

# Aspects of the Involvement of Non-Canonical Prophets in the Religious Political and Social Life of their Time

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**ABSTRACT:** The prophet, whether he was called canonical or non-canonical, namely, one whose writings were or were not included in the Holy Scriptures Canon, is considered to be the man of God, who hears God's voice and conveys His message, playing a very important role, respectively, to communicate to men the will and plans of God. The difference between a canonical and a non-canonical prophet consists only in writing, only in the fact that one wrote a book and the other did not write a certain book, which would have been included in the Canon of the Bible. There are also cases in which some prophets have written, but their books have not become reference books, that would shape some basic rules and in which to be said how the conduct of human life should be. Therefore, the prophets who wrote such books are called canonical prophets, because through their books they created general rules, applicable to all people of all times. Non-canonical prophets, in particular, addresses to specific situations, to some specific moments from the religious, social, or political life of the time. The study presents some examples of non-canonical prophets.

**KEYWORDS:** institutions, prophet, canonical prophet, non-canonical prophet, power pole, royal house, sanctuary

The Prophet, no matter how he was called, canonical or non-canonical, is considered to be one whose writings were or were not included in the Canon or in the Scriptures. Thus, the prophet is considered to be the man of God, the one who hears God's voice and transmits His message where it is sent, a person who fulfills a very important role, namely to communicate His divine will and plans to people.

The difference between a canonical and a non-canonical prophet is only in the writing, only in the fact that one wrote a book and the other did not write a book, which should be included in the Canon of the Bible. There are also cases in which some prophets wrote but their books did not become reference books, that would shape some basic rules and in which to be said how the conduct of human life should be. Thus, the prophets who wrote such books are called canonical prophets, because through their books they created general rules, applicable to all people of all times. Non-canonical prophets, in particular, addresses to specific situations, specific moments in the religious, social, or political life of their time.

During the royal period, the institutions from Israel multiplied and developed. In the time of the judges there was only one institution, namely the Sanctuary and one man who was representative, namely the priest, while the judge appeared from time to time, in times of crisis and often the prophet appeared simultaneously with the judge. During the royal period, however, the second strongest institution was formed, the Royal House, which had a chancellery, with well-trained people, writers, archivists, chroniclers and various other officials, and the Royal House and the Sanctuary (Temple) will constitute the two main elements that led the people, one from a political and social point of view, and the other from a religious point of view. There has been, over time, a fairly good collaboration between the two institutions, the priesthood supporting and offering their good faith, to the monarch (king) in all the laws and legal aspects that he took. Many times, the king together with the priests went astray, from the point of view of worship, of the relationship with God, from the point of view

of political relations in the society of the time, when certain agreements or conventions were not according to God's will, for the conclusion of which neither divine guidance nor divine approval was required. And then, in those religious or political slippages that took place due to the activity of the two institutions, the Royal House and the Priesthood, an intervention was necessary in order to correct those slippages. Under those conditions God sent some men, prepared by Him, whom He endowed with the prophetic gift and whom He sent to correct those mistakes made in tandem by the King and by the priesthood. Thereby in the royal period we can speak of two poles of power, respectively a politico-religious pole (the Royal House and the Sanctuary or the Temple) and a second pole of power and authority (the Prophet). Between these two poles of power there was almost always a state of tension, of conflict and only very rarely, the king and the priest were willing to fulfill the words of the prophet.

In today's society, we do not have such a system, but it is normal for any institution or person to have someone behind him in order to correct him when he makes a mistake. When someone is a student, he / she has a mentor, who has the role of guiding and of correcting, and when someone has a certain job, there is also a supervisor who checks and corrects if necessary. Even from a political or administrative point of view, there are institutions that check, correct and hold accountable the slippages encountered. Instead, in the ancient society, God created an institution, the Institution of the Prophet, which had the greatest endorsement, namely the divine approval. This is how prophets were presented: This is how the Lord says, or the Spirit of the Lord spoke through me, the Word of the Lord spoke. The institution of the Prophet was an authoritative voice, a clear, indisputable voice, because he spoke in the name of divinity. Thus this Institution of the Prophet, which came to correct and direct the priesthood and the king, an institution that was unique in the human society, having a very good period of operation, for almost 600 years, starting from about the years 1050 (the time of Samuel) and until the year 586 (the enslavement of the tribes from the Kingdom of Judah in Babylon) or even until the year 425, when we have the last prophet. The institution of the Prophet, unique in its kind, was directly coordinated by the Spirit of God. The prophets, whether canonical or not, could not be subjected to criticism and analysis, for they did not speak from themselves, but were transmitters of the divine will. Normally in their message, because what they presented was the Word of God, man (no matter what position he held at that time) had to accept that message and be willing to correct the things he didn't do well.

It should also be mentioned that in addition to the true prophets, false prophets appeared also, just as in any time of our society, to a quality product appeared a counterfeit one. But man had the opportunity to prove, to verify, the true prophet, according to some signs that were given for recognition (Deuteronomy 18: 15-22).

The prophet **Ahijah** rose from Şilo, a locality that served as a religious center for a period of about 300 years, where the ark stood until the Philistines took it and destroyed the sanctuary, a locality which remained only in a certain form. This prophet rose respectively in the final period of King Solomon's reign. The prophet Ahijah was contemporary with King Solomon, because while King Solomon was working and building, he had a supervisor over a work team, a team of workers from the tribe of Ephraim, a very capable, strong, energetic young man named Jeroboam (1 Kings 11: 28). During the work, the prophet Ahijah follows this team leader, Jeroboam, and when he catches him somewhere alone in the field, he approaches him, asks him to sit down and listen to him to tell him something. The prophet, who was wearing a new, expensive cloak, which you could not easily find at that time, takes off his cloak and tore it into exactly 12 pieces, and gave 10 pieces of it to the young Jeroboam, explaining that Solomon's kingdom will be broken and he will be given ten tribes. The Prophet tells Jeroboam that at that time there were 12 tribes in the Kingdom of Israel, over which King Solomon ruled, but that kingdom was to be divided, and Jeroboam was to receive from God 10 of the twelve tribes, who would form a kingdom in the north and over which he will become king. The young Jeroboam is visibly surprised. The scripture passage describes this event as follows: "And it

came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever" (1 Kings 11: 29-39).

Under these circumstances, Ahijah will become the prophet of the house of Jeroboam, for which the king will have great respect. After a period of about 20 years, when Jeroboam's son was to become king in the place of his father, he fell ill, and in those moments of crisis, the king remembers the old prophet Ahijah and wants to hear from him information about his son and so he sends his wife to him, but sends her disguised (clothed) in an ordinary woman so that the prophet may not know her: "At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child. And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age. And the LORD said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman" (1 Kings 14: 1-5 ).

The queen, Jeroboam's wife, arrives at Shiloh, and as she walks through the courtyard, the prophet, who is in the house and does not see her at that time, hears her footsteps and says: "...Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it. Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all

Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now. For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger. And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin " (1 Kings 14: 6-16).

The prophet tells Jeroboam's wife (the queen) that during the 20 years of reign, her husband, namely the king, did everything upside down, quite contrary to what he was told to do, and for this reason God will take the kingdom and his house will be destroyed. It can be seen that the non-canonical prophets are very harsh in a way. They present a judgment that shakes you, as a human being. Thus the prophet Ahijah was the prophet of the house of Jeroboam, he spoke about his choice as a king, and he also presented the final judgment. During the reign of Jeroboam, the great things took place that led to his decline but also to the decline of the empire, respectively: the establishment of a religious system parallel to that one existing in Jerusalem, but opposite; the building of two religious centers at Bethel and Dan, with altars, with golden calves, with priesthood chosen from the common people; parallel holidays, celebrated one month after those in Jerusalem, similar, but not the same. All of these religious innovations brought by Jeroboam practically destroyed the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom.

The prophet Ahijah was the man who lived in the days of Solomon and Jeroboam, being the man who propelled Jeroboam to the position of king, transmitting to him, as a prophet, what he was told by the divinity to be transmitted to him. The Prophet felt a responsibility only insofar as he received a divine message with a certain recipient. It has always existed in history and today there is a tendency for certain people to become messengers, reformers, divine spokesmen, without being able to prove that they have a divine calling for the quality they claim to have.

If in the year 930 BC., the kingdom of Solomon was broken up, with ten tribes in the north and two tribes in the south, for the northern kingdom, the people had Ahijah of Shiloh as a prophet, while in the southern kingdom there were two prophets. Shemaia, who was a contemporary of the time of the kingdom breaking, a prophet who will tell the king from the south, Rehoboam son of Solomon, not to go to war with the northern tribes and not to try to reunite all the tribes together, because the separation of the kingdom was made by the divine will. Under these conditions the prophet goes to explain a political situation. The king Rehoboam understands the situation described and listens to the prophet's words and gives up the war with the ten northern tribes: "And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen *men*, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam" (2 Chronicle 11: 1-4).

It is written about the prophet Shemaiah that he wrote all those words in a book, which indicates that the non-canonical prophets were also literate, they knew how to write, read and wrote certain books, but these books did not remained in the canon of the Bible, were books that had a content of chronicle, historiography, data, for a certain period of time. And at the same time there was another prophet, **the seer Ido**, about whom we are not told what interventions in the religious, political or social life he had. He is considered to have been a court clerk, a chronicler, with more of an office mission than a punctual mission for one situation or another.

The impact of these prophets has been multiple. For example, the prophet Shemaiah stopped a fratricidal war between the Kingdom of Israel consisting of the ten northern tribes, with the capital at Samaria, and the Kingdom of Judah consisting of the two southern tribes, with the capital at Jerusalem. People should give much more importance to the prophets in general by studying the entire Holy Scriptures, reading what each prophet said and wrote, and in various situations of life, similar to some described in the Bible, the man could ask himself the question, if a punctual message given then in a certain situation would not suit him too. If we had thought in this way, listening to a prophetic advice given in a situation similar to ours, we would have prevented many of our misfortunes, hardships, or failures.

At that time another prophet appeared, also called the man of God. He was not from the northern kingdom, but from the southern kingdom, from Jerusalem, and God sent him from that area (we do not know exactly whether he was of the tribe of Benjamin or Judah) to go to Bethel. The distance between Jerusalem and Bethel is about 30 km, being considered the highest point of the plateau of Benjamin, and there on the highest point was placed the Bethel Altar, a place that was a religious center of the Northern Kingdom. The scripture passage describes the following aspects of that event: "And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out...The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD " (1 Kings 13: 1-3,5).

The Prophet was sent there with a precise message but also with some very precise clauses. He had to go one way and he had to go back another way. He had to go and send the message and then return without eating or drinking. Thus, the prophet goes to Bethel, reaches the altar, it is possible to have been a day of holiday, with many people present there, occasion on which the king was also present. The prophet arrives there, raises his hand, and speaks to the altar, including about the burning of human bones on it.

In the Jewish conception, burning bones was considered a terrible thing, or throwing bones in the field was also an extremely serious matter, considering that the man had no perspective. The prophet says in that situation that the sign or proof of the fact that he speaks from the part of divinity will be the fact that the altar, to which he spoke, will split in two, fact which happened in the following moments of his message. A similar altar was also built by Jeroboam at Dan, where the stone wall was about a meter long.

The king who was there at the altar stretched out his hand and cried out for the man of God to be caught, and his hand dried up (paralyzed) and remained stiff. And at that moment the king, afflicted and ashamed, asked the prophet to pray to God so that he could pull his hand back, and at the prophet's prayer his hand healed. The third miracle occurs in that moment (the miracle with the altar that splits, with the hand that paralyzes and then with the respective hand that heals): "And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before" (1 Kings 13: 4,6).

The prophet's message to those who were there was that what they were doing religiously was not right. King Jeroboam acted in the mind of a pagan, who makes an idol and who is worshiping that idol, believing that the idol is truly a god who has power and who is powerful

to do something. The Northern Kingdom was not fully converted to God, still had many Canaanites among them, converted to Judaism, but not really changed, and the pagan mentalities of that time were very strong. To those in the Northern Kingdom, the golden calf altar was truly their idol, and they believed that the altar or the calf had miraculous powers. For this reason, the prophet speaks to the altar, due to the fact that in their minds that altar was a god with miraculous powers, and when according to the prophet's message their altar or god splits (cracks), their whole religion collapses. That altar was their religious center, and there they went to worship, and if at that time (which was the beginning of the kingdom) the altar had suffered that total humiliation, the people should have understood that there was no point to go and worship an altar struck by God and which was not approved by God. The lesson for the people was that they no longer had to go and worship there an altar that had fallen into the divine disfavor.

After the miracles that took place with the altar, with the paralysis and healing of the king's hand, the king becomes very kind to the prophet and will invite him to stay with him at the royal table, and the man of God, very politely replies that he can not stay at the table, but he must return to another path according to the divine command: "And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (1 Kings 13: 7-9).

Everything that happened there in that day quickly spread to Bethel and its surrounding area, talking about the situation of the altar and about the man of God, and this message reaches someone who claims to be a prophet, who runs after him, reaches him, introduces him to the fact that he too is a prophet and determines him to go and eat at his house (1 Kings 13: 14-19).

The false prophet presents two things, two messages. A. Come back from the road you're going on. B. You will die because you disobeyed the divine will. The second message turns out to be real. After eating, the prophet leaves and is killed by a lion, proving that the false prophet's words were authentic (1 Kings 13: 24-26). The prophet received a clear message from God, and in this way, his obedience was tested. The two roads run almost parallel.

God does not change when He sends a message. The death of this prophet was still a clear proof to the inhabitants of that area, of Bethel, or of any place, that any man, no matter who he was, little or big, king or priest, true prophet or false prophet, if he did not conform strictly to the Word of God, what follows is God's judgment. Just as the altar was torn down, just as this prophet was eaten by a lion, so those who were to worship at such an altar were to suffer the same consequences. These were the prophetic messages conveyed through the events of that day.

The lesson is very simple and very clear. When two contradictory pieces of information appear, and both pieces of information claim to come from the same source: *The Spirit of the Lord has spoken*, which one should be taken for granted? The original one, namely, the one by which the prophet was called and sent on a certain mission, a mission accomplished exactly, accompanied by tests, by divine miracles. When all this has been questioned, listening to the second information, he declines from his capacity as prophet or man of God.

**Micah, the son of Imla**, who is known through a famous passage from the book 1 Kings 22, may have been one of the sons of the prophets who studied in the schools of the prophets in Elijah's day, being called at a given moment to transmit the divine will, at a time quite religiously difficult for Israel.

The situation referred to in the scriptural passage refers to a state of hostility and to the beginning of a war or not. Ahab, the king of the northern tribes of Israel, which had his capital in Samaria, and the king of the southern tribes, Jehoshaphat, which had his capital in Jerusalem, were involved in this hostile situation. The question then was whether it would be appropriate

to start a war against the city of Ramoth in Galaad. A large number of prophets, about 400 (1 Kings 22: 6) told the king to go to war that he would be victorious. At that time, King Ahab was at the peak of his power. Only a year earlier, a great battle had taken place with the Assyrians, namely with King Shalmaneser III, a battle mentioned in the Stele of Shalmaneser III, where it is said that King Ahab had 2.000 chariots and 10.000 soldiers for that battle. This army, plus the coalition of those who were with him (Syria and other countries) managed to destroy the Assyrian army, which highlights the military power of King Ahab, a man who had just won a victory and as such felt very strong. That is why he set out to reclaim an Israeli city in the hands of the Syrians, the city of Ramoth, in the territory of today's Bashan.

When the man felt very strong, he did not need God very much, so he allied himself with his in-law King Jehoshaphat, with whom he was on good terms, considering that two kings of Israel would have no problem to conquer the city of Ramoth. The two kings, Ahab and Jehoshaphat, are preparing to go to war. Jehoshaphat, a king more religious and closer to God than Ahab, asks him to ask first the Lord's Word, and to consult the divine advice. Ahab also had an army of 400 court prophets, whom he called to seek advice regarding that war. The 400 prophets all say in unison that in that war Ahab will be victorious and will defeat the Syrians, one of them even made some horns to illustrate their positive prophetic message (1 Kings 22:11). For King Jehoshaphat, the whole assembly of prophets it seemed a cheap spectacle, and he asked King Ahab if there was no other prophet there. In this context, appears there at the royal court, Micah, the son of Imla, who has a completely different message and is totally unpleasant for King Ahab. In the message of the prophet Micah, the death of King Ahab is presented, and the king orders the imprisonment of the prophet, being fed there with the bread and water of sorrow (1 Kings 22:27).

The Canonical or non-canonical prophets were not first or second category prophets, they were just prophets, people who received a message from the divinity for a certain situation. Whether or not their writings were included in the Holy Scriptures does not affect their status as prophets. The difference between them is that the non-canonical prophets had mainly punctual messages for a certain situation, and in the situation of some slips they came and announced some punctual judgments or clear consequences. These prophets were people of culture, because they also acted as teachers, chroniclers, sending correspondence, but the only difference is that we do not have written records from them (although some of them wrote) in the Holy Scriptures, although some prophets considered to be canonical prophets were inspired by their books when they wrote their prophetic books.

## References

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