

THE ROLE OF THE *OLD TESTAMENT* PROPHETS IN THE HOLY WAR NARRATIVES: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS*

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Rezumat: Studiul de față examinează rolul profeților din *Vechiul Testament* în narațiunile războiului sfânt. Propunem o analiză textuală (lingvistică) a episoadelor care descriu modul implicării profeților în războaiele veterotestamentare, scopul fiind reliefaarea rolului acestora în războiul sfânt. Analizând aceste narațiuni dintr-o perspectivă lingvistică, lucrarea de față prezintă și discută trăsăturile particulare ale profeților care luptă în războiul sfânt, așa cum este descris acesta în textul veterotestamentar. Examinând expresiile lingvistice care evocă războiul sfânt, ne propunem să oferim o descriere a rolului profeților în această confruntare.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Vechiul Testament*, profeți, războiul sfânt, războinic, Dumnezeu Războinic.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the role of the *Old Testament* (OT) prophets in the holy war narratives. This is a textual analysis and a close reading of the war narratives in which the OT prophets are involved. The questions raised in this paper are the following: 1) Which is the role of the OT prophets in the holy war contexts?; 2) To what extent the OT prophets are involved in these wars?; 3) How do prophets approach the issue of holy war and which is their relation to Yahweh the Warrior?; 4) Which is the language (linguistic expression) that evoke the context of the holy war?

This paper will focus on the OT texts that describe instances of holy war. We will not define and present all instances of “holy wars,” but rather select those episodes in which prophets are involved. These issues have been discussed in other studies,¹ which will be taken as reference for our study.

The prophets we have found to be involved in the holy wars and we have selected for this analysis are: Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Samuel, the Unknown Prophet, Elisha, and Isaiah.² Our aim will be to show what social role they play in their relationship

* *Rolul profeților din Vechiul Testament în narațiunile războiului sfânt. O analiză lingvistică*

¹ See, for example, Magyarosi (2010); see also Neipp (2012).

² All these are involved in the holy war narratives.

with Yahweh. We will also try to find out which are the most important activities prophets perform in the holy war narratives.

2. The OT concept of holy war

The term *holy war* (lat. *bellum sacrum*) does not occur in the *Bible*, but it is used for describing a reality which is illustrated in the OT writings. It refers to a kind of war which is carried out by God or commanded and conducted on behalf of God. For example, Magyarosi (2010, 15) shows that “the notion of divinely conducted war as well as the portrait of God as the «Divine Warrior» are central themes “to the entire Old Testament, and dominate the Israelite faith throughout its existence.” Further, he states that throughout the OT “there are wars carried out at the command of God, in the name of God, and with the help of God (Ex. 14:13, 17:9-16, Num. 31:7, Deut. 1:30, 7:23-24, 20:4, Jos. 10:14, 25-26, 23:3)” (ibid.). In these OT texts, God is described, according to Janzen (1972, 156), as one who causes, commands, and is involved in wars of the Israelites.

However, the above biblical descriptions give rise to some theological and philosophical problems and questions such as:

1) How can we understand these actions carried out by God’s chosen people and especially by the prophets in OT times?

2) How can we reconcile the image of a warlike God with his character of love (e.g., Ex. 34:6, Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 108:4) without distorting and misrepresenting “the credibility, authority, and historicity of the OT?” (Magyarosi 2010, 16);

3) Can we consider a war holy? (Magyarosi 2010, 16; see also Copan 2011, 22-23; Craigie 1978, 51).

Some of these questions are raised by moral sensitive persons who condemn genocide, violence, ethnic cleansing, and wars.

In the theological literature, there are some explanations for theological and philosophical issues raised above. Therefore, it is important when we examine the OT narratives to take into consideration the fact that not every war is a “holy war.” Thus, we should not blame God for every war, because some wars were carried out by the will of humans and for human purposes. The prototypical “holy war” is that type of “war in which God is personally and directly involved, and with which he identifies himself, maintaining control over the events in such a way as to actively determine their final outcome” (Magyarosi 2010, 19-20). Usually, in the prototypical “holy wars” God is the One who fights with his heavenly armies, while humans only watch what God is doing (see the next subsections). The typical “holy wars” are actually acts of judgement carried out by God himself, without human intervention.

For understanding the concept of “holy war” as well as the image of God as a “Warrior,” we should view it, as Magyarosi (2010, 272) shows, “against the backdrop of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, God and Satan.” Because, actually “the language and the images of the analysed OT passages related to holy

war reveal the fact that divine intervention in holy war is the historical manifestation of the cosmic conflict” between good and evil, i.e. between God and Satan. This type of war does not “only reflects a glimpse of the cosmic conflict as in a mirror, but it is part and parcel of the same controversy, anticipating God’s end-time judgment in the sphere of present history.”

Thus, having this in mind, we should view the wars of Yahweh from the OT as God’s way of bringing justice and punishment of evildoers. This type of war is intrinsically related to the problem of sin and the solution brought by God to it. The war in which God is personally involved is actually a type of “just war.” However, since our paper does not explore this issue, but rather the involvement and the role of the OT prophets in these types of wars, we will not define and present all instances of “holy wars.” Therefore, we will not bring other arguments against or in favour of this. This has been done in other studies,³ which will be taken as references for this paper.

3. Definitions of the term *prophet*

In the *Bible*, “prophets” are described as God’s spokesmen. The Hebrew term נָבִיא (*nāvi*), which is translated as “prophet”, has the meanings of ‘spokesman,’ and ‘speaker.’ The equivalent in the *New Testament*, namely the Greek term προφήτης is more appropriate to be translated as “the one who speaks for God.” The text from Ex. 7:1-2 (NET) captures the nuance of this definition:

¹So, the Lord said to Moses: “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. ²You are to speak everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh that he must release the Israelites from his land.”

It means that the prophet is “a person authorized to speak for another” (Brown et al. 2000, 611), like Aaron speaks in Moses’ place to Pharaoh. Therefore, this term implies the idea that prophets usually receive the message and deliver it to humans. As Harris et al. (1999, 544) puts it, prophets “receive God’s speech” and then they proclaim it to humans. But a prophet “could be such a spokesman for God only if God had genuinely given him a message (however obscurely) to speak” (ibid.).

Moreover, Lundbom (2010, 9-29) has identified six typical characteristics of the Israelite and ancient Near Eastern prophets: a) they have a divine call; b) they speak God’s word; c) they have divine visions; d) they do mighty work; e) they are filled with the Spirit; f) they pray. Therefore, those of the prophets⁴ who exhibit all these features are “true prophets.” For instance, Moses is a “prototypical prophet,”

³ See, for example, Magyarosi (2010) and Neipp (2012).

⁴ But not all prophets exhibit all of these attributes. For example, the prophet Obadiah only claims to communicate the divine revelation he received from God.

the prophet *par excellence*, because he shares all these features,⁵ while Amos and Nathan are less prototypical. On the other hand, there are also false prophets (Jer. 23) who claim to have several of these features. Non-prophetic individuals have one or two of these typical characteristics or no characteristic.⁶ Therefore, these features contribute to a prototype structure of the social role prophet.

4. The Warrior Prophet in *Genesis*. Abraham, the First “Warrior Prophet”

The prophet Abraham is the first “warrior prophet” from the *Bible*. He is called “prophet” by God himself (Gen. 20:7). This is the first occurrence of the word *prophet* (*nāḇî*) in the Hebrew *Bible*. Mathews (2005, 254) states that “Abraham is considered a prophet by virtue of his mediatorial role; he is not the founder or model of the prophetic institution of Israel (cf. Moses, Deut. 18).” This call to intercede for others appears in the context of a conflict that apparently seems to be between Abraham and Abimelech. But this is actually between God and the king of Gerar. From this context, it is clear that the office of the prophet is higher than the king. And the intercession is indeed “a function of the prophet” (Skinner 1910, 317). Moreover, “it is interesting that Abimelech is not required to make a sacrifice in order to be restored. What he needs for his restoration is the prayer of a prophet,” as Pshenichny (2007, 149) states. It is important to highlight that this prayer is not a usual one. In this context, according to Wenham (2002, 71), the word *pray* is “used particularly of intercessory prayer,⁷ whereas «to call (on the name of)» – קרא בשם (*ba-shem qara*) is a less precise term for prayer used quite often in Genesis.”⁸

In this narrative described in Gen. 20, there is not any fight or war, but it is only a conflict between God and the king of Gerar. As anticipated, what is important is the fact that this is the first mention of the word נָבִיא (*nāḇî*).⁹ According to this text, the role of the prophet is to encounter, to communicate with God, and to pray, even though in this situation he is the one who is wrong partially, because he lies and hides the fact that Sarah is his wife. This issue is complicated because she is actually his half-sister. Moreover, at a higher level, this may be a conflict between Yahweh and some other forces, i.e. the evil forces, but this is just a presupposition we advance when we try to make sense of this narrative. Theologically, we consider

⁵ For example, Moses is named by God “prophet” (Deut. 18:15-18, 34:10), he also encounters God “face to face.”

⁶ In the biblical tradition, there are some individuals who had visions; for example, King Pharaoh. These persons are not considered as prophets.

⁷ E.g., Num. 11:2, 21:7, Deut. 9:20, Jer. 7:16, 11:14.

⁸ See 13:4, 12:8, 4:26, 26:25, 21:33.

⁹ According to the biblical text, it is evident that God appeared to Abraham only in Gen. 18 in a way that has not occurred since the Garden of Eden.

this to evoke the conflict between God and Satan, that is the conflict between good and evil behind the curtain.

Before Abraham is called a prophet, there is a narrative description portraying him as a warrior, namely in Gen. 14. We turn our attention to his narrative. For example, Brodsky (2003, 167) claims that “Genesis 14 gives the first description of warfare in the Bible, and the central figure in the conflict is the founding father of Israel,” the prophet Abraham, the one who fights against “Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations (Genesis 14:1 NET).” In this story we find the first and the last occurrence of the word מִלְחָמָה (*milchamah*), which means ‘war,’ ‘battle’ in Gen. 14:8.

The army of Abraham is composed of “his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house” (Gen. 14:14). Therefore, the question to be asked when we analyse and try to comprehend this narrative is: how is it possible to win the battle against these trained armies of coalition of kings who were more powerful than Abraham? Before answering this question, there are other questions to be answered: Could this be an instance of holy war? If this is true, which are the arguments against or for this assumption? Did Yahweh command Abraham to fight against these kings? The answer to the first question is to be found in v. 20, place that relates about the blessing pronounced by Melchizedek. He recognizes the fact that God is the one who delivered Abraham’s enemies into his hand.

The word מָגָן (*māgan* ‘to deliver’) belongs to the holy war language. According to Wenham (2002, 317), the verb מָגַן (‘to deliver’) “occurs in only two other passages (Hos. 11:8, Prov. 4:9), both times in parallel with נָתַן (*natan*), which means ‘to give.’ Here too, *giving* is mentioned immediately afterwards (vv. 20-21). The cognate term מָגֵן (*māgan* ‘shield’), used in 15:1, seems to look back to this passage evoking the same holy war context.

Melchizedek recognizes that the battle is won with the aid of Yahweh. And Abraham acknowledges that this is not his war, but Yahweh’s war, by not taking any plunder, even though the king of Sodom offered him everything. By doing this, argue Brodsky (2003, 137), “Abraham made it clear that material gain was not his motive for entering into this conflict. Ostensibly, his only objective was to rescue his kinsman Lot.” This could be an instance of הֶרֶם (*hērem*), i.e. a war of total destruction, where a captured territory was purified of all evil so that it may be dedicated to God. We may call it so, because Abraham refuses to touch those things which did not belong to him. As evident from the episodes describing the conquest of Jericho, the people of Israel were not supposed to touch the plunder of war, all was dedicated to Yahweh. But this is of a different kind than the case found at the conquest of Canaan, since this is not a direct command from God, or maybe he received this command and we do not know about it, because it is not recorded in the *Bible*.

Even though Abraham is named “prophet” by God only later, in Gen. 20, he also functions here as a prophet and warrior having the task to make justice, to

pray, to intercede, and, finally, to intervene in this conflict of war. What is interesting is that, after this war, he himself needs an intercessor, namely the priest Melchizedek. As Brodsky (2003, 143) says: “Abram suffered from what is now called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or, perhaps more familiarly, shell shock,” because “no sensitive person can go into battle and witness the slaughter of other human beings without being burdened with a sense of horror. Abram needed the comfort of a priest.” Rabbi Levi¹⁰ (ap. *ibid.*) expresses the same idea: “Abraham was fearful, saying, ‘perhaps the sons of the kings that I killed will collect troops and come and wage war against me.’” Furthermore, Nehama Leibowitz¹¹ (ap. *ibid.*) states that “the victory is not the end of war. It contains within itself the germs of the next war,” thus, “it takes careful judgment to determine just how far one should go to ensure that an enemy is sufficiently punished so that he will not wish to do battle again.”

Having examined this narrative of war described in Genesis 14:14, it is evident that Abraham participates in the war as a prophet, and there seems to be a just war for rescuing Lot, his nephew. It is clear that Abraham is helped by God to win the war. He is a prophet that intercedes for another king and prays for him. But, on the other hand, he needs the blessing of a priest and the atonement prayer after the war is finished. This is not an instance of the holy war *par excellence*, as we will show below, but an instance of “just war,” because Abraham fights not for material gain, but to rescue his kinsman Lot. Abraham is a warrior who makes justice. As seen, he acknowledges that the victory is God’s victory.

5. The warrior prophets in *Exodus*

5.1. Aaron as the “warrior prophet”

Ex. 7:1 describes an instance of divine revelation where the Lord says to Moses: “See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.” Moreover, in the *exodus* event is the case of a kind of war *par excellence* (Miller 1973, 160). Boling/Wright (1975, 28) agree with this assumption by saying that “the holy war *par excellence* was the one at the Red Sea, in which Yahweh and his heavenly army defeated the host of Egypt (the Israelites did no fighting) and thus laid the basis (Ex. 1-15) for Israel’s acknowledgement of his total sovereignty.” What is interesting and characteristic for the episode at the Red Sea is that God (Yahweh) fights, and Israelites only witness this event.

Having this context in mind, we will now see what role has the prophet Aaron in the context of holy war. The role of Aaron is described in Ex. 4:30: “and Aaron spoke all the words, which the Lord had spoken to Moses.” Then, the narrative

¹⁰ In *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, vol. 2, translated by H. Freedman, London, Soncino Press, 1983, 57.

¹¹ In *Studies in Bereshit*, Jerusalem, World Zionist Organization, 1974, 136-141.

says that Aron did the signs in the sight of the people. Aaron does not have to fight, but only to speak the message received from Yahweh. He has the prophetic duty of “performing the signs (אוֹתוֹת, v. 30)” (Durham 2002, 59). Therefore, “Aaron is highlighted as the performer of divinely spoken commands” (Findlay 2005, 56).

As anticipated, in this war, the people do not fight, because Yahweh is doing everything for them. Ashby (1997, 29) says, “the word, even though mediated through both Moses and Aaron, is so effective that the signs are re-enacted, and the people believe.” The people of Israel have only to believe and wait because Yahweh will fight for them. Therefore, in the context of war between God and the king of Egypt, Aaron is a spokesman with an important role, i.e. to transmit Yahweh’s message to Pharaoh persuading him to let the people of Israel go out of Egypt.

5.2. Moses as the “warrior prophet”

Moses is not directly called a prophet during his life, but in Deut. 18:15-18 and 34:10 there is an indirect allusion to him being a prophet. For example, God describes Moses as the prototype of all prophets. Moore (2007, 157) says that “while Moses fills a broad spectrum of leadership roles in Israel’s formational phase, the Torah’s most explicit projection of his identity is as the prophet *par excellence*, the exemplar for all Hebrew prophets to come.” In the *Exodus* narratives, Moses is involved a lot in the holy war, which starts with the deliverance of the Israelites from *exodus* and the Crossing of the Red Sea, which is the holy war *par excellence*. This is because “the Exodus battle is different from battles in which two opponent armies fight against each other. Here the battle is fought by Yahweh, and Israel is required not to fight (Exodus 14:14)” (Magyarosi 2010, 77-78). Thus, Moses participates in the holy war *par excellence* and he is the prophet *par excellence*. Moreover, Jacob Milgrom¹² (ap. Findlay 2005, 235) sees Moses as having the “prophetic role as mediator between God and the people,” and considers Aaron to be “powerless” [...] in comparison to Moses.”

Thus, from the *Exodus* account, we find also that Moses starts his activity as a warrior by killing an Egyptian, thus he revenges against the cruel treatment of the Egyptians against the Israelites who were inhumanly treated as slaves in Egypt. Afterwards, Moses is called by God to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt. As seen, in this mission Aaron is a prophet, while “Moses was made God to Pharaoh” (Ex. 7:1), which means that he has to represent God before Pharaoh.

In this type of holy war *par excellence*, Moses has a very important role. For example, in Ex. 14:13-14, it is said that after Moses heard that Pharaoh was coming with his entire army, he started to encourage the people by saying:

¹² In *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, Doubleday, 1991, 57.

Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. “The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14:13-14).

According to these verses, the role of Moses is to encourage the people and to point to Yahweh, who is the true Warrior. What is important in this episode is that “the encouraging words of Moses addressed to the Israelites begin with an expression אֶל־יְהוָה (*al yāwē*) which belongs to holy-war language” (Dion 1970, 565-567; see also Conrad 1985). This suggests that here the prophet has the role of using specific expressions, which point to the true Fighter. Israel ought to stay quiet and to listen to the prophetic message. This also “suggests not only non-intervention but also the sanctity of Yahweh-war as a religious and confessional event” (Durham 2002, 192). Besides this, Moses has to do a specific ritual, namely to lift up the rod and stretch out the hand over the sea and divide it. Even though, as mentioned above, Yahweh is fighting for them, Moses is the instrument through which the miracles are accomplished.

In another context of war, when the Amalek attacks the Israelites, Moses fulfils another role in this kind of war. First of all, he has to command Joshua to prepare the army and then he climbs on the top of the mountain with the rod of God in his hand. Durham (2002, 236) comments this passage by saying that Moses “will take a position overlooking the field of battle, and he will be equipped with «the staff of Elohim»”; in this context, the staff is an “authenticating symbol of Yahweh’s powerful Presence.” The episode describes a ritual which evokes the miraculous power of God upon the people of Israel who were involved in the fight. Symbolically, “Moses’ upraised hands became also conductors of that power” (Durham 2002, 236). It is clear that “the war against Amalek is a holy war, with which Yahweh identifies himself (Ex. 17:16) on basis of a special directive” from God (Magyarosi 2010, 251).

What is interesting is that in this war, the Israelites are in a way actively involved in the fight, but what is about to take place is firmly and surely under Yahweh’s control. This war is not the “holy war” *par excellence* in which only God fights, because the Israelites are involved and fight, unlike in the Red Sea episode.

There is an explanation for the fact that Yahweh allowed the Amalekites to attack Israel. The first reason is because “they were disobedient,” and “they might learn to trust him again” (Winandy 1998, 320). Probably this is the reason why God made them experience the war, because of their fault. Had they not been rebellious, probably God would have continued to fight for them as before. An interesting explanation comes from White (1980, 134), who says that “if the children of Israel had not murmured against the Lord, he would not have suffered their enemies to make war with them.”

The role of Moses is highlighted in v. 11: “and so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” In this ritual, Moses stretches his hand towards heaven, i.e. God. When Moses

intercedes for the people of Israel, their victory is assured. This could be a hint to the cosmic conflict, where the interceding prayer offers to God the possibility to intervene in this fight on their behalf. After the fight was over, Moses “built an altar and called its name, the–Lord–Is–My–Banner.” In other English version, this expression is translated “Yahweh is my standard.” The Hebrew word **נִסִּי** (*nēs*) has the meaning ‘signal’ or ‘ensign, flag, banner,’ but HEL:651 (ap. Durham 2002, 237) renders the word *standard* as ‘rallying-point’ in this biblical verse. The expression evokes the holy war language and points to the role of the prophet Moses in the holy war context.

Thus, we might say that the ritual is part of the prophetic activity specific to the context of war for proclaiming the victory of Yahweh over their enemies.¹³ The banner serves as a remainder of the fact that Yahweh is the greatest Warrior in the world. It is evident that Moses’ ritual and language evoke the holy war frame.

6. The warrior prophets in the other OT books

6.1. Samuel as the “warrior prophet”

In 1Sam. 3:20, it is said that “all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.” Klein (2002, 34) gives the following characteristics of Samuel and his prophetic mission:

Though other accounts portray Samuel as a local judge (7:16) or local seer (9:6-9), the author of chap. 3 wants him to be understood as a prophet to the whole people. The word prophet may mean etymologically something like “the one called” (cf. the discussion in McCarter), but the definition most appropriate to this context is not to be gained by etymology. The prophet is the one to whom Yahweh appears (v 21a; cf. 15b) and to whom he reveals himself (v 21b; cf. v 7).

Thus, Samuel is a prophet, and also a judge. He is involved in some battles of the people of Israel.

1Sam. 4:1 describes an instance of a war: “and the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.” But, according to this text, there is no information that Samuel started the battle or fought as a leader and warrior against the Philistines. We find him fighting only later, because when this battle took place, Samuel was only a young prophet.

This episode is interesting, because it sheds light on the understanding of further episodes. What is characteristic of the holy war contexts is the Ark of the Covenant which is brought on the battlefield (see Merrill 2003, 85). In other words, “most important for the present context is the ark’s role as the symbol of Yahweh’s

¹³ This is part of his activity as a prophet and warrior.

presence, leading the people's march in the desert¹⁴ or their armies in holy war"¹⁵ (Klein 2002, 42). Another characteristic is "the shouting of war,"¹⁶ which is "typical of holy war contexts"¹⁷ (Klein 2002, 42).

This war sound also made the Philistines afraid, because they thought that the God of Israelites came into the camp, as it was supposed to happen in the holy war context. But, unfortunately, the people of Israel were defeated in the end. What is tragic is the fact that "the ark was captured because Yahweh had chosen to abandon Israel on account of the wickedness of the Elides" (McCarter 2008, 109). It seems that, before this happened, a prophecy has been made. This war has the characteristics of a holy war, but it seems that God the "Divine Warrior" is against his own people for whom he used to fight for. As said, there is no information showing that any prophet participated in this fight. Even though, Samuel communicated with God and received the call to be a prophet via the supernatural revelatory experience. He was too young and could not get involved in the fight.

Coming back to the battle narrative, we find that the battle continues with the Ark of the Covenant. At this time, the war is between Yahweh and Dagon. This is indeed a holy war, which is finally won by Yahweh. Being severely punished, the Philistines have sent back the ark of the Covenant. This may suggest that they were defeated. This seems to be a true context of holy war in which the Israelites were punished this time for evil conduct. As shown, there is no mention of a prophet who might have been involved in this battle.¹⁸

We will look now into other context of war where Samuel is involved:

Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel (1Sam. 7:10).

This happens after the Israelites repented, and Samuel "cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him." This is also a clear context of holy war. For example, according to Klein (2002, 27), the act of "crying" to Yahweh is a frequent motif in a holy war. This motif is also found in the period of the judges (the Hebrew terms are: קָרָא¹⁹ and קָרָעוּ).²⁰ Through this cry they would ask Yahweh, their

¹⁴ See Num. 10:33-36.

¹⁵ See Ex. 33:14-15, Num. 14:42-44, Josh. 3:4, 6, 2Sam. 11:11, 15:24-30.

¹⁶ 1Sam. 4:5 mentions that "when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook."

¹⁷ See also Josh. 6:5, Judg. 7:20, 1Sam. 17:20, 52, 2Chr. 20:21-22.

¹⁸ It is evident that Samuel was not yet in charge to fight the battles of the Lord.

¹⁹ See vv. 8-9, 1Sam. 12:8, 10, Judg. 3:9, 15, 6:6, 7, 10:10.

²⁰ See Josh. 24:7, Judg. 4:3, 10:12; cf. Ex. 14:10.

“God”²¹, to save them. McCarter (2008, 145) discusses the semantics of the Hebrew word *waybummēm*.

The verb means to throw into confusion and panic and is used especially with Yahweh as subject and an enemy as object within a holy war context (Ex 14:24; 23:27, Josh 10:10, Judg 4:15). Cf. especially 2Sam. 22:15 = Ps 18:15 (English 18:14) and Ps 144:6, where the term is used to describe the effect upon the enemy of Yahweh’s lightning (“arrows”) in a storm theophany context.²²

It is clear from this account that Samuel has the role of crying to the Lord and to bring sacrifice. Without the prophet, the holy war could not happen and start. The prophet Samuel is “portrayed in this account more as the *prophetic mediator* of holy war (cf. 1Kings 20:13-14, 22:5-12, 2Kings 3:11-19) than as a hero judge who led Israel in a great victory” (Klein 2002, 67). As the following verses show, “the victory is Yahweh’s alone” (ibid.).

In 1Sam. 13, the king Saul is in war with the Philistines, but before the start of the war the prophet was supposed to come and bring a sacrifice. They were supposed to wait seven days, as appointed by Samuel. In v. 13, the prophet Samuel says: “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you.” According to this, the word of Samuel is equal to the Word of God. And “during the monarchy the only representatives of holy war remained the prophets” (Magyarosi 2010, 249-50). They carried on the concept of holy war. So, the prophets remained as the true representatives of the holy war *par excellence* (as fought in the *Exodus* narratives).

Concluding this section, we might say that the role of the prophet in the holy war seems to be very preeminent even during the Monarchy, when kings were in charge of wars. The prophet Samuel conducts sacrifices, prays on behalf of the people. The wars usually start at his command which may show that his office is more important than that of the king Saul. The episode shows that the prophet Samuel is the mediator of holy war.

6.2. The unknown prophet who came to king Ahab

Another context of war in which a prophet of the Lord is involved is described in 1Kings 20, where “Ben-hadad the king of Syria” comes with his army to fight against Ahab. The Biblical account mentions that “Ben-hadad’s army was composed of thirty-two kings” that “were with him, with horses and chariots.” Thus, “this army, equipped with cavalry and chariotry, comes upon Samaria with clearly hostile intent” (De Vries 2002, 248). Moreover, v. 13 says that “suddenly a

²¹ See Josh. 24:17, 24.

²² As it is found in Westminster Hebrew text which is in the tagged Hebrew text from BIBLEWORKS 9 software.

prophet²³ approached Ahab king of Israel, saying: «Thus says the Lord: ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord’».” As evident from the text, the unnamed prophet comes to Ahab and “in the name of the Lord assures him of victory” (Rice 1990, 168). And even though the King hated prophets, this time Ahab received him because “in the time of their distress a prophet who foretold victory was even welcome” (Lange et al. 2008, 234).

According to Gerhard von Rod²⁴ (ap. Merrill 2003, 115), this is another characteristic of the holy war. The prophet gives him the “announcement of victory” (ibid.), which was granted by Yahweh. In the case of this war, the victory is not done by a miraculous intervention of Yahweh, but it is done by a divine strategy proposed by the prophet.

From this account, we observe that the role of the prophet in this kind of war is to foretell victory and act as a divine messenger by encouraging the king Ahab to go to war. Moreover, the prophet came with the strategy of war, which he received from the Yahweh Himself. The same unknown prophet also announces that a new war will take place in the spring of the next year when “the king of Syria will come up against you.”²⁵ Thus, the role of the unknown prophet was to encourage the king and announce that the victory is guaranteed by Yahweh himself. As evident from this episode, the particular role played by the prophet fits very well with other contexts of holy war as mentioned so far. It also shows that the unknown prophet possesses some of these typical characteristics of the holy war narratives.

6.3. Elisha, the son of Shaphat, as the warrior prophet

In 2Kings there is another context of war, even though it is not a kind of holy war, but a war in general. We are going to see which is the role of the prophet in this context.

In this account, the King of Israel, the King of Judah and the King of Edom went together to war. And in 2Kings 3:11, it is mentioned that “Jehoshaphat said: «Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?» So, one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said: «Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah».” In other words, the King Jehoshaphat felt the need to enquire the Lord through a prophet. Thus, we infer that hierarchically the prophetic office is higher than the kingly office. It shows, according to Hobbs (2002, 36), “the role prophets played during campaigns of this kind.”

²³ An unnamed prophet (lit. “a certain prophet”) approaches Ahab.

²⁴ In *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel*, 4th edition, Göttingen, Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 1965.

²⁵ In 1Kings 20:22 is mentioned: “And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, «Go, strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you».”

As in other cases mentioned so far, the role of the prophet is to “assure the kings that it is as easy to hand over Moab into their power as it is to supply water for the armies” (Hobbs 2002, 37). Furthermore, it is important to mention that “this is the first instance of Elisha’s active involvement in the political affairs of Israel; because of him, victories were granted to Israel’s armies (cf. 6:24-7:20, 13:14-19)”, as Cogan/Tadmor (2008, 48) states. Even though this is not a holy war *par excellence*, “the systematic way in which the defeat of Moab is described is reminiscent of the ordered way in which holy war is described elsewhere in the OT” (Hobbs 2002, 37).

To end this section, it is evident that the most important role of the prophet is to be “mediator of YHWH’s word” even in times of war causing the kings to remember that only Yahweh could guarantee their victory (Conrad 1985, 48).

6.4. Isaiah, the prophet who receives the war letter

In 2Kings 18-19 it is presented another instance of holy war, where all the fortified cities of Jerusalem are surrounded and attacked by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. Before attacking, Sennacherib sends a letter to the King of Israel, Hezekiah. This letter is “sent to Hezekiah (2Kings 19:10-13)” and “provides a good example of how the Assyrians adapted a message of their propaganda to a particular audience” (Dubovský 2005, 30).

In this critical situation, the king of Israel humbles himself and covers with sackcloth. The biblical text says that “he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.” Thus, prophets have a very important role even during the monarch period. Hobbs (2002, 274) says that “Hezekiah now involves Yahweh’s prophet in the sequence of events.” When the prophet Isaiah is called, he “prophesies deliverance employing a formulaic expression «thus says Yahweh» (2Kings 19:6)” (Evans 2008, 122). He predicts that “the foreign monarch, Sennacherib, will hear a rumour and return to his land (2Kings 19:7)” (Evans 2008, 122).

Moreover, in v. 6, the prophet comes with the answer: “Thus you shall say to your master, «thus says the Lord: ‘Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me’».” The Hebrew the expression אַל־תִּירָא (al *tirab* “do not be afraid”) contains a very crucial message from the prophet; it “is one of reassurance, one which echoes throughout the pages of the OT, not only in the stories of Abraham (Gen. 15:1), but also in the tradition of holy war”²⁶, which is quite suitable for our discussion (Hobbs 2002, 275).

Like the previous prophets, Isaiah has an important role in war contexts. What is important is the fact that this war resembles the prototypical (*par excellence*) holy

²⁶ See Josh. 8:1, 10:1, 11:6.

war, in which God proves victory and Israel's enemies are defeated by a direct intervention of Yahweh. In this war, the prophet has a very decisive role, namely he predicts victory and encourages the king with the crucial message of assurance. Isaiah prophesies that the king of Hezekiah will win the battle with a supernatural intervention. As seen, the prophet also uses the specific language of holy war. What matters is the fact that the prophet is more important than the King who was the supreme commander, because he has a crucial and decisive role in winning the battle representing God's voice. It is obvious that "after kingship the prophets became the theological bearers of the holy war theme in the North" (Lind 1980, 28). Thus, the prophet's office is higher than king's office, because he is directly God's spokesman.

7. Conclusions

This paper has examined the role of the OT prophet in the holy war narratives. We have started with a linguistic analysis of the Hebrew word נָבִיא (*nāvi*) and its etymology. Our results show that a "prophet" is God's spokesman, namely "a person authorized to speak for" God.

Following a textual analysis, we have found that the most important prophets involved in "holy war" narratives are: Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Samuel, the unknown prophet, Elisha and Isaiah. After an in-depth linguistic analysis, we have discovered that they are the most active prophets who participated in the holy wars representing Yahweh the Warrior. They have the most typical characteristics which evoke the holy war imagery.

Abraham's role is to do a "just war" in order to rescue Lot. He also practices a kind of war, known as *hērem*, which was a war of total destruction at God's command as a revenge. Like in this type of war, the prophet Abraham does not touch anything of the prey of war, because he considers that this might be unfair. Thus, Abraham does not fight this war for material gain, but for a just cause. After the war is finished, Abraham is in a state of suffering, probably being physiologically affected and needs a purification of his conscience. What is interesting is the fact that Abraham pays tithe and asks the priest Melchizedek to intercede for him.

Aaron is another prophet who is involved in the *par excellence* holy war in *Exodus*. As he speaks on behalf of God, he is a "divine spokesman." Moreover, Aaron also makes some "signs" and "miracles." In the war between God and Pharaoh, his role is to execute what God requires him to do. By his actions, Aaron shows that God is the true Fighter and Warrior. He only performs some rituals and is the human agent who does what Yahweh prescribed him to do. He does not fight using arms or violence, but is a true warrior for God against the Egyptians.

Moses is the next prophet analysed in this paper. He is also involved in the holy war *par excellence* in *Exodus*, and he is the prototypical prophet. He starts his "career" as a warrior and fighter by killing the Egyptian, but this was not according to God's plan. Only later, he becomes a true warrior in the holy war. For example, Moses is

involved in the war from the Red Sea, where he has a very important mission of encouraging the Israelites using some expressions which belong to the holy war terminology evoking this type of war. The prophet Moses performs some important rituals using the Yahweh's rod. Thus, he is God's instrument through which the miracle is accomplished. Further, Moses is also implicated in the war with Amalek, where he is passively involved, because he does not fight, but only intercedes for the people of Israel with "the staff of Elohim" in his hand. It is clear that he makes the connection with the spiritual and metaphysical world. This may be a hint to the cosmic conflict. Thus, the conflict seems to be between two realms of God and Satan. As presented above, this is a "symbol of Yahweh's powerful Presence" (Shin 2012, 128).

Another important prophet analysed is Samuel. He occupies a lot of offices, for example, he was a judge, a warrior, and a prophet. The prophet Samuel is the one who reconciles the people of Israel with Yahweh and reintroduces to a certain extent the holy war in his time. He is the one who starts the war with a sacrifice. What is interesting is that he even kills Amalek. This in fact shows that he is a great warrior. Samuel's narrative suggests that the prophets remain the only representatives of the holy war *par excellence* in which only God fights and the people witness. Thus, the prophet Samuel becomes the "prophetic mediator of holy war" (Klein 2002, 67).

Another prophet with an important function is the Unknown Prophet who comes to Ahab. He gives "announcement of the victory." As shown, this may suggest that this is a manifestation of holy war, as the typical characteristics show in fact. In this narrative, the prophet has the role of foretelling the victory and encouraging the king. The Unknown Prophet also comes with the strategy of war. Besides this, he also announces the victory and foretells the next war, which will take place in the following spring.

As seen, Elisha son of Shaphat could be characterized as a warrior prophet involved in the holy war. The biblical narrative shows that he is very much involved in the political affairs of Israel. He comes with a strategy and foretells the defeat of Moab, giving a political advice. He functions as a mediator of Yahweh's word.

Isaiah is the last prophet analysed in this paper. He is consulted by the king Hezekiah through a letter, when Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked Jerusalem. Like the previous prophets, he has the same role of encouraging the political rulers and proclaiming God's deliverance by prophesying it. He also uses specific expressions and terminology which belong to holy war narratives. Like the previous prophets, Isaiah occupies a position and office higher than that of king in the social hierarchy representing God. Like the previous prophets, Isaiah is God's spokesman.

Following this analysis, it is obvious that the OT prophets have certain roles in the holy war setting. They are involved in this type of war and represent God acting at His command. Prophets do not fight as warriors, but are mediators between God and the humans involved in the war.

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