful clergymen/women take sides with the powerful politicians. They cannot see the violence and corruption committed by those in offices of authority as daily reported in the media.⁶⁹ Contemporary prophets/esses' seem to prophesise for their personal glory rather than God's glory. This is the opposite of Israel's prophets/esses who were promoters of justice/righteousness (*mispat/sedeqah*).⁷⁰ Much of the elite rich in Zimbabwe are breeding corruption to enrich themselves with the country's resources at the expense of the poor.⁷¹

⁶⁶Thomas Wilfrid Crafer, *The Book Hosea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 26.

⁶⁷Francis Machingura, *Feeding of the Masses: An Analysis of John 6 in the Context of Messianic Leadership in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe*, (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2012), 126.

⁶⁸Nyasha Madzokere, *The Divine Preferential option for the Oppressed*, (VDM: Germany, 2010), 11.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Patrick Bond, *Uneven Zimbabwe: A Study of Finance, Development, and Underdevelopment* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998), 195; Hevina Smith Dashwood, *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transformation* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 10; John Mukum Mbaku, *Corruption in Africa: Causes, Consequences and Cleanups* (London: Lexington Books, 2007), 323; Wellington Garikai Bonga, *An Empirical Bonga, An Empirical Investigation of the Nature of Corruption in Zimbabwe* (GrinVerlag, 2014), 68; Jacob Chikuhwa, *Zimbabwe: The End of the First Republic*, (USA: Bloomington, 2013), 71

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing debate that no singular criterion can be regarded as the answer to the debate on true and false prophets/esses in light of the contemporary prophets and wonders. The criteria need to be considered when discussing about true and false prophets/esses. The contemporary Pentecostal prophets/esses fall in the category of both false and true, although it is a difficult task to ascertain who was a true or false prophet/ess in ancient Israel. This is the same challenge we face today.

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