

THE FALLACY OF ‘TRUE AND FALSE’ IN PROPHECY ILLUSTRATED BY JER 28:8–9

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of ancient Near Eastern prophecy has shown that a principal distinction between ‘prophecy of salvation’ and ‘prophecy of judgement’ is questionable.¹ The prophets in the ancient Near East did much more than just speaking pleasant words to those who paid them.² Encouragement, although taking a prominent position in ancient Near Eastern prophecy, was accompanied by divine claims. Both in Mari and in Assyria, we see that if such claims were not granted or if a king had otherwise not fulfilled his duties, the gods, through their prophets, could reproach him. More drastically, prophecy of encouragement could be turned upside down. Whereas normally the gods encouraged the king and announced the annihilation of his enemies, announcements of annihilation could also be directed *against* the king as part of a declaration of divine support to his adversary.³ The same prophetic voice that encouraged and legitimized the king, could also formulate demands on him, or even choose the side of his adversaries. The fact that prophets functioned within the existing order did not mean that they always agreed with the king and his politics. The interest of the cosmic and social-political order could well transcend the interests of an individual king.⁴

¹ In particular the various contributions by Martti Nissinen, mentioned below.

² M. Nissinen, “Das kritische Potential in der altorientalischen Prophetie,” in M. Köckert and M. Nissinen (eds.), *Propheten in Mari, Assyrien und Israel* (FRLANT, 201; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 1–32.

³ M. Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* (SAAS, 7; Helsinki: University Press, 1998), 108–162. Although kings tried to forbid this kind of prophecy, it was nevertheless possible, see Nissinen, “Das kritische Potential,” 24–25.

⁴ For the prophetic function, see M.J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets. A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah*

Prophets functioned as part of the broader system of divination.⁵ Prophets were part of this system, which means that they spoke and acted for the benefit of social and cosmic stability.⁶ So, in the ancient Near East, prophecy could include many aspects—both supportive, cautionary, and critical. In all cases, its intent was to support the collective well-being and to serve the political and cosmic order. The categories of *Heilsprophetie* and *Unheilsprophetie* are as such not applicable to prophecy in the ancient Near East.⁷ The concept of ‘true versus false prophecy’ does not play a role in ancient Near Eastern sources either. Letters from the Mari archives refer to a procedure of checking reported prophetic oracles by extispicy; this was to check whether the oracle and its interpretation were trustworthy.⁸ The idea that certain kinds of prophetic messages were ‘false’, and others ‘true’, however, is lacking. Two passages from the Neo-Assyrian period have been discussed by Martti Nissinen as examples of ‘false prophecy’,⁹ but this label does not fit these texts. The first example comes from the so-called Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon.¹⁰ This lengthy treaty contains a section that deals with potential propagators of malevolence against Assurbanipal, the crown prince. This stipulation obliges the oath-takers to inform Assurbanipal, if they hear any “evil, ill, and ugly word that is mendacious and harmful to Assurbanipal” be it “from the mouth of his enemy, from the mouth of his ally (...), or from the mouth of a *raggimu*, a *mahhû*, or an inquirer of divine words (*šā’ilu amat ili*), or from the mouth of any human being at all.”¹¹ This text reckons

Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies (VTSup, 117; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007), 294–318.

⁵ M. Nissinen, “Prophecy and Omen Divination: Two Sides of the Same Coin,” in A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 341–51; A.M. Kitz, “Prophecy as Divination,” *CBQ* 65 (2003), 22–42.

⁶ M. Nissinen, “The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets,” in M. Nissinen (ed.), *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context. Mesopotamian, Biblical and Arabian Perspectives* (SBLSS, 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 110–111.

⁷ Cf. also the description of ancient Near Eastern prophecy in M.J. de Jong, “Biblical Prophecy – A Scribal Enterprise. The Old Testament Prophecy of Unconditional Judgement considered as a Literary Phenomenon,” *VT* 61 (2011), 48–51.

⁸ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 16. See J.M. Sasson, “About ‘Mari and the Bible,’” *RA* 92 (1998), 97–123, here 116–117.

⁹ M. Nissinen, “Falsche Prophetie in neuassyrischer und deuteronomistischer Darstellung,” in T. Veijola (ed.), *Das Deuteronomium und seine Querbeziehungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 172–195.

¹⁰ S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA, 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), text 6. Nissinen, “Falsche Prophetie,” 176–182.

¹¹ SAA 2 6, lines 108–118. Translation from Nissinen, *Prophets and*

with the possibility that prophecy can be used *against* the king.¹² That is, however, not a case of 'false prophecy', but prophecy that might be harmful to the crown prince or king.¹³

Nissinen's second example is a case of such a prophecy *against* the king, reported by Nabû-rehtu-uşur.¹⁴ This official informs king Esarhaddon about a conspiracy in the city of Harran in which a certain Sasî was involved.¹⁵ Nabû-rehtu-uşur reports to the king a prophetic oracle that was delivered in favour of Sasî, "This is the word of Nusku: the kingship is for Sasî; I will destroy the name and the seed of Sennacherib".¹⁶ This is an example of a prophecy against the king, in favour of his adversaries.¹⁷ Nabû-rehtu-uşur does not picture it as a false prophecy, but as something potentially harmful. He takes the prophecy of Nusku very seriously, for he adds in his letter several other oracles supportive of Esarhaddon, in order to counter the harmful prophecy from Nusku.¹⁸

In both cases discussed by Nissinen, the point is not that the prophecies are false, but that they pose a threat to the king. Such prophecy was unwelcome from the perspective of the king, but the label 'false prophecy' was not used. People being in the midst of the events were simply not in the position to declare a prophecy false. People knew of course what they hoped for and what they wanted to hear, but they did not know for sure what the gods had in store. Human beings did not control the gods, and the king was no exception to this.¹⁹ Therefore, instead of declaring unwanted

Prophecies, 150–151. The terms *raggimu*, *maḥḥû*, and *šā'ilu amat ili*, denote prophetic figures.

¹² So also Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 135. Furthermore, Nissinen, "Falsche Prophetie," 178, "Die Propheten waren in der Lage, gegen den König im Namen einer göttlichen Autorität Aufruhr stiften zu können." Since the king did not fully control the prophets, he needed to be informed about their words in order to root out any sign of disloyalty.

¹³ Contra Nissinen, "Falsche Prophetie," 180.

¹⁴ Nissinen, "Falsche Prophetie," 182–193.

¹⁵ M. Luuko and G. Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA, 16; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), texts 59–61; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 170–175. For the historical background, see Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources*, 108–153.

¹⁶ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 171 (SAA 16 59 [ABL 1217 rev. 2'–5']).

¹⁷ A similar case of a prophecy against the king is found in 2 Kgs 9:1–13, where a prophet proclaims to the military commander Jehu: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. You shall strike down the house of your master Ahab" (2 Kgs 9:6b–7a, NRSV).

¹⁸ See De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 271–275.

¹⁹ Note the words of Adad of Kallassu addressed to the king, in one of the prophecies reported in the Mari letters, "I – the Lord of the throne, territory and city – can take away what I have given!"; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 19.

prophecies false, the king obliged his officials to report whatever potentially harmful oracles they might hear of, so that the king could effectively deal with the matter.²⁰

When dealing with prophecy in Israel and Judah, one needs to distinguish between prophecy as a socio-historical phenomenon on the one hand, and the scribal depiction of prophecy in the biblical literature on the other.²¹ It is likely that in monarchic Israel and Judah the prophetic repertoire included similar aspects as in the rest of the Near East, such as encouragement of king and people, announcements of the annihilation of the enemies, criticism of the king or the political leaders, and political direction. Furthermore, when prophets announced a disaster, they did not stand in opposition to the state, but functioned as guardians of the collective well-being: such predictions were revealed in order to be averted. If the threatening disaster foretold by a prophet was successfully averted, this did not make the prophecy ‘false’. Instead, the prophet had done a good job protecting the well-being of society.²²

²⁰ There is one example of a diviner disqualifying his own performance of extispicy as a ‘fraud’ in a letter to king Esarhaddon (SAA 10 179). Kudurru, an expert in divination, writes how he against his will was involved in a conspiracy against the king. He was forced to perform a divination on the question “Will the *rab ša rešē* take over the kingship?” Kudurru performed the divination, with a positive outcome. Since this – both the outcome and the query as such – was unacceptable to the king, Kudurru claims: “The extispicy [which I performed was] but a colossal fraud! (The only thing) [I was th]inking of (was), “May he not kill me.” [Now th]en I am writing to the king, lest [the king my lord] hear about it and kill me.” Translation from Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (SAA, 10; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), 143, text 179 rev. 19’–23’. For the historical background, see Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources*, 133–135. The phrase ‘but a colossal fraud’ is a rendering of *alla šaru meḥû*, ‘nothing but wind and storm’. This terminology corresponds with the biblical qualification שֶׁקֶר, ‘lie, trick, falsehood, false’. Kudurru, however, disqualifies his own performance as a fraud: he assures the king he formulated a positive answer to the query in order to save his life.

²¹ M. Nissinen, “How Prophecy became Literature,” *SJOT* 19 (2005), 156–157; M. Nissinen, “What is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective,” in J. Kaltner and L. Stulman (eds.), *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of H.B. Huffmon* (JSOTSup, 378; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 31; R.G. Kratz, *Die Propheten Israels* (München: C.H. Beck, 2003), 50.

²² L.S. Tiemeyer, “Prophecy as a Way of Cancelling Prophecy – The Strategic Uses of Foreknowledge,” *ZAW* 117 (2005), 329–350; De Jong, “Biblical Prophecy – A Scribal Enterprise,” 49–50. For similar dealings with negative omens, see S. Maul, “How the Babylonians Protected Themselves against Calamities Announced by Omens,” in T. Abusch and K. van der Toorn (eds.), *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspective* (Styx: Groningen, 1999), 123–129.

The biblical prophetic books portray the (true) prophets as oppositional figures, who predicted the irrevocable downfall of their society. This portrayal is a product of later reflection on the disasters that befell Israel and Judah, as this article will argue. The biblical contrast between the prophets falsely prophesying peace and the figures truly prophesying Yahweh's judgement, belongs to what may be called the afterward, to a later, scribal depiction of prophecy, and not to prophecy as a historical phenomenon.

With regard to prophecy as a historical phenomenon, the dichotomy between true and false prophets is based on a fallacy.²³ This insight should play a role in the exegesis of biblical prophetic literature. The present article gives an illustration of this by focusing on Jer 28:8–9. That text is commonly interpreted from the dichotomy between (true) prophecy of judgement and (false) prophecy of salvation. The first part of this article (section 2) argues that this implies a forced reading of Jer 28:8–9, and that a more coherent reading is possible. The second part of this article (section 3) shows that Jer 28:8–9 plays a role in the early development of the traditions concerning the words and deeds of Jeremiah. The common view is that 'irrevocable judgement on Judah' was part of the original message of Jeremiah. However, there are good reasons for adopting the more critical view that these 'prophecies' originated after the downfall of Jerusalem as a kind of reflection on the past.²⁴ Within the book of Jeremiah, one can detect early traditions that must have preceded the framework of sin and punishment that at a later stage became dominant. The earliest traditions found within the narrative materials relate to the issue how to deal with Babylonia (e.g. in Jeremiah 27–29* and 37–38*). Jeremiah, as we will see, played a role compatible to other ancient Near Eastern prophets. The later revision of the early traditions decisively re-shaped the 'prophecies' of Jeremiah, by interpreting the disasters as Yahweh's punishment of the sins of Judah. Jer 28:8–9, as I will argue, belongs to an earlier stage of the traditions concerning Jeremiah, preceding the revision. It is an early commentary on the original message of

²³ See M. Nissinen, "Die Relevanz der neuassyrischen Prophetie für das Studium des Alten Testaments," in M. Dietrich and O. Loretz (eds.), *Mesopotamica – Ugaritica – Biblica* (AOAT, 232; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 251, and De Jong, "Biblical Prophecy – A Scribal Enterprise," 66.

²⁴ For this view, e.g. Kratz, *Die Propheten Israels*, 53–86; K.-F. Pohlmann, "Religion in der Krise – Krise einer Religion. Die Zerstörung des Jerusalemer Tempels 587 v. Chr.," in J. Hahn (ed.), *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels. Geschehen – Wahrnehmung – Bewältigung* (WUNT, 147; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002), 40–60; U. Becker, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Prophetenbuches. Tendenzen und Aufgaben der gegenwärtigen Prophetenforschung," *BTZ* 21 (2004), 30–60; De Jong, "Biblical Prophecy – A Scribal Enterprise," 39–70.

Jeremiah, claiming that Jeremiah's position, 'submit to Babylonia in order to survive', had been right.

The article concludes with the general issue of 'true versus false prophecy' (section 4).

2. A NEW INTERPRETATION OF JER 28:8–9

2.1 THE STANDARD INTERPRETATION

I will first describe the standard interpretation of Jer 28:8–9. In these verses, Jeremiah replies to the prophet Hananiah, according to the *NIV*:

8 From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.²⁵

According to a full scholarly consensus,²⁶ v. 8 refers to prophets who prophesy 'doom' and v. 9 to prophets who prophesy 'peace'. Jeremiah, it is held, belongs to the first category, whereas his opponent Hananiah belongs to the second. The passage authenticates

²⁵ In the course of the discussion, I will criticize this rendering on two points, see notes 47 and 49.

²⁶ The following titles are meant to be illustrative; many more could be mentioned. E.g. L.C. Allen, *Jeremiah. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 316–317; R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1986), 544–45; W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Volume II. Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 718–719, 723–725; G. Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 73–74; W.L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 2: Chapters 26–52* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 127–129; J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36* (AB, 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 334–335; J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (2nd ed; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 137; H.-J. Hermisson, "Kriterien "wahrer" und "falscher" Prophetie im Alten Testament. Zur Auslegung von Jeremia 23,16-22 und Jeremia 28,8-9," *ZTK* 92 (1995), 134–137; F.L. Hossfeld and I. Meyer, *Prophet gegen Prophet. Eine Analyse der alttestamentlichen Texte zum Thema: Wahre und falsche Prophetie* (Biblische Beiträge, 9; Fribourg; Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1973), 96–99; G. Münderlein, *Kriterien wahrer und falscher Prophetie. Entstehung und Bedeutung im Alten Testament* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, series XXIII, Theology vol. 33; Frankfurt/M./Bern: Lang, 1974), 111; M. Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26-45* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 44–46; J.T. Hibbard, "True and False Prophecy: Jeremiah's Revision of Deuteronomy," *JOT* 35 (2011), 348.

prophecy of the first type and warns against prophecy of the second type. The argument for authenticating prophecy of doom in v. 8 is based on precedent: from time immemorial prophets have delivered this type of prophecy. As a prophet of doom, Jeremiah belongs to this reliable tradition. The argument against prophecy of peace in v. 9 is cast in the form of a warning against wishful thinking. Peaceful messages are attractive, but also deceptive. Therefore, people should wait and see whether the peace predicted really happens. If not, it was just another example of wishful thinking. Thus, Jeremiah claims authority for his own message of doom and warns the people of Judah against the message of peace delivered by Hananiah.

Various scholars have expressed discomfort with this interpretation.²⁷ They point out that 28:8–9, as it is interpreted, is a rather poor argument on Jeremiah's part. The claim that 'prophecy of doom' is supported by a tradition of centuries and therefore to be accepted on its own merit seems dubious. By Jeremiah's time this type of prophecy did not have such a long tradition at all.²⁸ And there is a further reason for scholarly unease: v. 8 refers to prophets of doom speaking 'against many countries and great kingdoms'. If this were taken literally, some scholars admit, Hananiah would be part of this tradition, since he predicts doom for Babylonia!²⁹ In my view, there is every reason to take verse 8 literally in this respect.

Although scholars have admitted that the argument voiced by Jeremiah is strange, unexpected, and unconvincing, no one, as far as I see, has really questioned the common interpretation. This should be done, for Jer 28:8–9 does not say what the consensus assumes it to say.

2.2 TEXTUAL REMARKS ON JER 28:8–9

Several differences between the Hebrew text of MT and the Greek of the LXX (Göttingen Edition) of Jer 28:8–9 need to be briefly addressed.

²⁷ Recently by R.W.L. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 100–109.

²⁸ Hermisson, "Kriterien," 134–137, and McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 723–725, aim to solve this by taking v. 8–9 as a theological reflection from the exilic period. From this exilic point of view, all true prophecy of the past was prophecy of doom and none of the prophecies of peace had come true. However, this exegetical judgement does not solve the difficulties mentioned.

²⁹ Münderlein, *Kriterien wahrer und falscher Prophetie*, 111, note 3. A. Graupner, *Auftrag und Geschick des Propheten Jeremia. Literarische Eigenart, Herkunft und Intention vordeuteronomistischer Prosa im Jeremiabuch* (Biblich-Theologische Studien, 15; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 74.

(1) In v. 8, the LXX has a plural *πρότεροι ὑμῶν*, ‘preceding [all of] you (pl.)’, but the singular of MT (וּלְפָנַי) probably is the more original reading.³⁰

(2) For Hebrew *רבות רבות*, ‘many/mighty countries’, the Greek has *γῆς πολλῆς*, ‘much land’, an unexpected phrase which ruins the parallel with ‘great kingdoms’. This is best explained as part of a wider (secondary) tendency in the Greek text to represent Hebrew *רבות* with the singular *γῆ*. MT represents the more original text.³¹

(3) For LXX *εἰς πόλεμον*, ‘war’, MT has a longer reading *וּלְדָבָר וּלְרָעָה וּלְחָמָה וּלְמָחָה*, ‘war, disaster, plague’. The reading of LXX is likely to be the original one.³² The shorter reading ‘war’ better serves the contrast with ‘peace’ in v. 9, but the main argument is that in MT Jeremiah shorter depictions of terror are often extended to a threefold depiction, the common triad being ‘sword, hunger, plague’. By contrast, there are no other examples in LXX Jeremiah that can be explained as the reduction of a threefold image to a single one. In other words, the longer reading in v. 8 MT looks similar to other extended passages, and the triad, ‘war, disaster, plague’, can be seen as a variant on the triad, ‘sword, hunger, plague’.³³ This triad occurs fifteen times in MT Jeremiah, only four times in LXX Jeremiah. In some of the extra cases, ‘plague’ has been added, in order to extend the twofold depiction, ‘sword and hunger’, to the preferred triad. In other cases, the triad is part of later additions, not found in the edition as represented in LXX Jeremiah.³⁴ The original *וּלְחָמָה*, in the mind of the editors invoked their favourite motif ‘sword, hunger, plague’, which they applied in a variant way. In what follows I will deal with this shorter, in my view original, reading. However, all that will be said applies to the longer reading just as well.

(4) The difference in v. 9 between *בְּבֹא דְבַר הַנְּבִיא* ‘when the word of the prophet comes true’, and *ἐλθόντος τοῦ λόγου* ‘when his word comes true’, is not of great importance, as the sense is similar. One may either explain *הַנְּבִיא* as another expansion in the text of

³⁰ The plural forms, starting in v. 7, are likely to be an adaption *ad sensum* influenced by the reference to ‘all the people’ (v. 7). Instead of *αὐτὸν* in v. 9b part of the Greek tradition reads *αὐτοῖς* (Rahlfs’ Edition). This is not likely to be original (cf. Göttingen Edition). If the *Vorlage* had *עֲלֵיהֶם* (to them, LXX Jeremiah would probably have rendered *πρὸς αὐτούς*, as elsewhere. Hebrew *וְהוֹשִׁיעַ* in Jeremiah is elsewhere rendered as *ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν* (19:14; 43:1 [LXX 50:1]), the reading *αὐτοῖς* is due to a later change.

³¹ H.-J. Stipp, *Das masoretische und alexandrinische Sondergut des Jeremiabuches. Textgeschichtlicher Rang, Eigenarten, Triebkräfte* (OBO, 136; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 54–55.

³² See Stipp, *Sondergut*, 101; McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 712.

³³ For this argument I am indebted to Raymond de Hoop.

³⁴ Stipp, *Sondergut*, 101.

MT,³⁵ or judge it as a case of accidental omission in the version represented in LXX.

The text can be translated as follows: “The prophets who preceded you and me from early times, prophesied war against mighty countries and great kingdoms. The prophet who prophesies peace—when his word comes true, it will be known that Yahweh truly sent that prophet.”

2.3 INNER COHERENCE OF JER 28:8–9

The phrase *עַל־מַמְלָכוֹת רְבוֹת וְאֶל־אֲרָצוֹת רְבוֹת*, ‘against mighty countries and great kingdoms’ is a parallelism consisting of synonymous parts.³⁶ The combination *אֲרָצוֹת רְבוֹת* does not occur elsewhere. The usual collocation is *גּוֹיִם רַבִּים*, which occurs often, both as ‘many nations’ (e.g. Mic 4:2; Hab 2:8) and ‘mighty nations’ (e.g. Ps 135:10; Jer 25:14; 27:7). The parallel between *רְבוֹת* and *גְּדֻלוֹת* suggests that *אֲרָצוֹת רְבוֹת* may be read as ‘mighty countries’. The plural *אֲרָצוֹת* indicates an international scene, the world of the nations, and points to foreign countries. The combination *מַמְלָכוֹת גְּדֻלוֹת* does not occur elsewhere either, but its meaning is clear: ‘great kingdoms’. The whole phrase refers to the mighty countries and kingdoms that exist in the world.

Important to note, the subject in v. 8 is a plural, ‘the prophets’. The verse gives a summarizing view of the prophecies that have been delivered from time immemorial, and presents the prophets as prophesying against many countries and kingdoms. This does not imply that each prophet individually prophesied against many foreign nations, but it gives an overview, the sum of a long history of prophetic activity, during which prophets prophesied against lands and kingdoms that were powerful in a particular period. Individual prophets prophesied against particular powerful countries or kingdoms.

The prophecies against the many foreign countries and kingdoms are summarized by the word *מִלְחָמָה*, war: ‘they prophesied (נִבְּאָה) war (לְמִלְחָמָה)’. The preposition *לְ* is used to refer to the content of their prophecies without actually citing them.³⁷ Here

³⁵ J.G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM, 6; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1973), 103, argues that since the expanded edition of MT in ch. 28 has added the word *הַנְּבִיאִים* 11 times, this could well be the twelfth time. For the use of the term *הַנְּבִיאִים* in the respective versions of the book of Jeremiah, see M.J. de Jong, “Why Jeremiah is Not Among the Prophets: An Analysis of the Terms *נְבִיאִים* and *נְבִיאִים* in the Book of Jeremiah,” *JOT* 35 (2011), 483–510, here 488–490.

³⁶ The prepositions *אֶל* and *עַל* in Jeremiah are used interchangeably and synonymously; G. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 51.

³⁷ For the phrase with *לְ*, cf. 2 Chr 18:17, with *נִבְּאָה* (hitp.) with *לְרָע*, ‘to prophesy evil’ (*לְ* as indicator of the direct object).

מְלַחְמָה functions as the shortest possible description of bad fortune, disaster, destruction, loss of power, military defeat, etc.³⁸ Prophesying ‘war’ against a mighty country or kingdom is not a neutral forecast of future events, but reveals a divine decision that will be carried out by divine force.³⁹ To prophesy ‘war’ against a mighty kingdom is to declare that God has decided to ruin that kingdom. The implication in v. 8 is ‘and so it happened’. Not only did prophets prophesy against mighty kingdoms, but the ‘war’ they predicted really occurred. In the past, many countries and powerful nations have been ruined by Yahweh’s intervention.⁴⁰

Verse 9 is phrased as a parallel to v. 8, but the use of the singular הַנְּבִיא shows that it is not an exact parallel. The connection between the two sentences is not one of two parallel cases, but after v. 8 has described the ‘norm’, the way it has gone for centuries, v. 9 presents the exception.

The fact that the same term is used for ‘the prophet(s)’ in v. 8 and v. 9 without any mark of distinction, warns against a strong contrastive reading of these two verses. The passage does not deal with two different types of prophets, but it deals with the diverse content of the prophetic message. In contrast to מְלַחְמָה in v. 8 is לְשָׁלוֹם in v. 9; the prophet pictured in v. 9 prophesies ‘peace’ instead of ‘war’. Just as in v. 8, לְשָׁלוֹם depicts the content of the prophecy without actually citing it.

But peace for whom? The answer is implied by v. 8, which refers to ‘mighty countries and great kingdoms’. One difference between the two verses however must be taken into account. Whereas v. 8 presents an overview of a long history of prophecy, v. 9 brings in the example of a single prophet. His message of peace does not relate to countries and kingdoms in general, but specifically to a particular country or kingdom. Just as the prophets of v. 8 did, the prophet of v. 9 deals with a particular nation or kingdom, but instead of ‘war’ he proclaims ‘peace’ for that kingdom.

The logic of verses 8–9 is clear: For centuries there have been prophets proclaiming the violent downfall of many great countries and powerful kingdoms, and it happened as they proclaimed. Now suppose a prophet comes along who proclaims something different with regard to a powerful kingdom: not its downfall, but its great success. Verse 9b states how to deal with that (apparently exceptional) situation: ‘when his word comes true, it will be known that Yahweh truly sent that prophet.’ The Hebrew בָּבֹא must not be

³⁸ The choice of the longer reading in v. 8, ‘war, disaster, plague’ does not alter the picture.

³⁹ Nissinen, “Prophecy and Omen Divination” 345.

⁴⁰ A similar overview is implied in 1 Sam 10:18, “I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.” For the motif of the foreign nations as enemies to be saved from by Yahweh, see e.g. Ps 46:7, 79:6, Jer 51:20, Hag 2:22, and see section 3.2 below.

taken as a condition, as is almost always done. Instead, it introduces a temporal clause, 'when it comes true'.⁴¹ This means that the phrase does not denote a criterion to be fulfilled, but introduces a hypothetical case: 'Suppose there is the prophet who prophesies peace (for a certain powerful kingdom), when his word comes true ...'. The emphasis of the sentence is on what follows: 'then it will be known that Yahweh *truly* sent that prophet.' The final clause forms the climax.

This leads to the following interpretation: Prophets, when dealing with foreign powers, usually predicted their bad fortune. Suppose, however, the case of a prophet proclaiming good fortune for a certain foreign kingdom. When the prediction comes true, it is clear that this prophet truly has been divinely commissioned. The passage first depicts the normal prophetic practice, and then introduces an exceptional case. The exception does not have to do with an unusual type of prophet, but with a prophet delivering an unusual message. When the prediction comes true, it must be acknowledged that this prophet truly delivered a divine message.

2.4 NO DEPENDENCE ON DEUT 18:21–22

It is often assumed that Jer 28:9 is dependent on Deut 18:21–22,⁴² an assumption triggered by the standard interpretation of Jer 28:9. Read as a reference to (false) prophecy of peace and the criterion to falsify it, it is attractive to connect this verse with the criterion given in Deut 18:21–22 on how to identify false prophecies. However, as argued above, v. 9 does not deal with false prophecy, nor with a criterion for judging whether or not a prophet has been divinely commissioned. The parallel with Deut 18:21–22 is therefore much less evident than usually assumed.⁴³

The number of words shared by Deut 18:20–21 and Jer 28:9 is not so impressive (הַנְּבִיאַ the prophet; דְּבַר the word, i.e., the oracle; בּוֹא to happen, come true; יָדַע to know), and, more importantly, these words are used in profoundly different ways. In Deut 18:21–22, דְּבַר is the keyword used three times with the definite article and in an absolute sense. Its importance is supported by the use of the verb דָּבַר (pi.) occurring four times. In Jer 28:9 דְּבַר is not used in an absolute sense and it is not a key term. For the act of prophesy-

⁴¹ E.g. P. Joüon, S.J. and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Vol. II* (Subsidia Biblica, 14/II; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), §166 *l*; E.S. Jenni, *Die Präposition Beth* (Die hebräische Präpositionen, 1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), 316–327.

⁴² E.g. Hibbard, "True and False Prophecy," 339–358, esp. 346–347.

⁴³ Various scholars have doubted the alleged dependence of Jer 28:9 on Deut 18:20–22, e.g. C.J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (Old Testament Studies; London / New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 152–153; Graupner, *Auftrag und Geschick*, 66–67.

ing not דבר (pi.) is used, but נבא (ni.), a term not found in Deuteronomy.

In Deut 18:22, the conclusion of non-fulfilment is stated strongly with a double phrase (ולא־יִהְיֶה הַדְּבָר וְלֹא יָבוֹא) because it is the essence of the answer to the question of v. 21. In Jer 28:9, the formulation is more casual, and, importantly, positively stated: ‘when the word of the prophet comes true’ (בָּבֹא דְבַר הַנְּבִיא). This is neither a conclusion of non-fulfilment, as in Deut 18:22, nor part of a criterion to identify a false prophecy. In 28:9, the phrase ‘when the word of the prophet comes true’, prepares for the climax of the sentence: then that prophet must be recognized as having been truly sent by Yahweh. Deut 18:21–22 deals with a criterion on how to recognize a prophecy not spoken by Yahweh, but Jer 28:9 deals with a case in which a certain prophet is, in the end, known to be truly divinely commissioned. The shared terms are used in profoundly different ways.

A further difference must be taken into account. In the climax of 28:9, ‘that Yahweh has truly sent him’ (שְׁלָחוֹ יְהוָה בְּאֱמֶת), the term שלח is used for the divine commissioning of a prophet. The term is not used in this way in Deuteronomy, nor is divine commissioning an issue in Deuteronomy 18. The same holds for the qualification בְּאֱמֶת, ‘truly’, which does not occur in Deuteronomy. In Jer 28:9 it plays an important role: a prophet apparently treated with disbelief is in the end to be acknowledged to have been truly sent by Yahweh.

The issue in Deut 18:21–22 is how to recognize words spoken in the name of Yahweh that nevertheless have not been spoken by him. Such words ‘do not come true’, and thus they are recognized to be spoken ‘presumptuously’; the prophet who spoke them must not be feared or revered.⁴⁴ Jer 28:9 deals with a completely different issue. It presents a hypothetical scenario of a prophet who delivers a surprising, perhaps unwelcome, message. When his message does come true, it must be admitted that Yahweh truly sent him.

⁴⁴ Some have argued that Deut 18:21–22 only deals with prophecies of doom, since only prophecy of doom is something to be ‘feared’, and that Jer 28:9 then re-applies, or broadens, the criterion of Deut 18:21–22 to ‘prophecy of peace’ (so e.g. Hibbard, “True and False Prophecy,” 348–349; Hossfeld and Meyer, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, 97). However, the phrase ‘do not fear him’ does not imply that the criterion only deals with prophecy of doom. The verb גֹּר denotes the right attitude towards God and to persons speaking divine words (‘to fear, to revere, to stand in awe’). The phrase is to be taken as ‘do not be afraid of him’, i.e., the prophet, rather than ‘do not be frightened by it’, i.e., the word the prophet spoke. The combination of גֹּר with preposition מִן and object suffix also occurs in Ps 22:24 and 33:8, where, applied to God, it means ‘revere him’, ‘stand in awe of him’.

The two texts deal with different issues and their resemblance is only superficial.⁴⁵ There is no support for the assumption that Jer 28:9 is dependent on Deut 28:21–22. The assumption is merely based on the (wrong) application of the concept of 'true versus false prophecy' to Jer 28:8–9.

2.5 REFUTATION OF THE STANDARD INTERPRETATION

Scholars usually summarize v. 8 as 'prophesying doom' and v. 9 as 'prophesying peace', and interpret these verses through the stereotypes of 'true' (prophecy of doom) and 'false' (prophecy of peace), thereby neglecting the question, 'doom and peace for whom?' Building on the preceding sections, I will list six arguments to show that the standard interpretation cannot be right.

(1) 28:8–9 does not present a contrast between two types of prophets: הַנְּבִיאִים in v. 9 is a representative of the category of הַנְּבִיאִים of v. 8.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the text does not deal with a criterion for distinguishing between true and false prophecy. It does not refer to false prophecy at all. V. 8 claims that the prophets from time immemorial have proclaimed 'war' against foreign powers, suggesting that such prophetic messages were common practice. The implication is that such messages of 'war' against foreign powers have come true. V. 9 deals with the proper reaction in the (apparently unexpected) case a message of 'peace' concerning a foreign power coming true. When this would happen, it had to be accepted that Yahweh had truly sent that prophet.

(2) V. 8 speaks of 'prophesying war against mighty countries and great kingdoms'. This is not how Jeremiah is depicted in chs. 27–28. In ch. 28, he is rebuked by Hananiah for warning the people that Babylonia will prosper and remain powerful (see ch. 27).

(3) V. 8 cannot be a depiction of true prophets of judgement, for this kind of prophecy did not exist 'from time immemorial'. This type of prophecy, according to the traditional view, originated in the eighth century BCE. (According to a more critical view, it originated after the downfall of Samaria and Jerusalem as a kind of reflection on the past).⁴⁷ It did not exist 'from time immemorial'.

⁴⁵ The punishment of Hananiah in 28:15–17 does not invoke the criterion of Deut 18:21–22. The punishment, death within some months, is not compatible with the wait-and-see criterion which would have required two years of waiting; so rightly Hibbart, "True and False Prophecy," 347; McKane *Jeremiah II*, 719–720. Jer 28:16 (and 29:32) MT contains a phrase taken from Deut 13:6, but that does not draw 28:8–9 any closer to Deut 18:21–22. This phrase, missing in LXX, is part of the late expansions to the text of Jeremiah as found in MT Jeremiah, see Stipp, *Sondergut*, 105–106.

⁴⁶ The rendering of the *NIV*, cited above, enforces this (wrong) interpretation by commencing v. 9 with 'But'.

⁴⁷ See literature mentioned in note 24.

Moreover, the ‘war’ here relates to foreign nations. Usually, this problem is ‘solved’ by pointing to the ‘oracles against the nations’ that are part of the prophetic collections ascribed to the classical prophets. However, these oracles are not what characterizes the ‘classical prophets’ in the first place, and certainly not what characterizes them in contrast to the ‘false prophets of peace’. To read v. 8 as a depiction of the ‘true prophets of judgement’, is a forced reading.

(4) To identify the **שָׁלוֹם** of 28:9 with the **שָׁלוֹם** proclaimed by the lying prophets referred to in Jer 14:13 (cf. 6:14, 8:11, 23:17), is against the logic of ch. 28. The parallel with v. 8 strongly suggests that the message of peace here relates to a foreign nation (see section 2.3). Furthermore, v. 9 prescribes the proper reaction should the message of peace come true. By contrast, the texts dealing with the deceptive prophets simply state that they were not sent by Yahweh and that their messages were lies.

(5) V. 9 is not a condition that is not fulfilled. Although it is often rendered that way, this is not warranted by the Hebrew clause.⁴⁸ Of course, the alleged dependence of Jer 28:9 on Deut 18:20–22, ostensibly sanctifies this reading, but dependence on Deut 18:21–22 is quite unlikely (section 2.4). There is nothing that justifies reading v. 9 as a condition that is not fulfilled.

(6) The final clause of v. 9 once more shows that the common view cannot be right. What is known about the prophet is, in the end, ‘that Yahweh truly sent him’. The end-result is formulated explicitly by **בְּאֵמֶת**, ‘truly’ sent.⁴⁹ It is highly unlikely that the whole verse is meant negatively, i.e., that in the end this prophet is unmasked as a deceiver, who is *not* sent by Yahweh. The qualification **בְּאֵמֶת** implies that the verse unfolds a positive scenario: in the end it must be conceded that this prophet was truly sent. There is a clear difference between the concessive statement ‘Yahweh truly sent him’, and the frequently attested motif with regard to the deceiving prophets, ‘I have not sent them’, in Jer 14:14–15, 23:21, 32, 27:15, 28:15, 29:9, 31.

Jer 28:8–9, to conclude, does not deal with the stereotype of true prophecy of judgement and false prophecy of peace. The proclamation that a foreign kingdom will collapse or be destroyed (the kind of proclamation referred to in 28:8) is not what is usually understood by ‘prophecy of judgement’; and the proclamation that a foreign kingdom will enjoy a peaceful time (the kind of proclamation referred to in 28:9) is not what is usually understood by ‘prophecy of peace’.

⁴⁸ See note 41. The *NIV*, cited above, enforces this (wrong) interpretation, by rendering Hebrew **כִּבְּאֵמֶת** (‘when it comes true’), as ‘only if (his prediction) comes true’.

⁴⁹ For the adverbial use of **בְּ**, Jenni, *Die Präposition Beth*, 335.

3. JER 28:8–9 AS PART OF THE DEVELOPING JEREMIAH TRADITION

3.1 JER 28:8–9 IN THE CONTEXT OF JER 27–29

This section shows that my interpretation of 28:8–9 fits the wider context of Jeremiah 27–29. V. 8 claims that prophetic predictions of war against foreign powers were a common practice.⁵⁰ Examples of such prophecies can be found, for instance, in the earliest parts of Isaiah. Isaiah delivered messages in which the imminent downfall of Judah's enemies, Israel and Aram, was foretold (e.g. Isa 7:4–9a, 7:14b.16, 8:1–4), and he furthermore proclaimed that the power of Assyria would be broken (e.g. Isa 10:5–15).⁵¹ Besides, various prophecies attributed to Isaiah (probably creations from the late seventh century, when the decline of Assyria took place) proclaim the downfall of the great kingdom of Assyria (e.g. Isa 10:16–19, 14:24–25, 30:27–33, 31:8–9).⁵² For example, Assyria's violent destruction is proclaimed in Isa 14:24–25:

²⁴ The LORD Almighty has sworn, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. ²⁵ I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders.”⁵³

These prophecies of ‘war’ against Assyria—some of them genuine oracles, others being later, literary imitations—were popular during the time of Assyria's decline and fall.

The oracle of Hananiah, dealing with the downfall of Babylonia (28:2–4,11), looks remarkably similar to these prophecies. It proclaims Judah's good fortune by foretelling the misfortune of Babylonia. Hananiah announces that Yahweh will cause the downfall of Babylonia and break its power: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.” This is a clear example of a prophecy of ‘war’ against a mighty kingdom. The phenomenon described in 28:8 thus matches Hananiah as he is depicted in the same chapter.

Jer 28:9 deals with a prophet predicting peace with regard to a foreign kingdom. This does not apply to any of the so-called false prophets as pictured in the book of Jeremiah. None of them prophesies peace with regard to a foreign power. The only one who does so is Jeremiah himself, at first in his message as recorded in

⁵⁰ Section 3.2 will show that such messages were part of the prophetic repertoire from time immemorial.

⁵¹ De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 58–73, 126–136, 193–210, 217–219.

⁵² De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 160–170, 375–378.

⁵³ Quotation from *NIV*.

chs. 27–28*, e.g. 27:11: “Any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the LORD, to till it and live there.” This message points out that survival depends on accepting Babylonia’s supremacy, which implies that Babylonia will prosper and remain in power. Furthermore, Jeremiah deals with the good fortune of Babylonia in his letter to the Judeans in Babylonia, 29:5–7:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage.⁵⁴ Multiply there, and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (בְּיָהוּיָהּ יְהִי לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם).

Considering how Jeremiah is depicted in chs. 27–29, the description of 28:9 clearly applies to him. Hananiah and other prophets proclaiming the imminent downfall of Babylonia, propagated rebellion against Babylonia and announced the return of the Judeans from their exile. Jeremiah prophesied the opposite. He prophesied that Babylonia’s hegemony would not end soon and that the survival of Judah and her neighbour states depended on accepting the Babylonian yoke. Furthermore he admonished the Judean exiles to seek Babylonia’s welfare, for “in her שְׁלוֹם will be for you שְׁלוֹם” (29:7).

3.2 THE AGE-OLD PHENOMENON DESCRIBED IN JER 28:8

Jer 28:8 defines a common practice of prophets proclaiming the downfall of foreign powers. Generally speaking, this is indeed what prophets had done from time immemorial. The earliest prophetic oracles that we know of, found in the Mari letters from the 18th century BCE, contain predictions of ‘war’ against other nations and kingdoms. For instance, in a letter addressed to king Zimri-Lim comes the prophecy: “Hammurabi, king of Kurdâ (...). Your hand will [capture him] and in [his] land you will promu[lgate] an edict of restoration.”⁵⁵ Another letter to Zimri-Lim reports a prophecy concerning Babylon: “Babylon, what are you constantly doing? I will gather you into a net and ... The dwellings of the seven accomplices and all their wealth I give into the hand of Zimri-L[im].”⁵⁶ These predictions concerning other countries and kingdoms serve to benefit the recipient of the oracles, in this case, king Zimri-Lim of Mari. The oracles deal with the enemies of the reci-

⁵⁴ The phrase “that they may bear sons and daughters” (missing in Jeremiah LXX) is likely to be an expansion of MT Jeremiah; see Graupner, *Auftrag und Geschick*, 80.

⁵⁵ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 24–25 (ARM 26 194).

⁵⁶ Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecies*, 44 (ARM 26 209).

ent. This kind of divine announcement—'I will defeat your enemy'—has been part of the prophetic repertoire from time immemorial.

Such announcements are an important motif in the oracles for the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal too. The promise of the god(ess) to annihilate the enemies of the king is found in many of the extant oracles, and a series of countries and kingdoms are mentioned by name, such as Elam, Egypt, Mannea, Melid, the Cimmerians, and the land of Ellipi.⁵⁷

This same kind of prophetic announcement—'I will defeat your enemies', or 'I will protect you against your enemies'—was well-known in ancient Israel and Judah, in particular in the monarchic period. Examples from the book of Isaiah, mentioned above (section 3.1), deal with the imminent downfall of Judah's enemies Israel and Aram, and proclaim that Assyria's rule will be broken. The biblical tradition contains many examples of military defeat of enemies and of Yahweh's saving intervention, and in several of these texts we find prophetic announcements, or at least prophetic involvement (e.g. Exod 15:20–21, Judg 5, 1 Kgs 20:13, 22:6, 12, 2 Kgs 3:16–19, 14:25–28, 19:6–7).⁵⁸ Moreover, texts with a royal outlook, such as 2 Samuel 7 (v. 9) and Psalms 2 and 110, contain clear echoes of this kind of prophetic announcements.⁵⁹ The divine promise of 'war' against foreign nations was part of what is usually called 'cultic prophecy'.⁶⁰ Instead of using the term *cultic* prophecy, I would simply call it prophecy, since in historical terms prophecy was always somehow related to cult. Acting as the mouthpiece of a deity implies taking on a cultic role, although this role could be very well performed outside the temple.⁶¹

An example of the same kind of prophetic announcement, from a later period, is found in Hag 2:20–22:

20 The word of the LORD came to Haggai ...: 21 "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. 22 I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and

⁵⁷ The materials from seventh-century Assyria are brought together in Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 97–177. See also Nissinen, "Das kritische Potential," 23–24.

⁵⁸ See further De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 334–335, with note 253 (for Exod 15:20–21 and Judg 5) and 343, with note 313 (for the passages from 1 en 2 Kings).

⁵⁹ See J.W. Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy in the Psalms* (BZAW, 352; Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2005), 43, 76–101.

⁶⁰ For a recent survey on 'cultic prophecy', see Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy in the Psalms*.

⁶¹ Cf. De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 294–298, 334–337.

their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

To sum up, these oracles had a long tradition in Israel and Judah, as they had in the rest of the ancient Near East.⁶² They were mostly addressed to the king, but the people were involved as well, not only because the oracles usually were publicly delivered, but also because the whole nation shared in the good fortune announced to the king.

The prophets referred to in Jer 28:8 are thus prophets such as Isaiah,⁶³ the anonymous figures behind the ‘cultic prophecy’ in the Psalms, and the prophets that occasionally appear in the historical books in the context of wars and conflicts. The nations against which they announced ‘war’, were enemy nations—Aram, Moab, Israel, Assyria, etc.—that at those particular moments posed a threat against the recipient(s) of the oracle. The encouraging, supportive prophecy in which the announcement of destruction of the enemy occupied a natural place, was in accordance with the state ideology of monarchic Judah. It was strongly believed that Yahweh would protect the king of his choice, his abode, and his people, against the threat of any foreign nation. For this reason, oracles proclaiming the good fortune of the king and the people often contained predictions of bad fortune, ‘war’, for any foreign nation that happened to threaten Yahweh’s abode.

Prophecy of doom and prophecy of salvation were not two different phenomena.⁶⁴ Proclamations of the destruction of the enemy—messages of ‘war’ against enemy nations—were a common element in oracles of encouragement. Yahweh’s promises of good fortune for the Davidic king and the people of Judah went hand in hand with his promises to destroy nations or kingdoms threatening them. The misfortune of the one implied good fortune for the other. This is the case in Jer 28 as well: the misfortune of Babylonia, foretold by Hananiah, implies a turn for the good for the people of Judah. Proclamations of war and destruction simply were part of (encouraging) prophecy.

This furthermore shows that the term ‘peace prophecy’ is not an adequate label. The vital question is peace (or war) for whom? The case of 28:8 is clear: announcing the misfortune and destruction of enemy countries and kingdoms was part of the common prophetic practice. Such prophetic statements were part of oracles that supported king and nation by promising divine help against the

⁶² M. Weippert, “‘Ich bin Jahwe’ – ‘Ich bin Ishtar von Arbela’: Deuterocesaja im Lichte der neuassyrischen Prophetie,” in B. Huwyler *et al.* (eds.), *Prophetie und Psalmen: Festschrift für K. Seybold* (AOAT, 280; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2001), 31–59.

⁶³ For a view on the historical Isaiah, see De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 345–351.

⁶⁴ De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 311–313.

enemies. This was the kind of oracle Hananiah delivered in 28:2–4, 11.

3.3 TWO LAYERS IN JER 27–29

It has been observed that Jeremiah's reaction to Hananiah in 28:6–9 is profoundly different from the assault on Hananiah as prophesying falsely in 28:15–17. This observation will be worked out in the present section.

Jeremiah's reaction to Hananiah's oracle in 28:6–9 is surprisingly mild and subtle. First, he declares his hope that Yahweh makes Hananiah's words come true, "Amen! May the LORD do so!" (v. 6), after which he apparently sheds doubt on whether this hope will be realized: "Listen however to this word ..." (v. 7). Then follow the two verses we have analyzed. By introducing the 'common practice' in v. 8, applying to Hananiah's oracle, Jeremiah concedes that what Hananiah proclaimed is neither unusual nor unacceptable. It would be the best thing to happen! V. 9 however makes clear why this will nevertheless not happen, by pointing to the exception: this time, the unwelcome message is the one that will come true. Babylonia will not fall down, but remain powerful. Babylonia will prosper, and Judah's well-being depends on accepting this. Jeremiah's answer to Hananiah can be paraphrased in this way: Of course, the best thing to happen would be the violent downfall of Babylonia, the return of the temple vessels and the exiled Judeans, and the regaining of political autonomy. True, the prophets of old have often proclaimed Judah's salvation in similar terms, and Yahweh has often rescued his people from the hands of powerful enemies. But our situation is different, for Yahweh has decided for Babylonia not its downfall but its good fortune.

The defence of Jeremiah's prophecy in 28:6–9 does not present a simple picture. It is conceded that Hananiah's prophecy accords with normal practice and that the ruination of Babylonia would indeed be the best thing to happen. Only, as v. 9 adds, the situation is different, and in the end this will be known to all. In the final part of chapter 28, by contrast, Hananiah is simply accused of prophesying falsely without being divinely commissioned. He will be punished for this by dying within a few months' time, which is what happens (28:15–17). This assault on Hananiah, presenting a simple, black-and-white picture, is incompatible with 28:6–9.⁶⁵ It leaves far behind the subtle argument of 28:8–9, and presents another, much more rigorous, criticism. This motif of the deceiving prophets—prophets who without being divinely commissioned prophesy falsely and make the people trust in lies, and who will therefore be punished by Yahweh—occurs throughout chs. 27–29, in 27:9–10, 14–17; 28:15–17, 29:8–9, 15, 21–23, 31–32 (cf. 20:6).

⁶⁵ Noticed by McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 719–720.

Scholars have pointed out that these passages on the motif of false prophecy belong to a later literary layer that elaborated on the earlier traditions in these chapters.⁶⁶ In ch. 28, the later motif overrules the more subtle argument of 28:8–9. It presents a black-and-white picture of Jeremiah speaking the truth and of Hananiah as a deceiver who is rightly punished for his lies. It is clear, therefore, that 28:8–9 must have preceded 28:15–17. It must have been part of a nucleus of ch. 28 to which v. 15–17 was added at a later stage.⁶⁷ This suggestion will be worked out in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

3.4 THE MESSAGE OF JEREMIAH

Verse 9 introduces in hypothetical terms the case of a prophet who predicts the opposite of what prophets usually proclaim. Suppose his message were to come true, then people must acknowledge that this prophet was sent by Yahweh. This refers to Jeremiah and it intends to argue that Jeremiah was truly sent by Yahweh.

Jeremiah announced not Babylonia's downfall but its prosperity. Prophetic oracles revealed divine decisions which implied that the deity had taken sides. The proclamation of שלום for Babylonia was thus presented as Yahweh's decision, revealed by Jeremiah. Jeremiah announced Yahweh's decision that Babylonia would stay in power, would enjoy 'peace', and that Judah's well-being would depend on accepting Babylonia's supremacy.

An oracle in which Yahweh proclaimed Babylonia's well-being and success, probably was not what the people of Judah expected. Babylonia formed a threat to Judah's political existence. It had taken away much of Judah's autonomy; it had exiled its king and part of the upper class in 598 BCE, and remained a severe military threat. Although not everyone in Judah considered revolt a good strategy, the promise of well-being of this superpower was an unwelcome message. From the perspective of many Judeans, Babylonia was the enemy. Yet, however unwelcome this message may have been, from a divinatory point of view, it served the same goal as that of Hananiah's competing message: to secure Judah's prosperity and well-being. Whereas Hananiah propagated 'survival through resistance', Jeremiah propagated 'survival through submission'. Both of them did what divination generally aimed at: to reveal the divine decrees in order to provide those in charge with the information needed to make the right decision for the benefit of

⁶⁶ Graupner, *Auftrag und Geschick*, 73–75, 82–83; McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 702–703, 724–725.

⁶⁷ Cf. McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 723–725. I do not argue that 28:6–7 was part of this nucleus too. It seems more likely that these verses originated during a later stage of development, when the polemics against the deceiving prophets and the motif of the temple vessels became part of chs. 27–29. They function as a bridge between the earlier and the later material.

all.⁶⁸ Although many Judeans at that time hoped that Yahweh would plan evil for Babylonia, Jeremiah revealed a different scenario: Babylonia would flourish. This may have been unwelcome news, especially for those Judeans favouring rebellion, but it certainly was not meant as 'doom' for Judah. On the contrary, the revelation of Babylonia's good fortune aimed to provide the Judean people, the political leaders in particular, with the information needed to take the right decision: to submit to Babylonia's hegemony. Jeremiah's message implied that Judah's survival and well-being depended on accepting Babylonia's rule. Moreover, it implied that submission to Babylonia was in accordance with Yahweh's will. The announcement of Babylonia's good fortune was not a prophecy of doom for Judah, but aimed to serve Judah's well-being. It pointed out how Judah was to survive. Sacrificing political autonomy and accepting the terms of a foreign kingdom clashed with the beliefs of the state ideology. To take such a step required Yahweh's consent, and this is what Jeremiah's oracles gave.

Prophetic announcements were relevant for a particular situation. The announcement of Babylonia's good fortune, delivered by Jeremiah, did not intend to express that Babylonia's power would last forever. However, whether the Babylonians would prosper for five years, or ten, or still more, was not the point of the prophecy. The point was that at that particular time, Yahweh wanted Judah to accept Babylonia's rule and not to reject it and start a revolt. It was not the number of years Babylonia prospered that proved Jeremiah's message right, but the failure of Zedekiah's politics of resistance.

The earliest traditions concerning Jeremiah, found in e.g. chs. 27–29* and 37–38*,⁶⁹ indicate that Jeremiah's oracles aimed to secure Judah's well-being.⁷⁰ The early traditions in chs. 27–29 contain the message of Jeremiah and the reaction to this by his contemporaries; a nucleus of these chapters may have consisted of 27:2–4.11, 28:2–4*.11, 13–15* and 29:1.3–7*, 25–28*.⁷¹ First, we hear Jeremiah's message not to revolt against Babylonia, symboli-

⁶⁸ J. Sweek, "Inquiring for the State in the Ancient Near East: Delineating Political Location," in L. Circolo and J. Seidel (eds.), *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (Ancient Magic and Divination, II; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 44.

⁶⁹ For a survey of the early Jeremiah traditions, see C.R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW, 176; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), 208–214, 238–241, 272–273.

⁷⁰ I deal with the early Jeremiah traditions more comprehensively in M.J. de Jong, "Prophecy in Politics and Literature. Examples from The Royal Archives of Assyria, Herodotus, and the Book of Jeremiah," *forthcoming*.

⁷¹ See McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 695–708, 716–25, 735–48; Graupner, *Auftrag und Geschick*, 61–97; Hossfeld and Meyer, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, 90–111; Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 208–214.

cally acted out by the yoke he put on himself (27:2–4, 11). After this follows a violent reaction by Hananiah, who delivers a message sharply opposing that of Jeremiah, supporting this by breaking the yoke Jeremiah is bearing. To this, Jeremiah presents a counter-message (28:2–4*.11; 28:13–15*). Next, we hear about Jeremiah’s message to the exiles in Babylonia, followed by a furious reaction from Shemaiah (29:1.3–7, 25–28*). These early traditions form a coherent whole. Jeremiah, in word and deed, announces that Babylonia will prosper and stay in power, that the chances of survival for Judah depend on accepting Babylonia’s supremacy, and that the well-being of the exiles depends on Babylonia’s well-being. The reaction to his message is a hostile one: Hananiah violently breaks his yoke and presents a counter-message and Shemaiah writes a furious response.

The traditions in chs. 27–29* match with those preserved within chs. 37–38*. The earliest parts, 37:11–21 and 38:14–28,⁷² dealing with the final stage of Judah’s monarchy, depict Jeremiah announcing that surrender to the Babylonians would lead to survival. During the revolt of Zedekiah, Jeremiah once more urged the king and the political leaders to surrender to the Babylonians in order to stay alive. Again, his message was rejected. Significantly, 37:11–21 contains a depiction of the prophetic scene that is very similar to that of 28:8–9. In 37:19, Jeremiah critically addresses Zedekiah, “Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying: ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land.’?” The plural form, ‘your prophets’, matches the plural in 28:8, and their message exactly matches that of Hananiah in ch. 28. Again, the point is not that these prophets are ‘false’, but that, this time, their message happens to be wrong. It is Jeremiah whose message is right: the revolt will fail, only surrender will lead to survival (cf. 38:17).

The early traditions present a coherent picture of Jeremiah’s message: Judah’s political survival depends on submission to the Babylonians. This message can be understood in terms of ancient Near Eastern divination and the normal function of prophecy: to reveal divine decrees in order to supply the decision-makers with the information needed to make the right decisions to secure the collective well-being.

The fact that Jeremiah’s message was rejected by the political leadership of Judah, is not surprising, as 28:8 points out. The Judeans in charge did not accept the advice coming from Jeremiah’s revelations. They preferred the other scenario, namely that Yahweh in due course would severely punish the Babylonians for their dis-

⁷² For this reconstruction, see McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 932–945, 962–971; O. Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah Under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 76–77, 93–94, 316–325; Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 238–241, 272–273.

play of aggression against Jerusalem. The preferred scenario was that Yahweh would rescue his people from the hands of the enemy. For centuries, Yahweh had protected his people, his city Jerusalem and the dynasty of his servant David; he had always saved them from the hands of their enemies. This time too Yahweh would crush the Babylonian power, and from this perspective, resistance to the enemy was a sensible policy to adopt. This rival scenario was equally supported by prophetic oracles, such as that of Hananiah mentioned in ch 28*. This scenario and this political position prevailed in Judah during the reign of Zedekiah.

In cases of 'prophecy against prophecy', only afterwards is it clear which message was right and which was wrong. This was a fact of life (not yet a Deuteronomistic criterion). The Judean people and their political leaders had to deal with competing divine messages. Both messages were immediately relevant to the political situation; both gave divine consent to a certain political action. Both messages were prophetic and belonged to the sphere of divination. The only difference between them was that the Judeans in charge in Jerusalem embraced the one and rejected the other. Jeremiah's message of survival through submission came off worst in the rhetoric of revolt during the years of Zedekiah.

After the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the outcome was clear: the message of Jeremiah's opponents had been shown to be false, and Jeremiah's message had come true. Yahweh's decision had been not the downfall but the well-being of Babylonia, and Judah would have fared better if its politics had been those of submission. This is wisdom that comes with hindsight. It was too late to choose for the right course of action, but it was not too late to embrace the message that had been proven right. This was what happened afterwards: the 'words and deeds' of Jeremiah were collected and transmitted and held in great esteem, because, it was believed, Jeremiah had been right and had been truly sent by Yahweh.⁷³

Jer 28:8–9 can be read as an early commentary on the message of Jeremiah and his fate, and implicitly also on the terrible fate of Judah. It does not constitute a message from the historical Jeremiah, nor does it deal with events before 586 BCE, but it argues that the historical events permit but one conclusion: Jeremiah's message had been the right one. The claim that Jeremiah had been right provided the ground for the collection and transmission of the sayings, stories and other traditions associated with the prophet after 586 BCE. 28:8–9 is a rehabilitation of Jeremiah put in the

⁷³ Jeremiah's message is also echoed in the Gedaliah story (Jer 40:7–41:18). Shortly after the disasters of 586 BCE, Gedaliah repeats Jeremiah's message, as part of an oath to the Judeans that remained in the land (40:9), "Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall go well with you."

mouth of the prophet himself. These verses demand credit for Jeremiah. He was truly sent by Yahweh. As a stamp of approval of Jeremiah's message, 28:8–9 marks the first stage of the collection and transmission of a 'Jeremiah tradition'.

3.5 THE EARLY JEREMIAH TRADITION AND ITS LATER DEVELOPMENT

The first stage of collection and transmission of a 'Jeremiah tradition', to which Jer 28:8–9 belongs, sharply differed from the expanded and thoroughly revised 'Jeremiah corpus' that was developed later during the (post)exilic period. The main difference is, that the Jeremiah tradition in its early stages was not yet marked by the framework of sin and punishment that decisively shapes the 'prophecies' of Jeremiah as we have them.

As argued above (section 3.3), Jer 28:8–9 must have preceded the polemical depiction of the prophets (הַנְּבִיאִים) as deceivers who were not sent by Yahweh (e.g. 28:15–17). This polemical depiction is part of a later revision of the Jeremiah traditions. The early traditions, including 28:8–9 and 37:19, do not yet make a distinction between Jeremiah and the false prophets. It is still a matter of competing messages: survival through submission versus survival through resistance. Of course, the reason of collecting and transmitting the Jeremiah traditions was, as 28:8–9 makes explicit, to underscore that Jeremiah's message had come true, but the qualifications 'falsehood' and 'lies' for Jeremiah's opponents do not belong to the earliest stage.

A fundamental revision of the Jeremiah tradition gave the earlier materials a decisive new twist. It is in this revision that a new depiction of 'the prophets' (הַנְּבִיאִים) originated: they are now portrayed as Jeremiah's opponents, false and deceptive smooth-talkers, that were not sent by Yahweh (e.g. 27:9–10, 14–15, 28:15–17, 29:8–9, 29:31–32).⁷⁴ Whereas the early traditions, including 28:8–9, do not relate the disasters that befell Judah and Jerusalem to Judah's sins and Yahweh's anger, this is the dominant perspective introduced by the later reworking. The early traditions do not contain 'prophecy of judgement'.⁷⁵ Judah is not doomed, rather Jeremiah's messages serve the collective well-being, aiming to achieve 'survival through submission'. In the later revision, however, the downfall of

⁷⁴ De Jong, "Why Jeremiah is Not Among the Prophets," 495–503.

⁷⁵ Various scholars have argued that this applies to the earliest parts of the sayings material of Jeremiah 4–23* as well, e.g. Kratz, *Die Propheten Israels*, 77; K.-F. Pohlmann, *Die Ferne Gottes: Studien zum Jeremiabuch. Beiträge zu den 'Konfessionen' im Jeremiabuch und ein Versuch zur Frage nach den Anfängen der Jeremiatradition* (BZAW, 179; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989); K. Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches. Untersuchungen zur Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Jer 30–33 im Kontext des Buches* (WMANT, 72; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 330–340.

Judah is explained as Yahweh's rightful punishment of the sins of his people. This later reflection reframed the 'prophecies' of Jeremiah. This is how the 'prophecy of doom' originated, and how Jeremiah became a 'prophet of judgement'.⁷⁶

The message of doom for Judah is often regarded as being part of the earliest stages of the Jeremiah tradition, but there are good reasons for siding with the more critical view that the message of doom for Judah is the product of a fundamental revision of an earlier, prophetic legacy. First of all, as a revision dating from the exilic period, it can be understood as a normal ancient Near Eastern explanation for the disasters that befell Judah, as being 'due to divine wrath'.⁷⁷ By contrast, understood as genuine prophecy, it creates the anomaly of a prophet rejecting his own society.⁷⁸

Moreover, as this article indicates, underneath the sin-and-punishment perspective, i.e., the rejecting of the prophets as liars and the irrevocable doom predicted by Jeremiah, lies an earlier tradition, a prophetic legacy. Here, Jeremiah appears as a prophet in ancient Near Eastern guise. His messages supporting Judah's survival by submission to Babylonia are incompatible with the message of 'doom'. The most reasonable explanation is that the original messages have been re-written from a later, exilic, perspective. An earlier prophetic legacy was revised: Jeremiah, as the mouthpiece of Yahweh's anger, now foretold doom for his own people, because they had not heeded Yahweh's words spoken by Jeremiah.

At a still later stage of development, probably in the Persian period, a further dimension was added to the 'prophecies of Jeremiah'. The period of Judah's punishment was now limited to three generations or to seventy years, after which for Judah a new time of restoration would come. As a result of this development, 'Jeremiah's prophecies' now encompassed a wide perspective in time, *viz.*, Babylonia's rule and ultimate fall, and in space, *viz.* the world of the nations at large.⁷⁹ Within chs. 27–29 this further redactional development is represented by 27:5–7 and 29:10–14. The redactional character of such passages, dealing with the time set for Babylonia's hegemony and Judah's punishment, has been widely recognized.⁸⁰

Importantly however before these, presumably post-exilic, redaction(s), the image of Jeremiah and his prophecies and the image

⁷⁶ Kratz, *Die Propheten Israels*, 52–86, esp. 77.

⁷⁷ De Jong, "Biblical Prophecy – A Scribal Enterprise," 41–54.

⁷⁸ Nissinen, "Das kritische Potential," 30, points out that no ancient Near Eastern prophet ever rejected the institution of kingship or announced the collapse of the society or state he was part of.

⁷⁹ For this later, post-exilic, perspective, see De Jong, "Why Jeremiah is Not Among the Prophets," 490–495.

⁸⁰ These texts have been related to the Deuteronomistic redactions of the Jeremiah corpus. See R. Albertz, *Israel in Exile. The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (trans. David Green; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 312–327, esp. 316.

of the prophets opposing Jeremiah, had already been decisively reshaped by a scribal revision. Underneath the dominant perspective of sin and punishment that was produced by this revision, a prophetic legacy is still visible. Before Jeremiah was turned into a preacher of doom for Judah, a 'Jeremiah tradition' existed. During its earliest stages, traditions concerning Jeremiah's words and deeds were preserved, collected and transmitted. According to these early traditions, Jeremiah was not a preacher of doom but a prophet whose message happened to come true, and his opponents were not false prophets but prophets whose message happened to be wrong (e.g. 37:19). Jeremiah 28:8–9 claims that it must therefore be acknowledged that Jeremiah was truly sent by Yahweh. This claim lies at the basis of the Jeremiah tradition, and Jeremiah 28:8–9 is thus to be seen as an early commentary to Jeremiah's prophetic activity.

4. THE CONCEPT OF TRUE VERSUS FALSE PROPHECY

The idea that prophecy of judgement and prophecy of salvation were two completely different types of prophecy has been a huge impediment for an adequate view of prophecy as a historical phenomenon. This idea should be abandoned. Instead, prophecy is to be seen as a multifaceted phenomenon which could include messages of encouragement, support, warning, criticism and reproach.

The biblical prophetic books certainly present a contrast between the true message of punishment and destruction on the one hand and the falsehood of the prophets claiming that all will be fine on the other. This contrast belongs to the prophetic books as scribal artefacts and does not correspond directly with the historical practices of prophecy. There is however something more to say in this regard. The biblical contrast between the true message of judgement and the false message of peace, is not adequately described by the terms 'true versus false prophecy'. Take for instance the harangues against 'the prophets' in Jer 23:9–40, Ezek 13:1–16, and Mic 3:5–8. These texts are commonly referred to as dealing with the 'false prophets', but instead they deal with 'the prophets' (הַנְּבִיאִים) in general. The prophets in general are denounced as deceivers of the people, and the figure addressing them is not presented as a prophet (נְבִיא), but instead described in other words as the true spokesman of Yahweh's message of judgement.⁸¹ In these three cases, the picture is that Yahweh has put his words of judgement 'in' his mouthpiece and forces him to speak them out. A similar picture of such a 'mouthpiece of Yahweh's anger' versus the 'normal' prophets, is found in Amos 7:10–17 (esp. 7:14–15). What

⁸¹ See the depiction of Jeremiah in Jer 23:9, that of Micah in Mic 3:8, and that of Ezekiel in Ezek 2:7–3:4.

we see in various prophetic books is a depiction of a true spokesman of Yahweh's words, positioned outside the range of prophecy and divination, and standing in opposition to the religious establishment, which as a whole—including 'the prophets' as such—is condemned.⁸²

Elsewhere I have argued that the Book of Jeremiah is built on a tradition complex in which Jeremiah is deliberately *not* referred to as a נְבִיא in order to distinguish him from 'the prophets' in general.⁸³ This tradition complex depicts the Judean establishment, that is, the leaders, the priests, and the prophets, as being sinful altogether. If this is correct, what we encounter in the biblical prophetic books is in many cases not 'true against false prophecy' but rather a denunciation of 'the prophets' as such, as part of a denunciation of the political and religious establishment as a whole. This is a scribal, *ex eventu*, perspective, and the spokesmen of this perspective are often depicted as 'containers' of Yahweh's angry words, but deliberately not as 'prophets'.⁸⁴

The Former Prophets do not contain many examples of 'false prophets' presented in direct opposition with one or more 'true prophet(s)' either. There is, of course, the example of Elijah versus the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). The story of 1 Kings 22 may at first sight seem to be another example. However, on a closer look, it is not, since the four hundred prophets are not depicted as 'false prophets', but simply as 'prophets' that, for a particular reason, are deliberately misinformed by Yahweh.⁸⁵ An interesting element here is the 'spirit' becoming "a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets" (v. 22). This element functions as an explanation for the fact that all the prophets (including Micaiah himself, in v. 15!) have delivered an illusory and deceptive message to the king (v. 6, 11–12, 15).⁸⁶ So the question of reliability is at stake—the issue whether a

⁸² See on this De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 323–333.

⁸³ De Jong, "Why Jeremiah is Not Among the Prophets," 483–510.

⁸⁴ In the later, redactional, development, this distinction was not always maintained, and sometimes the term נְבִיא was used again in a positive way, mostly in the expression 'Yahweh's servants, the prophets' (e.g. Amos 3:7; Jer 7:25, etc). See on this below.

⁸⁵ See E. Ben Zvi, "A Contribution to the Intellectual History of Yehud: The Story of Micaiah and Its Function within the Discourse of Persian-Period Literati," in Ph.R. Davies and D.V. Edelman, *The Historian and the Bible. Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (LHBOTS, 530; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 89–102, here 96–98.

⁸⁶ See for this element, E.J. Hamori, "The Spirit of Falsehood," in *CBQ* 72 (2010), 15–30. Hamori's claim that the spirit of falsehood "affects people viewed as being already in the wrong" (p. 28) may be justified with regard to king Ahab as the target of this deceptive message, but is not justified with regard to the four hundred prophets. According to Hamori, "Ahab's prophets are already giving false prophecy" (p. 28), but this is not

prophetic message can be relied upon, or, in case of several, conflicting messages, which one is most trustworthy—but there is not the issue of ‘true versus false prophecy’.

The Hebrew Bible presents two different characterizations of ‘the prophets’ (הַנְּבִיאִים) in general.⁸⁷ First, there is the characterization of the prophets as ‘deceivers of the people’, prominent in some of the prophetic books. Second, there is the characterization of ‘Yahweh’s servants, the prophets’, that were sent to the people time and again in order to urge them to amend their ways, but in vain. These two characterizations originally were unrelated, they belonged to very different tradition complexes. In the course of the redactional development of the biblical literature, they began to emerge side by side in some books.⁸⁸

In Deut 18:15–22 different characterizations of the prophets are purposefully brought together. This passage introduces a distinction between ‘the prophet like Moses’ (vv 15–19), that is prophets that are true spokesmen of Yahweh on the one hand, and prophets speaking in the name of other deities or speaking presumptuously in Yahweh’s name on the other (vv 20–22). Here we may see a deliberate contrast between ‘true and false’, although even here these terms are not used. In relation with other texts dealing with the prophets, such as in the book of Jeremiah, Deut 18:15–22 stands on the receiving end of the tradition rather than on the giving.⁸⁹ It builds on various strands of tradition, such as the characterization of the prophets as loyal servants of Yahweh (‘my servants, the prophets’) and the characterization of the prophets as deceivers, at home in the prophetic books. In Deut 18:15–22, these are brought together and rephrased from a deuteronomistic point of view. It was now defined that ‘true prophets’ had nothing to do with divinatory practices at all (see Deut 18:9–18), and these, from

the case. The group of prophets gives a uniform and univocally encouraging prophecy, and it is only in retrospect that it is explained by Micaiah how this unisonous message originated (1 Kgs 22:19–23). By referring to the spirit of falsehood, Micaiah explains how the prophets – unknowingly! – delivered a deceptive message.

⁸⁷ See De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 330–332; De Jong, “Why Jeremiah is Not Among the Prophets,” 495–500.

⁸⁸ For this phenomenon in the book of Jeremiah, see De Jong, “Why Jeremiah is Not Among the Prophets,” 496–497.

⁸⁹ For the dependence of Deut 18:9–22 on the Jeremiah traditions, see W.H. Schmidt, “Das Prophetengesetz Dtn 18,9–22 im Kontext erzählender Literatur,” in M. Vervenne and J. Lust (eds.), *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature: Festschrift C.H. Brekelmans* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 55–69 and M. Köckert, “Zum literargeschichtlichen Ort des Prophetengesetzes Dtn 18 zwischen dem Jeremiabuch und Dtn 13,” in R.G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann (eds.), *Liebe und Gebot: Studien zum Deuteronomium* (FRLANT, 190; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 80–100.

a historical point of view very unprophetic, 'prophets', were designated as נְבִיאִים.

The concept of 'true versus false prophecy' does not relate to historical prophetic practice, and is, as I have argued, not at the heart of the biblical prophetic literature either. Yet it became a reality in the scholarly mind. Following the footsteps of Deut 18:15–22, but going beyond what this text claims, interpreters blended the various images ('the prophets as deceivers of the people'; 'the prophets as Yahweh's loyal servants'), thereby creating the cocktail of 'true versus false'.⁹⁰ Among the victims of this thinking was Jer 28:8–9. V. 8 was connected with 'true prophecy of judgement' and v. 9 with 'false prophecy of peace', since the text simply had to fit to the schema, even though it was clear that v. 8 describes what Hananiah says in v. 2–4 and v. 9 describes what Jeremiah says in 29:7.

⁹⁰ The Septuagint translators of the books of Jeremiah and Zechariah were among the first who did this. They introduced the term *οἱ ψευδοπροφῆται* ('the false prophets') as a rendering of Hebrew נְבִיאִים (nine cases in Jeremiah, one in Zechariah) in order to show the principal distinction between 'the prophets' as deceivers of the people on the one hand, and 'true prophets' such as Jeremiah on the other.