

PROPHET IN A RIGHTEOUS LAND:
GEORGE W. BUSH'S RHETORIC
AND THE HEBREW BIBLE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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CATHERINE WALSH



PROPHET IN A RIGHTEOUS LAND:
GEORGE W. BUSH'S RHETORIC AND THE HEBREW BIBLE

by

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Abstract

Through an examination of his speeches in the first half of 2003, American President George W. Bush is shown to assume and use major themes of biblical prophecy in his rhetoric. Bush presents himself as a prophet to his people by describing God's participation in their national affairs and by interpreting God's will. He uses language reminiscent of the Bible, but in his role as prophet Bush borrows from the prophetic books only very selectively, and delivers some messages that sit in opposition to the messages of many of the prophets. Bush constantly assures his audience that they are righteous before God, and that they should go abroad in a mission to spread God's gift of freedom. Even though this message has no biblical parallel, Bush's prophetic message is internally consistent overall, and in many ways better suits his modern audience than the more classic messages of the biblical prophets.

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Chapter One: The Religion and Rhetoric of the American Presidency

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the public speeches of American president George W. Bush for themes and language reminiscent of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, and offers an analysis of Bush's biblical rhetoric. Through both allusion and direct quotation, Bush uses the Bible to provide a philosophical and religious underpinning for his public discourse. Bush bears some resemblance to the Hebrew prophets as a public figure, and also at times uses language reminiscent of the prophetic books in his speeches. Yet some of the sentiments that Bush presents in a prophetic manner draw conclusions that run counter to some of the most enduring themes in biblical prophecy. As these anti-prophetic conclusions are perhaps more compatible with the realities of modern American politics, Bush can be viewed as a new American prophet delivering a prophetic message that reflects a biblical yet modified message.

Many of the major themes of the Hebrew Bible are found in Bush's rhetoric. These themes include: God's ultimate control of the cosmos, God's election of a chosen people, God's guidance and blessing of God's chosen, the corporate responsibility of the chosen people to follow God's law, God's judgment, the justice of divine retribution, God's intimacy with the nation state, and the consequences of the state's special relationship with God as it is reflected in the military arena. These foundational themes form a basis for the interpretation of Bush as a modern-day prophet, cast in the mold of a

biblical prophet. These themes also suggest underlying assumptions about reality that both the biblical prophets and Bush seem to share.

Bush's public persona has much in common with the Hebrew prophets. When he speaks officially and publicly as the president, he speaks primarily to his own people, commenting on the pressing issues of the day and speculating on the future. He speaks as a community leader, who is aware that he has a sympathetic audience. But most importantly, it is his repeated references to God in his speeches that links Bush most solidly with the prophetic profession. Bush calls upon God frequently and consistently in his speeches, to bless and guide America. He credits God with all creation. He claims that faith in God and a desire to do God's will lie behind his motivations and the motivations of the nation. Like the Hebrew prophets of old, Bush relies heavily on the tenets of the Torah and the experience of the Bible's so-called historical books to bring a public message to his people.

Yet Bush's message is not entirely like the messages of the Hebrew prophets. Bush condemns foreign nations, as do Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, but never chides his own domestic audience for its iniquities, as do they and most prophets. Bush promises a coming destruction of the enemy, just as Ezekiel does, but his promises of prosperity for his own people resemble only a few passages in the Book of Isaiah, and is at-odds with the many biblical prophets who foretold doom. Bush asks that his audience care for others, as Amos and Micah asked, but Bush never does so with their anger or disappointment. His message of repentance is for foreigners, not Americans, whereas the Hebrew prophets called upon their own people to repent.

In his speeches, Bush is able to present a picture of benevolence and God-given law based on biblical teachings, a picture with which much of his American audience can find sympathy. It is the very same set of background assumptions with which the Hebrew prophets approached their ministries. In this way the premises of the rhetoric serve to help camouflage the deviation that Bush's offerings take from the prophetic books. In the end, it is an anti-prophetic offering of prophetic truth that Bush's speeches bring to his public, many of whom are accustomed to hearing and accepting Judeo-Christian truths. Bush firmly establishes himself as wedded to the foundations of the Bible while simultaneously presenting a message bearing a distorted resemblance to the prophetic books.

This first chapter is meant to offer a series of contexts, all distinct yet complementary, for the rest of the thesis. First to be addressed are some technical issues of scope and method, a few words about the religious demographics of America, and a brief exploration of the American separation of church and state. Next, a field of academic study known as American civil religion will be explored as a concept that can enlighten this analysis, as can the related concept of manifest destiny. Then, previous studies of the biblical rhetoric of Presidents F.D. Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton will be compared and considered. This survey of presidential biblical rhetoric will provide a context for recognizing similar patterns in George W. Bush's speeches, and also for recognizing those forms that are unique to him. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of topics specific to the current study: a political overview of the United States from 2000 to 2003, and some remarks about the relevance of George

W. Bush's attested religious convictions and those of his supporters. This chapter ends by looking forward to the rest of the thesis.

1.2 The Bible and America

George W. Bush's public speeches are a very direct measure of the message that his administration wishes to communicate to the American public, as well as a reflection of how that administration understands and defines itself. That Bush sees fit to speak daily, and often gives speeches of nearly an hour in length, indicates that these speeches are a powerful tool through which he can reach the people by way of mass media, and history by way of the public record. Isolating biblical rhetoric in Bush's public utterances can lead to a better understanding of the biblical influences to which the administration is responding. It also illuminates how the administration's speechwriters use one set of commonly-held myths to communicate their messages. To find a consistent use of the Bible within such a varied corpus of corporate authorship would suggest a singularity of thought if not outright deliberateness in intentions.

Not only considered highly authoritative, the Bible is a text of deep emotional importance for many people, and this makes it a powerful tool in communication and persuasion. It is also a foundational text for Western thought, which makes it a powerful tool for understanding western society and one's place in it. As a book of common myth, the Bible has long been fertile ground for literary allusion. The prophets are some of the most recognizable characters of the Hebrew Bible, and the speeches of the prophetic books are some of the most well-known passages. It is worthwhile to better understand

how popular political discourse in the United States, in particular the discourse of the presidency, uses these myths.

Politically established and initially settled by European Protestants, the United States remains an overwhelmingly Christian state. In 1999 the Princeton Religious Research Center reported that 55% of Americans self-reported as Protestants and 28% as Roman Catholic. This means a total of 83% of the American population considered themselves to be Christians, at least nominally, compared to 2% who reported Jewish, 6% “other” and 8% who gave no affiliation.¹ Indicative of commitment levels, 70% of all Americans considered themselves church or synagogue members, and 43% reported having attended a church or synagogue within the seven days before participation in the survey (qtd. in “United States Census Bureau” 62). Based on another large collection of surveys, Alan Wolfe’s study of faith in middle-class America in 2000 characterizes American religious experience as follows: 94% of Americans say they believe in God, 82% believe the Bible is the actual word of God, 35% believe the Bible should be understood literally, 79% say either that God has guided them in making decisions in the past, or that prayer is a very important part of their lives, and 63% say that religion can answer at least most if not all of today’s problems (36). If these statistics are taken to even roughly approximate the religious views of Americans, then they show that the American public is potentially receptive to biblical rhetoric.

More than two hundred years after its founding the United States is still largely Christian, in the majority Protestant, and quite religious. As the bulk of the American

¹ For a total of 99% (presumed rounding error). These percentages are a composite of several Gallup Polls that surveyed the civilian non-institutionalized adult population in 1999.

population are at the least familiar with Christianity, it would not be strange to employ Christian references in a rhetoric intended for the general population. Although Christian groups can vary greatly in their practices, they also, by definition, claim a small central core of beliefs and shared canonical texts. Religious affiliation is, after all, a cultural phenomenon as well as a spiritual one, and so speechwriters, White House staff, and the president himself, will naturally feel comfortable communicating within their own cultural milieu. Given this, it is hardly surprising that the Christian canonical text would be reflected in presidential speeches.

If Christianity is so pervasive in America, and the Jewish population so very tiny, why investigate George W. Bush's rhetoric using the Hebrew Bible rather than the more extensive Christian Bible? The primary reason is that the much larger Christian canon would simply have been too unwieldy for this modest study. All things being equal, a smaller scope of research can usually be expected to yield an analysis of higher quality. It is true that the much smaller New Testament, or some of its books, could be used to undertake an analysis similar to the one produced here, and such a study would likely be fruitful. But the power of the Hebrew Bible, in particular its earliest books, is its extensive influence over Christianity, and through it over western thought. The choice of which parts of the Bible to investigate was also guided by Bush himself. His speeches indeed do bring to mind both Testaments with very direct biblical allusions but, as the reader will discover, many of the themes are decidedly from the older canon, and prophetic.

1.3 Method and Scope

There is a great deal of variety in official presidential speeches. The immediate settings for the speeches were varied: military installations, hotel ballrooms, factory floors, community centres, government offices, the United States Congress, presidential retreats, and assorted White House rooms and gardens. Bush's longer speeches have either one or multiple themes, such as domestic economics, war, security, or social projects, and they seem intended to defend policy and persuade the audience. His shorter speeches welcomed award winners and guests to the White House, or gave the press brief access to Bush in question and answer sessions. Much of this material was scripted but, as with past White House administrations, the identities of the speeches' many authors will remain unknown until after the Administration has passed.

The primary documents considered in this study are the public speeches, broadcast addresses, and news conferences of President George W. Bush from January through June of 2003. Public speeches, broadcast addresses, and news conferences were chosen because they are all intended to relay messages to the American public, and are either fully scripted or approached by the Administration with a great deal of anticipation and presumably forethought. News conferences in particular are included with speeches both because they are aimed very directly at the public, and because, although perhaps not strictly scripted, they are still highly controlled.² In order to contain this present

² Although news organizations deny this, some commentators contend that presidential conferences are indeed scripted, in the sense that questions have been submitted to White House staff beforehand, which presumably would also mean that composed answers are at the ready (Taibbi 143). At any rate, the presence of any particular reporter from any particular news agency at presidential press conferences is at the pleasure of the White House, and this in itself allows presidential staff some advantage in preparing for anticipated questions, or denying access to news organizations deemed impertinent.

project in size, only the public appearances of the president himself, not those of his staff or his wife, were considered. Non-documentary evidence (such as facial expressions, for example) was not considered. All documentation of these oral addresses was readily available as primary source: presidential speeches, broadcast addresses and news conferences are all available as transcripts on the White House web site.³ These texts were compared to the Oxford Annotated Revised Standard Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated. The comparison matched similar vocabulary, similarly shaped phrases, and shared themes between the two sets of text. Once isolated, the rhetorical functions of these elements in their respective environments were compared.

As well as creating a very contemporary focus for the project, the first half of the year 2003 was chosen because it held such great activity and controversy for the Administration. The year began with the wide-scale anticipation of a second war in Iraq, followed by the execution of that war, and the maintenance of troops abroad under hostile conditions. Added to the continuing hostilities in Afghanistan and the so-called war on terrorism, the year 2003 was very much one of war in American political discourse. In times of war politicians often strengthen their rhetoric, and indeed religious rhetoric does tend to increase in America in times of national crisis (Wilson 56). With this in mind, George W. Bush could be expected to have delivered sentiments in the first half of 2003 that were forceful, likely more forceful than he might have expressed in times of peace.

³ www.whitehouse.gov

1.4 The Separation of Church and State

The phrase “separation of church and state” is one of the most famous pieces of common knowledge about the American constitution, and it is also very misleading. It suggests an impenetrable barrier, one that any casual observer of American politics would have to say is violated daily. Worldwide, the degree to which religious interests have influence over the political life of their respective states ranges from essentially undetectable to the blatancy of pure theocracy. The United States of America falls somewhere in between these two extremes, but where exactly is the subject of an ever-shifting debate. While that debate is beyond the scope of these few pages, the often-cited “separation of church and state” should be addressed before venturing any further, if only because it is an idea that so often generates confusion.

A particularly lucid exploration of this so-called separation can be found in Derek Davis’s 2001 editorial in the Journal of Church and State. Davis describes the American compromise as combining a separation of church and state with an integration of religion and politics (5). Davis describes the separation as institutional in nature, which is to say that the institutions of any one church and any one government must remain independent from one other. The most obvious practical evidence of this separation is that churches proper in the United States receive no direct government funding and in turn pay no taxes. But religious groups in the United States are free to undertake political advocacy, comment on politics “from the pulpit,” address government committees, and lobby politicians, all without threatening their tax-free status. This integration of religion and

politics has limits,⁴ which are mostly intended to preserve the institutional separation of church and state, but within this system, religious groups are allowed a fair amount of political participation as a matter of course (Davis 9).

The United States, like any other state, has set some rules governing in what manner religious groups and the government may and may not mix. To understand the separation of church and state as an absolute immiscibility of all things political with any thing religious is incorrect, and to expect that a true and complete separation could exist in any state promising substantial freedom of religion is probably unrealistic. The rules governing the interaction of and boundaries between church and state have been described in general terms in the constitution, are interpreted in particular by the courts, and will no doubt be subject to mutation into the future.⁵ The term “separation of church and state” is an historical one, which comes down to us from a time when the American experiment of simply limiting the intrusions of one upon the other was seen as truly radical. Like many archaic terms, it is best not taken too literally.

Any problematic debate about the nature of the church-state separation is not a serious hindrance to this thesis, which focuses on a collection of sacred texts common to many churches, faiths, and the western cultural tradition, rather than any particular church or religious faith. This present study is interested in describing the connection between the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible and the American presidency in

⁴ For example, churches that endorse political candidates by name risk losing their tax exemption.

⁵ The Bush Administration has precipitated a vigorous public debate about the appropriateness and the constitutionality of the support of “faith-based initiatives” with federal funds. That this debate remains ongoing in the fourth year of the Administration shows how the line between separation of church and state and the integration of religion and politics is both movable and shifting, and to some degree a matter of interpretation.

2003 as it is found in George W. Bush's speeches. It is not the goal of this thesis to pronounce that connection right or wrong, but to describe its form and speculate on its effect. The intention of this thesis is to describe how the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible intersects with modern presidential rhetoric in America. Next, this present chapter turns to something that Derek Davis calls an accommodation of religion to American politics: American civil religion.

1.5 American Civil Religion and its Biblical Connections

American civil religion⁶ is a term made popular in contemporary academic debate by Robert Bellah with an influential paper he published in Dædalus in 1967. Re-interpreting the ideas of Rousseau and Alexis de Tocqueville, Bellah focused the academic discussion about religion and politics in America once again:

Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling American civil religion. (4)

For Bellah American civil religion is a religious movement as worthy of study as any other, and susceptible to the same methods of academic investigation (18). Using such historical evidence as Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, a series of presidential addresses, and the Declaration of Independence itself, Bellah defended his argument that

⁶ The term civil religion was coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in The Social Contract (Coleman 25).

American politics had always been in part a religious expression. He cited as evidence how Americans subscribe to beliefs such as personal freedom and democracy, how they focus on symbols like the National Cemeteries or the flag, and how they celebrate a ritual calendar of civic events like the presidents' birthdays. According to Bellah's description, much of American civil religion derives from Christianity, and hence had biblical connections.

One of those biblical connections is what sociologists call the American myth of manifest destiny. This term is used to describe a very particular vision of the role of America in the world under God. By the logic of civil religion, God has always been deeply interested in America, the new Promised Land (Bellah 8). This self-conception holds that "God led people (white Europeans) to America to found a new and superior or exceptional social order that would be the light unto all nations" (Coles 403). The trace of this idea can be found as early as the writings of the Puritans, and terms like "light to the nations" and "Promised Land" make its connection to the Hebrew Bible obvious.

Manifest destiny is a recurring theme and prominent feature of American civil religion, and past studies of presidential speeches have focused upon it, especially in times of war. Roberta Coles's comparison of the speeches of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton before the bombings in Iraq and Kosovo, respectively, argued that both men framed their biblical rhetoric in the context of manifest destiny (Coles 403). She describes the operation of manifest destiny in American political life either in terms of American example or American mission. In exemplar mode, America sees itself as a light to the nations, but does not overtly venture beyond its own borders to bring about

change in other jurisdictions, as it does when in missionary mode. As Coles has pointed out, the distinction between mission and exemplar modes rests on the definition of “intervention,” and this can be a fine distinction indeed (406). American example can be interpreted as an American cultural hegemony, while military activities such as peacekeeping similarly blur the lines between example and mission.

Some scholars have considered the expression of American civil religion even more directly in terms of the Bible. Ernest Lee Tuveson’s Redeemer Nation posited that the book of the Bible that had historically been most influential on American politics was the Book of Revelation. Co-existing with the role of chosen people as found in the Hebrew Bible, America’s politicians had often believed that they were participating in a “millennial-utopian destiny for mankind; a continuing war between good (progress) and evil (reaction) in which the United States is to play a starring role as world redeemer” (Tuveson vii). Where Bellah had focused on the themes of Exodus and Promised Land in the civil religion of antebellum America, Tuveson focuses much more on the apocalyptic undertones of political discourse. According to Tuveson, the American people have imagined that their march through history is pre-destined to culminate in an absolute triumph of good over evil (65). Tuveson’s explanation of this phenomenon relied on a coincidence of history. America was founded just after Western Europe had emerged from the middle ages to enter the Reformation, and its Protestant founders brought with them both a sense of pre-determinism and an expectation that apocalyptic books may not necessarily be allegory, as Augustine said, but something that would truly come to pass. The core idea of the Protestant revival of millennialism was that after generations of

Christians battle evil, a time would come when those Christians could bring about a Utopia on Earth (Tuveson x). Thus Tuveson claims that the idea of manifest destiny is rooted in Protestant theology and expressed in a form of apocalypticism (Tuveson 97).

A few years after Tuveson, Robert Jewett published a book that argued for a much broader biblical influence on American politics. The Book of Revelation, with its steady march toward an inevitable triumph of good over evil, when “violence would inaugurate God’s kingdom,” was still crucial (Jewett 27). But Jewett also argued that the Puritans brought the Hebrew Bible’s tradition of active warfare and the heroic myths of Samuel, Elisha, and Elijah from Europe as well as the millennial themes (83). Righteous violence against the wicked as a means of conversion and redemption for the chosen is as old as Miriam’s song (Jewett 177). In the Exodus Myth, victory is determined by “the justice of the cause and the faithfulness of the people,” and Jewett feels it is this model upon which the American people have relied (220). In this world-view, God rewards the righteous, and thus America’s wealth proves its virtue (Jewett 221). Along the lines of manifest destiny, especially in the context of the Vietnam War, Jewett is especially interested in American nationalism, which he also traces to a biblical source. Direct and violent nationalistic zeal is the earliest Israelite tradition, of which Phineas’ exploits in Numbers 25 is an example (Jewett 82). Jewett’s “artful zeal” is a “will to power,” personified in Jehu in II Kings 9-10. This zealot still imagines himself as God’s instrument with a righteous cause, but finds glory not in God’s justice but in his own importance (Jewett 106).

American civil religion and manifest destiny are constructions posed by academics trying to understand the American political experience while keeping in their minds its religious dimensions. This is not to say that such constructions are arbitrary or unfounded, but to distinguish them as in the main constructions of academia and political intellectuals. Robert Bellah's thesis was never universally accepted: to this day scholars debate its merits, and even those who accept its basic validity argue about what the consequences might be. Many find the concept of a civil religion useful and agree with Bellah that American civil religion is a religious movement worthy of study like any other. The phenomenon described as American civil religion certainly does seem to encapsulate a set of symbols that have meaning to an extended group and, in as much as those symbols most often derive from a Judeo-Christian view of the sacred, American civil religion suggests itself as a contemporary religious movement. Other scholars counter that the features of American civil religion really describe a simple glorification of state, which Bellah confused with a religion because of American patriotism's religious trappings. Regardless of the shortcomings of Bellah's thesis, it has been the model that has been much discussed in academic literature, and will be considered a context for this present work. Bellah's most important contribution may actually be the studies by others that came after his seminal 1967 paper, in which academics started to consider American politics and public life in religious ways. The successive studies, including this present one, that have since re-imagined American politics and presidential rhetoric in religious terms would have been unlikely without Bellah's pioneering work.

1.6 The Biblical Rhetoric of Presidents Past

The first American president to ask for the blessing of the Christian God in his inaugural address was George Washington, and when Robert Bellah wrote the first paper on American civil religion in 1967, every single president since Washington had followed suit (Bellah 7). Including God in this important symbolic occasion is thought to provide a means of legitimating and solemnizing the presidential office religiously (Bellah 4). A cursory glance at his speeches to date will readily show that George W. Bush frequently mentions God in his public appearances, but this in itself makes neither his presidential style nor his place in the tradition of American civil religion particularly special. What lies closer to the heart of the matter is how Bush uses biblical rhetoric as illustration and justification, and what sorts of images he invokes with it. Academic literature has documented the use of religious rhetoric by many if not most presidents, and it is so pervasive one gets the impression that every single presidency has made use of the device. Such case studies have set an example for this thesis in terms of method and direction, and have provided a history of the academic interpretation of presidential speeches. They also illustrate how complicated the relationship between rhetoric, the president, and the public can be.

Past studies of presidential rhetoric within American politics have noted biblical themes in speeches, most often inaugural addresses.⁷ But very few of these studies have focused on large collections of these speeches, or considered the Bible to be a central focus of the research. Biblical themes noted in past studies include: righteous nation,

⁷ See Bellah, 1967.

exemplar nation, missionary nation, nationalism, universalism, millennialism, covenant, apocalypse, war, judgment, evil, divine retribution, priesthood, and prophecy.

Throughout American history, each presidency has maintained its own subset of these themes in its speeches, but it seems that no presidency has escaped them all.

It is a valuable exercise to review a few past examples of academic analyses of biblical themes in presidential rhetoric. While it is not necessarily true that these studies foreshadow this present one, or accept similar conclusions, they do establish a precedent for the work and suggest some possible interpretations of the evidence to come. The concept of casting the president in a certain type of religious role according to his rhetorical style will recur throughout this present section's brief survey of the literature. This present thesis is in many ways set according to the template of these past studies, but argues to a different conclusion. Studies in the field have tended to cast the president as a comforting pastor, or a celebratory priest, or a judgmental prophet, according to his rhetoric. While this present thesis casts Bush as a prophet, it does not argue this distinction on the grounds that Bush is judgmental, but rather on the grounds that judgment alone is not enough to cast a president as prophet, but rather that other factors must be considered. In order to better place this argument in the context of what has gone before, a series of past publications are presented now. This survey of past studies is not exhaustive, but rather is a selection of those that proved to be most valuable for this present analysis.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's extended tenure gave Ronald Isetti an unequalled opportunity to compare a series of inaugural addresses delivered by the same man, and

Isetti's study unearths a great number of direct biblical references. Roosevelt's first inaugural address made reference to the gospel stories of the moneychangers in the Temple, and the Prodigal Son, and, from the Hebrew Bible, the Plagues of Egypt and quoted sayings from Proverbs (Isetti 680). In his second inaugural, FDR returned to the story of the moneychangers (a powerful narrative during the Depression, which had been precipitated by a stock market crash), but also alluded to the ideas of covenant and Promised Land (drawing a parallel which would presumably cast FDR as Moses), and the Gospel of Luke (Isetti 682). His third inaugural quoted the New Testament directly, both from the gospels and the Pauline letters (Isetti 683).

Isetti believes that FDR used such allusions because they were comforting, accessible and familiar. These stories helped FDR to cast the Depression in the simple terms of good (workers) and evil (bankers), although he was careful not to implicate capitalism itself in this scandal: money was not evil; moneychangers were evil (Isetti 687). By considering letters that Roosevelt received from ordinary citizens while in office, one senses that these biblical references had resonance for many people during what were difficult times. In fact, his biblical rhetoric was more often commented upon and complimented in these letters than the sayings⁸ for which Roosevelt is now famous. These letter writers would not only echo FDR's biblical references in their letters, but also call Roosevelt a "light" and a "Moses" (Isetti 688). Isetti feels that Roosevelt's administration understood the president's tandem roles as effective governor and

⁸ For example, FDR's "moneychangers" allusion was mentioned in these letters much more frequently than his maxim, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself" (Isetti 687).

symbolic leader, and that his speeches were tailored to reach the common person in language he or she would find commanding yet familiar (Isetti 689).

Bernard Donahue's case study of the 1972 presidential campaign between Richard Nixon and George McGovern is also very revealing, because it suggests not only roles for the candidates, but also why these roles may have been effective (or in McGovern's case, not effective). Firstly, the article shows that there are opportunities for speakers to use similar religious symbolism to different ends. According to Donahue, McGovern's speeches made use of biblical rhetoric in order to call America to repent like a prodigal son, and return to a sense of responsibility for the disadvantaged minorities among them (50). In contrast, Nixon's rhetoric was less biblical, but instead relied upon words like "faith," "belief," "hope," and "spirit," words which together suggested a generic religiosity, without necessarily recalling the Christian Bible (Donahue 52).

Compared to McGovern's, Nixon's religious language is what Donahue calls "bland" and "blind" as Nixon offered "moralistic-sounding solutions to social problems" compared to McGovern's solutions, which spoke more concretely of economics (60). In answer to McGovern, Nixon said, "the critics contend that [the American system] is so unfair, so corrupt, so unjust that we should tear it down and substitute something else in its place. I totally disagree. I believe in the American system" (Donahue 53). Thus Nixon cast himself as a comforting "priest," and reassured the public of their goodness, and opposed McGovern the "prophet" who urged repentance. Donahue postulates that as the American public came to terms with the social upheaval of the 1960s and a frustrated end

to the Vietnam War, the electorate more probably felt victimized than repentant, and thus Nixon's reassurances were better received (55).

As mentioned above, Coles' case-study compared the rhetoric employed by George Bush Sr. during the first Iraq War with that of Clinton's bombing of Kosovo, and found that both men participated in American civil religion similarly, though not in identical ways. She found Bush's rhetoric to be priestly and charged with mission, and Clinton's to be somewhat prophetic but mostly pastoral. Clinton used civil religious terms and biblical reference to comfort the people and preach that they lead the world by good example (Coles 418). By contrast, Bush's use of the terms that are associated with civil religion or the Bible are an opportunity to draw attention to America's exceptionalism and place as a blessed nation (Coles 411). Clinton also calls America exceptional, but for its prosperity, where Bush says it is blessed through its freedom (Coles 415). Clinton used more biblical imagery than Bush, but was less likely to invoke God's blessing for the country (Coles 412). For Clinton, America was a nation blessed with prosperity and called to be an example in the world, while for Bush Sr., the nation had a call to mission abroad, in which to spread its gospel of freedom (Coles 418).

Robert Linder also explored Bill Clinton's civil religious expression, and similarly found that Clinton used biblical rhetoric to promote himself in the roles of both pastor and high priest. In his inaugural Clinton called for renewal, hope, and courage in the name of the "Almighty," and quoted Gal 6:9: "And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season, we shall reap if we not faint" (Linder 743). Elsewhere in his inaugural he gave what Linder calls "priestly encouragement" by calling on the "idea of America"

(744). Clinton's Inaugural Address had a universalist emphasis that emphasized justice world-wide and promoted the community over the individual (Linder 745). Linder judges Clinton's overall speaking style to be that of pastor/shepherd and priest/patriarch rather than prophet/judge (747). This is much along the lines of Coles's conclusions about Clinton.

While these studies are no doubt useful and insightful, this present study argues that the categories used by Isetti, Donahue, Coles, Linder, and others are somewhat simplistic in that they do not fully consider the breadth of biblical prophecy. Like both Coles and Linder, Martin Marty writes that the American president is usually found in a priestly role, which Marty describes as "celebrative, affirmative, and culture-building," and on rare occasions a prophetic role, which Marty describes as "dialectical about civil religion, with a predisposition toward the judgmental" (145). This seems to be the current consensus when academics characterize presidential rhetoric in religious terms, and many also add "pastoral" to the list as an expression of comfort, care and renewal. It is the contention of this study that biblical prophecy is a tradition with more nuance than these characterizations allow, and while judgment is part of prophecy, so is comfort, renewal, and affirmation of the state. Moreover, the biblical prophet presents himself as a model for the president as a speaker who calls on the name of God. It is in this direction that the biblical rhetoric of George W. Bush will be explored.

In closing it should be noted that the findings of past studies of presidential rhetoric have often been counter-intuitive. All presidents have used religious rhetoric in their speeches, and therefore one can only assume that this feature has an important

communicative function. But the academic research to date makes it very clear that the equation is not so simple as “biblical references equals mass appeal.” Bill Clinton quoted the Bible more avidly than most presidents, but this did little to sooth the religiously conservative forces that mounted against him in his second term (Coles 411, Linder 742). McGovern’s religious rhetoric in his campaign speeches appears to have been less effective than Nixon’s religious rhetoric, if election results are any measure, but both employed it, and McGovern more vigorously (Donahue 50). The connection between use of the Bible in public address and the influence of religion on presidential policy is also not always straightforward. Roosevelt has long been considered a very secular president by political scientists but, like Clinton, FDR made very regular use of well-known biblical stories in his addresses (Isetti 687). Jimmy Carter was the first American president to proclaim himself “born-again” in an evangelical faith, yet he did not make any more use of the Bible in his rhetoric than did his predecessors. He made only one reference to God in his 1977 Inaugural Address, which is fewer than many other presidents (Flowers 125). That Carter’s use of biblical rhetoric has garnered no more interest in academic publication than Nixon’s or Bush Sr.’s or Clinton’s suggests that it was not overwhelming. Given these examples, George W. Bush can be expected to use the Bible in his speeches, but it would be foolhardy to prejudge conclusions about the shape of George W. Bush’s biblical rhetoric, or its effect on the American electorate, before embarking on a thorough analysis.

1.7 George W. Bush and his Administration

George W. Bush's arrival in the White House was extraordinary, not the least because of the role of the judiciary in enabling his inauguration. After the infamous voting debacle in Florida, Bush's presidency was confirmed by order of the Supreme Court and he took office in January of 2001. His early initiatives included establishing the Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, which has sought to remove regulations prohibiting religious groups from using federal funds for social programmes. The focus of the Administration shifted with the September 2001 al-Qaida terrorist attacks in Manhattan, and Pennsylvania, and at the Pentagon, and the retaliatory invasion of Afghanistan. In 2002, the White House was publicly concerned with what they have called homeland security, and frequently asserted that dangers were posed to the United States by Iraq.

The year chosen for this study is 2003, which in many ways was the crescendo of the two previous years. Citing concerns about what the Administration termed weapons of mass destruction, the United States spent the first few months trying in vain to enlist the United Nations in an invasion of Iraq, and in March led that invasion with a much smaller contingent of countries. The winter of 2003 was a stormy one for relations between the United States and many other nations. Iraq was invaded by the United States (although there were also British and Australian troops on the ground) on 21 March 2003 and Bush announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq on the first of May. This proved not to be the end of hostilities, however, and insurgent activity fatal to American soldiers continued throughout the year on a daily basis. Autumn saw an increase in

White House focus on domestic issues, particularly economic issues, but the Iraqi situation remained at the forefront, particularly the problems of guerrilla activity, establishment of governance, and the embarrassment that no weapons of mass destruction had been found by the year's close.

A few words need to be written about the public nature of George W. Bush's religious faith (he has declared himself a committed Methodist and personally attested to a born-again experience), and what relevance his faith has for this analysis. Presidents typically have publicly proclaimed their faith while still candidates, and to do so seems in fact a pre-requisite for gaining the office.⁹ Regardless, no matter how strongly Bush may hold to his religious convictions, he does not write his own speeches. Normally, a presidential speech is written by a team of speechwriters and advisors who remain anonymous at least until the administration has passed. At first glance, then, it looks as if Bush's faith is par for the course, and, more to the point, irrelevant. But on closer consideration, there are other ways in which the president's personal faith, if not capable of determining the flavour of the speeches in itself, is symptomatic of a milieu of heightened religiosity in the Bush Administration.

George W. Bush very naturally keeps professional company with others who share his political ideology; he can work with them, and they can support him, because they share objectives and outlook. It also stands to reason that Bush would work most closely with colleagues who share a world-view with him, including his religious

⁹ Critics of Howard Dean's so-called electability during his 2004 run for the Democratic nomination cited Dean's reluctance to profess a Christian faith as a serious liability. The eventual winner of the nomination race was avowed Roman Catholic, John Kerry.

leanings. An early and public test of this compatibility between Bush and his administration was how Bush's generous attitudes toward federal funding of religious groups that conduct social outreach manifested into one of his first presidential initiatives. Similarly, it makes sense that cabinet members, policy advisors, and even speechwriters would be at least professionally unconcerned and at most in whole-hearted agreement with Bush's religious views. So while it is difficult to know how much Bush's personal faith (and the quality of this faith is not externally verifiable, at any rate) causes the religious temper of the speeches, it is probably safe to consider his speeches at least in some part symptomatic of his faith.

On the other side of the communicative divide lies the audience. Bush's speeches are intended for all Americans, one could even say all the world, to hear, and they are a matter of speaking to the record, and thus to history and legacy, as well. These are the broadest characterizations of the audience, but speeches are also an invaluable opportunity for a sitting president to rally the more specific audience of his supporters. In the 2000 presidential vote, a crucial block of Republican support came from white Protestants of the South,¹⁰ both evangelical and mainline (Green 14). The southern Protestant group that proved to be most important in that election was the one described in surveys as the intersection of evangelical denomination and high-commitment practice. Indeed, the South's white Protestant population has changed in the last few decades to the effect of a great increase in this group. From the 1980s to the 1990s the number of high-

¹⁰ Green defines the South as including the states of both the Deep South (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina) and the Rim South (Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia).

commitment white evangelicals in the southern states has increased by forty percent, to compose a full twenty-five percent of the population (Green et al 287). Bush's 2000 presidential campaign was able to consolidate their support to great effect, and adding their support to that of southern white Catholics was extremely important to its victory. White Protestants furnished Bush with seventy-two percent of his received votes in the South, and Green argues that this was crucial to Bush's win in a very close race (Green 17).

These numbers all suggest that members of the Bush Administration would be wise to think of the Christian Right when composing strategy, and there is some evidence that they do. Ron Suskind¹¹ has investigated strategic planning inside the White House, and reports on the influence of Karl Rove, Bush's long time strategist and now head of the White House's Office of Strategic Initiatives. Suskind's article argues that the Bush Administration takes political strategy much more seriously than policy issues, allegedly due in large part to the pervasive influence of Rove. Some of his evidence rests on charges levied by ex-advisor John DiIulio,¹² who resigned in the late summer of 2001 as the head of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In a letter to Suskind, DiIulio writes of Rove:

The Republican base constituencies, including Beltway libertarian policy elites and religious-Right leaders, trust [Rove] to keep [George W.] Bush 43 from behaving like [George H. W.] Bush 41 and moving too far to the center or inching at all central-left. Their shared fiction, supported by zero

¹¹ Suskind is also author of The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill. O'Neill was George W. Bush's Secretary of the Treasury. Suskind has been particularly skilled at obtaining critical comment on the Bush administration from past Administration staff.

¹² DiIulio had been a leading advocate of tough measures on juvenile crime in the early 1990s, and in the late 1990s began to champion the idea of faith-based social welfare for America's inner-cities (Shapiro 1).

empirical electoral studies, is that 41 lost in '92 because he lost these right-wing fans. (qtd. in Suskind 25)

While DiIulio obviously disagrees with Rove's view that these two groups are critical elements of Bush's political support, his letter claims that Rove, Bush's chief re-election strategist, believes that the "religious Right" is a crucial constituency. In the same letter, DiIulio also complains that Rove tried to encourage him to create policy initiatives that would appeal to conservative evangelicals (Suskind 25). This all suggests that the Administration is very interested at least in southern evangelicals, and well-motivated to include rhetorical devices intended to speak to them. Such religious groups are of course not only resident in the south, and Karl Rove's interest in this particular group in 2000 can be taken as an indication of his sensitivity to Christian voting blocs in other states in future elections.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to give the reader the background required for a critical reading of the study to follow. It has declared the methods and scope of this study, surveyed the theoretical territory within American civil religion, discussed related past studies and their conclusions, and commented upon the political fortunes of George W. Bush. These issues will be revisited in the coming chapters where they can shed light on Bush's biblical rhetoric. But before Bush's biblical rhetoric can be analyzed, the other side of the equation, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, should receive a similar treatment.

Chapter Two anticipates the major biblical themes that will be encountered in the analysis of Bush's speeches in Chapters Three and Four. Very early in the Torah one

finds God in control as creator, guide, and benefactor, calling a chosen people, giving them laws, and instilling a corporate responsibility under the promise and threat of divine retribution. The so-called historical books of the early days of the nation of Israel further express the law of divine retribution and the chosen nation, and marry these concepts to military conquest. It is in the reign of the House of David that the relationship between God and the nation state becomes most intimate. These themes are the foundation of the Hebrew Bible, and of the prophets who fill so many of its latter books. Some prophets grapple with the scandal of the prosperity of the wicked, both wicked members of their own communities and the wicked tribes beyond the hill. Some prophets call those among their own people who do not do God's will to repent and return to God's ways. Some prophets foretell doom, while some call for hope and renewal. All are part of the tradition of Hebrew prophecy.

Chapter Three describes how Bush's speeches adhere to the philosophy of the Torah and draws on the prophetic tradition. He uses his speeches to express a piety based on the principles of the Hebrew Bible and the poetry of the prophets. The early themes of the Bible (God's control, chosen people, law, corporate responsibility, divine retribution, the nation state, and military might) return in the rhetoric of George W. Bush. Bush extends his rhetoric into the prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible by using God's name, and by delivering messages that allude to biblical verse. He comments on the affairs of the day, foretells the details of the future, and does so in the name of God. He calls on the people to love their neighbours and assures them of God's presence in their lives. He calls on God's guidance and encourages his audience to do the same. He calls

on God's name to sanctify the actions of the nation state. These elements of Bush's speeches are found not by imaginative reading but because Bush makes clear allusion to the Bible, in some cases even as quotations, and thus offers them directly himself.

Chapter Four examines the nuances of Bush's role as prophet in current American political discourse. It argues that while Bush's approach is prophetic, his message bears a contorted resemblance to the messages of the Hebrew prophets. This is a surprising result given how closely Bush's speeches have otherwise followed the tenets of the Hebrew Bible. As a prophet, Bush uses biblical language to ask his own people to care for the poor, but never with the suggestion of past failure that the Hebrew prophets brought to their people. Bush's message of repentance is for foreigners, not Americans, whereas the Hebrew prophets called upon their own people to repent. Bush condemns foreign nations and promises their destruction, but has no oracles of doom for his own nation. According to the rhetoric of Bush's speeches, his ministry is to a God-fearing, law-abiding people, a good people, while it is the foreigner who is doomed and cursed. George W. Bush is a happy prophet in a righteous nation, delivering a message that is expressed in biblical language, reflecting biblical prophecy as he distorts it to create his own prophetic message.

Chapter Two: Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible

2.1 Introduction

The official speeches and remarks delivered by George W. Bush in the first half of 2003, before, during, and after the American invasion of Iraq, used rhetoric that reflected some key elements of biblical prophecy, yet omitted others. The present chapter is intended to survey prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, calling attention both to its diversity of theme and to the common threads running through centuries of prophetic writings. This background is necessary in order to judge how Bush's speeches recall, and sometimes refute, through theme and language, the prophecy of the Hebrew Bible. It is also important to see how varied and complex the prophetic tradition is before attempting to compare the prophets to a modern-day political leader. In addition to considering biblical prophecy itself, the exercise of reflecting on the theological worldview of the prophets, as described in the Torah, readies the reader for the assumptions of biblical prophecy, some of which Bush's speeches also share.

Prophecy in the Bible reflects a tradition that spanned several centuries, so it is hardly surprising to find that the middle section of the Hebrew canon, known as the Prophets,¹² is heterogeneous in theme, language and temper. Yet there are some important characteristics of prophecy that are persistent and reasonably stable. The single most durable characteristic of biblical prophecy across the Hebrew canon is the prophet's claim to divine inspiration. A prophet was only a prophet of Yahweh if he

¹² The Books of Joshua through Kings, and the fifteen books ascribed to prophets.

claimed for himself the status of Yahweh's special emissary. A prophet would often express his special relationship with God by claiming to know of God's future plans for the community, and accuracy on this point could be judged as evidence of the prophet's true identity. Prophets preached of maintaining a right relationship with God, which usually included fidelity to the cult of Yahweh, or a just treatment of one's neighbours, and often both.

There are other characteristics that appear, disappear, and reemerge across the many centuries of the tradition. Some prophets in the Bible, particularly the earliest ones, are involved in ecstatic practices. A prophet's knowledge of the future often inspired him to warn of looming disaster, complete with a wail of despair or perhaps a call to repentance. But he might also profess knowledge of God's plan for the community's renewal in more hopeful terms. Foreign nations are sometimes portrayed in the prophetic tradition as threats, and the conquest and destruction they bring upon Israel as the means of God's punishment. But often it is the nation of Israel that the prophets vehemently condemn, angrily blaming the people for their own troubled fate. Alternatively, a prophet might call for renewal within the nation and the national cult, and even extend this message to the peoples of other nations, who are viewed by the prophet not as conquests or conquerors, but as other seekers of Yahweh. Other prophets describe the national cult as meaningless in the search for God's will, and prefer to instruct their followers on the importance of fair treatment of one's neighbours.

The themes of biblical prophecy that are the most volatile are generally those most subject to the changing political realities of Israel. A complicated and lengthy

history of redaction of the Bible's books seems to have left a mix of some contradictory themes within many of the prophet's messages. Repentance and despair, universalism and xenophobia, or doom and hope may sit juxtaposed within the record of the same prophet's ministry. But historical development is not at issue in this study, because as an authoritative sacred text and source of literary allusion the historical development of the Bible becomes less important than its shape as a collected work. All of these themes belong to prophecy and colour the prophets' messages. Many also colour Bush's messages, and Bush's very act of delivering messages while invoking the name of God squarely places him in the tradition of biblical prophecy. Bush's speeches, however, mine biblical prophecy selectively, and that selective mining can only be seen with some prior appreciation of the prophetic tradition as a whole.

2.2 God in Control: Promise and Law

Consideration of the Bible's earliest books is necessary for any appreciation of the prophetic stories and poetry that follow. The prophets preach largely through the understanding of God and God's expectations for the community as they are found in the Bible's first five books. The passages of the Torah that will be considered in this present section are not obscure proof texts of the Hebrew Bible, but important narratives that have had great influence on the theology of the prophets of both the Israelite and early Jewish communities. Important ideas established by the Torah and presumed by the prophets include: God in control of the future and all the cosmos, the special status of the community before God, a good future assured by a communal attempt to do God's will,

and the converse notion that through evil deeds destruction is assured. Not that all parts of the Torah were written and universally espoused by the age of prophecy, nor is it true that the Hebrew Bible will not contradict itself across the Torah and the Prophets, or even within them. But there are critical themes of the Torah that appear also to be the presumed philosophy of the prophets, their audiences, and their chroniclers.

God's first appearance in the Hebrew canon is as the Omnipotent Creator; he is cast in both creation narratives as a character very much in control. Although humans appear only silently and late in the first chapter of Genesis, the dependence of all of humanity on God's purposeful actions is established by virtue of God's creation of everything from nothing. It is almost as if for emphasis of this theme that the alternate creation narrative in Genesis 2 and 3 is offered. Although in this alternate myth God's control of creation remains great, the inclusion of human characters in the story, and the freedom of humans to name, question, and disobey moves God somewhat back from centre stage. What Genesis 2 and 3 more firmly establish than Genesis 1 is God's interest in humans, a theme continued through God's personal direction of characters such as Cain, Noah, and Lot. The stories of Noah and Lot are also fine examples of God's control and how God's will is the preeminent determiner of history, especially cataclysmic events.

God's covenant with Abram further describes the community as being dependant on God's will, and establishes a chosen status for Abram's heirs. Here the Bible first voices a theme that will reemerge again and again throughout the Bible, when "on that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'to your descendants I give this

land” (Gen 15:18). Although God’s promise is made to one individual man, it is also an indirect promise to a future community, through the retelling of the story in Scripture. The geography of this Promised Land is given in detail, “from the River of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perrizites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:18-20). The new reality here is not a change in the physical landscape itself, but a change in dominion, from the land that belongs to foreign nations to a land that belongs to the children of Abraham. These are the chosen people of God, who will be the recipients of God’s special attention among the many nations.

But Abram’s covenant does not describe what responsibilities (if any) his children may have in order to retain their special relationship with God. God’s promises to Moses on Mount Sinai adds an element of corporate responsibility not clear in Abram’s time. God’s promises rely upon a measure of human reciprocity in Moses’ stories, as the Hebrews are now given their own side of the relationship to uphold. Now there is an expectation that the Hebrews will themselves act in a way that justifies their special relationship with the Deity as a chosen people. The Sinai narrative insists that the Hebrew community can influence its future through its relationship with the Lord as determined by the Sinai contract. Alternate futures are now available for the choosing: compliance on the part of the people will bring blessings, but non-compliance will leave them accursed.

Deuteronomy 28 lists in great detail¹³ the rewards of obedience (a fruitful land and people) and the punishments of disobedience (agricultural misfortune, military defeat, illness, and, ultimately, exile). The Hebrews are promised by Moses that “if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you” (Deut 28:1-2). The blessings include a fruitful land, healthy animals, prosperous cities and many progeny (3-6, 8, 11-12). The blessings apply just as seriously to the Hebrew nation’s status among other nations. In addition to great military victory (verse 7), they are promised holiness as a people (verse 9). Moses tells the people that, “you shall lend to many nations but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward” (12-13). Following the litany of blessings come the less pleasant consequences of disobedience, and in the text this list of curses is more than four times the length of the list of blessings. It begins with a repeal of the blessings cited, now given in the negative as curses (16-20). The curses continue with descriptions of excruciating illnesses, devastating natural disasters and pestilence, military defeats and the defilement of the bodies of soldiers. If they ignore the commandments, then the Hebrews will lose status among nations, as those other nations seize their possessions, humiliate their people, and scatter them in exile. These curses can be brought upon the Hebrews themselves by their own actions, should they “not obey

¹³ See Lev 26 for a similar list.

the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes” (15).

The promise of divine blessings and threat of divine curses predicated on the proper behaviour of the people establish the notion of divine retribution. God’s people will be physically rewarded for right action, but punished should they abandon God’s precepts. With the Sinai narrative the notions of community responsibility and the community’s own agency in determining its future have entered the national myth. There is a way to remain in right relationship with God and receive his blessings, but also many ways to violate this same relationship, and reap just punishments from above. The Hebrew Bible is in a sense a grand meditation on this theme, both in its instances and in its contradictions, and the prophets are some of the greatest interpreters of the nature of piety and punishment. God’s control of the cosmos, as expressed in blessings and curses and understood by the biblical authors as divine retribution, is essential in an appreciation of the prophets and their prophecy. These are the assumptions made by the biblical prophets and their audiences, and in order to appreciate the messages of those prophets it is best to understand first this milieu. These foundational ideas will recur subtly and often, both in the stories and poetry of the Hebrew prophets, and in the speeches of George W. Bush.

2.3 Public Ministry by Divine Inspiration

Prophets are speakers, and the prophetic books as they exist in the canon are largely collections of sayings. A prophet spoke to an individual or called to a crowd,

delivering a message that was only later transformed into written text, presumably by his disciples. The oral roots of the art of prophecy affected the forms found within the books; many of the prophets are recorded as having spoken in poetic parallelism, a form of poetry tailored to oral transmission. The prophets are thought to have employed patterns of speech found in everyday life (Schmitt 483). Some of Isaiah's language¹⁴ is viewed by many modern scholars as liturgical, with hymns and poetry that would not be out of place in public worship (Barton 491). The books of the prophets have arrived today primarily as speeches, and the prophets as public personalities in a manner that is very dependent on their speech. The paucity of biographical information, or even narrative, in many of the prophetic books, also casts the prophets largely in the light of their public address.

Prophets most often addressed themselves to the community as a whole. In the longest prophetic anthologies, those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the prophet most often addresses himself to a crowd, city, or nation. But even the speeches that prophets give directly to individuals reach a much broader audience once they pass into legend and are subsequently committed to ink. It is true that some biblical prophets usually directed their messages to individuals, but from the reader's point of view this is not an absolute limit of audience. Firstly, these messages are of importance to the nation in as much as they affect the community's leadership. Secondly, as they are recorded and repeated to future generations of the Israelite and Jewish communities, these messages ultimately address the community at large. When Nathan promises David an eternal kingship for

¹⁴ The oracles in question come from the poetry of Second Isaiah (40-55).

his line (2 Sam 7), this is a clear example of a message to an individual that has consequences for the community.

A prophet (*nābī'*) was also sometimes called a man of God (*'iš ʔlōhīm*) and indeed the most universal quality among the biblical prophets is their divine inspiration. All prophets claimed to speak for God, often prefacing their remarks with “thus says Yahweh.” The call narratives of Samuel, Hosea, and Isaiah all feature God’s voice actively rousing the prophet (1 Sam 3, Hos 1, Isa 6). God’s sanction is paramount for the status of a prophet, and a prophet who leads the people away from God is no prophet of Yahweh at all. According to the Book of Deuteronomy, “if a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet ” (Deut 13:1-3). A prophet was also sometimes called seer (*rō'eh*), or visionary (*hōzeh*), the receiver of special visions from God. Many of the prophetic books begin with the notice that the descriptions contained within came to the prophet in a vision (Amos 1:1, Isa 1:1, Micah 1:1, Hab 1:1). These episodes serve to establish the true prophet as called by God.

A second common characteristic of biblical prophecy is a claim to see some vision of the future. The claim to a vision of the future is an extension of the claim to divine inspiration: it is the prophet’s special status as the receiver of God-given knowledge that allows him to see God’s plans. Although Deuteronomy does not accept such clairvoyance as sufficient evidence in itself of prophecy inspired by Yahweh, the ability to tell the future was an empirical test, recommended to discern true from false

prophets. Deuteronomy reads, “when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him” (18:22). Both this verse and Deut 13:1-3 encourage the people to be skeptical about prophecy, to test against the possibility of a false prophet, for prophets claiming to be of Yahweh can contradict one another (1 Kgs 22, Jer 28).

Public ministry by divine inspiration is probably the most stable and consistent feature across all of the biblical prophets, regardless of their historical or social circumstances. A prophet is of little effect in secret, and his public nature and the development of his identity through public address is an important parallel with the American president. Prophets come in the name of God, calling out “thus says the Lord,” and while the presidents do not use this phrase, they do call on God’s name frequently. As was noted in the first chapter, presidents have been called “prophetic” in the academic literature, but not with reference to the simple fact that they speak in public and often call on God’s name while doing so. This is not to say that presidential speeches instruct the audience forcefully and directly as a direct conduit of God’s message, as do so many of the prophets, but that when a president uses God’s name in a speech, he is to some extent following in the very ancient prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible.

2.4 Fidelity and Justice

A major concern of the prophets was their audience’s maintenance of a right relationship with God. From the giving of the Law to Moses in the Torah, God had

demanded proper action from his chosen people as payment for blessing and under threat of cursing. Piety in the Bible is demonstrated by fidelity to God and the carrying out of God's will, which always includes fidelity. When an unnamed "man of God" says, "This is the sign that the Lord has spoken: 'Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out,'" he is referring to the apostasy of worship outside of the cult of Yahweh (1 Kgs 13: 1-5). This is prophetic condemnation of the same 'high places' that are condemned repeatedly throughout the Deuteronomic History¹⁵ as the sign of the people's unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Infidelity to Yahweh is most blatantly expressed by this outright worship of other gods, as in the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18: 20-40). Hosea denounces the cultic practices of his people as perverted and whorish, because the people are "joined to idols" (5:17). These prophets know that God will not tolerate interloping deities.

While the prophets take a constant negative view of the worship of other gods, the relationship of the prophets with the cult of Yahweh is more complex.¹⁶ There is certainly a prophetic tradition of rejecting the sincerity of cultic practices because the people are otherwise unfaithful. Isaiah says that God has "had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts" (1:11). Jeremiah seems to ridicule empty ritual when he pleads, "circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts" (4:4). The use of such imagery, whether or not it is meant as metaphor, suggests a negative view of contemporary cultic practices on the part of these prophets. In contrast, other

¹⁵ The Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

¹⁶ Generally speaking, the pre-exilic and exilic prophets are more likely to denounce the cult of Yahweh as devoid of real faithfulness to God, while the post-exilic prophets are more likely to be in support of the cultic practices of their day (Barton 490).

prophets take a more positive view toward the national cult. The Book of Haggai opens with God demanding his new house of worship, and Zechariah recounts his conversation with an angel in which he is told of God's instructions to Zerubbabel for rebuilding the Temple (Hag 1:4, Zech 4: 1-9). Rather than dismiss the priests' rituals as empty and meaningless without community justice, Malachi chastises the priests for offering blind and lame animals, animals unworthy of the holy ritual (1:6-8). While no prophet advocates the worship of other gods, the dispositions of the prophets toward Yahweh worship are more heterogeneous.

When prophets disparage cultic practice, it is because they see this practice as the façade of piety on an unrighteous people, who otherwise offend God through unjust treatment of the underprivileged. The prophets are famous for their social criticism based on this idea. Amos says that God demands that "justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," in place of "burnt offerings and cereal offerings" (5:22-24). Micah dismisses burnt offerings, rivers of oil, and rams when God instead wishes the people to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly" with their God (6:6-8). Isaiah portrays God demanding, "What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" (Is 3:15). Isaiah criticizes those who offer a wisdom that is not God's wisdom as an excuse to perpetrate injustice. He warns, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes," but "who acquit the guilty for a bribe and deprive the innocent of his right" (5:21-23). And again Isaiah calls, "'Woe to the rebellious children,' says the Lord, 'who carry out a plan, but not mine; and who make a league, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin'" (30:1). Here Isaiah denounces

the scheming of men that is not linked to God's justice and hurts the vulnerable of society.

This view of social dynamics focuses Amos, Micah, and Isaiah on what is good and what is evil: those who help the needy are good, and those who do not are evil. Speaking for God again, Isaiah says, "remove the evil from your doings, before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (1:16-17). Amos, who repeatedly sides with the downtrodden, places the poor themselves in the company of the good. The wealthy of Israel, he says, "sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes" (Amos 2:6). For these prophets doing good means siding with the underprivileged, and evil is the violation of the poor. These prophets criticize the growing number of wealthy in the kingdom who abandon the poor, and thus bring God's wrath upon themselves and the community.

It is likely a lack of this sort of chiding language in the presidential speeches that has kept past studies from considering presidents as prophets. The dismissal of the people's offerings as vain in the face of the suffering they allow to grow among the poor is a powerful image of prophecy, but it does not find an echo in George Bush's speeches. Chapter Three will argue that despite a lack of scolding and judgment in Bush's speeches, there are many other traits of his rhetoric that allow him to attach himself to the role of biblical prophet.

2.5 Judgment

Judgment is another persistent theme in Hebrew prophecy, and prophets present themselves as the judges of what is pleasing to God. Because they see themselves as

God's messengers, the prophets mean for their judgments to be interpreted as God's judgments. Recall that according to the Torah, God has made a covenant with the people based on the law, and thus has the right to judge and punish them. This attitude is a manifestation of divine retribution based on God's will and law. Prophetic judgment appears as judgment against an individual, but more usually as a global judgment of the entire community, and even in the case of individuals the judgment usually extends to the community through subsequent generations, or as a warning. Judgments also tend to be negative, for the great majority of the prophets believe that the people have failed to live the law, and choose to speak on this matter in particular. This negative judgment usually carries with it the expectation of punishment, often manifest as a total destruction of the society.¹⁷

A literary form that accompanies this pattern of judgment is commonly termed "reproach and threat," a form that Schmitt describes as "because you have done this evil, therefore, thus says the Lord, disaster will come upon you" (484). In this way, these prophets remain faithful to the established traditions by maintaining the doctrine of divine retribution, as they interpret the loss of the nation state as punishment for the people's inequities. This is not to say that all prophets would necessarily agree on the nature of the crime. Amos condemns Israel for her failure to attend to the economically needy, while for Hosea and Ezekiel Israel's great sin is poor cultic practices and idolatry. Regardless of the sin, there is a widespread agreement among these prophets that Israel's misfortune is Israel's own doing, a consequence of a lapse in behaviour, and not a

¹⁷ This is a very persistent theme in the books of the prophets, as a response to the political jeopardy of the Assyrian and Babylonian expansions.

flippant and unprovoked action on the part of the Deity. The Lord remains in control of events, but Israel is responsible for them.

In dispensing their negative judgments the prophets often become extremely emotional, raging or weeping at the inequities of the people and the damage this does to the community's relationship with the deity. As God's emissary, the prophet's anger and sorrow is meant as God's anger, God's sorrow, just as his admonishment is God's admonishment. Nathan angrily chastises David for the murder of Uriah (2 Sam 12:1-25). Elisha's fuse is certainly very short (2 Kgs 2:23-25). God's anger and disappointment is expressed within Hosea's own marriage. Speaking for God, Isaiah calls the conquering Assyria "rod of my anger, the staff of my fury" (10:5). Jeremiah, so famous for weeping, speaks often of his despair over the punishment of the people, for his "soul will weep in secret for your pride" (13:17). Ezekiel orders Jerusalem to "bear your disgrace" and "be ashamed" of its unfaithfulness to God (16:52). These prophets are angry, ashamed of their people, and despondent.

Another important symbol of punishment in the prophets' messages is the impending destruction of the "day of the Lord." This will be a day of catastrophe and punishment that the people of Israel will bring upon themselves through their own failure to conform to the covenantal promises of their fathers. The "day of the Lord" is perhaps the most distinctive motif that the prophets add to the literary repertoire of the Bible.¹⁸ Amos cries, "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light" (5:18). Isaiah orders his audience to "wail, for

¹⁸ "The day of the Lord" is a name for destruction that the early Christian communities will retain. See for example Acts 2:20, 1 Cor 1:8, and 1 Thes 5:2.

the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come” (13:6).

Ezekiel rages against the false prophets of Israel and shames the people who have “not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord” (13:4-5). Zephaniah warns that “the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there” (1:14). The day of the Lord is a day of doom, often characterized as a day of battle and in which the strong fall. When prophets foretell the coming day of the Lord they usually leave little hope of a last-minute reprieve. Amos bluntly states that the end has come (8:2). Other prophets also have their moments of pessimism. Jeremiah holds little expectation that the people will repent, for “every one deceives his neighbour, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies, they commit inequity and are too weary to repent” (9:5). With these words the prophets seem to be condemning the entire community.

As with chiding and judgment, forecasts of doom do not seem readily apparent in presidential speeches. In fact, George W. Bush’s speeches in 2003 do forecast a day of reckoning for a group of people, with little hope of repentance and reprieve, as the next chapter will make clear. For the prophets doom is also a manifestation of God’s control, and it is worth investigating whether Bush makes any connection between the destruction he promises for the Iraqi regime, the role of repentance in his speeches, and the God he credits with the ultimate control of all destinies.

2.6 Comfort and Hope

Sometimes the prophets who announce threatening punishment call for an acceptance of the inevitable doom of the whole community, but sometimes they call for repentance instead, in hopes of redeeming some of the people. Speaking for God, Ezekiel reports, “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin” (Ezek 18:30). Ezekiel and Isaiah both prophesy that God’s judgment is more selective than total, and the coming disaster is only for those who fail to repent: “The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezek 18:20); “Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness. But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed” (Ezek 1:27). Although prophets sometimes predict total inevitable destruction of a community, the alternate notion that some will perish and some will be spared by God because of their righteousness and repentance is also quite prevalent.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah¹⁹ are prophets who promise the survival of a righteous “remnant” after the coming destruction. Isaiah promises King Hezekiah that after the Assyrians have gone “the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward” (1 Kgs 19:30). He repeats the sentiment later, sometimes verbatim, and he describes the remnant as a “band of survivors” (Isa

¹⁹ The Books of Jeremiah and Micah are primarily pre-exilic, as is most of Isaiah 1-39.

11:11, 11:16, 37:31-32). Jeremiah also uses the word this way,²⁰ when he rejoices, “For thus says the Lord: ‘Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, “The Lord has saved his people, the remnant of Israel.” ’” (Jer 31:7). Micah speaks of the remnant being not necessarily penitents but the needy: “In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame, and gather those who have been driven away, and those who have been afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off a strong nation” (4:6-7). Israel survives as a kernel of chosen people, purified by its harsh punishment. The remnant becomes a way for the prophets to refer to what is left as the chosen after God’s punishment, and whether they do so in anger or consolation, it is a way of referring to the survivors who have been spared by God.

There is indeed a consoling tradition in prophecy as well as pessimism and anger. The Book of Isaiah reads, “Comfort my people” (Isa 40:1). Ezekiel reassures his audience that even in trying times their God is still with them, will forgive them, and will take them back: “Thus says the Lord, I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel” (40:25). The Book of Isaiah records the prophet’s delight at God’s comfort: “Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted” (49:13).

This hope accompanies a call to renewal. Speaking for God, Ezekiel says, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from

²⁰ Jeremiah uses the phrase in less positive ways as well (see Jer 24:8). This is usually interpreted as a political hostility toward those Israelites who were not exiled to Babylon but remained behind.

all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ezek 16:25-26). The Book of Isaiah assures that “the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.” (Isa 42:9). In Isaiah’s poetry this renewal is associated with a re-creation of creation: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa 65:17). Jeremiah calls, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). These are calls to hope and celebration in renewal, not pessimism. “The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give” (Isa 62:2). This quotation refers also to Israel’s nationhood and status among other nations, two important and interrelated themes of biblical prophecy.

These celebratory verses offer good reason to consider the possibility that presidential speeches have connections with biblical prophecy. To view Hebrew prophecy as only a judgmental, defeatist, and ill-tempered exercise is to sell it short. Biblical prophecy has its share of hopeful and comforting moments, and these moments have been inspiration for some of Bush’s own speeches. This is not to diminish the importance of the more wrathful elements of prophecy, only to say that the prophets’ speeches are not only fire and brimstone. The concept of a special place for the people in God’s eyes, a concept that stretches back to the Torah, is one that the prophets draw on for solace and to encourage spiritual renewal. Within the logic of American civil religion, the idea of a chosen people is the basis for manifest destiny, a subtle but

important idea in George W. Bush's speeches. The next two sections of this chapter consider the related ideas of nationhood and foreign nation in biblical prophecy.

Nationhood and foreign nations are naturally important topics in Bush's 2003 speeches, and the final two chapters of this thesis examine the parallels between the treatments these topics receive in the Hebrew Bible and in Bush's presidential addresses.

2.7 Nationhood

Nationhood is a concern of the prophets over the centuries of prophecy, and to some extent the development of prophecy in the land runs tandem with the fortunes of the nation. The prophets are involved in the establishment of the monarchy, and its subsequent development. They are witnesses to the schism of the nation of Israel, the threats that other nations pose, and the catastrophes of war and exile. They are also the heralds of renewed nationalism after calamity. The place of other nations in biblical prophecy is necessarily filtered through Israel's political position of strength or weakness, and so is also varied. Any consideration of nationhood as a theme in prophecy must include a view to the fortunes of the monarchy, where Israel's nationhood is most directly expressed.

The prophets of the day were intimately involved with the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. Samuel anoints Saul as prince over the people of Israel, then David as king, according to God's command (1 Sam 10:1, 1 Sam 16:1-13). The Prophet Gad directs David as he gathers his forces against Saul (1 Sam 22:5). But perhaps most importantly for the tradition of prophecy, the Prophet Nathan delivers Yahweh's promise

to David that “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam 7:16). The Davidic Promise is added to those established through Abraham and Moses: an heir of David shall rule in perpetuity over the children of Abraham, who people their own land because they obey the laws given to Moses. The Davidic promise is delivered with a reminder of the intimacy between God and his people, and a promise to vanquish enemy nations. “I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth” (2 Sam 7:9).

Prophets like Samuel, Gad, and Nathan speak most directly to individual leaders. But while it is the relationship between the leader and God that is at issue for a prophet like Nathan, this does not mean that his message is of no consequence beyond the court. The potency of the Davidic Promise will have consequences for all the Israelites through the generations, and for the Jewish nation beyond. By prophesying to the king, the prophet actively participates in national life. This promise that Nathan delivers further strengthens nationalism and the immediate ties between God and the people through David. Nathan here also fulfills his role as a legitimizing agent. Many of the prophets, even those who were the king’s critics, were greatly invested in the institution of monarchy. These prophets maintain close connections with the monarchy, providing legitimacy for the dynasty, even when their declarations are critical of the king. Nathan chastises David for his role in the death of Uriah, but still supports David, and Bathsheeba and Solomon as well. Regardless of the prophecy, Nathan remains wedded to the dynasty as an institution.

Some prophets were more critical of the king, and through him the state, and these messages fit handily with messages of sin and doom. Ahijah the Prophet tears from his garment ten pieces for Jeroboam, to prophecy the secession of the northern kingdom from Solomon (1 Kgs 11:29-38). Micaiah prophesies doom for the king of Israel, Isaiah doom for Hezekiah (1 Kgs 22, 2 Kgs 19). Jeremiah presents a negative judgment on kings as he condemns the shortcomings of the line of Josiah (21:11-22:30). The Prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah have anti-monarchic messages, but they also focus on the loss of state as punishment for all. The loss of the national state is indeed principal among the punishments awaiting a sinful people, in effect the dissolution of one of the pillars of early biblical eschatology: the eternal Davidic king. The destruction of the kingdom inevitably entails the loss of the king.

The great consequence of the prophets' acceptance of Israel's downfall as God's punishment is the re-imagination of monarchy. The loss of state is a very direct challenge to the Davidic promise of 2 Samuel 7, leaving a vacuum of mythic leadership. Isaiah,²¹ in his prophecies of hope, elevates Cyrus, a messiah, over David as the leader *par excellence*. Isaiah portrays King Cyrus of Persia as Israel's saviour, or messiah, a name not given to a foreign king anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah prophesies Babylon's downfall, but Cyrus of Persia is God's "shepherd," God's "anointed," who has grasped God's "right hand...to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings" (44:28, 45:1). In other words, although the great new day is to come by means of a political leader, it is not requisite that the messiah be even a Jew, let alone of the Davidic

²¹ Deutero-Isaiah.

line. The lauding of Cyrus of Persia in the Book of Isaiah is part of a trend in late biblical prophecy toward a positive view of foreigners.

2.8 Foreign Nations

The modern study of the Hebrew Bible describes a large class of prophetic works as “oracles against foreign nations,” which foretell the destruction of neighbouring tribes and empires as God’s punishment for those peoples’ sins of idolatry and their harsh treatment of Israel. Negative attitudes towards foreigners usually involve war and conquest, even though these misadventures are often cast as ultimately being God’s just punishment of Israel. Assyria and Babylon had roles in the great drama that was Israel’s judgment, and other, smaller nations were met on occasion in battle and in diplomatic circumstance. Micaiah foretells the defeat of the army of the King of Israel at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kgs 22). Isaiah, speaking for God, famously proclaims that, “Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury,” has come to punish Israel (10:5). The interest in foreign nations here is primarily as destroyers of the kingdom and media of God’s wrath. In Jeremiah’s prophecy of the yoke of the king of Babylon, Jeremiah tells Zedekiah not to revolt against Babylon but to respect Babylonian rule, for this punishment is God’s will (Jer 27). It will not last forever, nor will it be over soon, but the exile is part of God’s plan and should be accepted by the leadership of Israel (Jer 28). Foreign nations often appear as active threats, but as the bringers of punishment from God for Israel’s sins their sting is inevitable.

While prophets are often more concerned with condemning Israel itself than its neighbours, some prophecy does take Israel's side, so to speak, and condemns the foreign nation for its assault on Israel. In fact, the Book of Isaiah simultaneously condemns Babylon and lauds Persia. Babylon has taken too great a liberty in its role as punisher of Israel, has made Israel suffer more than was its due, and now will be paraded in shame (Is 47:1-7). In his oracles against foreign nations, Ezekiel relays messages suggesting that God is not fully behind every assault upon Israel by a foreign land, and will even come to Israel's aid: "Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance upon them,' therefore thus says the Lord God, 'I will stretch out my hand against Edom'" (Ezek 25:12-13). Ezekiel similarly rages against the Ammonites, the Philistines, and the people of Tyre, and his oracles promise that God will punish these and other nations for their harsh treatment of Israel. Isaiah says that God will destroy Babylon and make it the "possession of the hedgehog" (Isa 14:22-23).

The prophetic tradition holds positive as well as negative perceptions of foreign nations, sometimes within the same prophet's book, again owing in part to the span of biblical prophecy over successive centuries of independence, exile, and occupation. Some of Isaiah's poetry²² has been discussed in terms of foreign nations and a new universalism, in which Israel's salvation does not concern Israel alone, but is set as an example to all, and a route to the salvation of all: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Is

²² In the chapters ascribed to Deutero-Isaiah.

49:6). This is another facet of biblical prophecy, as Isaiah speaks about the salvation of those beyond his own nation. Isaiah's ²³ positive view of foreigners sometimes includes them among the chosen: "The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord...every one who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer" (56:6-7). Zechariah says much the same: "Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of Hosts: in those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (8:22).

Obviously there is no one prophetic view on foreign nations in the Bible, but rather a complicated and contradictory record of who was to blame for Israel's woes, and who was worthy of Yahweh. In a sense, this leaves nearly any stance George W. Bush may want to take toward foreigners with a biblical precedent. Bush's speeches in 2003 did reflect some of these biblical attitudes toward foreign nations, and not others, and Bush's messages about the worth and blame-worthiness of America's neighbours are equally complicated. What is interesting in the comparison between the speeches and the Bible is the mix of these themes on foreigners which Bush chooses to present to the American public.

²³ In the chapters ascribed to Trito-Isaiah.

2.9 Conclusion

Several ideas within biblical prophecy are very stable across the Hebrew canon, and these stable ideas are thus crucial to the description of prophecy. The control exerted by God over the cosmos, the ability of the chosen people to affect their own future through the Mosaic covenant, and an expectation of divine retribution, are all ideas important to the development of biblical prophecy. Prophecy is also predicated on divine inspiration and heavily reliant on the notion that a prophet of Yahweh knew what fate awaited the people. As the next chapter will show, these very important ideas are echoed in Bush's 2003 speeches.

There are some themes in biblical prophecy stressed more in some ministries than others, and several that are contradicted across the prophets. Most prophets preach fidelity to the cult of Yahweh, and many concern themselves with justice for the poor. Some prophets bring the message of God's condemnation to Israel, and anger at the people's craven behavior that has separated them from their God. Some prophets blame other nations for Israel's woes, and direct their anger outward from Israel. Some prophets preach doom, others hope and renewal. Some prophets promise the survival of a remnant of pious people, others condemn the entire nation. These ideas will also reappear in the next two chapters, with the examination of Bush's speeches.

It is important to have a sweeping view of biblical prophecy in order to compare Bush with the biblical prophets. The features that are shared between Bush and the prophets build the case that Bush's speeches cast him in the role of biblical prophet. Such a comparison is largely the business of Chapter Three. The features that are not

shared between them are just as instructive, and those contrasts are the business of Chapter Four. Where features of the prophetic tradition are simply absent in Bush's speeches, this thesis will speculate as to what conflicts may have arisen by their inclusion, or why for Bush they would be unnecessary. Where the features of the prophetic tradition appear to be directly contradicted by Bush's speeches, this thesis will speculate as to how Bush's revision of biblical prophecy creates a new message.

Chapter Three: George W. Bush as Biblical Prophet

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter One, much has been made of the role of the American president as high priest or comforting pastor within the American civil religion, while the term “prophet” has been reserved for those rare occasions when the president exercises criticism. As described by Robert Linder, for example, the pastoral president inspires and comforts the people, the priestly president glorifies the citizenry and celebrates the nation, but a president speaks prophetically only when he judges the nation according to transcendent values and calls the people to repent for corporate sins (735). Roberta Coles uses similar definitions for priestly, prophetic, and pastoral (406). Similarly, Martin E. Marty defines the priestly approach to civil religion as “celebrative, affirmative, and culture building” and the prophetic approach as judgmental (145). Linder, Coles, and Marty all allow that a president may act in a priestly, pastoral, or prophetic manner at different times, although most presidents have a favoured stance. They also all require that the president deliver oracles of judgment in order for his speech to be deemed prophetic; should he shift to a more positive message, he has shifted to the role of priest or pastor.

This present chapter argues that even when Bush is being celebrative, affirmative, culture building, comforting, and inspiring (in other words, priestly and pastoral by the definitions of Linder, Coles, and Marty) he is still relying on a way of communicating that owes much to the Hebrew prophets. In this sense even a happy and celebratory Bush

is prophetic, regardless of the absence of judgment in his speeches. To label the president prophetic only when he criticizes is to assume a flattened image of prophecy, in which a prophet can only ever be a harsh critic, never a comforter and never a celebrant. This over-simplified use of the term prophet does not adequately consider what it is to be a prophet in the Hebrew Bible, and how those same elements of identity have an echo in the modern political persona that is the president of the United States. Moreover, even a president as given to boosterism and affirmation in his speeches as George W. Bush reaches back to the prophetic books of the Bible with clear and easily recognizable allusions.

An examination of George W. Bush's early 2003 speeches unearths striking similarities with the prophetic ministries of the Hebrew Bible, even while he remains within a so-called priestly role. The strongest tie between Bush and biblical prophecy is Bush's propensity to speak in God's name, call upon God, and interpret for the listeners God's will. In his public persona, Bush is also very much like a biblical prophet. He speaks to crowds, which are usually composed of his fellow citizens, often promising a changed future according to God's will. As president, Bush is quite naturally concerned with the nation state, as were so many of the prophets. The community of America is of course a nation-state, and Bush describes the fate of the nation as being tied to God's will, as he presumes a God in control of the nation's future. Finally, Bush's speeches are meant to persuade, just as many a prophet hoped to galvanize his followers and to turn those who were not of his party. These traits of Bush's public face have parallel in both the Hebrew Bible in general and biblical prophecy in particular.

The particular elements of Bush's speeches that will be considered in this chapter all have strong biblical ties. In his speeches Bush describes a comforting God, who controls the cosmos through mighty power in a way that is benevolent toward America and guides its journey. The instruction to love one's neighbour is an artifact of Mosaic Law found in Bush's speeches, and it is also an important idea for the social justice teachings of many of the prophets. Bush is also fond of saying that all people are equal in God's eyes, and he integrates this idea with calls of compassion for the underprivileged that are reminiscent of those same biblical prophets. Another recurrent motif in Bush's speeches is that God is the ultimate giver of freedom to all, another example of Bush interpreting God's intentions and sharing his intentions forcefully and publicly. When Bush contrasts these ideals of love and freedom with his depictions of America's enemies, it resembles those segments of the prophetic tradition known as the "oracles against foreign nations." Bush reflects biblical prophecy with recurrent references to both evil and a day of reckoning, and cites in his speeches the blessings that God has extended to America, and the curses that God extends to America's enemies.

This chapter will offer evidence that Bush at least partially operates within the persona of a biblical prophet. The first category of evidence involves a general consideration of the nature of Bush's appearances compared to the biblical appearances of the prophets. Here is discussed what Bush most usually says, how he says it, and what parallels exist with prophetic ministries in the Bible. The second category of evidence specifically considers key phrases found in the speeches that reflect biblical verse, in which Bush clearly describes his picture of God and God's will. The strength of this

documentary evidence rests on two pillars: that these utterances are straight from Bush's mouth, and that they have direct mirror in the Hebrew Bible itself, in the preaching of God's messengers, the prophets. This chapter does not rely on popular notions about Bush's religious convictions or those of his speechwriters or staff, beyond the simple fact that Bush considers himself to be a Christian. There is no need to do so in order to make the case that Bush's speeches rely upon elements of biblical prophecy; Bush speaks for himself.

3.2 The President as Prophet

As mentioned above, past scholarly interest in prophetic presidential rhetoric has been limited to "president as judge." Henderson cited McGovern's tendency to be prophetically judgmental as a major handicap in the 1972 presidential election (525). Coles deems Bill Clinton an occasional prophet president because he occasionally called on America to aspire to improve itself morally (416). Marty found much more evidence of pastoral and priestly approaches in both Eisenhower's and Nixon's speeches than anything judgmental, and therefore prophetic, in either (147, 151). But a close examination of George W. Bush's public persona, as well as his speeches, finds much reminiscent of biblical prophecy, regardless of the paucity of judgments against America.

One of the strongest ties between Bush and the prophetic tradition is the use of God's name. Bush closes nearly every speech with the simple coda: "may God bless America," just as the prophets so often opened theirs with the simple introduction: "thus says the Lord." He also makes regular reference to God by name within the body of his

speeches, and by doing so he places himself in the biblical territory of the prophets. While Bush may not declare “thus says the Lord,” his persistent request of God’s blessing and his frequent references to God’s wishes and viewpoint in the bodies of his speeches strongly imply God’s sanction. The vast majority of Bush’s utterances that will be considered throughout this chapter and the next are those referring to the Judeo-Christian God, most usually as the “Almighty.” As one trait that all biblical prophets share, the use of God’s name is a very significant test of prophecy, and Bush’s use of God’s name in nearly every speech is similarly significant. The prophets’ frequent references to God are the very thing that made them prophets.

Like the prophets, Bush’s speeches take the existence of God to be axiomatic, an idea Bush seems to assume that his entire audience accepts without question. As Bush said at the Annual Prayer Breakfast for 2003, “the Almighty God is a God to everybody, every person” (“President Bush Addresses”). The prophets preached that their God was the one God, the people were to worship no others; in fact this was one of the ideas about religion that found the widest agreement among the prophets. Bush is not at liberty to issue a decree of fidelity to the one God in America today, but he does play an obvious religious favourite every time he mentions God in a speech. Bush’s message about God is global, as it was for the biblical prophets, who made a similar assumption about the relevance of God for their audiences. Bush also frequently refers to God in combination either with a direct allusion to biblical law or with an interpretation of God’s current point-of-view or wishes (as this present chapter unfolds the reader’s attention will be repeatedly called to this tendency). The use of God’s name and the interpretation of

God's will are important functions of the prophets, who were the interpreters of God's will for the people of the day, drawing connections between human behaviour and what is pleasing for God.

Bush's speeches often offer views of the future, and the promise of change is a significant part of his message. A few examples show that his promises have wide range: creating economic growth, supporting Medicare reform, sparing America from terrorism, securing Mid-east peace, and supporting a self-governing Iraq ("President Signs," "President Promotes," "President Bush Vows," "President Bush Meets with President Mubarak," "President Discusses the Future"). As it is for the speeches of most politicians, promising is itself a frequent aim of the Bush speeches. The prophets' views of the future, their eschatologies, were a significant part of their messages, too. Many biblical prophets promised that, through God's divine plan, Israel would come to fulfillment. Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah all especially promote the idea of a divine plan for Israel's development (Barton 492). Bush implies a similar expectation of divine involvement in his speeches, by repeatedly asking for God's direction in America's future.

With regard to audience, Bush resembles the prophets, who spoke primarily to their own people. When Bush speaks to a gathering of fellow citizens, he resembles the prophets who preached to the common crowds of their own nations. When Bush delivers the State of the Union Address, it bears resemblance to a prophet addressing a royal court, but, even then, the prime-time broadcast extends his reach much further, just as

recording the prophets' speeches in the Bible expanded their audiences.²⁴ Many prophets maintained a deep interest in the actions or fate of other nations, but they addressed those interests to a domestic audience. As he rarely travels abroad, Bush's immediate audience is most usually his fellow citizens. It is true that Bush is a well-known figure worldwide, and other countries, especially countries such as Iraq and Israel, can feel a great impact from American power. But while anyone anywhere can access the White House website's speech archive, only American citizens can vote. Bush's speeches are of most immediate consequence to other Americans, and much of the pomp associated with Bush as head of state (as opposed to head of government) has little relevance beyond America's borders. Bush's speechwriters have a key and preferred audience, and whether it is those who vote, or those who donate to campaigns, it is largely domestic. Other people may be listening, and Bush may be in part speaking to them, but he is always speaking to his own citizenry; very often there are none but other Americans in the room.

Over the course of this thesis the reader will frequently find Bush insisting upon his own interpretation of God's wishes. This insistence, this attempt at persuasion of the masses to adopt Bush's impressions of God, is at the heart of any argument to cast Bush as a biblical prophet. No matter how his concerns differ from any other prophet, every prophet had a vision of God to share with his people, a vision about which he felt so strongly that sharing became his imperative. These rhetoricians delivered varied

²⁴ The source of the speeches considered here is the transcription found on the Bush White House's own website, a parallel to the chronicling of a prophet's disciples, albeit presumably with a higher fidelity to the original speech than the Book of Amos enjoys.

messages: destruction is at hand, repent and be saved, renewal is at hand, the foreigner is doomed, serve the poor, build the temple, worship this way and not that. So many of the messages of the biblical prophets are an attempt to convince their audiences of what God is like, what God has made come to pass, what God wants, and what God will do. So often when Bush mentions God, he makes similar comment on all these things, just as a prophet would.

3.3 A Comforting God

A direct and credited biblical quotation is a rarity in the public speeches of George W. Bush, but it is not unheard of. A few hours after the Columbia Shuttle was lost on 1 February 2003 Bush gave a brief public address from the White House:

In the skies today we saw destruction and tragedy. Yet farther than we can see there is comfort and hope. In these words of the Prophet Isaiah, 'Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.' ("President Addresses Nation on Space")

This quotation is from the New International Version's translation²⁵ of Isa 40:26, and while these words were no doubt considered by the speechwriters to be apt because they referred to celestial objects, it is telling that they come from a song of comfort in the Book of Isaiah. The Book of Isaiah rebuts the notion that biblical prophecy and comfort

²⁵ The New International Version (NIV) is the latest translation of the Bible by the International Bible Society, which has printed 150 million copies of the NIV. The International Bible Society calls the NIV "the most widely read English version," although it is not made clear whether this refers to American or worldwide readership ("Historical Highlights"). The NIV seems to be the translation of choice for the White House. It is the most academically defensible of the evangelical translations.

are mutually exclusive. The mid-section of the Book of Isaiah,²⁶ from which the verse is taken, is particularly well-suited to George W. Bush's version of prophecy, with its themes of comfort, renewal, optimism, universalism, and divine guidance. These are the sorts of themes that reappear in Bush's speeches to paint the picture of a comforting God. Isaiah 40 is a passage of comfort, and when Bush repeats it here it is meant to be soothing. The verse itself is taken from a song that begins, "Comfort, comfort my people" (Isa 40:1). Isaiah 40:26 says that God who knows each star by name, and Bush uses the line to suggest that God would be personally interested in each lost astronaut. Isaiah claims to know of God's actions in this verse, and by using this same verse as he does Bush also claims prophetically to be privy to God's point-of-view.

It is also telling that in the one instance in early 2003 in which Bush quotes the Bible directly and with attribution, he chooses the poetry of the most optimistic of the biblical prophets. The next week, at the Religious Broadcaster's Convention in Nashville, Bush returned to comforting words when referring to the loss, again citing hope:

Last week, our nation lost seven brave Americans - brave souls, six Americans and one Israeli citizen, aboard the space shuttle Columbia. Laura and I went to Houston. We were so honored to meet the families. There's no question in my mind they are finding strength and comfort because of your prayers and because of the Almighty God. In times of tragedy, faith assures us that death and suffering are not the final word; that love and hope are eternal. ("President's Remarks")

Like Isaiah, Bush says that it is in God that people can find comfort in trying times, and hope for the future. The sadness will pass and a new day will dawn; of this Bush is absolutely sure. It is the same sentiment that Isaiah 35 expresses, as strength and joy are

²⁶ This is again from the part of the book considered the work of Deutero-Isaiah.

restored through God's powerful action. Bush's particular quotation, Isa 40:26, is taken from a part of the Book of Isaiah in which the prophet often refers to creation, in this instance the creation of the heavens on the fourth day, in order to describe the renewal waiting for God's people.

As well as a symbol for renewal, creation is a myth of ultimate control, placing all humanity beneath the beneficence of the Great Creator. On the National Day of Prayer, Bush again referred to a God who is all-powerful: "We find that the plan of the Creator is sometimes very different from our own. Yet, we learn to depend on His loving will, bowing to purposes we don't always understand. Prayer can lead to a grateful heart, turning our minds to all the gifts of life and to the great works of God" ("President Delivers Remarks on the National"). This God is omnipotent, far above humanity, and humanity is dependent on his "loving will." Bush's most usual way of referring to the Judeo-Christian deity in his speeches is as "the Almighty," a term that casts God in terms of his power over creation (with a down-home southern ring). As he was for all the prophets, Bush's God is a creator: mighty, and very much in control. Like a prophet, Bush describes God to the people.

For the prophets, God's control extended from creation, through to the fortunes of the nation of Israel, and on into the future. When Bush says, "may God bless America," he is similarly expressing a belief in God's effect on the fortunes of America in the future. He is expressing a close relationship between God and the nation state, and that God has an active role in the nation's future. God's interest in Israel's future begins with the stories of Abraham and extends through the ministries of the prophets. Nathan

promises David that God will act through his line to secure the nation (2 Sam 7). Isaiah promises that the vindication of Israel and return from exile is God's design (40). Zechariah sees the rebuilding of the Temple of God as critical for the prosperity of Judah (6:9-15). These are all promises about the future of the state and God's role in it. The people can take comfort in the prophet's promises that the all-powerful God will act in the nation's future to bring about the nation's prosperity. Bush's speechwriters seem intent on creating a similar comfort for the American people, who can know that God is with them, and hope that God will bless them. It is the security of being a chosen people.

3.4 The Chosen People

The description of Americans as God's favoured in presidential speech is well-documented and the idea well-analysed in academic literature, intertwined with the myth of America's manifest destiny as a chosen nation, as described in Chapter One. Just as the depiction of Americans as God's chosen people has been generally commented upon in many studies of American civil religion, America's chosen nation status and its myth of manifest destiny have been particularly cited in past studies of presidential rhetoric. Coles defines manifest destiny in terms of America's chosen status when she analyses the speeches of Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush (404). Lewis describes Reagan's narratives of the nation as resting on its status as God's chosen (282). At the 1970 Presidential Prayer Breakfast, Richard Nixon himself said that "America would not be what it is today, the greatest nation in the world, if it were not a nation which had made progress under God" (qtd. in Henderson 525). The chosen nation

concept has been analysed in past studies as part of so-called priestly discourse, but the prophets also had a sense of Israel's special relationship with God. Indeed, the maintenance of that relationship was the prime concern of most prophets.

George W. Bush closed his 2003 State of the Union Address by saying, "May [God] guide us now. And may God continue to bless the United States of America" ("President Delivers 'State'"). One could dismiss this as simply a slight embellishment on a special occasion of Bush's most typical closing line, "God bless America." It is certainly the repetition of the idea of a loving God in control of the cosmos. But there is another phrase in this quotation that is reminiscent of the Bible. God's guidance is one of the most enduring motifs of the Hebrew Bible, from Abraham to Moses, through the kings and the prophets, and into the age of the return from Babylon to Judah. God is giving guidance as long as he, with or without a human intermediary, is giving orders, which is most of the time in the Hebrew Bible. The prophets in the Hebrew Bible are themselves the very embodiment of God's guidance, sent to tell the people God's wishes and restore them to good standing in God's eyes. If God indeed sends America guidance, and it is Bush who tells America so, then he again casts himself in a prophetic mold.

In the theology of the Bush speeches, God's guidance is compatible with the assumption that God controls America's fate, and that America holds a special place before God. God as guide is a theme in Bush's speech on the National Day of Prayer. Here he says that "America is a strong nation, in part because we know the limits of human strength. All strength must be guided by wisdom and justice and humility. We pray that God will grant us that wisdom, that sense of justice and that humility in our

current challenges, and in the years ahead” (“President Delivers Remarks on the National”). Such talk of “strength guided by wisdom” and “justice” beside “humility” is reminiscent of both Isaiah and Micah (Isa 5:21-23, Isa 30:1, Mic 6:8). Bush would be unlikely to ask for God’s guidance if he did not at least perceive it as a positive thing, and perhaps even as a reward. Isaiah also speaks of God’s guidance as repayment for the people’s good deeds: “if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong” (Is 58: 10-11). This again is the notion of divine retribution: by doing God’s will one will be rewarded with God’s guidance. God’s guidance is for his chosen people, who have a special relationship with him, a relationship protected by the prophets.

More often than not, Bush asks for God’s blessing on America as he closes a speech. Like God’s guidance, God’s blessing has implications for the divine quality of America’s own mission. Bush’s speeches in early 2003 have described God as creator, guide, and grantor of blessings, in other words, as a God in command of the world, as is the God of the Hebrew Bible, for whom the prophets preach. In the Hebrew Bible, the cost of being a chosen people is the obligation to follow God’s will and law as a community, and the benefit is the receipt of God’s blessings. It is these topics that will be discussed here next, as they appear in Bush’s speeches. Bush focuses upon Mosaic law, and thereby presents a vision of how America exists before God as a community. The prophets spoke on similar themes when they preached.

3.5 Love Your Neighbour as Yourself

The Books of Amos, Micah, and Isaiah all cite concern with the treatment of the underprivileged in the community, in other words, the treatment of one's disadvantaged neighbour. Similarly, George W. Bush has often issued a call toward "loving a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself" ("President Calls for Medical"). Bush used this phrase, or one nearly identical to it, thirty times between January and July of 2003, and it is a direct reference to both the Old and New Testaments. Bush never accredits the phrase "love your neighbour as yourself" as being an allusion to Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:39, or Luke 10:27, but he hardly needs to do so. The quotation is not an obscure one, it is the Golden Rule, and a reference likely to be understood by Americans, most of whom consider themselves to be Christian. By calling on Americans to love their neighbours, Bush joins the long line of biblical prophets who remind their audience of the laws that God has laid down for them. Although it is the prophecy of the Hebrew Bible that is of interest here, it is important to examine the Christian context as well as that of the Torah. It is as a Christian president communicating to a predominantly Christian audience that Bush delivers his message, and it is Torah law that is the basis of Hebrew prophecy.

Mosaic Law is the Torah rule that the community of Israel is to uphold in order to receive God's blessings, and falling from God's favour is a potential consequence of failing to live up to this law (2 Kgs 17:34). Like the law, the prophets are guides for the people, and preaching fidelity to the law is part of their missions. As disaster befalls the Israelites "the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying,

‘Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets’” (2 Kgs 17 13). In this passage, the prophets are confirmed as God’s servants of the law, charged with bringing the law to the people, and this is a role they play again and again throughout the Hebrew Bible. The prophets are, among other things, interpreters of the law, calling on people to match their behaviour to god’s expectations as the law describes them. The prohibition against worshipping other gods is an example of a precept repeatedly brought to the people by the prophets (Ex 20:3, 1 Sam 7:3, 1 Kgs 14:9, Jer 1:16, Hos 3:1).

Loving one’s neighbour is a direct command of the Levitical Holiness Code. Leviticus 19:18 reads, “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” The instructions of Leviticus are presented as the Lord’s commands for his people as relayed through Moses. According to the narrative rationale of the Bible, the directions and admonitions in Leviticus are those upon which the Mosaic Covenant rests, and thus it is adherence to these that determines whether blessings or curses are appropriate as described in Dueteronomy 28. But the Levitical Holiness Code lists literally hundreds of precepts that are to be followed, including many that sound bizarre to modern ears. Why is this law, of all of them, so prominent in Bush’s speeches?

The answer to this question, for a Christian president preaching to a largely Christian audience, is likely in the Christian canon. The very particular instruction to

love one's neighbour is repeated in the synoptic gospels, in three very similar passages.

The story appears in the Gospel of Mark as follows:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (12: 28-31)

Jesus is interpreting the law here, as did the Hebrew and Jewish prophets before him, by elevating two commandments above the others. The exchange in Matthew 22:35-40, in which the question is asked by a lawyer rather than a scribe, is very similar.²⁷ Matthew 22:40 concludes that "on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." According to Matthew, both law and prophecy can be encapsulated in this rule, and rest upon it. It is in the Christian canon that this Hebraic law, upon which prophecy is based, gains the highest status. Understanding the Christian perspective of the hierarchy of Levitical Laws sheds light on which parts of the Mosaic Code might be deemed most crucial for salvation as understood by Christian readers, such as Bush's White House speechwriters, or the majority of the American electorate. It is also true that while a predominantly Christian audience will not be thoroughly familiar with the Levitical Laws, this famous teaching of Jesus is likely to ring familiar.

²⁷ In Luke's version of this story, a lawyer instead asks what he can do to inherit eternal life (Lk 10:25). It is a query concerning the lawyer's own future, but the moment is used in the story in order to give instruction to the community; thus this answer applies to the salvation of all. More will be said about Luke 10: 25-37 below.

There is reason to think it has also rung familiar for some of Bush's speechwriters. This passage from Mark speaks of two laws: loving God and loving one's neighbour. Bush told the National Religious Broadcasters' Convention in Nashville in February that "many good people are serving their neighbors because they love their God" ("President's Remarks at Religious"). In other words, loving their God is something that good people do, just as they love their neighbours, in order to remain in right relationship with God. Here also is evidence that the author of the speech is aware of the gospel passages, as he or she has made here the same connection between the two objects of love: God and neighbour. An awareness of the passage²⁸ also suggests an awareness of the primacy of this Levitic Law in the Christian tradition.

The instruction to love one's neighbour as one would want to be loved is Mosaic Law, Christian rule, and a recurrent theme of biblical prophecy. It is the same instruction left by Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, all of whom, while not using these exact words, remind their audiences of this responsibility. Bush uses the phrase in the context of compassion and service, usually voluntary community service. Many prophets also preached a message of voluntary aid for the poor of the community. At the Broadcaster's Convention Bush connected the love of God and love of neighbour like a biblical prophet calling people to right action in order to bring about a right relationship with God. Even in the instances in which Bush cited loving one's neighbour without mentioning God, the genesis of the phrase is common knowledge for a Christian audience, an instruction that

²⁸ On 29 April 2003, George W. Bush also alludes to Luke's version of the same story: "When we see the wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not, America will not pass to the other side of the road" (Luke 10:25-37, "President Urges").

many people have heard before in what they would consider to be an authoritative setting. In other instances, Bush directly reminds his audience that such ideas are biblical:

In the Book of James, we are reminded that faith without works is dead.²⁹ By loving a neighbor as you'd like to be loved yourself, you prove every day that faith is alive. By your work and prayers, you have formed your own army, an army of compassion. And by living your faith, you bring hope to those who need it most. It is appropriate that the group sponsoring this breakfast has the name Nueva Esperanza - New Hope. Hope allows us to dream big, to pray bold, and to work hard for a better future. I want to thank you for your abiding hope, for your steadfast faith, and for your acts of love. I want to thank you for helping to keep prayer an important part of our national life. May God continue to invigorate you as you work to make this country a compassionate home for anybody [sic]. May God continue to invigorate you as you reach out to help a neighbor in need. This country needs your compassion. We need your works. We need your love. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America. ("President Delivers Remarks at Hispanic Prayer")

Love your neighbour, be faithful and hopeful under our powerful God: this is Bush's prophetic call. Bush uses biblical rhetoric here to double effect by calling his people to do God's will just as a prophet would, and by relying on a well-known quotation from the Bible to do so. In the Bible, God sends prophets to remind the chosen people of their responsibilities under Levitical Laws, the fulfillment of which is required in order to retain God's blessing. Bush reminds the chosen people of their responsibilities under the most famous Levitical law, just as he asks God's blessing on them.

²⁹ There is some irony in a Protestant reminding a Catholic audience of the Book of James' assertion of the necessity of good works with faith.

3.6 We are all Equal in the Eyes of the Almighty

George W. Bush often claims that all people are “equal in the eyes of the Almighty.” The phrase was used frequently in the first half of 2003, in such disparate contexts as the invasion of Iraq, youth volunteerism, supporting global peace, fighting terrorism, describing the similarity between the United States and her allies, and supporting the Christian faith (“President Calls for Strengthened,” “President Commemorates,” “President Speaks on Fighting,” “President Rallies Troops at Fort Hood,” “President Bush Meets with Prime Minister,” “President’s Remarks”). It has thus appeared as a truly versatile religious sentiment about the equality of people before God. Bush’s statement about equality before God is a statement about community, a key interest of many prophets. It is also another example of Bush speaking in God’s name, interpreting God’s perspective and bringing it to the crowd, in other words, speaking as a prophet.

Associating this particular kind of equality (the equality of all before God) with the morality of the American populace and its government is a common strategy in Bush’s speeches. Bush told those celebrating the USA Freedom Corps’s anniversary that “everybody is precious in the eyes of the Almighty. Everybody has worth. That would be a philosophy that drives this government” (“President Commemorates”). He went on to describe this axiom as an incentive for civic volunteering, such as the kind the USA Freedom Corps is meant to undertake. Bush similarly cites it as a reason to strive for global peace and generally doing good in the world. He spoke this phrase again when addressing the AIDS crisis in Africa (“President Speaks on Fighting”). In February of

2003 Bush spoke at a Republican retreat held at a country club in Virginia. Here he cited the equality of all before the Almighty as the reason that Republican policies look to do good in the world by reducing suffering through compassionate work (“President Says”³⁰). Like the prophets, Bush tells his audience that God’s will is that they be compassionate, and he shares his own particular perspective on his people’s morality. In this case, the people’s morality is tied to the godly ideals of compassion and freedom.

In February 2003, Bush delivered a speech full of biblical and Christian references to the Religious Broadcaster’s Convention at the Opryland Hotel. In it he again linked the equality of all before God and compassion:

I've set a great goal for America. We must apply the great compassion of our people to the deepest problems of this country. This country is blessed with virtually millions of good-hearted volunteers who work daily miracles in the lives of their fellow citizens. And today I ask our religious broadcasters, those who reach into every corner of America, to rally the armies of compassion so that we can change America one heart, one soul at a time...Religious faith not only comforts, it challenges. Faith teaches that every person is equal in God's sight, and must be treated with equal dignity here on earth. (“President’s Remarks”)

It is in the context of America’s goals of compassion that Bush repeats that all are equal in God’s eyes. Bush is very clearly making a connection between God, good people, good works, and the equality of all. This is the scheme Bush delivers for the perfect America, in which the community is driven by faith in good to do good work. It is the function of a biblical prophet to tell the people how they can maintain a right relationship with God, and Bush is doing the same here. Everyone is equal and must be treated with

³⁰ The full title of this webpage is “President Says ‘It is a Moment of Truth’ for UN.” The impending invasion of Iraq was cast as a humanitarian mission within this speech, using this phrase, among other rhetorical devices, to do so.

dignity and compassion as per God's wishes. As a prophet, Bush offers an interpretation of God's will. Linked to the aim of compassion this interpretation resounds like prophetic statement.

As with loving one's neighbour as oneself, this equality of all before God is also about community, another key element of Hebrew prophecy. The equality that Bush is preaching is only meaningful in community, where two or more people can be equated. Bush describes the equality in terms of the worth of each individual before God, and the responsibility of each individual to do God's will. If the responsibility is the same for all individuals, who are all equal to one another, then the responsibility for remaining in right relationship with God is in fact a corporate one. When the biblical prophets cried out their forecasts, it was with respect to the entire community. Even when prophets spoke to the king, it was with the understanding that the king represented the people before God, and his actions had repercussions for the community at large, often into the generations.

Another element of Hebrew prophecy is the opposition of the righteous and the damned, and Bush uses this phrase about equality to make a similar opposition. This notion of equality of all before God, which at face value means equality and suggests fraternity, is often used in Bush's speeches as a means of defining us and them, our community versus some other entity. Rallying troops in early January, Bush said that terrorists "don't value innocent life like we do. In America, we say everybody is precious, everybody counts. Everybody is equal in the eyes of the Almighty" ("President Rallies Troops at Fort Hood"). Thus the context of this statement about universal

equality within the community is a lack of moral equality without, the righteous against the damned. Bush interprets God's perspective in order to deliver his own oracle against foreigners. He denounces foreign terrorists by saying that they are not acting in accord with God's understanding of the equality of all. In the Hebrew Bible it is the prophet who interprets God's point-of-view, and denounces those who violate God's will. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Nahum all deliver oracles against foreign nations that denounce their practices and promise their destruction.

3.7 Freedom is God's Gift to Humanity

Another recurrent message of Bush's speeches is that freedom is not America's gift to the world, but God's gift to humanity. On the 28th of January, 2003, he told Congress that "the liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity" ("President Delivers 'State'"). This idea of freedom as God's universal gift fast became a favourite of speechwriters, used twenty more times between that State of the Union Address and the first of July 2003, eleven of those instances between the State of the Union Address and the invasion of Iraq seven weeks later. Bush repeated this blessing even in speeches that focused on tax cuts and economic growth rather than the state of the union or military advancement ("President Calls for Tax Relief," "President Discusses National"). The day after the State of the Union speech, Bush connected this gift with the equality of all before God by arguing that "if everybody matters, if every life counts, then we should hope everybody has the great God's [sic] gift of freedom" ("President Calls for Strengthened"). God's gift of freedom to all again reinforces God's

power as understood by the prophets, and the universality of this blessing is not unlike the universality found in some of Isaiah's prophetic works.

The prophets' ideas of blessings from God naturally owe something to the Torah. The blessings of Deuteronomy 28, those promised if the Hebrews followed God's will, have primarily to do with wealth and warfare, but some of the curses would appear to refer to a position of lost liberty:

Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all the day, and it shall not be in your power to prevent it. A nation which you have not known shall eat upon the fruit of your ground and all of your labors; and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually. (32-33)

The curses threaten an exile into a foreign land, again a loss of national sovereignty, in which sons and daughters will "go into captivity" (28:41). This is an expression of divine retribution, in which infidelity to the law will result in future curses upon the community. Several biblical prophets speak of a similar type of freedom (or lack thereof). Isaiah says that the Lord "has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison³¹ to those who are bound" (61:1). Jeremiah delivers a missive from Yahweh that no one should enslave a fellow Hebrew (Jer 34:8). Zechariah delivers an oracle concerning the day of the Lord, in which the captives of Zion are to be set free (9:11). These prophets present freedom as a gift from God.

Bush is once again interpreting God's viewpoint by claiming freedom as a gift from God, and such interpretation is the work of a biblical prophet. Bush is also interpreting his own people's beliefs. "Here's what America and Americans believe - that

³¹ or "opening of the eyes" (Oxford RSV)

freedom is not America's gift to the world, that freedom is the Almighty's gift to each and every individual who lives in the world" ("President Visits Arkansas"). "We believe in freedom. We believe freedom is universal. We believe freedom is – is [sic] a gift from the Almighty God for every person, regardless of their race or their religion" ("President Visits Soldiers"). Bush is stressing the shared beliefs of the community, just as the equality of all before God and the relation between loving God and loving neighbour are about community. Both the biblical prophets and Bush have messages for the community about God's wishes for them.

The universality of this blessing is also striking. "We believe that liberty is God's gift to every individual on the face of the earth," said Bush to American troops in the Persian Gulf ("President Talks"). At every opportunity in which Bush preached God's blessing of liberty, he stressed this universality, but usually the more particular object of this universalism was Iraq. Bush says that "whether you're Sunni or Shia or Kurd or Chaldean or Assyrian or Turkoman or Christian or Jew or Muslim, no matter what your faith, freedom is God's gift to every person in every nation" ("President Discusses the Future"). Bush's universal message is a way of bridging American beliefs and an action taken on the Iraqi population. Isaiah³² is also a prophet interested in the extension of God's reach beyond his own borders. He called Cyrus of Persia the bringer of freedom, a messiah for the people of Judah (Isa 44:28, 45:1). Judah itself is to be a "light to the nations" (Isa 42:6, 49:6). Isaiah crosses national boundaries to extend his prophetic message by calling on Israel to look outward, and other nations to look toward Israel's

³² Deutero-Isaiah

example. Bush asks the same thing, that America extend itself to Iraq, and that Iraq follow America's example.

3.8 Evil and the Day of Reckoning

Not all of Bush's words are comforting or affirming. He also speaks very directly of the dangers of evil and the threat of America's enemies, and here the case for Bush as biblical prophet becomes even more compelling. As stated above, past studies have tended to reserve the word "prophetic" for those rare instances when the president publicly judges his own people. But as Chapter Two stated, many Hebrew prophets warned of coming dangers, harshly judged foreign nations, yet preached the preservation of a deserving remnant. In the first half of 2003, Bush did these things, as well as make clear to his audience the difference between good and evil as personified by nation states.

After the quotation of Isaiah 40:26, the most direct allusion to the prophetic books that appears in Bush's 2003 speeches is what he calls in his State of the Union Address Iraq's coming "days of reckoning" ("President Delivers 'State'"). This is another prime example of Bush drawing on the prophets of the Hebrew Bible.³³ The phrase "day of reckoning" is found in the New International Version of the Bible in Isaiah and Hosea, and it is akin to the RSV phrase "day of the Lord." The Revised Standard Version's alternate translation of the same passage as the "day of punishment" indicates the violent connotations of the phrase. Isaiah 10:3 (NIV) reads, "What will you do on the day of

³³ The day of reckoning according to Bush is not for his own people, but for his enemies. See Chapter Four below.

reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?" It is clearly a warning and condemnation, and the day of reckoning is a day of disaster. Hosea 5:9 (NIV) promises that "Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning" and Hosea 9:7 that "The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand." The days of reckoning are obviously a threat, and to use such a phrase, so similar to "the day of the Lord," is to imply God's hand in that threat.

The phrase "day of reckoning" invites a connection between Bush's speech and the biblical theme of apocalypse, but upon closer inspection Bush's rhetoric actually more resembles the eschatology of the prophets than the later apocalypticism described in the Books of Daniel or John. Although bearing some similarities, there is a key difference between the new world order heralded by the Hebrew prophets and that of the apocalyptic mystics some centuries later. Many prophets expected a future in which the Day of Yahweh would bring catastrophic punishment to the wicked and a new kingdom for the chosen and subsequently an era of prosperous and peaceful statehood. This was a nationalist vision for the here and now that the prophets offered, and it did not require the end of all time. On the other hand, the apocalyptic expectations of late Judaism and early Christianity for an existence after the present state of affairs changes are much more otherworldly than the one that the pre-exilic prophets envisioned. While Bush's speeches draw on a tradition that looks to the future based on a privileged understanding of America, these speeches do not describe a heavenly outcome, but rather one related to

statehood and worldly prosperity. Bush promises a day of reckoning, and soon, but he does not promise a supernatural existence afterward:

We cannot predict the final day of the Iraqi regime, but I can assure you, and I assure the long-suffering people of Iraq, there will be a day of reckoning for the Iraqi regime, and that day is drawing near...the day of Iraq's liberation will also be a day of justice...Our enemy in this war is the Iraqi regime, not the people who have suffered under it. As we bring justice to a dictator, today we started bringing humanitarian aid in large amounts to an oppressed land. ("President Rallies Troops at MacDill")

What Bush promises the Iraqi populace after Saddam Hussein has been vanquished is humanitarian aid that is meant to keep this body and this soul together, not a new world in heaven. In this way it is message like that of the biblical prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, delivered in a style reminiscent of these prophets.

Another motif of biblical prophecy that seems to have an echo in Bush's speeches is the idea of the preservation of a deserving remnant. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all promise the survival of a righteous remnant after the day of reckoning has come and gone. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel tend to describe the remnant as the worthy and repentant of Israel (1 Kgs 19:30, Jer 31:7, Ezek 18:30). Micah, on the other hand, describes the remnant as the weak: "In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame, and gather those who have been driven away, and those who have been afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off a strong nation" (4:6-7). Through his rhetoric of loving neighbours abroad, the equality of all, and the mission to bring freedom, Bush describes those he calls "ordinary" Iraqis as the oppressed who will be saved after the great day of destruction has done away with the oppressor. Alternately, one could cast America as the righteous remnant of this narrative

between good and evil: righteous Americans will prevail and outlast the evil that threatens them in the here and now, from within and without.

Bush also makes frequent use of the opposites good and evil, a pair of terms that is hardly foreign to the Hebrew Bible. In the Garden of Eden grows the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it is knowing good and evil from it that the serpent promises the woman, and it is this knowledge that affronts God and those around him (Gen 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22). Early in the Bible good and evil are put forth as a pair, and associated with both knowledge and punishment. Samuel tells his audience that they should turn back to God despite the evil they have done (1 Sam 12:20). Nathan tells David that he has dealt with Uriah in a way that was evil in God's sight (2 Sam 12:9).

Just as "good" and "evil" are binary opposites, distinct and separate states that do not overlap, so there is no room for compromise or middle ground in Bush's depiction America and its enemies. He declares that "either you're with us, or you're with the enemy; either you're with those who love freedom, or you're with those who hate innocent life" ("President Rallies Troops at Fort Hood"). This sort of stance aids in keeping the enemy separate from self, a necessity of separating the evil from the good in the most simple way, where the distinction can be most difficult to argue against. If it is axiomatic that the enemy is separate, and it goes without saying that we are good, then the designation of evil is easy to make.

References to evil can be found in most of the prophetic books. Isaiah calls on the people to cease to do evil before God, warns those who confuse good with evil, and promises that God will punish evil (1:16, 5:20, 13:11). Evil can also appear in the

prophetic tradition as a curse. Jeremiah reports that the Lord has promised, “out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land” (Jer 1:14). “This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this waistcloth, which is good for nothing” (Jer 13:10). Evil describes the sin of wrong-doing, the people who do wrong, and the unpleasantness of retribution. Evil is a rejected companion, and evil is also something done to those who deserve punishment.

The clear demarcation between good and evil is hardly foreign to the Hebrew Bible, and the same clear demarcation in Bush’s speeches is one of the traits that tie him to biblical prophecy. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nahum, and Zephaniah all offer their condemnation of the foreign lands. These prophets did so in response to foreign military threat, and so their oracles against foreign nations match their own perceptions of the world and presumably found resonance with their audiences. Likewise, it is this tendency to declare the evil and the good and separate them from one another that allows Bush to maintain some consistency in his message, particularly with respect to loving one’s neighbours. For the prophets the enemies were other peoples who worshipped other gods and declared war on Israel. For Bush, the enemies are terrorists and the Iraqi leadership, on whom he has declared war.

Bush’s characterization of the enemy as evil is a three-part proposition: firstly to make clear that the enemy is qualitatively different, secondly that the enemy’s morality is perverse, and thirdly that the enemy deserves to be treated according to this perversion. Bush does just this, using the same phrases that helped to cast him as a prophet.

According to Bush, “in America, we say everybody is precious, everybody counts. Everybody is equal in the eyes of the Almighty. That’s not the way the enemy thinks. They don’t value innocent life. They’re nothing but a bunch of cold-blooded killers, and that’s the way we’re going to treat them” (“President Rallies Troops at Fort Hood”). Using his familiar reference to the equality of all in God’s eyes as the litmus test, Bush says that “they” are different, “they” are degenerate in their morality, and “they” will be treated accordingly. He has taken recourse in the Almighty in his rhetoric, so presumably the Almighty approves of Bush’s impending “treatment.” Bush says that America’s enemies “kill in a name of a false ideology, based upon hatred” (“President Calls for Strengthened”). Spoken to the largely Judeo-Christian audience, a declaration of evil is an attempt to impose a negative definition that leaves no room for argument.

Just as it describes America as blessed and chosen, the White House took pains in 2003 to define those it considered to be enemies as “evil.” “As we continue our struggle against people who are evil and who would want to hurt America, that we can do so not only through the use of our great military, but we can do so by doing some good in our communities, in order to fight evil” (“President Calls for Medical”). Like prophets who condemned the apostates inside and outside the nation of Israel, Bush’s evil is found inside and outside America. The struggle against those who mean America harm is a fight against “evil,” a thing abhorred by God. Speaking in Florida in April of 2003, Bush said:

In the early stages of this war, the world is getting a clearer view of the Iraqi regime and the evil at its heart. In the ranks of that regime are men

whose idea of courage is to brutalize unarmed prisoners.³⁴ They wage attacks while posing as civilians. They use real civilians as human shields. They pretend to surrender, then fire upon those who show them mercy. This band of war criminals has been put on notice: the day of Iraq's liberation will also be a day of justice. ("President Rallies Troops at McDill")

The phrase "day of justice" is of course reminiscent of the biblical days of reckoning, days of judgment, and days of the Lord. America will bring God's gift of liberty to Iraq on the day of justice and banish the evil personified by those who carry out the most despicable crimes.

Along these same lines, Bush also took pains to compare the Iraqi situation with that of the Nazi Holocaust. In defense of the imminent invasion, Bush quoted academics who were of that mind: "As the Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, said this week, 'We have a moral obligation to intervene where evil is in control. Today, that place is Iraq'" ("President Discusses Iraq").³⁵ Coming before the invasion, this is delivered as a public warning against the dangers of evil, a pronouncement similar to the warnings of the biblical prophets. During a state visit to Poland after hostilities in Iraq had begun, Bush said that he visited Auschwitz that day "to remind people that we must confront evil when we find it" ("Interview").

There is precedent for such an attitude in biblical prophecy as well, in the tradition of oracles against foreign nations, as found in the books of Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. When Amos lists the transgressions of foreign nations, he says that the Ammonites will be punished "because they have ripped up women with child in Gilead,

³⁴ Bush was likely referring to the Abu Gharib Prison.

³⁵ Wiesel, Elie, "Peace Isn't Possible in Evil's Face." Los Angeles Times, 11 March, 2003.

that they might enlarge their border” (1:13). The Ammonites are guilty of heinous war crimes and are therefore not worthy of God’s mercy. Bush casts Iraq in a similar light: “International human rights groups have catalogued other methods used in the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape.³⁶ If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning” (President Delivers ‘State’’). In Bush’s speeches the goodness of the United States is contrasted with the evil of Iraq.

As the invasion of Iraq drew nearer, this comparison used earlier with the World Trade Center terrorists was extended to Saddam Hussein, and contrasted with America and her allies in the invasion. Bush explains that he has “great compassion and concern for the Iraqi people. These are people who have been tortured and brutalized, people who have been raped because they may disagree with Saddam Hussein. He’s a brutal dictator. In this country and in Australia people believe that everybody has got worth, everybody counts, that everybody is equal in the eyes of the Almighty” (“President Bush Meets with the Prime Minister”). There is again a clear line drawn between the righteous and the unrighteous, those with us and those against. Bush calls prophetically on his audience to abhor what God abhors, to see clearly the evil that surrounds them all and to denounce it.

3.10 Conclusion

Bush casts himself solidly in the role of prophet, despite how his delivery of comforting words and a positive view of America would, by previous definitions, seem to

³⁶ See also “President Discusses Iraq in Radio Address” for near-verbatim.

disqualify him from a prophetic standing in civil religion. He addresses the people of his nation in the name of an all-powerful God, interpreting for them God's will and offering a view of the future. Like the Prophet Isaiah, Bush comforts a chosen people by calling on God's guidance. Like the Prophet Amos, he calls for compassion, and Bush bases this call on the Torah law requiring love of one's neighbour. Bush describes the community as standing together before God, all members in equality with each other, just as the prophets were keenly interested in the community's standing before God. Again like the Prophet Isaiah, Bush brings a strong message of near universal salvation as he advocates God's blessing of freedom for all but those who do evil in God's sight. For those evil men, he forecasts a day of reckoning, yet a remnant of the deserving will flourish after the evil is destroyed. Bush displays many public characteristics of the biblical prophets, and solidifies these connections further by appealing to prophetic biblical rhetoric.

The work of this chapter has been to show how strongly Bush attaches himself to the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible through his speeches. The work of the next chapter is to show how Bush uses this same rhetoric to tailor his prophetic message to fit his own particular political, economic, and social circumstances. He accomplishes this feat by directly contradicting some of the most important features of biblical prophecy, as well as creating some themes that are all his own. This sort of juxtaposition can be interpreted as a use of the rhetorical power of the Bible, as Bush trades on the rhetorical authority of the prophets, often to conclude with messages that are not classically prophetic.

Bush's mixture of the prophetic with the non-prophetic and the anti-prophetic still has its own logic. Bush's speeches create a narrative about America in the world and under God, and Bush does not include any prophetic message that might violate that narrative. The omissions and contradictions that one can find upon a comparison of Bush and the prophets can be explained as Bush's refusal to include messages that contradict this narrative. Bush does not seem to have the luxury of regularly contradicting himself, as the prophets are now forgiven for contradictory oracles, but must instead remain faithful to a single vision of America. Not surprisingly, he chooses a description of the nation that fits well into the policies of his party, the economic and social situation of his country, and the tradition of American civil religion.

Chapter Four: Bush the American Prophet

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed that many of George W. Bush's messages have biblical inspiration, and more specifically that his presentation of these messages casts him in the role of a biblical prophet. This chapter explores how Bush develops his prophecy toward his unique conclusions, thereby creating his own modern, American prophetic ministry. By entering into his rhetoric as a biblical prophet but then delivering his particular messages with that biblical rhetoric, Bush simply follows the example of all the biblical prophets. All prophets speak publicly in God's name, calling on the people to maintain a right relationship with God, but each biblical prophet has a different sense of the details, and his prophecy reflects his own time, place, and circumstances. Bush's speeches create their unique prophetic message by picking selectively through the prophetic works of the Bible and subsequently tailoring them to Bush's needs. While his message is only partly consistent (and thus partly inconsistent) with the ministries of the prophets, it is remarkably consistent inside of itself. Bush delivers a prophetic message familiar to a Christian audience by way of its association with the biblical prophetic tradition, yet a message sure to be palatable to the wealthiest and most militarily powerful audience on earth. Thus Bush's particular brand of prophecy can be viewed as a new, American prophecy.

While doing so much to attach himself to the tradition of biblical prophecy in his speeches, Bush concurrently contradicts some of the most identifiable and enduring

messages of the prophets. He never chides his good and right audience. There are no reprimands, and therefore no calls to repentance. While he has called on the language of the prophets of social justice, Bush never scolds the wealthy for neglecting the poor. Bush warns of a coming doom, but it is not for his own people, as it so often was for the prophets, but for foreigners. Bush's vision of global justice seeks to both punish and save foreign nations, just as the Book of Isaiah contains these contradictory perspectives. Bush presents these ideas in terms of the same religious language that was shown in the last chapter to establish him as a biblical prophet.

It is true that in some areas Bush wanders so far from biblical prophets, by omitting some of their most memorable themes or even contradicting them, that he seems not a prophet at all. These omissions and contradictions would indeed be the very things to disqualify Bush from being called a prophet, according to the definitions of previous studies. But even in these instances, Bush continues to speak publicly in God's name, deliver his own interpretation of God's will, and prescribe a means to right relationship with God. These are such important traits of prophecy that they give pause to any thoughts of an immediate dismissal of Bush's role as prophet. All of the biblical prophets preach of God's wishes, but on the details of those wishes and how the people of God should fulfill them they often disagree with one another. Hosea is deeply concerned with proper cultic worship, while showing little interest in social justice. Amos is deeply concerned with social justice, while showing little interest in proper cultic worship. Jeremiah mourns the inevitable loss of his nation state as God punishes Israel, but also heralds a new covenant. The Book of Isaiah is considered notoriously schizophrenic for

its oracles for and against hope, for and against foreign nations, for and against the monarchy. No two prophets were alike, yet all followed in a prophetic tradition of bringing their interpretation of God's will to the chosen people.

Bush possesses so many of the key attributes of a biblical prophet that to disqualify him from the title on the basis of his omissions and contradictions of biblical prophecy is unconvincing, not to mention uninteresting. This present chapter attempts a response with more nuance: Bush is a particular kind of prophet, tailored to his time and place, just as every prophet in the Hebrew Bible possessed a certain set of characteristics that were not completely identical to those of his predecessors, nor were they to be repeated again in any other prophet. Bush is a new American prophet, using biblical rhetoric and biblical models within his unique set of ideological, economic and social constraints.

In his rhetoric, Bush has developed not a tension within but a revision of biblical prophecy, one that produces a new prophetic ministry based on a self-consistent message. He tells his audience that they are good because they love their neighbours, and that they have a holy obligation to make those neighbours in their own image of goodness. He tells them that God is pleased with the righteousness of Americans, and seeks only to bless them in their right ways of freedom and equality, and comfort them when disaster falls. He tells them that God is displeased with the evil of America's enemies, and that God will use America to punish evil and make the world right, and more like America. While these messages may not all be common in biblical prophecy, and some even run opposed to parts of the prophetic tradition, all of these ideas are entirely compatible with

each other. Bush uses the familiar mold of the prophetic tradition to create a coherent theology that well matches the political and economic realities of contemporary America. In this way, he is like any other Hebrew prophet.

4.2 A Righteous People Please Their God

George W. Bush is a great booster of the American people, and he often ties his affirmation of them to a specific set of ideals:

We live in a great country because we believe in serving concepts greater than ourselves. We live in a great country because we believe in values and ideals from which we will not - we will not vary [sic]. We believe strongly in freedom. We believe in peace. We believe in human dignity. We believe in the worth of each individual. We are a great country, and I'm proud to be the President of this great country. Thank you all for coming. May God bless. ("President Bush Pleased")

Recognizable in this quotation are some of the ideas that were shown in the previous chapter to be used by Bush in his role as prophet. The values of America, the gift of freedom, and the equality of all are repeated here, although missing in this particular quotation is the divine blessing that they have had elsewhere. This is a cheering and boastful passage, and not at all uncommon for a Bush speech. He usually assures his audience that they are doing well, as they do the things that he has said please God. As usual, he closes his remarks by asking God's blessing on his audience.

Absent from Bush's speeches are the reproach and threat, the forecasts of doom, and the calls to repentance so common in biblical prophecy. Despite the many ways in which he mimics the prophets, Bush is careful never to scold his audience, and never to tell them that they have failed to fulfill God's wishes. That sort of pessimistic,

judgmental, scolding talk is simply not part of his message. This is hardly surprising, as surveys of presidential rhetoric rarely find evidence of gloomy or chiding speeches. Bill Clinton occasionally made remarks calling on America to strive toward helping the poor, but even these remarks were prefaced with praise for the good that America had done (Coles 406). It would be most remarkable if Bush approached his public speeches with anything less than a happy, affirming description of the populace.

Although such joyous celebration is the thematic opposite of most of biblical prophecy, it finds precedent in the middle of the Book of Isaiah.³⁷ Isaiah's enthusiasm for God and optimism for Israel is evident in 49:13: "Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains into singing!" Isaiah's joyous passages are in anticipation of a national renewal for Israel. Bush likewise chooses not to preach a negative message. This present chapter will repeatedly show that disparaging comments about America would conflict with Bush's other prophetic messages about loving neighbours, good and evil, and equality and liberty.

The Books of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Zephaniah all promise a coming destruction for their audience, Israel (Amos 5:18-20, Isa 13:6-9, 58:13, Jer 46:10, Ezek 13:5, 30:3, Joel 2:28-32, Zeph 1). The Day of the Lord comes from a wrathful and vengeful God, and will be delivered upon the sinful nation. Just as nowhere in Bush's speeches can one find any condemnation of the American populace, nor can one find any hint of impending doom, deserved or otherwise. Such negative utterances simply have no place in Bush's characterization of America. Rather than a coming destruction for

³⁷ Once again, this is the work of Deutero-Isaiah.

America, Bush forecasts only a successful trajectory as God's chosen. Bush may warn of terrorist threats, but he assures his audience that America will rise to this challenge, and the evil enemy be vanquished. Again, while this puts Bush at odds with many prophets, it puts him in league with others. Nathan promises David an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7). The second half of the Book of Isaiah is full of promises of a restored and prosperous Israel.

Instead, Bush says that America's enemies are the ones to receive the day of doom. Recall that the "day of reckoning" is a rhetorical device that Bush uses more than once in the first half of 2003. But where the biblical prophets delivered such warnings to their home constituency, Bush hurls them outward, sparing his domestic audience any accusation or threat. On 2 January 2003 Bush said that Saddam Hussein must understand that "his day of reckoning is coming" ("President Focuses"). The day of reckoning is a date with destiny for the evil foreigner Saddam Hussein, not a date for Americans. The biblical record is full of warnings of the coming destruction of Israel (Amos 7-9, Isa 28-32, Ezek 1-24, the Book of Joel), but there are also a great number of prophetic oracles against foreign nations (Amos 1-2, Jer 25-38, 46-51, Ezek 25-32, The Book of Nahum, Zeph 2). Bush manages to convey dissatisfaction with the Iraqi regime well enough, and many prophets were angry with nations that they perceived to be enemies of Israel.

The biblical prophets who preached care of others did so by expressing disappointment in their audiences' interest in helping the poor, but Bush does not choose this route. Instead, he uses the idea of loving one's neighbours to reflect America's goodness to itself. He uses the phrase in anecdotes about personal service, in which he

praises an individual for volunteering. These are “feel-good stories,” used to illustrate how moral and right America is. Loving one’s neighbour is God’s wish, and America fulfills it. In praise of volunteers Bush says, “we’ve got millions of fellow citizens who are willing to love a neighbor just like they would like to be loved themselves” (“President Discusses Tax”). According to Bush’s speeches, Americans are good, and they do God’s will by loving their neighbours. It is America’s enemies who have failed to reach God’s standards.

When Americans serve the ideals of freedom, a gift God wishes for everyone, and fight against evil, a condition that God abhors, then their goodness and nobility also extend on into their deaths. According to Bush, God’s comfort and grace extend to the families of those American soldiers who have given their lives to spread God’s gift of freedom:

No one who falls will be forgotten by this grateful nation. We honor their service to America and we pray their families will receive God's comfort and God's grace. These are sacrifices in a high calling -- the defense of our nation and the peace of the world. Overcoming evil is the noblest cause and the hardest work. And the liberation of millions is the fulfillment of America's founding promise. The objectives we've set in this war are worthy of America, worthy of all the acts of heroism and generosity that have come before. (“President Discusses Operation”)

American soldiers are called to sacrifice their lives in an act described as noble and, as before, the inclusion of the name of God in this passage implies God’s sanction. Also as before, this rallying speech reflects the great esteem in which Bush holds America, for which only the greatest actions are worthy. America has been built by the heroism and generosity of Americans, specifically Americans at war.

4.3 Good Neighbours

Bush's biblical messages portray a hopeful America. He says that the "best way for America to be a hopeful place, the best way for America to be a – [sic] the land of opportunity we want it to be is for neighbor to love neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. It is that spirit of community" ("President Visits Arkansas"). Loving one's neighbour is a sentiment about community, and community was a concern of most of the biblical prophets as well. In this sense Bush's community extends farther than most of the prophets, to groups outside of national borders, but he does not quite extend an absolute universality. Bush does answer the questions of who is an American neighbour, how Americans are to love their neighbours, and just how well Americans love their neighbours in a way that remains consistent with his overall rhetoric.

A Hebrew prophet's definition of neighbour would likely rest on the Torah definition. Recall that Lev 19:18 reads, "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself." By the words "the sons of your own people" it appears that the Hebraic law lays forth guidelines for dealing with fellow Israelites, but says nothing of foreigners. The verse follows other, similarly specific admonitions, such as, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbour, lest you bear sin because of him" (Lev 19:17). Here in the Torah the word neighbour appears synonymous with the word brother. There is no sense that the Levitical neighbour is a universal neighbour, and indeed the act of specifying kin implies that the rule extends no farther than the Israelites themselves. Given the typical prophet's disposition toward foreign nations,

which were seen as either oppressors or heathens, this seems the most common expression of the prophetic view of the neighbour.

Since Bush's speeches address a primarily Christian domestic audience, it is worth again considering the Christian perturbation on this question. Neither Matthew nor Mark add anything to the definition of neighbour in their gospels to suggest the Levitical definition be expanded. But Luke's version of the story pursues the question of "who is my neighbour?" to a different conclusion than does Leviticus. In Luke's gospel, Jesus' response to the question of who is my neighbour is the parable commonly known as the Good Samaritan.³⁸ In this famous story, a man is stripped and beaten by robbers and is left for dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Neither the priest nor the Levite who see him lying there help him, but instead a Samaritan, who is not of the robbed man's religious association, compassionately rescues him and sees to his recovery. Jesus concludes the story by telling the lawyer to be a good neighbour just as the man who showed mercy was a good neighbour, and thus he might gain eternal life (Luke 10:37). Where this quotation in Leviticus refers to a very particular kind of neighbour, one who is clansman, or kin, Luke's rendition seems to indicate a wider definition.

To what definition of neighbour does Bush subscribe? In one speech Bush says that the "true strength of America is the fact that we've got millions of fellow citizens who are willing to love a neighbor just like they would like to be loved themselves. That's the real strength of this country, because we're a deep and compassionate nation. When we see suffering, whether it be here at home or abroad, we care" ("President Discusses

³⁸ On 29 April 2003, George W. Bush alludes to this very story: "When we see the wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not, America will not pass to the other side of the road" ("President Urges").

Tax”). Here, Bush clearly describes America’s neighbours as lying beyond America’s political borders. This suggests that, at least under some circumstances, modern international borders do not limit the definition of neighbour. As earlier stated, parts of the Book of Isaiah express a kind of universalism in his zeal for Israel to be a light to other nations, but overall this universalism is somewhat of an anomaly in the prophetic books.

Bush even tries to use this phrase in connection with the military, drawing attention to the outer limits of the neighbourhood. In his remarks at the Jacksonville Naval Base, Bush uses his imperative in association with military duty: “Not only work hard to be a good soldier and sailor, but also love somebody like you’d like to be loved yourself” (“President Salutes”). Bush substitutes “somebody” for “neighbor,” which is interesting in itself, as if any one person at all could fulfill the obligation, but the biblical allusion is still clear. It is an odd two-part command to be a good soldier and love your neighbour, given that, in other speeches, Bush has encouraged Americans to see their neighbours outside of America’s borders as well as within. The professional business of soldiering is killing, and death in military conflict is a fate few would associate with a love of neighbour.

Bush is very careful in this and other speeches to draw clear lines between America, its allies, and its enemies. It can be inferred from the many characterizations of terrorists and the leaders of Iraq as “evil” that Bush does not mean to call them neighbours. Bush draws no clean lines in his rhetoric about loving one’s neighbours that would disqualify any one group, but his description of Saddam Hussein hardly leaves a

doubt as to his standing with a righteous America. Bush joked that “in my judgment you don't contain Saddam Hussein. You don't hope that therapy will somehow change his evil mind” (“President Calls for Strengthened”). It does not sound as if Bush is interested in reaching out to Saddam Hussein as a neighbour.

Bush has his own special prescriptions for how Americans should love their neighbours. The love-your-neighbour allusion in Bush's speeches is frequently used in encouragement of volunteerism. Bush issues the “universal call” to love a neighbour in support of volunteer programmes (“President Calls for Action,” “President Bush Pushes”). According to Bush, compassion “doesn't even require a government program” (“President Calls for Medical,” “President Calls for Strengthened”). The Bush Administration insists that while faith-based groups receive federal funds, they “should not be forced to change their character or compromise their prophetic role” (“President's Remarks”). This is care for neighbours centered on religious feeling, which would not be a misplaced idea in biblical prophecy. But Bush's use of the maxim to love one's neighbour may also be a way to excuse the state from providing social services for the poor. A particular volunteerism that Bush extols in his speeches is faith-based volunteerism. Faith-based programmes are controversial because funding for religious groups that provide social services has the potential to muddy the separation of church and state, and because these programmes threaten the further abdication of the state's role in social services.

Bush connects the idea of loving one's neighbour to a sense of mission within America. He describes the USA Freedom Corps³⁹ as having a commission to "convince our fellow citizens to love one another just like we like to be loved" ("President Commemorates"). The word "convince" adds a missionary flavour to the sentiment. Loving one's neighbour is presented as a philosophy that one should not only hold personally, but also actively persuade others to follow. Similarly, Bush told the 2002 World Series champions, the Anaheim Angels, to "use the spotlight that you've achieved to encourage our fellow citizens to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself" ("President Congratulates").

Bush also uses this phrase about loving one's neighbour to express a particular view on the personal responsibilities of individuals. When praising a hospice worker at a meeting of southern small-business people, Bush says that "in a reasonable society, not only do you have a responsibility to make right choices, but you've got a responsibility to help somebody who hurts, to make somebody's life a little brighter, to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself" ("President Meets"). The notion of personal responsibility is likely meant to resonate with self-made entrepreneurs, and that this notion can be appended to the dictum of loving your neighbour suggests that the Bush speechwriters view this biblical reference as pliable. At an election fundraising dinner at the Ritz-Carlton in Greensboro, Georgia, in June of 2003 Bush said:

In a compassionate society, people respect one another, and take responsibility for the decisions they make. We're changing the culture of

³⁹The Freedom Corps is a council established by the Bush White House and chaired by Bush himself that coordinates volunteers with social causes, and works with faith-based initiatives ("Overview").

America from one that has said, if it feels good, do it, and if you've got a problem, blame somebody else, to a culture in which each of us understand we're responsible for the decisions we make in life -- that each of us are [sic] responsible -- that if you're fortunate enough to be a mother or father, you're responsible for the well-being of that child. And if you're griping about the quality of education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. A responsibility [sic] society says to CEO America, loud and clear, you're responsible to your shareholders, and you're responsible to your employees. And in our responsibility [sic] society, each of us are [sic] responsible for loving our neighbor, just like we'd like to be loved ourselves. ("Remarks")

This is as close as Bush comes to a judgmental pose when addressing American behaviours, but these are really mere hints at wrong-doings, issued more as challenges than condemnations. This passage is about individual responsibility, as opposed to government responsibility. It places the responsibility of improving education not with the state but with small communities and individuals. Bush says that the responsibility of those who manage corporations is to shareholders and employees, but he does not say anything of the responsibilities of government regulatory bodies. Bush says that one is "responsible" for loving one's neighbour; however, it is unclear in this speech whether those who may fail to take responsibility for their decisions are the neighbours of those who are more prudent. To love a neighbour as one would want to be loved suggests an unconditional kind of love, while an insistence on the importance of personal responsibility suggests that to be worthy one must choose responsibly. Bush does not clearly disqualify those he describes as shirking responsibility from the love of their neighbours, but he does not clearly include them either.

4.4 Freedom, Equality, and American Mission

On 28 January 2003, George W. Bush gave the annual State of the Union Address to Congress, the second half of which argued for a military confrontation with Saddam Hussein. Bush concluded his argument by saying that “the liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity” (“President Delivers ‘State’”). By the midpoint of the year he had repeated this phrase more than twenty times. Of the eleven times in 2003 that he repeated this statement before the invasion of Iraq, nine specifically named Iraq: three were spoken in the context of a broadly defined “global” freedom in which Iraq was specifically mentioned, and six were very pointedly part of the President’s arguments for confronting Saddam Hussein. This consistency with which Iraq was mentioned makes the phrase appear as a very deliberate rhetorical tool intended to argue for the invasion that the Bush Administration eventually undertook.

In the nine pre-war speeches that name Iraq, Bush immediately followed a description of a victimized Iraqi people with his phrase about God’s gift of freedom in only three of them. In one of these, he lists brutal Iraqi government atrocities such as rape and torture (“President Bush Meets with Small”). In another speech, the suffering of the Iraqi people is named as the reason to press forward with war (“President Meets with Small Business Owners”). In another, the opportunity to bring food and medicine is said to be the motivation for invasion (“President’s Remarks”). These three speeches connect the gift of freedom with the end of suffering, and describe the proposed military mission as an errand of mercy. Biblical prophets did not advocate errands of mercy beyond their

own borders, but if most Iraqis are to be considered the neighbours of Americans, then the lessening of Iraqi suffering is a goal consistent with Bush's rhetoric.

But in the majority of the pre-war speeches, the leading section before asserting "God's gift" does not directly cite the suffering of the Iraqi populace. Rather, typical of these sections is a promise that "we will uphold our values" ("President Calls for Strengthened"). Bush calls on freedom as an article of faith, and the mission to spread freedom is a reason on its own to act. He says that "Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation," or "when the United States acts abroad and home [sic], we do so based upon values – particularly the value that we hold dear to our hearts, and that is, everybody ought to be free," or "this country believes that freedom is God's gift to every individual on the face of the Earth" ("President Delivers Remarks at Hispanic," "President Says," "President Gives Iraq Update"). Thus the public rationale for invasion is not about the wishes or needs of Iraqis, but about America's missionary interest in Iraq. This missionary zeal is again obvious when Bush says, "the more threatened we are here at home, the more we love freedom. The more there's a chance that somebody might think they can take it away from us, the more stubborn we are in our demand for freedom universally" ("President Speaks at FBI"). These speeches attempt to draw a connection between personal beliefs and outward action, and this attempt is made by invoking the name of God. Bush cites God's gift of freedom often as an ideological basis for invading Iraq, and in doing so he prophetically implies that to undertake this military action is to remain in right relationship with God.

In providing a rationale for the Iraqi invasion, Bush uses language that reflects a positive view of America to Americans themselves, and encourages a missionary response to that view:

This country will accomplish anything we set our mind to. We will achieve peace in the world. We will work for freedom, not only here in America, a free and just society. We believe in freedom around the world because everybody has got worth. See, one of the great principles of America is everybody has dignity. Everybody counts. Everybody matters. As I said in my State of the Union, liberty is not America's gift to the world. It is God's gift to human -- mankind, and that's what I believe. And as we think about how to have a better society and a more peaceful world, we've got to trust in the wisdom and strength of the American people. ("President Bush Meets with Small")

According to Bush, God's gift to the world is made manifest through American strength and wisdom. Biblical prophets, even court prophets, did not advocate invasion of foreign lands in order to bring freedom to foreigners. Some parts of the Book of Isaiah may show Isaiah⁴⁰ calling upon the Jews to be a light to the nations, but this is as a nation of exemplary people, not as a nation of missionaries. As a prophet, Bush calls on America to undertake missionary action in response to God's will. Rhetorically, Bush uses a divine sanction for equality and freedom to again praise America, and to reassure Americans that America's intentions are right in God's eyes.

Bush's phrase about God's gift is usually a two-part assertion: not "America's gift to the world," but "God's gift to humanity." Bush referred to God's gift of freedom twenty-one times between the State of the Union Address and 30 June 2003, and in fifteen of those instances mentions America in this way. But to say that it is *not* America's gift is in contradiction to the overall message, a false humility: clearly Bush

⁴⁰ Deutero-Isaiah

intends to argue that America will bring freedom to Iraq through military action. The underlying assumption of the sentiment is that America's export-version of freedom, whatever that may entail, is appropriate for and desired by Iraqis, but more importantly, it is the will of God. The characterization of this kind of freedom as "God's gift" rhetorically protects it with a shield of divine intention. This sense of divine mandate appears elsewhere in Bush's speeches:

Our nation has more than a set of interests; I believe we have a calling. For a century, America has acted to defend the peace, to liberate the oppressed, and to offer all mankind the promise of freedom in a better life. And today, as America fights the latest enemies of freedom, we will strive to expand the realm of freedom for the benefit of all nations ("President Bush Outlines").

America is "called," by whom Bush does not here explicitly say, to free the oppressed as it fights the enemies of freedom. Court prophets in the Hebrew Bible did occasionally advocate for war, but not to make the neighbouring nations free, or as a missionary action to save them in some other way. While Bush resembles the prophets in some ways, he continues to make his prophecy his own.

The prophets focused on Israel's fate; Bush focuses on America's character. As Bush says, "We are a free people. This great, powerful nation is motivated not by power for power's sake, but because of our values. If everybody matters, if every life counts, then we should hope everybody has the great God's [sic] gift of freedom" ("President Calls for Strengthened"). In this statement is expressed both the equality of all and God's gift of freedom, and Bush again praises Americans for their morality. Context has much to say here as well: these sentences in the speech fall between a denunciation of Saddam Hussein and a promise to free Iraq. Thus the notion of equality in God's eyes is used to

distinguish the righteous America from the damned political leadership of Iraq, and as justification for war.

These sorts of sentiments have been observed before, and noted in the academic literature surrounding American civil religion. According to the logic of civil religion, America is a Promised Land and its people have a manifest destiny as the “prime agent of God in history” (Chandler 20, Coleman 26). Ronald Flowers defines manifest destiny in terms of this chosen status by calling it “the view that America is God’s chosen nation and that [America has] the obligation to shape diverse peoples and nations in [America’s] image” (130). In the Hebrew Bible, Israel’s chosen status is expressed through God’s interest in them, and blessing and guidance of them. America’s chosen status is expressed in much the same terms in Bush’s speeches.

The prophets assume that the all-powerful God ultimately controls Israel’s fate because Israel is God’s people. Rallying troops at Fort Hood in January, Bush says that history “has called the right nation into action. History has called the United States into action, and we will not let history down” (President Rallies Troops at Fort”). Bush has already attested that it is God who is ultimately in control of the cosmos, and therefore presumably the call of history cannot be against God’s wishes. This sentiment betrays a sense of destiny, manifest destiny, on the part of the Administration. Bush says the call comes from “history,” but according to the doctrine of manifest destiny, this call to destiny emanates from God. As Bush asks for and credits God’s guidance in America’s actions, reading “history” in this sense as “God” is not contradictory to the rest of Bush’s rhetoric.

Later in this speech Bush says, “Our country is in a great contest of will and purpose. We’re being tested” (“President Rallies Troops at Fort”). In the Bible, God puts the faithful, like the chosen Abraham, to the test. That America is being tested casts America as the chosen, the faithful, of God. The charge of history places a special burden on America and gives it a special status. According to Bush, “it is clear that the future of freedom and the future of peace depend on the actions of America. This nation is freedom’s home and freedom’s defender. We welcome this charge of history, and we are keeping it” (“Remarks”). Bush is clearly expressing a belief that America is special, and this can be well understood as an expression of manifest destiny, where the charge of history is ultimately a charge of God, and America is, as Isaiah said Israel was, “a light to the nations” (42:6, 49:6).

4.5 Bush’s Prophetic Message

The last chapter argued that Bush’s public persona and discourse cast him as a biblical prophet. So far this present chapter has argued that the rhetoric Bush uses attaches him to the prophetic tradition. The next step in the analysis is to consider the cohesion, direction, and internal consistency of Bush’s particular prophetic message. Taken together, Bush’s themes grow into an internally consistent narrative about America’s place in the world and before God. Cast in the mold of a biblical prophet, Bush creates a modified prophetic message in his rhetoric.

Bush’s entire message may not be consistent with the messages of the prophets (though the prophets are hardly consistent with one another), but it is consistent within

itself. This internal consistency contributes to the coherence of Bush's public message and to his ability to remain attached to the prophetic tradition despite his speeches' deviations from biblical prophecy. It is entirely possible that the internal consistency of Bush's message, combined with the trappings of prophecy, adds an air of divine authority to his conclusions that they would otherwise lack. The distortion of the biblical prophets' themes likely also compensates for some of the social differences between contemporary America and the Ancient Near East. The remainder of this section describes Bush's message as a modern American prophet.

According to Bush's speeches, America exists under a benevolent God, most often and most easily identified with modern Judeo-Christian concepts of God. This God is all-powerful, and exerts control over the modern world and over the course of events in history. God is interested in Americans personally and in their service to God and to each other. More importantly, God is interested in America as a nation. God loves goodness and rejects evil, and is in favour of the good of the earth conquering evil.

According to Bush, the American people believe that America is good and that they are good. Whenever Bush speaks about America and its citizens, he is cheering, boastful, congratulatory, and optimistic. America has had a noble past and looks forward to a bright future filled with economic prosperity and personal freedom for individuals. Bush is proud to be the leader of what he calls the greatest nation, a nation with a calling to be an example of goodness for all the nations. America is strong and Americans wise, and they can place confidence in its strength and wisdom, both of which come from God and are reinforced through prayer to God.

The good American people can feel confident asking for God's comfort, guidance and blessing because America is special to God, a chosen people. God is on the side of goodness, and America's economic prosperity may itself be interpreted as evidence of God's favour.⁴¹ Americans are encouraged to pray for guidance and for the prosperity of the nation. Americans can feel confident asking God's blessing because God is all-powerful and thus in control of future events. God is deeply interested in America and its future, and can be asked to comfort Americans when disaster strikes. God can be trusted to bless and guide America in its future development, both at home and abroad.

The American people understand that loving their neighbours, both at home and abroad, is another important aspect of their goodness. Americans follow what Mark's Gospel calls the greatest commandment out of both their sense of morality and the love of their God. Americans love their fellow citizens as well as people in other countries who need their help. Americans understand that they have been called to express this love, and that volunteering is an excellent way to do so. Americans do not need to extend this love to the nation's enemies, however.

The good American people understand that they have a responsibility to share their experience of freedom and equality abroad. This mission, or calling, to spread God's gift of freedom is based on the equality of all people before God, and it extends far beyond America's borders. The American people have a responsibility to aid the suffering in Iraq and bring God's freedom to all Iraqis not part of the Saddam Hussein regime. These so-called ordinary Iraqis are neighbours to the Americans, and thus

⁴¹ Max Weber's Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism offered such a thesis.

America has a responsibility to show them love, as manifest through the holy gifts of equality and freedom.

The good American people believe that the values of equality and freedom, and their willingness to love their neighbours, are important aspects of their goodness before God. God endorses both American equality, to which he is the divine witness, and American freedom, of which he is the divine benefactor. The instruction to love one's neighbours is found in the Bible itself, both the Old and New Testaments, and so has God's obvious approval across centuries. America is specially chosen to participate in these high and holy ideals, and it is through these three aspects of American life that God blesses the American people, and continues to make them strong.

America's enemies, most especially terrorists and the Iraqi regime, are evil. Just as God approves of America's goodness, God abhors Iraqi and terrorist evil. It is only right that America, as it brings freedom to so-called ordinary Iraqis, brings a day of reckoning to the Iraqi regime. This military invasion is a perfectly moral action in this regard, and soldiers who fight in this invasion are serving a high calling as they uphold the holy ideals of freedom and equality. Soldiers may even have an opportunity to love their neighbours in this context. The families of fallen soldiers can take comfort in God's grace, and solace in the knowledge that their sons and daughters died for a noble cause. America is God's righteous instrument in the fight against evil and the subsequent liberation of the oppressed.

These are the messages of the Bush speeches. They create a new theology, partly through a selection of the themes of biblical prophecy, and partly through Bush's

modification of them. As for the reproach and threat that is so clearly missing in a comparison between Bush and the biblical prophets, what room is there for such a message when America is so entirely good? To include admonitions, to call for repentance, would be to suggest that America was other than blessed. A forecast of doom would do the very same thing. Bush's speeches not only present a consistent prophetic message, they refuse to present any idea of the biblical prophets that would invite a contradiction of his message.

4.6 Preaching to the Choir

Many of the above messages, all of which are presented by Bush in a prophetic way, are antithetical to biblical prophecy, but they are all completely consistent with one another. The goodness of America is consistent with God's blessing of America. God's endorsement of the ideals of freedom and equality is consistent with God's blessing of America's overseas military adventures, which are described by Bush as an intention to spread those values. The evil of America's enemies similarly supports God's endorsement of those same adventures. These statements might not have complete parallel in biblical prophecy but they do agree with each other. Through them Bush creates a consistent new message, which incorporates the familiar language and tone of the Bible.

Bush's message no doubt better suits his own circumstances than would any ministry lifted directly and without modification from any biblical prophet. He is preaching under political circumstances far removed from Israel in the first millennium

BCE. Israel and later Judah were small nations among greater powers such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The Hebrew Bible provides much evidence that the scattering of the northern tribes by Assyria, the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, the exile to Babylon, and the time spent under Persian and Greek rule were particularly scarring to the national psyche of Israel, and did much to shape the tradition of prophecy that was concurrent with these national disasters. The prophetic books bear witness to the rhetoric of prophets preaching under oppressive political circumstances. Bush's speeches bear witness to the rhetoric of the person who is perhaps the most powerful political leader on earth. When one looks to the Bible for parallels, America may be the complement of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece of the prophetic books, but in its incomparable power it is rarely the mirror of Israel. The prophets preached a doom that had visited before and was reasonably expected again. While twenty-first century Americans may fear terrorist violence, they are hardly threatened with the total destruction of their nation, exile in foreign lands, or occupation by a greater military power. The optimistic message of Bush's speeches fits the heyday of America, as the doom of the prophets fit the trying times of the nation of Israel.

American presidents are not described in the academic literature as judgmental speakers, but as optimistic and reassuring ones. Coles, Linder, and Marty all described the presidents whose rhetoric they studied as high priests, because these presidents approached their public roles by celebrating America. The role of high priest has cultic connotations that do fit the president's role as chief celebrant of the civil religion. But the character of biblical high priest does not have the same familiarity and authority that

the character of biblical prophet maintains. Bush has not strayed from these well-established patterns of celebration in his speeches, but in a sense his role of celebrant is the most ceremonial and the least efficacious of his persona. Much more of the president's power lies in his ability to convince and persuade his population.

For the sizeable portion of the American population that considers the Bible authoritative, the biblical prophet is an authority figure vested with God's message. Whether or not he, his advisors, or his speechwriters are aware of the possibility, Bush invites his audience to accept him as an authority by appearing in the same role. This is not to say that his entire domestic audience necessarily accepts him as such, but the invitation is extended, just the same. By appearing as a prophet, Bush implicitly associates himself with divine authority. It is not ludicrous to suppose that Bush's use of prophecy is a powerful rhetorical tool that is up to the task of persuading at least some American voters that Bush's intentions and actions have God's blessing.

As stated in the introductory chapter, political scientists believe that the voting block referred to as southern, white, evangelical Protestants were crucial to the Republican Party in the 2000 Election, and will likely prove an important base again in November of 2004. Bush's popular support in so-called Middle America trades heavily on Bush's reputation as a man of high moral values. In his 2003 State of the Union Address, Bush says that "there's power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people" ("President Delivers 'State'"). The term "wonder-working power" is a very clear allusion to a line in the well-known Revivalist hymn "There is Power in the Blood:" "There is power, power, wonder-working power, in

the precious blood of the Lamb” (Jones). The allusion itself can be interpreted as a wink and a nod to the very same political base that is so well-disposed to biblical prophecy. To those in his audience whose ties to American Protestant Christianity are strong enough to recognize the allusion, it is a signal not only that the president is especially listening to them, but that he is especially speaking to them as well. There may indeed be power in reaching into the Christian American religious experience in order to inspire the electorate.

4.7 Conclusion

Bush and his speechwriters select from the themes of biblical prophecy and then modifies them to create a consistent message that is conducive to his own political aims and palatable to his audience. In this way he is like any other biblical prophet, calling on God’s name, assuming God’s infinite power, and interpreting God’s will, but presenting his own particular version of God’s will and how the people can best fulfill it. Bush preaches optimism and assures his audience that they lie in God’s favour by upholding God’s understanding of equality. He urges them to love their neighbours, and congratulates them for having done so. He urges them to go abroad and spread the mission of freedom, which God also wants.

Bush’s message fits well into the body of research concerning American civil religion. The idea of America as a chosen nation having a manifest destiny has certainly found resonance here. American manifest destiny describes a chosen people leading the rest of the world to enlightenment. Bush defends the invasion of Iraq as a mission to

spread the god-given gift of freedom, undertaken because ordinary Iraqis are equal to any free American and deserve to be loved as America's neighbours. Bush describes the invasion as an undertaking that God would no doubt support, and as God's special emissary, Bush should know. The role of prophet is a powerful one: Bush approaches his audience as God's messenger, sent to tell the chosen people how they can best remain in God's favour and do God's will.

Bush establishes his particular theology and cosmology from his position as new American prophet. He preaches to those in his audience who consider the Bible authoritative. Bush's message speaks not to an oppressed people under threat from powerful neighbours, but to the world's most militarily powerful country. There is no inescapable great doom, but instead evil enemies who will undoubtedly be overcome with God's guidance. Bush's message does not scold the wealthy for failing to aid the poor, but assures the population of the wealthiest nation in the world that they are indeed doing God's work at home and abroad. Bush presents himself as a prophet by associating himself with prophetic traditions and biblical language, and becomes an American prophet by modifying, and even sometimes contradicting, the traditional prophetic themes.

Conclusion

The religious significance and symbolism of the presidency has been of interest in academic circles at least since the 1960s, when the construct of American civil religion first established that the connections between the president and the populace might be understood in religious terms. Two of the most enduring themes of American civil religion, America as a chosen nation and America's manifest destiny, rely on ties to the Hebrew Bible. While past studies have readily cast presidents in the roles of comforting pastor and high priest of the civil religion, the term prophet has not been attached firmly to any president. Instead, the term prophet has been reserved for those who speak in a judgmental manner, a rarity in presidential speech. This thesis has argued that because the tradition of biblical prophecy is much more rich and diverse than the simple trait of reproach, the powerful religious persona of biblical prophet deserves to be considered as a template for the public persona of the American president.

No one set of traits can be used to describe the archetypal biblical prophet, because no one prophet in the Bible is identical to any other. All prophets preached in God's name and claimed God's divine inspiration, and all prophets preached with an understanding of their God as the only God to be worshipped. Most prophets believed that God was deeply interested in the nation of Israel, as expressed either through the fortunes of the dynasty or the fortunes of the people under foreign threat. Many prophets were critical of their audiences, be they the king or the people, at least some of the time if not much of the time. Some prophets were much concerned with social injustice, and

these prophets tended to forecast a coming punishment from God for this sin. Other prophets were more hopeful and preached renewal rather than destruction. There is clearly no one definition of prophet, but Bush reflects several of these variant characteristics.

Like all the prophets, Bush is a public speaker, addressing himself to his fellow citizens on issues of the day. He routinely expresses a faith in an all-powerful God, asks for God's blessing, and expresses confidence in God's guidance. He approaches the American people as a chosen people, who are special in God's eyes and responsible to God in their behaviours. Bush comforts his audience and encourages them to hope in God. Bush calls upon his audience to love their neighbours, a familiar Levitical Law and Christian instruction. His definition of one's neighbour is complicated, just as there was no one unified opinion on foreign nations held by all of the biblical prophets. For Bush the foreigner is also a neighbour, but the leadership of a foreign country such as Iraq may be cast as evil and beyond redemption. Like many prophets, Bush condemns the evil of the foreigner and forecasts days of destruction.

For all the ways that Bush's prophecy matches the prophecies of others, there are ways in which his prophecy is his alone. Bush always approaches his audience as if they are righteous and good, as if they please God. There is none of the judgmental scolding which is often associated with biblical prophecy. His cheerful and optimistic stance brings to mind Isaiah 40-55, although it has little precedent elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Bush uses God's name to personalize his prophecy: he tells his audience that they are all equal in God's sight, that freedom is God's special gift to them, and that this

freedom is a gift intended for all humanity. Doom is coming for the evil foreigner, but never for America itself. Bush says that America knows the equality of all before God, and so America's mission in the world is to spread God's gift of freedom to those who lack it. No prophet spoke this way, encouraging a holy mission to other nations, although invoking God's name in the cause of invasion has biblical precedent. Bush's biblical rhetoric may diverge in places from that of many of the prophets, but this tendency to modify his message remains in line with prophecy, an institution that accommodated a variety of themes and tempers over the centuries.

What is perhaps interesting is how Bush's modifications of the messages of the Hebrew prophets create a prophecy with an internal consistency, cohesion, and logic. In his rhetoric Bush declares the goodness of America in God's eyes, and will not violate this assumption with the pessimism, reproach, or anger that so many prophets shared with one another. He encourages Americans to show their neighbourly love to those abroad, who are equal to them in God's eyes, and share God's gift of freedom with those foreign people. This message may not have a parallel in the Hebrew Bible, but it does fit well into Bush's rhetoric. Bush's mixture of prophetic stance, prophetic themes, and his own unique messages creates a new prophecy in ways better suited to modern-day America. The optimistic tone is more in keeping with a land of such prosperity, and the optimistic view of war more in keeping with such unmatched military power.

What may matter more than Bush's fidelity to the message of the biblical prophets is his ability to sound divinely blessed with the authority to speak God's will to the American electorate. Bush uses his version of prophetic speech in attempts to

convince his populace of his prophecies. In past studies that have considered presidents as high priests, it was a ceremonial position from which they celebrated the American civil religion. As pastors, presidents have comforted their people and assured them of their goodness. Bush undoubtedly does both of these things, but in a way his position as prophet empowers him more than does his roles as ceremonial priest and comforting pastor. Biblical prophets cried out commands, telling the people what they were to do in order to remain in God's favour. They were God's messengers who were accredited with a special knowledge of what was pleasing to God. It is this aspect of prophecy, persuasion by a special emissary who is privy to God's will, which makes the persona of prophet such a powerful one when employed within presidential rhetoric. When Bush presents himself as a biblical prophet to his people, the implication is that he speaks for God, that he and God are in fact partners pursuing the same agenda. In the year 2003 thousands of people died in an American war that most Americans supported at the time, despite Bush's inability to offer much evidence that the war was necessary. God is a powerful and silent partner. It is the American people who decide whether Bush is allowed to claim him.

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