

THE GIFT OF TONGUES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

by
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The Old Testament does not deal directly with the gift of tongues as the New Testament does. Should one search the Old Testament for some information on the gift of tongues, he is unavoidably forced to deal with the difficult subject of ecstasy. Some writers seem to suggest that there is at best a slight and unimportant relationship between Old Testament ecstasy and New Testament tongue speaking.¹ Others do state that there is a material and historical connection between the ecstatic behaviour recorded in the Old Testament and the speaking in tongues discussed in the New Testament and practised by many groups today.² Still others say the Old Testament contains prophecies concerning tongue speaking.³ Concerning these prophecies, Kelsey says that, "the passages which are quoted refer to prophecy and other gifts, but never clearly to tongues, nor do any of them clearly foretell the debut of tongues."⁴

As one studies the various writings on the subjects of Old Testament ecstasy and the gift of tongues one soon realizes that the majority of students certainly does see a definite relationship between these. However there is no agreement on many aspects of the subjects discussed. Many and varied problems have been raised with the result that general confusion exists regarding the solutions to these very complex problems.

1. Writers on the gifts of tongues in various Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias do not refer to a relationship between Old Testament ecstasy and tongue speaking. E.g., in the **New Bible Dictionary**, edited by J. D. Douglas, I.V.F., London; in the **Christelyke Encyclopedie**, edited by J. Overduin, Kampen; in the **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, edited by J. Orr, Grand Rapids, Mich. E. J. Young does not refer to a relationship when he discusses the Schools of the Prophets and when he answers the question "Were the prophets Ecstatics?" Cf. **My Servants the Prophets**, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Neither does G. Vos in his **Biblical Theology**, Grand Rapids, Michigan when he discusses ecstasy, p.236ff. I do not say these omissions definitely indicate that the writers see no relationship, rather these omissions do suggest that if there is a relationship, the writers do not consider it to be of such importance as to warrant a discussion of it in the context of ecstasy. M. T. Kelsey in **Tongue Speaking**, New York, 1964, says "Actually there is nothing to be found in either Hebrew or Greek antecedents comparable to the experience described by Paul's letters and the book of Acts as speaking in tongues." p.141.
2. In the **Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible**, edited by G. A. Buttrick, this statement is found, "Such ecstatic speech (i.e. tongue speaking) prevailed among the earliest Hebrew prophets . . . who . . . wandered about the country in bands, working themselves into religious frenzy by means of music and dancing." Vol. 4, p.672. Many old Testament scholars, particularly those who have written books on Old Testament Introduction and Old Testament Biblical Theology definitely posit an important material and historic relationship.
3. Cf. e.g. M. Pearlman, **The Heavenly Gift**, Springfield, Missouri, 1935.
4. Kelsey, *idem*, p.140.

I.

It will not be possible to deal with all the major aspects of the phenomena referred to as Old Testament ecstasy and thus see the gift of tongues in its full setting. To indicate the scope and complexity of the subject I wish to state some of the questions that confront the student.⁵

1. Is the ecstatic experience inseparable from Old Testament prophecy and revelation? A strongly affirmative answer is given by and assumed by J. Lindblom.⁶ Earlier, G. Holscher attempted to state a strong case for the inseparable relationship between ecstasy and Old Testament prophetic activity.⁷ Koenig, as did others, gives an emphatic negative answer.⁸ A. J. Heschel gives a lengthy detailed argument against the position of Holscher.⁹ Others, such as R. S. Cripps,¹⁰ J. Skinner¹¹ and A. Guillaume¹² assume a milder and intermediate position on the question.

2. A closely related question to the first one is: Was the ecstatic experience which the prophets are said to have had primarily a means to receive messages from God? Some scholars would say so. Others say that the ecstatic experience was necessary for the delivery as well as the reception of the message. The Hebrew term *nabhi*⁷ is said to indicate a bubbling forth. Men in ecstatic trance or frenzy are said to have gushed forth words as the term suggests.¹³ Heschel, however emphatically denies that the Hebrew prophets were in any way ecstasies either in receiving or proclaiming their message.

3. If the prophets were ecstasies, at least to an extent, should we distinguish between various types of prophets? If so, were some of these ecstasies and others not?

Scholars have indicated that there may have been a total of six specific types of prophets in Old Testament times.

(a) The cultic prophets who were solely involved in the worship ritual of the community. These were mostly ecstasies it is affirmed.

(b) The classical or canonical prophets who were the preaching prophets of whom we have Biblical evidence in the various prophetic books.

(c) The schools of prophets who were prior to the classical prophets and

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5. I will not give my answer to the questions though my statement of conclusions will indicate the general position I take on most of the questions raised.
 6. J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1963, also suggests in some parts of his discussion that ecstasy was one of the states a prophet was in when he received revelation, e.g., cf. 173ff. Lindblom does not always have the same exact denotation in mind when he employs the term ecstasy.
 7. G. Holscher, *Die Profeten*, Leipzig, 1914 quoted by A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York, 1962.
 8. As quoted by A. J. Heschel, *idem* p.350. Heschel refers to men such as Robertson Smith and T. H. Robinson who also opposed the view held by Holscher.
 9. Heschel *idem* part in chapters 20, 21, cf. last part of section II of this essay.
 10. R. S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*, S.P.C.K., Great Britain, 2nd edition, 1960.
 11. J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, Cambridge, 1930.
 12. A. Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination Among the Hebrews and Other Semites*, London, 1938.
 13. J. Lindblom, *idem*, p.94ff.

who had outstanding leaders such as Samuel and Elijah. These are said to be ecstasies primarily.

(d) The seers, who were the diviners, i.e., a type of magician and wonder worker. These had various types of psychological experiences.

(e) The false prophets who were the imitators of the classical prophets and motivated by various ulterior forces or reasons. These prophets were able to induce ecstatic conditions also.

(f) The prophets of other nations and religious cultures who were of the same basic category as the Israelitish cultic, classical or seer types. These are seen by various scholars as the forerunners and sources of the Hebrew prophets.

Few, if any, scholars would unhesitatingly state that they personally believed that these six types were distinct categories and that ecstasy was peculiar to one or more types only. However various men have attempted to make a strong case for two or more specific classes and types of prophets. E.g., Haldar has attempted to show that the early Hebrew prophets were cultic prophets and as such were ecstasies. They are, according to Haldar, to be seen as distinct from the classical prophets.¹⁴ Johnson likewise has stated that the cultic prophets were a class of ritual specialists who were seers and ecstasies.¹⁵ H. H. Rowley has given a sane and balanced discussion from the critical view point. After a careful study of the various views and of the Biblical data, he carefully says that it is impossible to conclude that there was a distinct class of cultic or ecstatic prophets, or for that matter, various **distinct** types of prophets.¹⁶

4. If, as many scholars contend, the Old Testament prophets were in some way and to some degree ecstasies, how must we understand this phenomena? Was it related to enthusiasm?¹⁷ Is it true that there were various types of ecstatic experiences among the Hebrew prophets, e.g., orgiastic ecstasy as distinguished from the concentrative passive ecstasy?¹⁸

5. Was this Old Testament ecstatic phenomena a seeming imitation or partly borrowed from other heathen nations? Or, was the entire ecstatic prophetic movement of heathen origin? To this question various scholars have given vigorous assent. Halder says the Hebrews took it over from the Phoenicians and Canaanites.¹⁹ Lindblom defends the thesis that all prophetic activity is essentially the same throughout the world, and thus the Hebrews took over the phenomena from various neighbouring nations.²⁰ Lindblom sees the ecstatic experience as basically a single universal psychological phen-

14. A. Haldar, **Association of the Cult Prophets Among the Ancient Semites**, Uppsala, 1945.

15. Aubrey Johnson, **The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel**, 1944.

16. H. H. Rowley, **From Moses to Qumran**, Essay 4, p.111ff. New York, 1963. Much of what Rowley writes I can accept. However, I cannot accept Rowley's basic assumption that the Old Testament prophets were not entirely unique as to their calling, message and in the execution of their task.

17. Ekstasis and Entheos are discussed later in this essay.

18. Lindblom idem p.48, 106 makes this distinction and ascribes both to the Old Testament Hebrew prophets.

19. Haldar, idem.

20. Lindblom, idem cf. particularly pp. 80ff, 97.

omena which has varied expressions, Hebrew prophetism being one of these.²¹

6. Were the prophets who had ecstatic experiences the false prophets? Was the ecstatic phenomena, whether of the orgiastic or passive type, an evidence of improper conduct and unreliability? This question is not answered in the negative by many students of the Old Testament. Men adhering to various interpretations agree that ecstatic experiences were found among the God-fearing Hebrews. But, Heschel repudiates the thought of a true Hebrew prophet having ecstatic experiences or that any God-fearing Hebrew would seek ecstatic experiences. Heschel is emphatic that ecstasy was evil, always brought on by drunkenness, self-mutilation, wild sex orgies and other sensuous activities.²²

7. Are the various accounts of ecstatic behaviour historically reliable? E.g., is the account given in Numbers 11 not written for an aetiological purpose rather than to record history? Are the accounts given of Saul's ecstatic experiences with the prophets and the witch of Endor wholly reliable? Are these not stories with a religious lesson and not to be taken as strictly history?²³ These critical questions contribute to the complexities and confusion one meets as he seeks to obtain light from the Old Testament on the phenomena of ecstasy and more particularly, on "speaking in tongues".

II.

At this point a discussion of the theory of ecstasy as propounded by the scholars who view all ecstatic and prophetic activity strictly from the historio-psychological-religious points of view is in order. Ecstasy is said to be a universal phenomena in the religious history and it is to be studied basically from the psychological point of view. In short, ecstasy with all its attendant activities and characteristics is strictly human experience arising from the "psuche" of man.

Various Old Testament scholars stress this psychological approach in their attempts to understand ecstasy, prophetic inspiration and proclamation.²⁴ J. Lindblom does it most consistently, hence I will attempt to present his argument.²⁵

Lindblom states his case clearly, "The modern study of the psychology and history of religion has shown that prophets are found in many provinces of the world of religion, in modern as well as in ancient times. Among men and women who can be characterized as *homines religiosi* we distinguish a

21. Ibid p.105ff. N. H. Ridderbos has made a careful study of the relationship between Israel's prophets and heathen prophets. He sees many similarities but the differences are such that he concludes that the prophets of Israel were unique. Cf. *Exegetica* '55 Vol. II, No. 1.

22. Heschel, *idem*, chapters 19, 20, 21. Cf. particularly pp. 353ff.

23. A discussion of Numbers 11 is found in the third section of this paper. I can say now already that I unhesitatingly accept the historical passages referring to ecstatic behaviour as authentic and reliable.

24. In addition to Old Testament scholars already mentioned, E. Johnson, Haldar and Rowley (to an extent), we could add many others: e.g., E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, New York, 1938, p.242ff. Murray Newman, "The Prophetic call of Samuel" in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, edited by B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson, New York, 1962, p.38ff. M. Burrows (to an extent) *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, Philadelphia, 1946 cf. pp.26ff. and 246. Heschel refers to B. Duhm, H. Gunkel, J. G. Matthews, T. H. Robinson among others who take this approach.

25. J. Lindblom, *idem*.

special type which can be called the prophetic type." The prophet, belonging entirely to his God has the paramount task to listen and to obey his God. He is different from other *homines religiosi* in that he always communicates his religious experiences to others. Furthermore the prophet claims to have a share in a particular divine inspiration; a great power deals with him and speaks through him. The prophet is compelled by the spirit. He is no longer a free man, he is forced to follow orders of the deity; thus the prophet is under constraint. Lindblom says that psychologically this prophetic experience is very similar to the inspiration of a poet and he refers to various writers to substantiate his point.

Lindblom then states, "When inspiration is strongly intensified it turns into ecstasy . . . (which) belongs to the psychical phenomena" . . . variously described. Lindblom's definition of ecstasy is "an abnormal state of consciousness in which one is so intensely absorbed by one simple idea or one simple feeling . . . that the normal stream of psychical life is more or less arrested." He continues saying that such ecstasy is not peculiar to religious men. Any person so predisposed, who concentrates upon one idea or feeling passes into a sort of trance. And immediately following this he says, "In religious ecstasy consciousness is entirely filled with the presence of God, with ideas and feelings belonging to the divine sphere."²⁶

A review of various demonstrations of ecstatic experiences is presented by Lindblom in his first chapter.²⁷ The psychical experiences of the heathen shaman among the Arctic and Ural-Altai peoples, of the kahins and dervishes in the Arab world, of the Rwala bedouin of North Arabia, of Mohammed, of the sleeping preachers in Finland, of St. Bridget of Sweden, of the prophets of ancient Greece and of the ancient Near East (e.g., Wen-Amon the Egyptian who was detained in Phoenecia,²⁸ and Zarathustra), are discussed. These experiences are all said to be ecstatic, however the experiences may vary in degrees of ecstasy. Brigitta's experiences varied, not all her revelations were received in ecstasy in the strict sense,²⁹ yet basically all the ecstatic experiences are of the same psychological order.

Lindblom sums up: influences whether by information or experiences originating in the divine world, flow into the human soul. The contact with the divine world may be by having the divinity enter the human ego or remain outside it and then seize it, speak to it, etc. This is basically what inspiration denotes. Ecstasy is the term to use when inspiration has grown so strong that the inspired person has lost full control of himself. The normal current of mental life is interrupted . . . ordinary mental faculties and sometimes the physical powers, are put out of function.

Furthermore, revelation (a term taken from the medieval visionary mystics) is received when the person, inspired or ecstatic, is in a dynamic state of mind, also called the revelatory state of mind. These revelations are received by visions, hallucinatory experiences, etc., in which things are seen

26. See the first 5 pages of Lindblom's work for the detailed statement. Also, note that the Greek idea of "the nous departs before the duty enters" is implicitly assumed by Lindblom Cf. p.33. See the discussion of G. Vos idem, p.243ff, on this Greek notion.

27. *Ibid*, pp.6-32.

28. The story of Wen-Amon is found in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts as Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by J. B. Pritchard, Princeton, p.25ff.

29. Lindblom, idem p.23.

and heard pictorially, dramatically or symbolically. These revelations are of a varied material content and always proclaimed by the inspired ecstatic person.

Lindblom in his summary stresses the universal character of inspiration and ecstasy as follows, "as said above, inspiration and ecstasy are often connected with some accessory phenomena of a psycho-physical nature, strongly diverging from the behaviour of ordinary men. Such phenomena were found among the shaman, dervishes, Rwala seers, but also among the Finnish trance preachers and the medieval visionaries."³⁰ This intensified activity is manifested in violent bodily movements, dancing, jumping, leaping, etc., or by unnatural passivity: paralysis, anaesthesia, torpor, etc.

These ecstatic raptures are evoked by dancing, bodily movements, music, self mutilation, narcotic drugs and intoxicating liquors. Then, in the next paragraph Lindblom says: "typical of all prophetic personalities is the feeling that what they have to say is given them from above."³¹

These prophetic (inspired-ecstatic) elements in the history of religion are studied Lindblom posits: "to get a background treatment of Israelite prophecy."³²

With the light of the historio-psychologico-religio lamp shining on the Old Testament, Lindblom analyses the materials available on the Old Testament prophets. Lindblom distinguishes between the primitive prophets and the classical prophets; however this distinction is not absolute. Ecstasy is not a distinctive feature of the primitive prophets, for it is also found in the later prophets. Only the degree and frequency of ecstasy are the distinguishing features between the two groups.

The prophetic ecstasy reported in I Samuel 10:5ff., in which Saul joined (I Samuel 19:22-23 also) is the first type to be recorded. It was orgiastic, collective and contagious in character. Elijah also experienced orgiastic ecstasy when he ran before Ahab's chariot. Elisha experienced passive ecstasy when he met Hazeael the Syrian, II Kings 8:7ff. Prophetic ecstasy was also evidenced in foreseeing, foretelling, clairvoyance in the early days of the two kingdoms. Miracle working accompanied the ecstasy. The prophetic word was considered to be creative, powerful as well as deeds, such as striking water with a mantle. The magical element, says Lindblom, was undoubtedly involved in the activities of the early ecstatic prophets.

To understand the character of primitive prophecy, one must analyze the nature of the divine influence Lindblom admits. The most dominating influence was the Word of the Lord, said to be a mysterious knowledge, inner inexplicable certainty, wonderful insight into divine and human affairs received during the hours of inspiration. The Spirit of Yahweh and the Hand of Yahweh are also expressions used to describe the way in which supernatural activities were obtained. "The idea of the *ru'ah* (spirit) as the cause of ecstasy is a heritage from still more primitive times when ecstatic men and women were thought of as possessed by and filled with spirits." But in the Old Testament it is always Yahweh's spirit, a more or less substantial dynamic, a force, emanating from Yahweh, distinct from the jinns of the Arabs or the demons in the gospels. The Hand of Yahweh refers to the power of the Lord, and is substantially identical in effect to the Spirit of the Lord. Lind-

30. *Ibid*, pp.35-41.

31. *Ibid*, p.43.

32. *Ibid*, p.32,46.

blom adds that exterior methods such as self wounding,³³ music, dancing and rhythm were used to evoke ecstasy.³⁴

How did ecstatic prophecy originate in Israel? Lindblom sees much influence from the Phoenecians and Canaanites. But the mantic influences of the Arabian nomads is evident also. That the Hebrew prophetic movement was genuine to the Hebrews, of specific origin, is not referred to, however, the possibility of such a genuine movement borrowing customs from the pagan world is said to be hardly possible.³⁵

Lindblom introduces his discussion of the classical prophets by pointing to Amos as the first one of this series and Malachi as the last. These men were prophets in the strict sense, i.e., "their psychic peculiarities show incontrovertibly that they belong to the general religio-historical prophetic type discussed before and the psychological experiences resemble those of the early prophets." In short, the Canonical prophets were also ecstasies participating in the universal ecstatic phenomena.

Lindblom does stress that he does not agree that seeing the prophets thus detracts from the personal religion of the prophets, e.g., in ecstatic experiences they were personally filled with zeal for God and His cause.³⁶

"Amos may appropriately be described as an ecstatic." An analysis of his words and activities serve as Lindblom's basis for this statement.³⁷ All the Canonical prophets had possession of divine words for they were admitted to the "divine consultation" by means of the vision primarily. The words they then spoke after this consultation were powerful, creative, but then Lindblom adds: "a modern psychologist speaks of suggestion. The practical result is in both cases the same."³⁸ A lengthy discussion indicates that Lindblom views the Canonical prophets as true ecstasies because of the ecstatic visions and auditions they experienced and by means of which they received revelations. These revelations, historically and psychologically defined (not dogmatically) were conveyed through perceptions, thoughts and ideas which were then expressed in words.³⁹ Furthermore, the ecstatic visions are classified as (1) pictorial, such as Ezekiel saw when he was inaugurated⁴⁰ and when he saw the valley of dry bones and most of Amos' visions, (2) as dramatic, e.g., Isaiah's call, Jeremiah's call, Ezekiel's transportation to Jerusalem, chapters 8-11, and (3) as literary visions, which are nothing more than poetic

33. Lindblom bases this statement on Zechariah 13:2ff.

34. *Ibid.* Cf. pp.47-60.

35. Lindblom makes this statement after he asked the question if all the influences came from the Canaanites. He answers that since Hebrew prophets preached against these, they likely borrowed from the Bedouins in Sinai peninsula rather than from that which they opposed, p.66.

36. *Ibid.* pp.105, 106. In this context, i.e., of the classical prophets, Lindblom rejects the idea of the mental state losing consciousness and being absorbed in the divine, he prefers the idea of present day psychologists who stress the senses' temporary cessation of normal functioning. In this latter sense, men can speak to God and God to men as in prayer and thus the personal religion of the prophets is maintained, Lindblom contends, repeating Gunkel's position.

37. *Ibid.* p.107.

38. *Ibid.* p.118.

39. *Ibid.* p.122.

40. R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, London, reprint in 1963, suggests that Ezekiel had a hallucination when called, p.535 and that chapters 37:1, 40:2, 43:5 inform us Ezekiel ecstatically saw only hallucinatory apparitions, p.537.

inspirations such as Zechariah's visions and Ezekiel's vision of the new temple, chapters 40-48. In the ecstatic state, the prophet also encountered symbolic perceptions such as Amos' basket of summer fruit.⁴¹

Much more should be written concerning the various scholars' analyses and conclusions in order to present their views properly. Space forbids me. However, I trust that enough has been written to give a general idea of what happens when inspired prophets are analyzed from the historico-psychologico-religio point of view.

At this point I wish to make a number of comments.

1. The position Lindblom presents has been adopted and/or partially supported by a large majority of Old Testament scholars living today.⁴² There is much difference of opinion on details and emphases. Yet, a careful scholar such as H. H. Rowley wrote: "The view that the Hebrew prophets were an entirely unique phenomena in the religious history of the world, unique not only in the spiritual level they attained, but in the whole character of their work — is one that cannot be maintained."⁴³ Rowley simply means to say that Hebrew prophecy is related to the universal ecstatic phenomena, as well as to the magical elements seen in other religions. Rowley says: "Hebrew prophecy grew out of that background, and it did grow."⁴⁴

2. If the historico-psychologico-religio approach is correct it certainly follows that the historic Biblical ideas of Divine inspiration, revelation and authority are erroneous. In spite of the many references by Lindblom to God's voice, God's hand, etc., the whole prophetic character of the Old Testament is humanistically oriented. The divine aspect is essentially ignored.

3. If the approach of the modern scholar is correct then New Testament glossolalia is a strictly psychological phenomena. So is Paul's inspiration and his speaking in tongues.

4. Also, if Lindblom's position is correct, tongue speaking of today, in the light of Old Testament study by modern scholars, is part of the universal ecstatic phenomena which was found among the Canaanitish Baal worshippers and evidenced in the Greek mystery religions. Then tongue speaking is strictly an abnormal psychological experience which has its purposes and values for some present day people who require some unusual psychological outlet for inner tensions or who require unusual psychic experiences to bolster their ego.

The questions however to be asked are:

Is the historico-psychologico-religio approach valid?

Are the conclusions arrived at true to fact?

Is the entire system defensible?

I certainly do not believe we can answer the questions in the affirmative. I am not the only one to take this position. E. J. Young has indicated in his writings that he cannot accept the "psychological approach".⁴⁵ Nor does

41. *Ibid.*, p.137, 141.

42. Cf. footnote 24.

43. Rowley, *idem* p.113 (*italics mine GVG*).

44. *Ibid.*, p.115 Cf. also Rowley, **The Servant of the Lord**, p.91ff. for a fuller statement of his position.

45. Cf. **My Servants The Prophets**, particularly chapters V, VI and VII.

J. B. Payne,⁴⁶ or G. Vos.⁴⁷ J. Ridderbos, discussing the personality, inspiration and visions of Ezekiel, gives clear evidence he does not accept the psychological approach to prophecy either,⁴⁸ though he does not deny that some prophets had ecstatic experiences. Heschel says that the premise that all that appears in the field of religion, including prophetism, has its origin in the subconscious realm of the soul is open to question. It is unproven.

But Heschel overstates the case in his emphatic rejection of all ecstatic experiences in Old Testament prophecy. However, he does say much that is to the point. "The theory of ecstasy . . . reduced biblical prophecy as well as other phenomena in the history of religion to a common anthropological denominator . . . and it offered a psychological explanation of what seemed to be an enigma."⁴⁹

Heschel presents a thorough discussion of the Greek term *ekstasis*. The Greeks referred literally to a state of trance in which the the soul was no longer in its place; it had escaped the body to become united with a deity. The Greeks induced the state by narcotics, alcohol, music, dance as well as by contemplation, complete spiritual concentration and prayer.

The term *entheos* is also discussed. Literally the term means — in god, or god in (a man). It is closely related to ecstasy. Ecstasy refers to the soul out of a man, *entheos* refers to god in a man. The latter is a divine seizure. Thus, ecstasy was a prerequisite for enthusiasm or possession, resulting in a "sacred madness."⁵⁰

Heschel rejects both concepts as valid characteristics of the Hebrew prophets. He attributes the initial errors in prophetology, particularly in regard to ecstasy and enthusiasm, to Philo the syncretist. He emphatically states that the Old Testament Bible has no word for ecstasy.⁵¹ The Septuagint which does employ it uses it as a translation for a deep sleep as in Genesis 15:12. The rabbis in early Christian times knew of prophetic ecstasy, for they ascribed it to Balaam, the pagan prophet, but of Moses it was said that he received revelation while retaining his full power of consciousness." Heschel quotes one rabbi who posited the absence of all ecstasy as the mark that distinguished the Hebrew prophets from all other prophets.⁵² Heschel himself quotes Isaiah 28:7 as evidence that ecstasy resulted from drunkenness. "What is inaccessible to man in that of normal consciousness is given to him in the state of intoxication," is Heschel's comment.⁵³ Thus ecstasy also becomes a definite mark by which false prophets could be known.

46. J. B. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cf. chapters 3, 4 and Appendix 1.

47. Vos, *idem*, chapters 1-5, pp.203-252.

48. J. Ridderbos, *Het God's Woord der Profeten*, 4 volumes, Kampen. In Volume 4, pp.28ff, Ridderbos discusses Ezekiel's "ecstatic appearances." He immediately states that the specific use of the term *ecstasy* must be clarified in any discussion where it is employed. However, Ridderbos does not ascribe ecstatic tongue speaking to Ezekiel, rather, Ezekiel experienced a holy ecstasy at the hand of God's Spirit and not a natural ecstasy (psychological phenomena). p.28.

49. Heschel, *idem*, p.324.

50. *Ibid*, p.327.

51. *Ibid*, p.337.

52. *Ibid*, p.339.

53. *Ibid*, p.355.

In the chapter entitled prophecy and psychoses Heschel attempts to sweep all psychological, neurotic and psychoanalytical references from the deck of the ship of Hebrew prophecy. E.g., rightly, he emphatically rejects that Ezekiel was true psychotic, having periods of catatonia and a narcissistic-masochistic conflict with attendant schizophrenic withdrawals and delusions of persecution and grandeur as Klosterman, Bertholet, Broome and others have suggested.⁵⁴ Likewise he properly rejects that Hosea suffered from sex-obsession and Isaiah and Jeremiah evidenced pathological phenomena. While it is proper to reject such ideas, is it correct to say that no true prophet had any ecstatic experiences and that the Old Testament does not sanction any type of ecstatic experiences? Is it correct to imply with Heschel that tongue speaking, an ecstatic experience, is never of God? If it is not of God, it is of man and/or the demons. Does the Old Testament give indications that the answer should be, "not of God, but of man and devils"?

III.

A study of various selected Old Testament passages should enable us to come to some general conclusions.

An initial comment concerning the word prophet should be made. Various scholars have made detailed studies of the Hebrew word for prophet — **nabhi**'. Its early Semitic origins have been traced. It has been found that in Arabic a similar word meant to utter a low voice or sound. In the Assyrian language a similar word meant to call or proclaim. In Hebrew there is another word spelled just a bit differently, **nabha'**, which means to spring up, bubble up. It is said that the Assyrian word is basically the same word as this second Hebrew word. The next step that is taken by various scholars is to say then that the Hebrew word for prophet, **nabhi**', is a weakened form of the other Hebrew word, **nabha'**, and thus a prophet is one who bubbles forth, one from whom words spring up and bubble forth as water from an artesian well.⁵⁵ Thus, Heschel says, when he comments on the views of the word **nabhi**', it is supposed to denote, first of all, a person who had the gift of tongues or glossolalia through the inspiration of a higher being. This sort of speaking was not meant initially to be heard by others, the obscurity of its expressions making it totally unintelligible to the bystanders.⁵⁶ From this original prophecy, the intelligible prophecy developed.

Commenting on the two points just raised we should say the following at this point:

1. There is no definite evidence at all that the words in Hebrew have the same origin. In fact, the evidence suggests the contrary. Terms which have a different **root letter**, i.e., where the **'ayin** is found in one instance and an **'aleph** in the other, strongly suggests two distinct original terms. However, if there is a relationship between **nabhi**' and some other Hebrew or Semitic term it is most difficult to determine precisely what it is, as Vos has clearly pointed out.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Young points out that the term referring to the acts of prophecy, i.e., the verb, is most likely derived from the noun

54. *Ibid*, p.397.

55. For further information on these terms and their interrelatedness, consult among others **Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament**, B.D.B., Oxford or any of the recently produced studies in Biblical Theology, particularly those which stress prophetic activity.

56. Heschel, *Idem* pp.347-348.

57. Vos, *idem*, p. 209ff.

prophet, and not the noun from the verb as many scholars suggest.⁵⁸ Hence, a prophet is a specific type of person, who, when he does his work as such, prophesies.

2. Abraham is called a prophet, Genesis 20:7. The context discusses prayer and intercession which Abraham will offer on behalf of Abimelech, king of Gerar. There is no evidence at all of Abraham prophesying, of bubbling forth words, etc. Likewise, Moses is called a prophet by the Lord, Deuteronomy 19:9-22, but Moses never gave evidences of ecstatic experiences. Rather, the idea of prophet in this context is that of one who proclaims clearly and fully the counsel of God.⁵⁹

3. There is evidence in the Old Testament scriptures, however, as we shall see, that the term prophesy (**nabha'**), the verb, does also refer to some type of ecstatic behaviour which is of divine origin, and which existed simultaneously with the proclamation of divine revelation by the mouths of inspired prophets.

A. Numbers 11:23-29.⁶⁰ The setting of this passage is well known. Moses was overburdened by administrative and judicial activities. He needed help. He appealed to the Lord who instructed him to gather seventy men from among those who had been appointed as elders and leaders. These were to share the burden of governing the people with Moses. Seventy men were selected; sixty eight of these gathered, with Moses, about the Tent of meeting. The Lord took of the Spirit upon Moses and put it upon the seventy men, i.e., the sixty eight about the Tent, and Eldad and Medad, who for some unknown reason, were not near the Tent. All seventy prophesied once, and did so no more (verse 25), the two men in the camp included. When Moses was told about the two in camp, he uttered his wish "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them" (verse 29).

The specific questions that call for an answer are: What did these seventy men do when they prophesied once, and what did Moses wish concerning the Lord's people?

Various books and commentaries could be quoted but space forbids me to do this. I have selected Young⁶¹ as a good spokesman for various scholars. Young makes the following observations:

1. All seventy men prophesied, but it was not proclaiming the message of a superior.

58. Young, *idem*, p. 56ff.

59. Cf. Young, *ibid*, p. 20ff.

60. This passage is not accepted as historical by many present day scholars. Lindblom says it is curious narrative, p.47, and it has been inserted here to give authority to the later institution of elders in the Hebrew nation, p.67. C. Kuhl says that this passage in Numbers is inserted as a deliberate attempt to establish the antiquity and continuity of prophecy in Israel; the actual account of the 70 elders reflects the state of ecstatic prophecy in the days of Samuel. **The Prophets of Israel**, Richmond, Virginia, 1960, p.9. I accept the passage as reliable for various reasons, three of which are: (1) it is an integral, meaningful part in the narrative of the Israelitish wanderings in the wilderness; (2) there is no textual, critical evidence at all to indicate it is of later date; (3) the reasons given for the unhistorical character are based upon apriori suppositions concerning prophecy as such which I cannot accept.

61. Young, *idem*, p. 68ff, 83ff.

2. The prophesying, while it lasted, was of a continuing nature, a continuous action, for the participial form of the verb is employed.⁶²

3. Moses was not rebuked when the Spirit upon him was taken and placed upon the seventy. Moses had no less of the Spirit than before. Seventy one men now had the Spirit, so that in one spirit and purpose all could perform the necessary task.

4. The prophesying was a direct result of receiving the Spirit.

5. The prophesying assumed some outward expression; possibly the seventy spoke in an elevated state of mind, **perhaps giving utterance in tongues** as was the case at Pentecost.

6. Moses saw that the manifestation of the Spirit's presence was a token to the whole nation that God gave these seventy the Spirit so that they could be Moses' helpers.

7. Moses wishes all the people were prophets, i.e., acting as the seventy.

I cannot entirely agree with Young on every point. The following comments should be made:

1. Young says that the seventy did not proclaim the message of God, yet they likely spoke as the men and women did on Pentecost. Does Young imply that the Spirit-filled people on Pentecost did not proclaim the message of God? The people from various nations heard the Spirit-filled people speak in recognizable languages. What did these people hear from the Spirit-filled believers? I personally am quite certain they heard the message of God, not new revelation but a repetition of that given before or their own version of it.

2. Young says that the seventy possibly spoke in an elevated state of mind. What does **elevated** mean? It does not mean without the mind, in the Greek sense of **ekstasis**, I am sure. I know of an elevated, i.e., happy, exuberant, boisterous spirit, not of **mind**, i.e., intellect. Does Young mean that the mind did not function completely in a normal way? That these Spirit-filled men were to an extent not "normal", completely responsible? Would the Lord have seventy men behave in such a way just at the time He would have these men be received as responsible leaders together with Moses?

3. Young says in effect that Moses wishes the entire people to become elevated in mind, probably speaking in tongues. Is that what Moses really meant when he added "that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them"? I personally doubt it.

4. I entirely agree that we should see this prophesying activity of the seventy as the result of the Spirit upon the seventy. I also agree that possibly the nearest similar phenomena recorded in the Scriptures is the Pentecost story. I also agree that there was undoubtedly an external manifestation when the Spirit came upon the seventy. This manifestation was not of a moment's duration, as Young correctly observed, but of a longer period.

62. A. Noordtzi, *Het Boek Numeri, Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift*, Kampen, 1957, points out that this specific verbal form of nabha is used in I Samuel 10; 19:20-24; I Kings 22:10, Jeremiah 29:26. He says that the verb thus written does not indicate the prophetic activities of men such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, but a "geestesvervoering" (a being carried by the Spirit) such as Saul experienced, accompanied with the gushing forth of all sorts of spirit filled words, p.124. My personal opinion is that Noordtzi reads more into the participial form of the verb than it really says.

When it stopped, this manifestation was ended for good on the part of the seventy.

There are a number of additional factors which the passage records which we may not omit in our study.

1. There is no evidence that Moses ever had ecstatic experiences nor do we find any indication that Moses joined in with the sixty eight around the Tent of meeting.

2. The office of seventy elders was instituted at this time. The Spirit of God came upon these men in such a way that Moses and the entire congregation were assured that these men were indeed divinely appointed.

3. The church in the Old Testament was in a very severe crisis in the wilderness. Many foreigners had accompanied Israel out of Egypt. Strangers wandering in the wilderness, had joined the Israelite camp. The foreigners, alien rabble according to the Berkeley version, began to have cravings. They induced all the people to whine throughout their families (11:10). Rebellion, rioting, mob actions of various kinds were a real and dire threat. The foreign speaking people had to be addressed. They had to be impressed with the authority and power of Moses and also of the seventy appointed elders.

4. The two men who, for some unknown reason, did not join the assembly around the Tent of meeting were considered a threat to Moses' position of leadership. When Moses was informed, Joshua urged Moses to stop them. Was Joshua afraid of turmoil, rowdiness, undisciplined behaviour? No, for Moses replied: "Are you jealous for my sake?" Moses evidently realized that Joshua saw the two men who were not directly in the presence of Moses as a threat to his leadership. What were these two men doing that they should be considered a threat? They undoubtedly were doing that which was usually associated with Moses in one way or another.

5. Moses is very emphatic: he wishes that all the people of the Lord were prophets, that they would do as Eldad and Medad, as the sixty eight men surrounding the Tent of meeting.

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In view of all the given factors, mentioned by Young and the additional ones mentioned above, the question must be asked: Did the seventy men receiving the Spirit have only a behavioural ecstatic experience? Did they behave externally just as the bedouins, magicians and dervishes? As the Assyrian and Phoenecian cultic leaders? Did they behave as Saul did when he joined the band of prophets?

I find it very, very difficult to give affirmative answers to these questions. Would such behaviour evoke respect for the seventy men as assistants to Moses? Possibly the phenomena of ecstasy caused respect on the part of the masses for those experiencing it. But, would the foreigners in camp, with their religious leaders then not have immediately imitated the seventy men and claimed divine authority for themselves also? Further, did Moses only wish for an external ecstatic experience on the part of all God's devoted followers? Even if the ecstatic experience included the speaking of unintelligible words, would that mark the elders as distinct, filled with His Spirit, obedient and content in His service?

Young suggested that there may have been a speaking in tongues as was the case at Pentecost. This seems to me to be a very definite possibility. I

take the speaking at Pentecost to be a speaking miracle. Those who believed were Spirit-filled and they were given the power to praise God in such a way that men from many nations heard the marvels of God's grace. It seems to me that very likely something like this happened in the wilderness. The seventy men, controlled by the Spirit may have repeated the wonders of God which the people had experienced under Moses' leadership and which they had heard Moses repeat before. This speaking very likely was accompanied by unusual behaviour — bodily movement, singing, chanting, etc. I can well conceive of the definite possibility that the seventy speaking in the various languages spoken in the camp, boldly, exuberantly praising God were thus unhesitatingly accepted as assistants to Moses without question. In fact, we know that the office of the seventy elders continued throughout the history of Israel as a divinely instituted office.

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If we grant that the seventy men had an ecstatic experience which included intelligible tongue speaking, then we can readily understand why Moses longed to have all God's people to be prophets. Spirit filled people, who praise God as they recount His wonders, not only resist those who grumble and suggest rebellion, but they support the work of God. This was a dire necessity in the camp in the wilderness. However, the Lord designated seventy men to be thus blessed. The prophet Joel, chapter 2, however prophesied that Moses' wish would become a reality, as indeed it did on Pentecost.

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Should we seriously consider this explanation of what took place in the camp in the wilderness to be correct, as I personally am inclined to do, then we note also that there are certain similarities between the Old Testament account and the New Testament story.

1. In the beginning of the Old Testament church, when it was established as a theocracy, Spirit-filled men were appointed to be of specific assistance to Moses the leader. In the New Testament story, at the most crucial stage, the commencement of the missionary task of the church, the believers received the Spirit and were given assurance of their appointment to specific witnessing service as assistants to the apostles.

2. In the earlier stages of the Old Testament theocracy, the bands of prophets assisted Samuel, Elijah and Elisha in crucial periods. Thus also, in the New Testament era, as the church was extended, glossolalia assisted in the establishment of strangers in the household of faith. As such, both definitely were of the Holy Spirit.

3. The speaking in tongues in the Old Testament was a communal experience for the benefit of the entire congregation and for those who accompanied the congregation. On Pentecost, this speaking was also initially a communal experience, not for the benefit of individuals but for the entire church and for those who were led into the church of Jesus Christ.

4. The phenomena in the camp in the wilderness was definitely a Spirit directed and controlled experience on the part of the seventy elders. It was definitely distinct from prophetic activity in the sense of proclaiming new revelation from God. Likewise in the New Testament, glossolalia was distinct from prophesying also in the sense of proclaiming new revelation from God. The inspiration of the prophets was a unique and holy act of God as J. Rid-

derbos contends,⁶³ distinct from ecstatic experiences of fellow Israelites and also entirely different from the ecstatic experiences of Israel's neighbouring nations and non Christian peoples in the New Testament era.

B. Numbers, chapters 22, 23, 24.

The account by Moses concerning Balaam is well known. There are a number of items that have occasioned considerable discussion. Was Balaam a true prophet of the Lord? Or was he really a heathen ecstatic prophet or a magician? What does it mean, e.g., in chapter 23:3, 4, Balaam went to a bare height and God met Balaam, and verse 5, the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth? What does chapter 24:1 indicate when it speaks of Balaam's divinations?

Young says that Balaam could not be a true prophet for true prophets came only from among the brethren.⁶⁴ This does not indicate, if I understand Young properly, that Balaam was not given the prophetic gift for this specific occasion. Heschel agrees, saying that Balaam was a spark (inspired man) lost in the dark; what followed him was superstition or complete oblivion.⁶⁵

Noordtjij is quite certain that Balaam sought his enchantments, chapter 24:1, when he went to the open to seek a message, chapter 23:3, 4, 15.⁶⁶ However, the God of Israel met him instead and gave him a message. Thus Balaam gave forth the word of God, he was not ecstatic, he was not speaking in tongues. King Balak understood all he said, and understood it well.

Thus in the Balaam account we have no information as to ecstasy, much less of tongue speaking.

C. I Samuel 10:5, 6, 10-13; 18:24; 19:22-24.

The first passage records the story of Saul being told by Samuel that the asses he sought were found and that three signs on the way were to assure him. The third sign was that of a band of prophets, who with musical instruments, would be prophesying. Saul was to join them as a new man. It happened as Samuel had said. In the second passage, Saul in a frenzy seeks to kill David. In the last passage Saul, having stripped off his outer garments, joins the prophetic band and is overcome by a stupor.

Many Old Testament scholars intimate that these messages and similar ones in Kings really indicate the direct connection between the heathen ecstatic prophets and the prophets of Israel.⁶⁷

Payne considers Saul to have been changed in an external way when the Spirit of God came over him in a similar way as in the "schools of prophets". Saul thus did not experience a true conversion when he received that "changed heart". Later the Spirit left Saul, and then still later, under the influence of music, demon-possessed Saul in his ravings is said to have prophesied, I Samuel 18:10.⁶⁸

Young⁶⁹ points out that the band coming down the hill, I Samuel 10:5, was prophesying as it came. This was surely not preaching. Here some form

63. See footnote 48.

64. Young *idem*, p.27.

65. Heschel, *idem*, p.472.

66. Noordtjij, *idem*, p. 258ff.

67. E.g., Cf. Lindblom, p. 48ff.

68. Payne, *idem*, p.52.

69. Young, *idem*, p.70ff. Also chapter 5, pp.83-94.

of singing was undoubtedly employed along with the musical instruments. The actual behaviour was like the seventy in the wilderness, joyous, exuberant, noisy. Saul joined in this noisy exuberant demonstration singing with the prophets. In I Samuel 18 Young contends that under the power of the God-directed evil spirit, Saul becomes frenzied and attempts to kill David. In the passage I Samuel 19, Young understands Saul to be influenced externally by the Spirit of God for it is a God-given opportunity for Saul to repent and turn to God.

As I study these passages in I Samuel I am quite certain that I must conclude the following:

1. The external behaviour of the seventy elders in the wilderness is reproduced, possibly exaggerated, and therefore more like ecstatic frenzy.

2. The singing and music having been taken up, possibly in imitation of heathen prophets, was to induce more excited behaviour expressed in chanting, garbled speech and strange bodily movements. Thus we see how a God-given blessing begins to be manipulated by men. God still employed them, however, for His purposes. In fact, they were Spirit-led and controlled.

3. The actions of Saul were under God's control. Either through the Spirit of God or through an evil spirit, Saul is dealt with by God so that he may realize his own weakness and the sovereign power of God.

4. The schools or bands of prophets were in no way giving forth revelation. They were of assistance to the inspired prophets Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah (8:20), etc., by preaching, singing and other possible means of exhortation and/or admonishment.

D. In the books of the Kings we read of bands of prophets also. These books we must remember cover the period in which the Canonical prophets lived and worked. In the ministry of Elijah we meet the prophets of Baal. On Mount Carmel an exhibition of their extreme endeavours to be fully ecstatic and thus powerful before their god is given (I Kings 18). Meanwhile the bands of prophets associated with the ministry of Elijah and Elisha (II Kings, chapters 2, 4, 6) indicate that these schools were disciplined, in close association with the inspired prophets, undoubtedly assisting them in their crucial work in the religiously critical times of the people of God.

We certainly are not justified to say that these later bands gave evidence of orgiastic behaviour or of any kind of ecstatic behaviour which would indicate a type of tongue speaking. However, the prophets who prophesied before kings Jehoshaphat and Ahab, I Kings 22:10, whom Jehoshaphat did not accept as genuine prophets may well have behaved in a pagan ecstatic manner. But the very fact that Zedekiah made horns and all the prophets said "Go up — fight" does indicate that the speaking was rational, intelligible in part at least.

Jeremiah 29:26 states that men who claimed to be prophets were "mad", i.e., acted strangely. They were undoubtedly wildly ecstatic; self influenced by drugs, alcohol and various specific exercises. It is to these that Heschel appeals as a basis to say that no ecstatic behaviour comes from the Lord at all.⁷⁰ Heschel is correct when he denies that the Canonical prophets were ecstatics in the psychological sense of the word. But the inspired prophets (from Moses to Malachi) certainly were enthused, *entheos*, God was in them.

70. Heschel quotes Isaiah 28:7 where drunkenness is intimated, as well as other texts. See footnote 22.

IV.

Before we turn to the New Testament, we can sum up the Old Testament rays of light on Tongue Speaking as follows:

1. The inspired prophets, from Moses to Malachi were under the power, direction and control of God to reveal God's will to man. This inspiration was a unique and distinct (holy) act of God.

2. The Old Testament speaks of a second type of prophecy.⁷¹ The prophecy was originated in the wilderness soon after the Old Testament church was instituted a Theocracy. It was initiated by God for the purpose of assisting the inspired prophets.

3. This second type of prophecy was always exercised in a community; it was not an individualistic phenomena. (It was not for the sake of personal assurance or personal enhancement in **any way**.) The fact that it was communal likely proved an incentive to exaggerated demonstrations of joy and exuberance and a competitive element may have entered in also.

4. This second type of prophecy had an unusual external behaviour as an accompaniment in various instances. Speaking in unison, singing, music by instruments and bodily movements were undoubtedly present as well as some tongue speaking. Evidence indicates however, that this tongue speaking may have been intelligible as on Pentecost day.

5. The second type of prophesying was continued throughout the history of the Old Testament. It was imitated by evil men, it was manipulated by believing men who undoubtedly may have meant well or had mixed motives. This resulted in exaggerated behaviour and very likely in unintelligible tongue speaking also. This tongue speaking, while not outrightly condemned, never received the full sanction of God.

6. As to prophecies concerning tongue speaking, we find that Joel 2 refers to Pentecost when the entire believing community was to receive the gift of prophecy — of the second type.

71. In Hebrew nabhi' referred to various distinct types of prophecy. So also in English, the word prophecy has a specific yet varied meaning. Cf. Young, *idem*, Chapter 3.