**“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying…”: An ideological comparative research study of the prophetic books attributed to the eighth century BCE**

Key words: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micha, 8th century BCE, biblical prophecy, ideological research, comparative research, HB

**Abstract**

The proposed research will present a comparative ideological discussion of four biblical prophetic books attributed to the eighth century BCE: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-39, and Micah. The study will introduce the conceptual world of the four prophetic books and the main topics that characterized their periods, offering a foundation for a new definition of basic concepts in biblical prophecy. The nature of the study and its methodology will encourage biblical scholars and students to reexamine basic assumptions about the Bible in general and prophetic literature in particular. It therefore has the potential to influence both methods of biblical text study and its conclusions.

There are a number of objectives to the research presented here:

First, the study is intended to introduce the ideological and theological world of the four prophetic books. Abstract worldviews are expressed by means of the content of the prophetic units, their design and formulation, and therefore their analysis in relevant prophetic units in the four books will help to clarify them. The study of the beliefs and opinions in these four books will help us understand the issues that preoccupied Israel during the periods documented in the books. Furthermore, it will shed light on the varied positions prevalent during these periods, and will help us appreciate the fundamental and practical debates that took place among the different thinkers of that period.

Secondly, the study aims to define the differences between the intellectual worlds characterized by each book. These definitions will help clarify distinctions between the books, and will also help to offer an ideal definition of the worldviews expressed in each individual book.

The third purpose of this research is the logical outcome of the two previous aims: a discussion of fundamental issues relating to prophetic literature, the world of the prophets, and basic questions concerning the establishment and formation of the Bible. Consideration of these fundamental issues will be based on the textual analysis, and thus it differs from the way these issues are dealt with in other studies.

In order to achieve the three goals detailed above, a number of steps will be required:

a. Publication of articles dealing with specific units within the prophetic books. These articles will analyze each unit in depth from a literary point of view and present the major research disputes relating to the unit in a clear manner [see the list of units in Appendix 1]. With this background, I will be able to present my understanding of the basic worldview expressed in each unit on the subject in which it deals;

b. Publication of a book that offers a comparative analysis of the texts. The book will examine the full range of the central themes that appear repeatedly in the four prophetic books. The book will present the positions expressed regarding each specific theme as they appear in each of the prophetic books, making use of the relevant units. The analysis of the units in the book will be based on the contents of the articles and will therefore not be very detailed. The book will serve as a vehicle for me to present both the differences and the similarities that appear in the prophetic books in relation to the recurring themes. In addition, it will allow me to present similarities and differences in the way each book relates to the different themes;

c. A number of presentations in conferences in Israel and around the world, as detailed in the proposal. These presentations will help clarify the conclusions of the research on a methodological and practical level, with the assistance of significant scholars of biblical prophecy. These sessions will focus on the main themes that appear in the books, the worldviews expressed in them, and the methodological implications of the research on attitudes regarding biblical prophecy.

The integration of the different parts of the research will offer a complete and thorough picture of the *weltanschauung* of the period. Each individual step is essential to achieve the best result.

**Research Program**

**Scientific Background**

The biblical corpus contains three prophetic books – Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In addition, there is another book, *Trei Asar*, which contains twelve smaller books of prophecy, attributed to the periods between the eighth century BCE and the return to Zion in the sixth century BCE. In the Christian biblical canon, based on the Septuagint, the books of Lamentations and Daniel are also seen as part of the category of prophetic works. Biblical prophecy is a poetic text, formulated using the language of poetry and saturated with a variety of literary devices such as imagery, parallel language, parables, repetitions, plays on language, euphony and more. The poetic text of prophetic literature, both in the Bible and in other works, provides a moral perspective, by means of a critical analysis of the historical and behavioral characteristics of the prophetic period (see, for example, Gowan 1998). Biblical prophecies are formulated as an expression of Divine analysis of these events and circumstances. This also appears to have been the perception of those who heard the prophecies (Ross 1962; Gilad 2011). In any event, the prophets had a sense of being called to this service and they served as the moral compass of their times.

My proposed research will be based on the four biblical prophetic books attributed to the eighth century BCE: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-39, and Micha, and will discuss them from an ideological point of view. I will not mention here the full range of studies conducted regarding prophetic literature in general and these books in particular. Excellent surveys can be found, for example, in Sweeny (2005, 2015), where prevailing research trends are presented. Comparative studies have been conducted in the past (see, Robertson 1968; Uffenheimer 1973; Boogaart 1981; Hunter 1982; Bjorndalen 1986; Stansell 1988; Cha 1996; Sweeney 2010), as have ideological discussion of the prophetic books generally and these four prophetic books, specifically (see Gowan 1998; Kapeirud 1971; Lemche 1992; Glenny 2009; Barton 2010). However, no comparative research study from an ideological point of view has been undertaken on this collection of books.

We usually view biblical prophecies as statements that not only predict the future or offer reproach, but also express ideologies (Barton 2007). This is true for every biblical text, as I have demonstrated in the past. In I Samuel 15, for example, not only is the story of King Saul presented, but a fundamental discussion of the issue of the ideal monarchy is exemplified (Zimran 2014). Nevertheless, it is especially pronounced in relation to prophecy. When I discuss ideology, I do not mean a search for concepts in theology in its Christian or Jewish sense, that is, dealing with religion as expressed in post-biblical writings toward the biblical text (Sommer 2009; Ben Zvi 2012; Sweeney 2016). Nor is it my intention to discuss the concept of God, which is one of the modern definitions of the term 'theology' (see Rom-Shiloni 2009; Gowan 1998). My intention is to discuss various abstract and fundamental concepts that appear in the Bible itself. I will focus on the text and expose the different concepts that it expresses.

Various critiques of ideological research on prophetic books have been raised over the years:

Some scholars assumed that the prophets had personal interests or represented the interests of the kings in whose court they operated. According to these scholars, it is impossible to discern the ideology behind the words of the prophets. However, this position, as a general approach to prophetic literature, is no longer accepted today.

A complete rejection of the ideological discussion emerges from another direction by scholars such as Weiss (1992). These scholars deny the very possibility of understanding the worldviews as they appear in the biblical verses or the possibility of understanding the world of the author and his intentions. According to this approach, the discussion can only be in the text as it appears before us and in its components that form a single unity.

Scholars like Knohl (2007) assume that it is possible to discern worldviews that are reflected in biblical text in general and prophetic units in particular, but we should not assume that one writer or book has a unified world view. The author may have different positions even in relation to the same theme, which are influenced by the circumstances of his life and major historical events that occurred in his time. Knohl goes so far as to emphasize the gaps between different prophetic units in order to demonstrate his position. This is his approach, for example, regarding the prophecies of Isaiah ben Amotz, Hosea and others.

Others accept the opposite view. They suggest that the prophecies do represent worldviews, and that not only can one see a coherent position of one writer, but there are ideological similarities between different prophets. Thus, for example, we often find suggested that the later prophets present an identical position regarding the precarious social situation of their generation (see Garbbe 1995).

Another critique comes from a different popular scholarly approach: that the distinction between historical layers in a given prophetic book that are attributed to different periods of composition prevents scholars from grasping the worldview of a single prophet. These assumptions sometimes even undermine the possibility of seeking a coherent world view of a biblical book (see Goldstein 2005; Barton 2010).

The proposed research is committed to dealing with these approaches that deny the possibility of conducting ideological research. This will be done by means of a textual and ideological discussion, involving the articles and book included in the research that deal with the various units.

In my research, I will focus on the four biblical prophetic narratives attributed to the eighth century BCE. I chose this group for two reasons: First, the fact that the books are attributed to parallel prophets at the time provides fertile ground for ideological discussion and illuminates some of the fundamental issues of the research topic. The parallel prophetic activity offers unique insight into questions about the relationship between God and His prophets, the influence of the prophets on the content of the books, the relationship between the prophecies that were spoken and those committed to writing, the degree of influence of the prophets on their counterparts, and the extent of the circulation of the prophecies (further questions will be raised and discussed in section on Research Objectives & Expected Significance).

Secondly, we have much information on the eighth century BCE, both from other biblical books and from archaeological findings (Faust 2011). This information helps us understand the contents of the books and topics discussed by the prophets. They also raise questions regarding the reliability of the words of the prophets and, again, the relationship between what was spoken and what was written in the prophetic books. The subject of the study can serve as an example for possible future studies that may be conducted on other collections of books that will be influenced by the conclusions of the present research and the general and particular clarification that it will offer.

**Research Objectives & Expected Significance**

My research will deal with the prophetic books that are traditionally attributed to the eighth century BCE: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-39, and Micha. The primary purpose of the study is to define the various worldviews reflected in the books as they relate to the recurring themes in the four books. Examples of these themes include attitudes towards idolatry, the flesh-and-blood king vs. the kingdom of God, social reproach, the universality of the God of Israel, and the relations between Israel and the Gentiles. This will lead to a deep familiarity with the books, but one whose understanding will be grounded in the study of repeated themes rather than a full chapter-by-chapter analysis of them.

The four biblical books that constitute the subject of the study belong to the biblical division of prophetic literature. As mentioned above, they are all associated with one historical period, the eighth century BCE. Amos and Hosea were active in the northern kingdom of Israel; Micah and Isaiah son of Amotz were active in the southern kingdom of Judea. This reality creates literary similarities and content between the books. The recurring themes found among the books attest to these similarities. We even find repetitive language such as the use of the image of the lion in the units of Hosea 5:14, Micah 7(8) and Isaiah 31:4 that support this.

This similarity gives rise to two other goals of this research, which are mutually supportive. First, the emphasis on the differences between the worldviews expressed in the four books. The differences between the books will be discussed according to the attitude of each of the books to recurring themes such as those mentioned above. I expect to see differences in the attitudes of the different books, such as the difference I already hinted at in my article (Zimran 2017) between the perception of God and His involvement in military actions in Hosea and what can be deduced from the chapters in Isaiah, based on the discussion of the lion image in specific units in these books.

Second, establishing a consistent conceptual position in each, individual, one of these prophetic books that corresponds to the attitude of that book to the various themes. What is the basic worldview of the book [if there is one], based upon which all the different themes in the book are considered? I am looking for a concept that unites the book's approach to the various themes. For example, in the Book of Isaiah, when presenting God as a God of Justice, the emphasis on how separate He is from man would constitute a central concept that dictates an attitude towards the different themes. This is the basis for Isaiah’s special treatment of idolatry, as well as for his position on the Divine King. On the other hand, in the Book of Micah, the emphasis on the importance of human action will constitute a fundamental concept that informs the various perspective found in the book, beginning with his attitude towards God, continuing with political issues, and concluding with his view on idolatry. Even if I do not succeed in uncovering such a systematic conception, it will open the way to discussion of fundamental questions of prophetic literature relating to the world of the prophets and to the questions of the writing and editing of the books, as I discuss in further detail below.