

Divination and Prophecy: Demystifying the Occult In
Deuteronomy 18:9-22

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Narada H. Somboon

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ขอบคุณปู่เงินผู้เป็นหมอผี พ่อประทวน แม่กิ๊กและอาม่านภา ผู้รับใช้พระคริสต์

*Thank you my shaman and great-grandfather Ngune and my father Pratuan, Mother Gik, and
Grandmother Napah, faithful servants of Christ*

Introduction

I remember being about eight years old, sitting in my church's office in Thailand. There was a commotion started by a Filipino intern pastor. In one hand he was dragging a sobbing teenage member of our church and holding a copy of a *Harry Potter* book in another. Before other leaders in that room, he condemned the teen's father for allowing her contact with this *occult* writing. An evil in disguise as children's literature. The passionate rebuke was followed by an exorcism prayer and the immediate burning of the book.

That event set a fear in my heart that was not there before, perhaps even traumatizing. Being accustomed to narratives such as Moses turning his staff into a snake and turning water into blood, Elijah raising a child from the dead and summoning fire from heaven, or Joseph interpreting dreams and predicting the famine, to me, magic was commendable rather than condemned. My fascination with magic was reinforced by Disney fairy tales compiled with magical objects, fairy godmothers, curses, prophecies, and a jinn. Combined with reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* series, my love for the supernatural magical world was solidified. Every content listed above carries elements we would traditionally understand as *occult*. Yet there is an invisible category, an unspoken rule, that certain kinds of occult writings are permissible and other kinds are not. Although there is no consensus on what the rule is or where the lines are, it appears that the girl's father permitted her to read *Harry Potter* and the Thai church members and leaders did not disapprove of the book, the Filipino pastor was offended. There were no questions asked or explanations given as to why *Harry Potter* should be rebuked compared to other "Christian-approved" entertainment. What exactly is the occult, why is it taboo, and who gets to decide what is permissible in Christianity and what is not?

Due to the vague nature of the term occult, it is difficult to determine why it had become an object of fear within the church community without an attempt to identify what we consider to be occult. In an investigation of Deuteronomy 18:9-22, the Bible's most exhaustive prohibition against the occult practices,¹ I will attempt to demystify *the occult* by demonstrating the paradoxical stance the HB² has against them and how the prohibition does not reflect the Israelites' lived experience. The banning of divination and the description of a prophet in Deut 18:9-22 is a theological construct developed in hindsight to explain the defeat of Israel resulting in the Babylonian exile. I propose that Deut 18:9-22 is Israel's attempt to redefine its history and identity. In doing so, Israel preserves the strength and validity of their nation against the narrative of their conquerors. DtrH³ says that Israel's defeat was not a result of the nation's (or YHWH's) weakness, but it is because of their infidelity to YHWH's covenant. For that reason, the idea that the occult is a malicious force that is anti-YHWH is invented. The taboo of the occult then is the violation against the Covenant to worship only YHWH rather than a fault in the occult itself. While the DtrH is an emic construction of Israel's religion, resulting in the marginalization of other common practices of their time, the modern idea of religion is an etic categorization that resulted in the creation and marginalization of the occult.

From the Latin root, *occultus* means “secret, hidden from the understanding, [or] concealed.”⁴ In Evangelical circles, the term connotes something evil, life-threatening, and taboo. A term we often use with the assumption that its meaning is clear and universal. Most dictionaries define the *occult* in a very broad sense, being something “connected with magic

¹ The term occult does not exist in the Bible, but I will refer to the list of practices below as occult for convenience and will later problematize the term itself.

² An abbreviation for the Hebrew Bible.

³ Abbreviated from the term *Deuteronomistic History*. Referring to a theory of history in Deut – 2 Kgs. See pgs. 5-6.

⁴ “Occult, Adj. and n.” In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 4, 2022.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130166>.

powers and things that cannot be explained by reason or science.”⁵ Though arguably, religion too is not explainable by reason or science. More precisely, Oxford Dictionary defines it as “relating to magic, alchemy, astrology, theosophy, or other practical arts held to involve agencies of a secret or mysterious nature; of the nature of such an art; dealing with or versed in such matters; magical.”⁶ The miscellaneous nature of the occult makes the term susceptible to misuse. For example, Phil Phillips, the author of the influential book during the moral panic of the 1980s, *Turmoil in the Toybox*, describes “occult toys” as “those that teach witchcraft, violence, sex, and humanism,” referring to He-Man, Barbie, G.I. Joe, Smurfs, Dungeons and Dragons, and the list goes on.⁷ By obscuring the already complex term, occult, with violence, sex, and humanism, Phillips is expanding the term to cover his assumption. To avoid following in Phillips' footsteps, the church must have clarity on what the biblical text say about what we consider to be "the occult."

From Divination to Prophecy

However, like many other debated issues, the HB is unclear and quite paradoxical in its stance on the occult. In fact, it contains several prohibitions and negative evaluations against magic and the occult (e.g. Lev 19.26, 31; 20.1-6, 27; Exod 22.17; 1 Sam 18; Isa 8.19; 57.3; Ezek 22.28; Mal 3.5). At the same time, it also takes a positive or sometimes neutral stance on dreams, clairvoyance, hydromancy, belomancy, magic staffs, decision making by lots, juridical ordeals, blessings and curses, and so forth.⁸

⁵ “Occult Adjective - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.Com.” Accessed March 9, 2022.

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/occult?q=occult>.

⁶ “Occult, Adj. and n.” In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 4, 2022.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130166>.

⁷ Phil Phillips. *Turmoil in the Toy Box*. Lancaster, Pa: Starburst, 1986. 37.

⁸ Kuemmerlin-McLean, Joanne K. “Magic (ANE).” In *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, Vol. 2. New York u.a: Doubleday, 1992. 469.

To drive at the origin of the taboo, I want to center my argument around the HB's most exhaustive list of prohibitions against what we generally understood as occult practices located in Deuteronomy 18.9-22:

9 When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. **10** No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, **11** or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. **12** For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. **13** You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. **14** Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so.

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. **16** This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God anymore, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." **17** Then the Lord replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. **18** I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. **19** Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. **20** But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die." **21** You may say to yourself, "How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?" **22** If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.⁹

Although the text does not refer to the practices as being of the *occult* since the term did not exist in Israel's repertoire, it does claim those practices as foreign and abominable¹⁰ to YHWH. The passage laid out a seemingly hard-drawn line between the divination practices being incompatible with the Israelites and establishing the prophets as YHWH-approved mouthpieces replacing those occult practitioners. Yet evidence shows that Deut 18.9-22's claim

⁹ Deuteronomy 18.9-22. NRSV.

¹⁰ תועבת – the severity of the term could be questioned i.e. Gen 43:32 "for it is an abominable thing for the Egyptians" (to eat with the Hebrew).

of such distinction does not represent the reality of the HB's world where YHWH's prophets frequently tread between the line separating prophecy from the realm of divination and magic.

In defining religion as “an anthropological, not a theological category,” J.Z. Smith argue that it “describes human thought and action, most frequently in terms of belief and norms of behavior.”¹¹ Dispatching the belief that religions are distinguished solely by their theological differences, Smith might say that at its core, religion is what people do despite theology's attempt to describe human thought behind their actions. It is important to note that for Smith, religion is not a native category, but an etic observation from outsiders imposed upon native practitioners of the "religion."¹² Drawing from Smith's definition, I argue that Deut 18.9-22 is a theological category constructed in retrojection. Where Israel looked back at their history and attempted to describe themselves as separated from their neighbors as the covenant commanded them to be. In doing so, they advanced the notion that it is their disloyalty to YHWH that led them to their exile.

The book of Deuteronomy gets its English meaning from the Greek title meaning "second law."¹³ It is a retelling of many stories already present through the Torah— a recapitulation of instructions on how to live as people who subscribe to YHWH’s Covenant and Commandments.¹⁴ Deuteronomy sets the stage for Israel’s interpretation of their subsequent history (from the book of Joshua to 2 Kings, excluding Ruth) commonly referred to as Deuteronomistic History.

¹¹ Jonathan Z. Smith. “Religion, Religions, Religious.” In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 269.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jerry L. Sumney. *The Bible: An Introduction*, 2014. 99.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Compiled after the exile, DtrH is a retrojection of the Israelites' story, making sense of their history and what led to the loss of their land under the understanding that,

The Covenant [with YHWH] requires certain behavior from the people, and if they adhere to those requirements, God will bless them. However, if they do not fulfill the conditions of the Covenant (primarily by keeping the law), God will punish them.¹⁵

Since this ideology is formed after the fact, it is important to reconsider the factual historicity of DtrH's narrative whether the rigid distinction between prophesy and divination existed or not and whether these divinatory practices were truly foreign to Israel or not. Since the prominent concern for the Dtr¹⁶ is Israel's undivided fidelity to YHWH, it is not difficult to see that the Dtr understood the exile to be YHWH's punishment for Israel's worship of other gods.¹⁷ The book is concerned with Israel establishing itself as a distinct nation in a "foreign land" with appealing "foreign practices" while remaining different from the rest of their neighboring cultures.

Deuteronomy 18 is a continuation of Israel's establishment of leadership over the land they will possess. Chapters 16 through 18 describe the continuation of Israel's leadership establishment over the land they will possess by instituting roles of judges, kings, priests, and prophets.

Immediately, we know that this rigid distinction between these roles is inexact, for we have characters such as Aaron who was referred to as both a priest and prophet, Moses and Samuel were judges, priests, and prophets.¹⁸ This begged the question posited by Martti Nissinen of

¹⁵ Sumney. *The Bible: An Introduction*, 2014. 100. See also Deut 11:26-28.

¹⁶ Abbreviated from the term *Deuteronomist*. Referring to a school of writers responsible for the compilation of Deuteronomy-2 Kings.

¹⁷ Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: J. Knox Press, 1990. 4.

¹⁸ Thomas C. Römer. *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality, and the Formation of a History*. Edited by Mignon R. Jacobs and Raymond F. Person. Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and Its Literature, volume 14. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013. 129-130. However, Moses was never directly named a *nabi*.

whether prophecy is a social phenomenon or a literary one.¹⁹ Here Nissinen is pointing to the dichotomy between the different characteristics of the former prophets compared to the Writing (latter) prophets which I will later discuss.

Before the institution of the prophets in 18:15, we are first presented with the longest list of condemned divinatory practices. Frederick Cryer noted that this passage is the "only one in the legal corpora which regards certain forms of divination as essentially foreign practices," alluding to his conclusion that many of them are likely native to Israel.²⁰ Thomas C. Römer also observed that v.15-22 is an "attempt to redefine the role and function of a prophet...dissociating the prophet from divination, and locat[ing] the origin of the prophetic office in the divine revelation at Horeb [v.16-17]," where the covenant was given.²¹ Indicating that Israel's prophets are raised by YHWH, distinguishing them from practitioners of divination in the land.²² It is also worth noting that divination requires much training and diviners are commonly well-educated scholars from the more privileged societal class while prophets are described as not scholars, rather, they were generally illiterate and arise from a lower social sphere.²³ Römer continued to bring up certain texts in the HB where the word "diviner (חֹזֵן)" is associated with Judean prophets (Isa 3.2; Jer 29.8; Ezek 13.1), and places where divination is considered a prophetic activity (Mic 3.11: "its prophets practice divination for money"), which further proves the boundary between prophets and divination is permeable despite what Deut 18:9-22 depicted.²⁴

¹⁹ Martti Nissinen. *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*. Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, volume 494. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. 502-504.

²⁰ Frederick H. Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 142. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994.231.

²¹ Römer. *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality, and the Formation of a History*. 131.

²² Ibid.

²³ George J. Brooke. *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*. Edited by Todd Klutz. Journal for the Study of the New Testament 245. London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2003. 216.

²⁴ Römer. *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History*. 131.

The discrepancies mentioned above are rarely acknowledged by biblical commentators. Many implied that the Israelites do not know about these practices prior to entering Canaan. A few commentators are heavily concentrated on the "child sacrifice"²⁵ mentioned in v. 10. On the innocence of Israel, John Currid said that the concern for v. 9-11 prohibitions is for Israel to not "learn" these "things of horror" when they enter the land.²⁶ He emphasized child sacrifice as being the "most hideous practice of pagan peoples."²⁷ Similarly, Chris Wright considers these practices to be "lumped together as the detestable ways of the nations."²⁸ Led by child sacrifice, (though he acknowledges that it is not a divination rite) "sets the tone for the way the following practices were to be viewed."²⁹ Deducing child sacrifice as evil practice belonging strictly to the *other nations* and convoluting other complex practices under the umbrella of evildoing. Yet it is debatable whether child sacrifice is an accurate interpretation of מעבר באש which literally translated to "passing through fire," a topic I will soon discuss.

However, not all commentaries are as harsh in associating these practices with horror and detestation. Most still have a catch-all attitude towards these divinatory practices and not much effort is spent on identifying each practice. Rather, they focus more on contrasting the foreign practices with the YHWH-chosen way of communication. I would argue that these practices were not banned for being evil or ineffective, but they simply are not compatible with the covenant community³⁰ according to the Dtr. These exhaustive prohibitions function more like

²⁵ Though I will lightly touch on the subject as it pertains to divination, the issue of child sacrifice is beyond the scope of this paper. Further resources available, see for example Dewrell, Heath D. *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel*. Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2017, with bibliography.

²⁶ John D. Currid. *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy*. Darlington, England; Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press, 2006. 320-21.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright. *Deuteronomy*. New International Biblical Commentary 4. Peabody, Mass. : [Carlisle, Cumbria]: Hendrickson Publishers ; Paternoster Press, 1996. 216.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ A term used to describe Israelites, inspired by DtrH.

a detailed description of whom and how Israelites can and cannot consult as a people committed to YHWH. I argue that the Israelites are well versed in these non-Yahwistic practices for they too are a part of the ANE cultures. It may be comparable to the stereotypical stern father demanding, "my house, my rule." While his children traverse the culture outside their home, they know that if they still want to remain under their father's roof, they must conduct themselves according to his rules. We know all too well that very few children ever perfectly subscribe to their house rules. The institution of the prophets could be viewed as YHWH providing Israel with the approved mediator for Israel through which to communicate to YHWH. The prophets' distinction is set against other divinatory practices in Canaan that the Dtr considers abominable. The concern here is not against monotheism but monolatry—worshiping only YHWH in the midst of other gods they acknowledge.

So, what exactly are these prohibited practices, why are they condemned, how are they incompatible with Yahwism, and how does a prophet replace these practitioners? For the most part, these divinatory practices seem redundant, and some terms are synonymous with another. Tigay suggested that the reason for redundancy is for there to be no slight room for interpretation that some of these can still be permitted.³¹ Yet there are other forms of divination that did not make it on this list and other terms for magician and diviners are mentioned in the HB but not in v. 9-11.

מעבר באש ("pass through fire")

While, the issue of child sacrifice is larger than the scope of this paper, it is worth noting the discrepancy in translation and biases. As I mentioned previously, some commentators read מעבר באש in v. 10 along with translations such as the ESV, "anyone who burns his son or his

³¹ Jeffrey H. Tigay. *Deuteronomy =: [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. 1st ed. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996. 174.

daughter as an offering," interpreting the phrase as child-sacrifice. As Chris Wright mentioned, child sacrifice is not a divinatory act. One may wonder why this begins the list of divinatory practices on v. 9-11. The phrase is more literally translated as "passing through fire" compared to Jeremiah 7:31 "to burn (שרף) their sons and their daughters in the fire." While שרף undoubtedly means "to burn,"³² the verb עבר used in v. 10 in the hiph'1 literally means "causing to pass." While it could refer to a metaphorical passing on or passing away, it is more commonly translated as physically passing through.³³ Therefore, passing through fire could be a divination-related act. An oracle ordeal gauging whether the son or daughter is harmed through the process could become a divine sign.³⁴ Whether the ritual is referring to sacrifice or divination, both are potentially lethal. Jeffrey H. Tigay noted that "underlying child sacrifice is the belief that for the most earnestly desired benefactions from the gods, the most precious gift had to be offered."³⁵ It is not difficult to see this perception of offering in Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac or Jephthah his daughter. The same logic behind YHWH favoring Able's sacrifice over Cain could apply here as well—that different sacrifice holds different value, and that value could be based on the intention of the offeree. It is the common preaching rhetoric that YHWH deserves our best, but the ideology presented in DtrH is that YHWH values life.

קסם ("Divination")

The HB views divination as a subcategory of magic and uses קסם as a general term to encapsulate the whole complex of magical and divinatory practices.³⁶ Many divination methods

³² "H8313 - *śārap* - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 21 Mar, 2022. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8313/nkjv/wlc/0-1/>

³³ "H5674 - *‘ābar* - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 21 Mar, 2022. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5674/nkjv/wlc/0-1/>

³⁴ Tigay. *Deuteronomy*. 464.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Freedman, David Noel, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 2. New York u.a: Doubleday, 1992.

were present in the ANE including hepatoscopy (examination of livers in sacrificial animals, rhabdomancy (studying arrows), hydromancy (shape of water and oil), teraphim (a type of sacred/symbolic object), and through mediums and wizards, and priests or authorized personnel.³⁷ The human desire for confidence and clarity is universal and recognizable, making divination appealing, even arguably necessary. Martti Nissinen described divination as being,

...triggered by uncertainty [the purpose of divination] is to become conversant with supernatural knowledge in order to 'elicit answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding' divination tend to be future-oriented, not necessarily in the sense of foretelling future events, but as a method of tackling the anxiety about the insecurity of life and coping with the risk brought about by human ignorance. The rationale behind divination is the belief that a necessary amount of superhuman knowledge is available to humans, especially to those acknowledged by society as diviners by virtue of their background, education, or behavior. The role of diviners is essentially that of an intermediary between the human and superhuman world.³⁸

Similarly, the *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* translates divination as the “process of discerning divine purpose or attaining supernatural knowledge through various devices and stratagems.”³⁹ While it added this further definition that does not take into consideration the evidence that shows prophets trotting between both roles and defines act divination as “...human schemes for uncovering divine will, in contrast to prophetic insight...[which] derives from a direct revelation” from YHWH.⁴⁰ Due to this discrepancy, Cryer argued against the validity of the “conquest” narrative and Israel's distinction between its neighbors.⁴¹ In many ANE documents, the term “Canaanite” does not refer to a particular ethnic group but is a term broadly

³⁷ F. Scott Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Vol. 2. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.

³⁸ Nissinen, Martti. *Prophetic Divination*. 76.

³⁹ Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 143.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 255.

used to distinguish an otherwise indistinguishable group of inhabitants in one area including the Hittites, Amorites, and also the Israelites.⁴² Rather than a preemptive warning, the prohibition against "the nations" in Deut 18:9-22 is an ideological retrojection, attempting to redefine what is Israelite and what is not, separating themselves from the "Canaanites".⁴³

From the linguistic standpoint, Hebrew is considered a language within a subgroup of Semitic languages called Canaanite which includes Moabite, Phoenician, and Punic.⁴⁴ Cryer investigated the etymological roots for each divinatory practice mentioned in v. 9-14, proving that if Israel truly assimilated into their neighbor's culture, there should be evidence of related terms for magic and divination in the surrounding cultures inside of Canaan at least at the end of the second millennium.⁴⁵

First on the list, קסם is attested in Palmyrene Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Mishnaic Hebrew, the Talmud, and Aramaic of the targums (but not in Moabite or Phoenician) and means broadly to "conjure" or "to cut (in pieces)" in Arabic.⁴⁶ Cryer challenged that "if the art of divining by קסמים was truly a phenomenon Israel had learned from her neighbors, it is curious that they have left no record of it."⁴⁷

In this next part, I will exhibit some common divination practices and show evidence of Israel's participation in those practices. First, a popular source of divination is through studying the liver of sacrificial animals (**hepatoscopy**). This ritual is considered to be a science of reading the intricacy of the liver and requires a highly trained practitioner.⁴⁸ Policies for war-making and

⁴² Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 254-55.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Huehnergard, John and Na'ama Pat-El (eds.) *The Semitic Languages*. 2nd ed. New York; Routledge, 2019. 3.

⁴⁵ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 256.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 256.

⁴⁸ Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 144.

peace are one common way hepatoscopy is used.⁴⁹ There is no attestation in the HB where this is practiced, though they offer animal sacrifice regularly. Second to be examined is **rhabdomancy**, a divination technique studying wooden rod, stick, staff, or arrow shaft to disclose either good or ill fortune⁵⁰ (i.e. Moses' staff in Exod 4:1-5 and 17:8-13; Aaron's staff in Num 17:7-11; and other instances in Judg 4:5; 6:11). **Hydromancy or oleomancy** is the practice of decoding the patterns formed when the liquid of different densities is mixed (i.e. water and oil).⁵¹ In the NIDB, F. Scott Spencer referenced Gen 44:5 and 15 during Joseph's service in the Egyptian court, he possessed a silver cup that he claimed to use for divination and threatens to curse his brothers with it, though he never followed through.⁵² **Teraphim** is likely a symbolic object representing household deities.⁵³ The etymology for the root word is unhelpful and it is unclear precisely how these statues disclose fortunes.⁵⁴ Out of the fifteen times the word appeared in the OT, ten times teraphim is attested as an idol (Gen 31:19,34,35; 1 Sam 19:13,16; Judg 17:5; 18:14,17,18,20) and thrice mentioning its function for divination (Hos 3:4; Ezek 21:21; Zech 10.2).⁵⁵ The HB either denounces teraphims (1 Sam 15:23, 2 Kgs 23:24) or it is neutral about it (Gen 31:19-35; Judg 17-18; 1 Sam 19:11-17; Hos 3:4).⁵⁶ Finally, **casting of lots and Urim and Thummim**.⁵⁷ Priests and authorized persons can divine through the casting of lots or using Urim and Thummim which are believed to be sacred dice contained in Israel's high priest's breast pocket (Exod 28:30; Num

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 144.

⁵¹ Tigay. *Deuteronomy*. 173.

⁵² Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.144.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 272.

⁵⁶ Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.144.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of Urim and Thummim as an example of Psephomancy see Horowitz, Wayne and Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, "Urim and Thummin in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA137)" *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 21 (1992). 95-115.

27:21; Deut 33:8; Ezra 2:031).⁵⁸ This practice is approved by the HB and is largely utilized in decision making from assignments of territory (Num 26:55-56; Josh 18:0-10; Isa 34;17), service (kings: 1 Sam 10:20-23; priest: 1 Chr 24:31; 25:8; 26:13-14; Neh 10:34) and assessments of guilt (I Sam 14:38-42), or causes of disaster (Jonah 1:7-10).⁵⁹ It is clear from these preliminary examples that although prohibited in general, these specific forms of divination are dubious. The Israelites either still practiced or were very much influenced by magic and divination as we will further discover.

מַעֲנֵן (“Soothsayer, observer of times, one who looks for omens, sorcerer, enchanter”)

While קסם is a broad term encapsulating all types of divination, עֲנַן is the first specialized type of magic/divination in the list. The root עֲנַן could be related to the Arabic word ‘anna "to appear suddenly or show oneself" or ḡanna which means "to hum, buzz," possibly referring to someone telling a fortune in a quiet voice or reciting a spell.⁶⁰ In Isa 8:19-20, Isaiah indicated that ghosts and familiar spirits “chirps and mutter,” therefore, it is unclear whether it is the spirits or the practitioners who do the muttering. In Hebrew the root עֲנַן means “cloud” but it is closely related to the root for “eye” עֵין therefore, it could be interpreted as the practice of observing the clouds or "the times" for omens.⁶¹ The diverse way of interpreting עֲנַן means that there is a lack of consensus on whether the focus of the art is on divination—observing omens or more on magical spells—incantations and conjuring up spirits.⁶² Once again, the term is attested only in Aramaic-Middle Persian glossary without examples from truly foreign nations.⁶³

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Spencer. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.144.

⁶⁰ Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. Vol. 3. 4 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996. 857.

⁶¹ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 468.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment* 257.

מגזש (“augur, diviner, enchanter”)

The Hebrew root מגזש means “to practice divination, divine, observe signs.”⁶⁴ The Arabic *nahuša* suggests the meaning “to be unlucky” or “calamitous,” or the substantive form *nihšat* means “evil” or “omen.”⁶⁵ The term has also been translated as “enchantment,” “enchanter,” “indeed,” “certainly,” “learn by experience,” and “diligently observe.”⁶⁶ Again, the meaning “to divine” is attested only in languages associated with the Yahwistic tradition.⁶⁷ Cryer suggests that Israel tradition is the oldest source to associate מגזש with divination.⁶⁸ Kuemmerlin-McLean suggested that the root could either be מגזש which is closely related to the word for “snake,” suggesting a sense of hissing or whispering a spell.⁶⁹ Or it could be יזש which is associated with magic. Particularly the use of charms and enchantments makes it once again hard to define the nature of the practice.⁷⁰ In Ugaritic, ש יזש means “to whisper,” and “to conjure” in the Phoenecian of Arslan Tash.⁷¹

מכשף (“sorcerer”)

There is a consensus on translating כשף as “sorcery.”⁷² כשף is well attested in Mesopotamia, indicating the practice of dark magic.⁷³ Kuemmerlin-McLean points out translators’ tendency to use the neutral term “magic” to describe male practitioners of כשף while

⁶⁴ BDB, 638c.

⁶⁵ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 257.

⁶⁶ "H5172 - *nāḥaš* - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 8 Mar, 2022. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5172/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

⁶⁷ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 258.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 468.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 258.

⁷² Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 468.

⁷³ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 258.

using the “negative and antisocial” term “sorcery” to refer to their female counterparts.⁷⁴ This bias is also reflected in the unbalanced punishment for male and female sorcerers in the HB. Exod 22:18 stated that “you shall not permit a female sorcerer to live” while there is either no precise penalty given to male practitioners or the judgment is up to YHWH (Deut 18:10; Jer 27:9; Mal 3:5).⁷⁵ I brought up this point to contrast Tigay's dismissal of the specified gender in Exod 22:18 and presume that since it is a “capital crime” the practitioner of כַּשֵׁף must be practicing “black magic.”⁷⁶ On the question of origin, כַּשֵׁף is not attested in Ugaritic, Punic, Phoenician, or Old Aramaic, but borrows its root from Akkadian *kašāpu*.⁷⁷ As mentioned above, it is widely attested in Mesopotamia, one may wonder as Cryer did, that “if the Israelites had wanted to ban the practice of כַּשֵׁף at the time of the conquest, they would have had to go to Babylonia to do it.”⁷⁸ But even if they had, black magic was already punishable by death in Hammurabi’s time, Israel’s ban would be belated and redundant.⁷⁹

חֲבֵר (‘‘Charmer, one who casts spells, one who uses charms’’)

Frederick Cryer problematizes חֲבֵר due to its meaning as “to charm” which is only known in Middle Hebrew.⁸⁰ Elsewhere, חֲבֵר is a widely utilized word, meaning “to unite,” “to join,” or “to make an ally.”⁸¹ Even throughout the OT, the KJV translates חֲבֵר as “charmer” once in Ps 58:5, “charming” once, “couple” eight times, “join” eight times, “couple together” four times, “join together” three times, and “compact” once. Though in Isa 47:9, the KJV translated חֲבֵר as

⁷⁴ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 468.

⁷⁵ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 468.

⁷⁶ Tigay. *Deuteronomy*. 173.

⁷⁷ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 258.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Brooke, George J. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Edited by Willem VanGemeren. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997. 17

enchanter rather than a charmer.⁸² Derivable only from Deut 18.11, Ps 58.5, Isa 47.9,12 where חֶבֶר is translated as “conjuring” is due to its proximity to כָּשַׁף.⁸³ In Ugaritic, חֶבֶר means “companion” or “vessel.”⁸⁴ There is evidence of some Hasmonean⁸⁵ coins bearing the word חֶבֶר which shows that the term most likely refers to “community” rather than an enchantment.⁸⁶ Therefore, “to charm” is unattested elsewhere except in Hebrew. Biblical interpreters relate this concept of joining and binding to the practice of tying or wrapping knots around people or objects for magical purposes to derive the meaning “to charm.”⁸⁷ Alternative derivation can be found concerning Akkadian *ḥabārum* meaning “to be noisy,” “to make indistinguishable clamor.” From here, Kuemmerlin-McLean suggests that חֶבֶר could mean "mutterer" or "one who makes undistinguishable noise."⁸⁸

יָדַעַנִי (‘‘Wizard’’), וְשָׂאֵל אוֹב (‘‘Consult ghosts or spirits, medium’’), and דָּרַשׁ הַמֵּתִים (‘‘one who calls up the dead, necromancer’’)

The expression literally means inquirer⁸⁹(שָׂאֵל) of אוֹב and יָדַעַנִי. The word אוֹב appears in various contexts, making its precise meaning difficult to discern. It could mean anything from "skin-bottle," to "necromancer," or to "ghost."⁹⁰ Further translations suggested by Kuemmerlin-McLean include "spirit, ancestral spirit, person controlled by a spirit, a bag of skin, a ghost, a

⁸² "H2266 - *ḥāḇar* - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 19 Mar, 2022.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2266/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

⁸³ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 259.

⁸⁴ Cryer. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 258.

⁸⁵ A dynasty of ancient Judaea descended from the Maccabee family in 143 or 142 BCE. *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Hasmonean dynasty," accessed April 18, 2022, <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Hasmonean-dynasty/39464>.

⁸⁶ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 258.

⁸⁷ Kuemmerlin-McLean. "Magic (ANE)." 468.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 469.

⁸⁹ Also means “request” or “petition.” BDB, 982a.

⁹⁰ BDB, 15b.

demon,” or related objects could be “a ritual pit used by necromancers⁹¹,” “a spirit called up by a necromancer,” or the “necromancer himself.”⁹² Isa 29:4 mentions the אוב speaking out of the ground and whispers out of the dust. Cryer refers to the term אוב as “a famous puzzle.”⁹³ There is no etymology in syro-Palestinian, and the practice is sparsely evident in Assyria, yet it is extensively found in Talmudic resources, leading Cryer to conclude that “the practice is either acquired by the Israelite directly from Mesopotamia or developed independently by themselves.”⁹⁴

While it is not uncommon for the term אוב to appear by itself, this is not the case for ידעני which always appears next to אוב.⁹⁵ Kuemmerlin-McLean believes the two words could be hendiadys,⁹⁶ though, most translations refer to the term as a separate entity— a medium, and a wizard.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the translation of ידעני as “familiar spirit” could be correct, but Kuemmerlin-McLean warns not too convoluted its meaning with the medieval view of witchcraft.⁹⁸ Cryer agreed with the RSV’s translation of ידעני as “wizard.” He identified that the suffix ני conveys the sense of “belongingness,” Thus, the figure has something to do with knowledge.⁹⁹ But as usual, it is impossible to know what kind. In ידעני, the root ידע (“to know”) is recognized, leading to its interpretation as “one who knows,” whether that person is the being consulted or the practitioner consulting, there is no way to tell.¹⁰⁰ Cryer also noted that the word

⁹¹ Tigay further described it as a hole in the ground through which offerings are made to entice the dead to communicate with the living. *Deuteronomy*.173.

⁹² Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 469.

⁹³ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 260.

⁹⁴ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 260.

⁹⁵ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 469.

⁹⁶ A figure of speech in which two words are connected by conjunction in order to express a single complex idea, e.g. *nice and warm* for *nicely warm*. “hendiadys, n.”. OED Online. March 2022. Oxford University Press.

⁹⁷ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 469.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹⁹ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 261.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

is unattested outside of HB and rabbinic literature.¹⁰¹

דרש המתים is the third term concerning the practice of necromancy but the precise method or relationship to the previous two is unclear.¹⁰² דרש means "to tread a place," to "resort to," to "frequent," to "seek," to "consult," to "inquire," or to "seek deity in prayer and worship."¹⁰³ Cryer couples דרש המתים with the previous term שאל אוב referring to the two as a "twin expressions" which he considers to be anonymous—as inquirers, either of spirits or of המתים.¹⁰⁴ Both שאל and דרש are also frequently used in Hebrew consultations with Yahweh so as other gods¹⁰⁵

מות המתים is generally agreed to be a straightforward practice of necromancy.¹⁰⁶ The root מות means anything from “to die,” “to kill,” “death,” “dead body,” and so on.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, to דרש, the מתים is to inquire of the dead. Though the precise techniques are unclear, Isa 65.4 mentions those "who sit inside tombs," which could be a possible reference to such technique.¹⁰⁸

Terms Related to Magic and Divination Outside of Deut 18:9-11

It appears that even the most exhaustive list of prohibitions against magic and divination in the Bible still does not cover all practices and practitioners included in it. Beyond Deuteronomy 18:9-11, there are other terms that are translated as “sorcerer” or “magician” and another commonly attested divinatory not mentioned such as astrology. Isaiah 3: 2-3 mentions “diviners” קסם, “skillful magicians” חכם הרשם, and “expert enchanters” נבון להש as being among Israel's leaders such as the prophets, judges, and elders. The term "skillful magicians" is

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 261.

¹⁰³ BDB, 205b.

¹⁰⁴ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment*. 259.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 469.

¹⁰⁷ BDB, 559a.

¹⁰⁸ Tigay. *Deuteronomy*. 173.

translated from the combination of, חכם generally means “wise” or “skillful (in technical work)” and הרשם, from the root הרש, which means “magic art,” attested in Aramaic, Ethiopian, and Arabic (the latter refers to a medicinal broth).¹⁰⁹ “Expert enchanters” came from translating נבון, from the root בן, meaning “to have discernment, insight, understanding and”¹¹⁰ לחש, which means “whisper” or “charm,” attested in Aramaic and Ethiopian.¹¹¹ The book of Daniel mentions wise men (חכימין), enchanters (אשפין)¹¹², magicians (חרטמין)¹¹³, and diviners (גזרין).¹¹⁴ Isaiah also described astrologers with the phrase חברו שמים החזים בכוכבים (“they that divide the heavens, and gaze the stars”).¹¹⁵ Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel have a specific terms associated with non-Canaanite magicians. Genesis 41:8, 24; Exod 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14, and 15 uses חרטמים to refer to Egyptian magicians while Daniel uses it in reference to Babylonian magicians (1:20, 2:2, 10, 27; 4:7; 5:7, 11, 5:15).¹¹⁶ At the end of her commentary on ANE magic, Kuemmerlin-McLean challenges,

Should the OT prohibitions and negative evaluations of magic be viewed as a fundamental position of the OT or should they be seen as simply reflecting the views of particular times or biblical writers? [and] does magic represents primitive, foreign, or perverted influences on Yahwism or does it represent an indigenous, or alternative form of Yahwism?¹¹⁷

These different terms can be further studied and problematize beyond the scope of my argument. The purpose of mentioning them is to exhibit the diversity and ambiguity they hold and showing the likelihood of them being native to Israel.

¹⁰⁹ BDB, 361b.

¹¹⁰ BDB, 106b.

¹¹¹ BDB, 538a.

¹¹² Dan 2:27; 5:7,11 NRSV

¹¹³ Dan 2:27; 5:11 NRSV

¹¹⁴ Dan 2:27; 5:7,11 NRSV

¹¹⁵ BDB, 211a.

¹¹⁶ Kuemmerlin-McLean. “Magic (ANE).” 469.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Now that I have laid out some issues in the historicity of each divinatory practice and hinted at the permeability of the Deut 18:9-15 prohibition, I will move on to exhibiting the places where prophets functions outside the role of YHWH's mouthpiece as described in v. 15-22. But first, some reflection on how the modern church, in general, understands the role of the prophets is warranted.

Who is a Prophet?

Prophecy and the role of prophets are widely studied and contested. Possibly due to the fact that nowhere in the Bible the extent of a prophet's role is fully explained or clarified and also there is much ambiguity and inconsistency in the biblical portrayal of its "prophets."¹¹⁸ The modern view of a prophet is someone who speaks out against injustice and challenges crooked authorities. Jack R. Lundbom suggested figures such as MLK Jr, Pope John XXIII, and Billy Graham could be considered modern prophets.¹¹⁹ The English translation *prophet* is derived from the Greek word *prophēteuō* meaning, "to speak on behalf of someone"¹²⁰ In a narrower sense, the Greek verb suggests the meaning "to foresee or prognosticate," yet Israel's prophets were accounted as doing far more than the Greek term suggests.¹²¹ Pointing back to v. 9-11's prohibition, Tigay commented that the Torah does not condemn the desire to know, but the means must be approved by YHWH, (which is through YHWH and YHWH only) and that prophets are capable of doing anything magicians and diviners can.¹²² Neither the modern idea of a prophet nor the Greek term fully encapsulate the extent of the prophetic role portrayed through

¹¹⁸ Lundbom, Jack R. *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 1.

¹²⁰ David L. Petersen. "Prophet, Prophecy" in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Vol. 4. 5 vols. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006. 622.

¹²¹ Birch, Bruce C., Walter Baumgartner, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. 292-93.

¹²² Ibid, 174.

the HB. The Hebrew term that gets translated to “prophet” is נביא.¹²³ The title prophet was not widely attested within the HB until the exilic/post-exilic writings.¹²⁴ Before the eighth century BCE, figures who are now considered prophets are also called "seer" (i.e. Samuel and Gad) or "man of God" (i.e. Elijah and Elisha), and some are neither mentioned as seer nor prophet (Isaiah, e.g.).¹²⁵ H.B. Huffmon observed that,

Some biblical personages of the early periods are called prophets long before prophecy in the usual biblical sense appeared in ancient Israel. Thus, Torah contains no prophets in the technical sense of the term, even though the term is given to some individuals anachronistically.¹²⁶

Huffmon's point explains the chaotic portrayal and characteristics of the "former prophets" are due to the retrojection of the term. Abraham is considered a prophet, but he never addresses people in YHWH's name.¹²⁷ Aaron acted as a prophet but never said: "thus says the Lord" as Moses did.¹²⁸ Miriam is called a prophetess but does not address people or has a revelation from YHWH. Joshua and Deborah are considered to be prophets along with their title as judges. Samuel was a priest, a judge, and a prophet even though none of these figures were depicted as the post-exilic portrayal of prophets.¹²⁹

In the JPS commentary on Deut 18:15-22, Tigay defines the prophet's role as oracle giver, foreteller, healer— like Moses, though they are not expected to continue Moses' role as

¹²³ This term along with its related verb נבא (attested only in the Niph'al and Hithpa'el) meaning to prophesy are related to the Akkadian verb *nubû* meaning “to call, proclaim, name” see BDB, 611-12.

¹²⁴ Petersen. “Prophet, Prophecy.” 623.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ H. B. Huffmon. "Prophecy." In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: O-Sh*, edited by David Noel Freedman, edited by Gary A Herion, David F Graf and John David Pleins, edited by Astrid B Beck, 477–502. Doubleday: Yale University Press, 1992. 482.

¹²⁷ Huffmon. “Prophecy.” 482.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ anchor

lawgiver.¹³⁰ Yet Deut 18:18 prescribes the prophets function strictly as YHWH's mouthpiece for the Israelites in place of the outlawed diviners,

I will raise up for them a prophet like [Moses] from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.

Nowhere in v.15-22 does it suggest a prophet's role as a healer or a seer, but more importantly, the notion of "a prophet like Moses" is contentious. Thomas Römer pointed out that Moses was only twice referred to as a prophet (Deut 18:15 and 34:10-12) but was never depicted as one explicitly.¹³¹ For example, In Exod 7:1, YHWH appointed Aaron to be Moses's prophet while Moses is made to be אלהים, ("I have made you God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet"). In Mal 3:22-24, Moses is portrayed as representing the law while Elijah represents the prophet ("Remember the teaching of my servant Moses...that I commanded him...I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes"). It seems that the Deuteronomistic redaction portrays Elijah as a "second Moses" figure where he traveled forty days to Horeb and experienced a theophany with YHWH as Moses did.¹³² Both Elijah and Moses are portrayed to have abilities beyond being YHWH's "mouthpiece." Moses possessed magical abilities to showcase against Pharaoh's magicians (Exod 7-11) after his theophany (Exod 3) and he continues to perform many more miracles while guiding Israel to Canaan (Exod 14:21; Exod 17:6; Num 21:8-9). Similarly, Elijah performed a resurrection from the dead (1 Kgs 17:22), producing endless supply of food (1 Kgs 17:8-16), and summoning fire from heaven (1 Kgs 18:38; 2 Kgs 1:10), (though his abilities were evident before his theophany

¹³⁰ Tigay. *Deuteronomy*. 172.

¹³¹ Römer. *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History*. 129.

¹³² *Ibid*, 141.

with YHWH took place). Elijah's protege, Elisha also possesses incredible magical abilities such as parting the water (2 Kgs 2:14), purifying water (2 Kgs 2:21-22), summoning bears (2 Kgs 2:24), resurrecting a child to life (2 Kgs 4:32-35), and heals leprosy (2 Kgs 5:10). These characteristics and abilities exceeded what Deut 18:15-22 says a prophet is and traversing into the realm of magic and divination it claims to forbid.

Other than this pre-exilic/post-exilic categorization, Marian Broida suggests there are two categories of prophets: typical and atypical. A prophet is considered atypical if 1) they serve multiple roles, such as Moses being a law-giver, judge, and priest, 2) they possess powers beyond communicating with YHWH, like Elijah performing resurrection, and 3) their modes of communication are explicitly distinct from the later prophets.¹³³ These atypical prophets are figures who give us a glimpse of what the prophets were like before the construction of the monotheistic YHWH cult. Within the pre-exilic prophecy, Simon B. Parker noticed a distinction between a "typical" prophesy and a "possession trance" such as the ones experienced by Saul in 1 Sam 10:11,

And it happened when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, "When all who knew him before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"¹³⁴

The group of prophets mentioned above is the band of prophets Samuel instruct Saul to go meet in 1 Sam 10:5-6,

¹³³ Marian Broida. "Ritualization in Prophetic Intercession." In *Prophecy and Its Cultic Dimensions*, edited by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, 17–37. Journal of Ancient Judaism. Supplements, volume 31. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019. 23.

¹³⁴ See also 1 Sam 18:10; 1 Sam 19:24. Parker, Simon B. "Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-Exilic Israel." In *Prophecy in the HB: Selected Studies from Vetus Testamentum*, edited by David E. Orton. Brill's Readers in Biblical Studies, v. 5. Leiden ; Boston, MA: Brill, 2000. 124-25.

After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim at the place where the Philistine garrison is; there, as you come to the town, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the shrine with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre playing in front of them; they will be in a prophetic frenzy. Then the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person.

The most vivid instance of this frenzy happened in 1 Sam 19:20,

Then Saul sent messengers to take David. When they saw the company of the prophets in a frenzy, with Samuel standing in charge of them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also fell into a prophetic frenzy. When Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they also fell into a frenzy. Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also fell into a frenzy. Then he himself went to Ramah. He came to the great well that is in Secu; he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And someone said, "They are at Naioth in Ramah." He went there, toward Naioth in Ramah; and the spirit of God came upon him. As he was going, he fell into a prophetic frenzy, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He too stripped off his clothes, and he too fell into a frenzy before Samuel. He lay naked all that day and all that night. Therefore, it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"¹³⁵

Parker calls this frenzy characteristic "ecstatic prophesy" and concluded that this type of prophecy is influenced by Phoenician prophecy.¹³⁶ These examples exhibit the range of Israel's prophetic experiences as anomalies that exist under the umbrella of the Dtr's construction of "prophesy" as YHWH's mouthpiece.

The making of category, whether it is an emic attempt as the ancient Israel tried to redefine their history or the etic way modern religions were defined through imperialism, the categorization of something means that something(s) else is being marginalized. Categories do

¹³⁵ Parker. "Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-Exilic Israel." 124-25.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 138.

not inherently exist. It is created and imposed upon a variety of existing things. Before someone decided that there is a right way to worship the gods, there was no wrong way to do so.

Therefore, categorization comes with consequences, and it is necessary to consider what they are.

What gets left out of *religion*

Being left out of what is considered “religion,” the occult became a term that holds every belief and practice that religions do not like. Invoking J.Z. Smith's definition that "religion is not a native category" means that religion is an imperialist etic observation from Euro-Western writers during the inquisition, colonization, and continuing so in globalization.¹³⁷ It is a foreign category attempting to describe groups of people and their way of life never mind if their description is agreeable to the native practitioners of the said religion. Furthermore, religions are only categorized as such when it contains similar elements as the Abrahamic religions. That is, if it has a deity, some sort of text, or a system/statement of belief. Everything that does not resemble the Euro-Western-made definition of religion becomes marginalized. The occult too is not a self-identifying term, but a category made by outsiders. The problem with categories is that they do not retain particularity. Like most household drawers, there is usually a drawer dedicated to anything resembling forks, spoons, or knives, then there is always a miscellaneous drawer where everything else is thrown in. It is a staple mystery drawer one looks into when they hope to find something that does not belong anywhere else. The common thing that items in miscellaneous drawers have is that they are all different. I propose that the term occult functioned as that miscellaneous drawer. An empty category to contain all the outliers and anomalies we do not understand. As H.P. Lovecraft puts it, "the oldest and strongest emotion of

¹³⁷ Smith. "Religion, Religions, Religious." 269.

mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."¹³⁸ The occult as a category shifted from containing things unknown to becoming the thing to fear in itself.

An event took place in Nashville on January 31st of this year that reminded me of the Harry Potter Incident that traumatized my childhood. Over a decade later, on the opposite side of the world, a "massive burning" was held at a church in Mt. Juliet, TN as a part of their sermon series, "Deliverance from Demons." Lead Pastor Greg Locke instructed in an Instagram announcement,

"Bring all your Harry Potter stuff...all your Twilight books and movies...bring tarot cards, Ouija boards, healing crystals, idol statues, spell books, and everything else tied to the occult...We're exposed to the kingdom of darkness for what it is. It's time for people to be delivered."

(@pastorlocke, January 31, 2022)

Locke's invitation presents many issues and assumptions. Since Christian churches usually adhere to the Bible, the stance against divinatory practices is acceptable, but the violence and hostility Locke displays pervaded what Deut 18:9-14 commands. While tarot cards and Ouija boards are undoubtedly divinatory practices seeking revelation from beings other than YHWH, they are not necessarily "dark" or evil. So as healing crystals, spell books, and idols, depending on their purpose, could be used for good as much as for harm. The Dtr's concern is not that these practices are inherently evil, but that they defy the people's fidelity to YHWH. On the contrary, reading literature such as *Harry Potter* or the *Twilight saga* is no different from reading the "Cristian-approved" writings such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, or even the Bible itself. They all hold portrayals of magic: both good and evil. They all carry an overarching theme of love, prophecy, fulfillment, sacrifice, and the victory of good over evil.

¹³⁸ Lovecraft, H. P. *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. New York: Dover Publications, 1973.

Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near Eastern
Dtr	Deuteronomist
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
HB	Hebrew Bible
JPS	The Jewish Publication Society
NIDB	New Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible

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