

B. Internal Israelite explanations for the origin of prophetism

1. Religious genius of Israel itself.

The idea is that Israel above all other peoples had a spiritual inclination and thus developed the highest form of religion - and prophetism was an essential feature of this.

Such an explanation, however, ignores the reality of Israel's history.

Historically Israel did not show itself to be a people with a natural inclination for the high form of religion embodied in the messages of the prophets.

The people showed much more of an inclination to go after the religious beliefs and practices of the surrounding heathen nations, and the prophets had to constantly urge them to turn away from these heathen deities to the true God.

This idea thus lacks any basis in the history of Israel's religious attitudes and expressions.

2. Others attempt to explain the origin of prophetism from the religious consciousness of the prophets themselves.

If Israel as a whole did not exhibit a genius for developing the high form of religion found in the pages of the OT, then perhaps some of the Israelites did have this genius, and they are the ones who became the prophets of the OT.

But as we have noted, the prophets indicate that when they speak it is not their own words or ideas that they speak, but they were compelled by God to speak God's words - the message was his not their own.

C. Prophetism in Israel according to the witness of the Old Testament finds its origin in God and must be viewed as a gift of God to his people (Deut 18:9-22).

This is the only explanation that does justice to and fits with Israel's prophetism as shown in the Bible.

This is explicitly said in Deut 18:9-22 where the question of divine guidance after the death of Moses is discussed. When the Israelites come into the land of Canaan, they are not to practice any of the heathen methods of divining, etc. (vss. 9-14). God has given to Israel something better (v. 15), "the LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers." In the context it seems clear that vv. 15-19 tell where they are to receive their guidance.

It will be by a means similar to that which came through Moses. Vv. 20-22 point out the danger of listening to false prophets, and gives a way to identify them.

Interpretation of this passage is diverse. The reason being that in the new Testament the passage is clearly applied to Christ (Acts 3:20-23).

The basic categories of approach are:

1. A *collective interpretation* in which "prophet" is understood as a collective noun, and therefore the prophets of Israel's historical period are in view.
2. An *individual interpretation* usually with exclusive reference to Christ. There is no reference to the prophets in Israel's historical period.
3. A *collective interpretation*, but only completely fulfilled in the person of Christ in whom the idea of the prophetic order was perfectly realized.

See: Freeman, CC, 6 and Young, CC, 6.

Thus over against the soothsayers, etc., God has given to his people the prophets. The people must listen to them. Israel's prophets are thus distinguished from all of these heathen practices and God puts his word in their mouths.

The origin of Israel's prophets is to be explained in no other way. This agrees with 2 Peter 1:21: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The origin of Israel's prophets lies in God and nowhere else.