

**V. Indra Sanjaya.**

*"... dan Firman Tuhan Datang kepadaku" :  
Telaah atas Tradisi Kenabian Perjanjian Lama  
[translated: "...and the Word of God Came to Me": Study of  
the Old Testament Prophetic Tradition]  
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244 hlm.*



With many years of experience in teaching Prophetic Literature at the Theological Faculty of *Sanata Dharma University* in Yogyakarta, Dr. V. Indra Sanjaya took up the challenge to fill a vacuum in the Indonesian library about Israel's prophetic tradition. There are many Indonesian publications on the books of certain prophets but it is difficult to find a book that "can provide basic and comprehensive information about the prophetic phenomenon of Israel in Indonesian language" (p. 6). Using extensive literature which is almost entirely in English and which reflects the development of prophetic research over the last half century, the Author discusses the most important topics which he hopes will help readers to understand the prophetic books more accurately.

In his "Preliminary Notes", the Author discusses a worldwide phenomenon of all ages where humans want to know the secrets of their future life, try to find them with the help of diviners, and also expect recommendations from them to adjust their lives. This raises the question to what extent the same is found among the prophets of Israel and to what extent in different ways. To start looking for answers, readers are invited to read the book of Jonah, guided by a number of questions about what a 'prophet' is, what he did, the reason of his mission, his addressees, the function of his prophecy, in order to discover how prophecy should be understood. The following chapters are going to delve into this in more depth.

The first topic discussed is "The Place of the Prophets in the Bible" (Chapter I). Looking at the sixteen titles of the prophetic books in the table of contents of our Bible is helpful but not the whole answer. When the New Testament speaks of "the Law of Moses and the Prophets" (Luke

24:27,44), these Prophets also include the books of Joshua to Kings which Judaism calls “the former prophets”; and we do not find the Book of Daniel included in “the later prophets” which in Jewish counts are only four books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Twelve. Such a division of the Torah and the Prophets – the Author explains from some texts – has a purpose and reflects a vision on stages of revelation: the Torah as God’s first face-to-face revelation directly to Moses is followed by a second stage of its incorporation into the life of God’s people with the help of the prophets, from Joshua to Malachi.

Then the Author explains how this configuration of the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*) has been changed in the Greek Septuagint which shows four sections: Law, History (Joshua-Maccabees), Poets (Psalms-Sirach), and Prophets (now including Daniel). Here our sixteen books of the Prophets are separated from the earlier Prophets by the “Other Books” (cf. Sirach, *Prolog*), and thus they became the final part of the Greek Bible. This end position of the Prophetic Books with their orientation to future fulfillment made it easier for the Christian community to add their New Testament writings perceived as fulfillment of prophecy. So it is not surprising that from the beginning until now the Christian Old Testament in regard to the order of its books has followed the Greek Bible.

Chapter II, entitled “The Terminology of ‘Prophet’ and the Phenomenon of Prophethood”, explores the meaning of various terms used for prophets in biblical texts, such as ‘seer’. After noting the temptation to make prophethood a profession for profit, the Author conducts an etymological study of the Hebrew word *nabi* and the Greek word *prophètès*, and explains in what way Israel’s prophetic phenomenon was part and variant of the wider prophetic phenomenon in the ancient Middle East.

In chapter III – continuing his reflection on prophethood which in the “Preliminary Notes” had departed from the reading of the book of Jonah – the Author discusses “The Prophet and His Person.” Because the figure of a prophet is understood as a person who conveys God’s message, everything starts from a special communication between with the Divine

and the Prophet. However, Biblical accounts usually pay more attention to the content of the prophet's message than to the modes by which he received it from God. Both in the way of receiving the message and in conveying it to the people, the prophets of Israel – the Author explains – do not appear as microphones but as individuals who perceive, interpret, and formulate the message each in a unique way, as can be shown from the experience of Amos. and other prophets.

In this context the Author explains Abraham Heschel's famous view of prophets as human beings who participate in what God feels, God's pathos (pp. 87-92). The mission of a prophet is to convey what God feels with regard to the actual state of the nation, whether it be their transgressions against God's law or the state of suffering as a result of their transgressions. So, the prophets' mission as it appears from the books usually has two sides: warning the people of their transgressions which without repentance will lead them to destruction, and on the other hand also bringing comfort and new hope to the people when suffering has befallen them. Especially the first part, the rebuke, tends to be rejected by those addressed, but there will be people who may have been victims of their unrighteousness and feel strengthened by the prophet's criticism. From these people did emerge the prophet's disciples who treasured his prophecies and made it possible that his message has been preserved for us in written form.

The long process from oral proclamation by the prophet to its being written down and becoming a book, is discussed in chapter IV, "The Prophet and His Prophecies". Without denying that a prophet who delivered his message orally could also have written down some prophecies, the Author shows from facts in the books that the writings presuppose besides the role of the disciples also the hands of a third-party editor who developed the prophet's proclamation. In this way prophecies were made meaningful beyond their original situation, could become more infinite and receive more fulfillments. After explaining the language and literary form of prophecy, the Author reminds us with a number of examples of

how a prophet conveyed his message not only by words but also by prophetic actions.

From chapter V on, attention is directed to more specific topics, first, the difference between “True Prophets and False Prophets.” We are informed about extensive but still indeterminate discussions about the various criteria for distinguishing the two, from the point of view of both the prophet as a person and the prophet’s message. In Chapter VI, attention is directed to the historical background, circumstances and events in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, 7<sup>th</sup> century, the exile, and the post-exilic era, which are important for understanding the activities of each group of prophets active in these alternating times.

Chapter VII deals with a topic that is important to Christians but complex, namely the relationship “Between the Old and New Testament”, between prophecy and its fulfillment, and the maxim “the new is hidden in the old, the old is revealed in the new” (Augustine). With the help of two Church documents, namely *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* [1993] and *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* [2001] and an example (Isa. 7:14 // Matt. 1:23), the Author explains how the relation between prophecy and fulfillment can be understood without falling in some extreme alternatives, either by claiming direct fulfillments or by completely rejecting the idea of any fulfillment. Fulfillment in the NT can be understood as a fulfillment that shows aspects of continuity, discontinuity, and progress/transcendence, keeping in mind that a prophecy can have more than one meaning: apart from its original meaning in its original context, it also can receive new meanings when read in new contexts.

This book on the Old Testament Prophetic Tradition does not only give Indonesian readers access to a myriad of up-to-date research results on the prophethood of Israel, but does so while at the same time expounding many key texts. The author presents his topics in the form of interesting discourses inviting readers to continue following his reasoning from page to page. I cannot but recommend this book to everyone

who wants to study and interpret any of Israel's prophets. These in-depth discussions of Israel's prophetic phenomenon, especially chapters III & IV, will be very helpful to become alert to the many characteristics in the oracles of the prophets and their books, helping to understand them more carefully. Here the author's goal is achieved. I wish to thank Dr. Indra Sanjaya for his thoughtful efforts to fill this vacuum in the Indonesian biblical library.

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