

Chapter VII

The Prophets and the Sacred Name

The importance of using the name יהוה and avoiding a substitute is further enhanced by the willingness of Yahweh's loyal prophets among the Israelites to die rather than abandon the sacred name. These prophets always prophesied in the name of Yahweh, as every book of the Scriptures reveals. Yet their insistence upon speaking with the authority of the sacred name constantly brought them under the threat of death. Their enemies were not just those of pagan beliefs. Indeed, their greatest foes came from among their brother Israelites, especially those religious and political leaders, men of power who would not listen to Yahweh. The prophet Daniel confessed this sin and rebellion by the Israelites, those both near and far, when he prayed to Yahweh that they had departed "from your commandments and from your judgments":

And we have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. (Dan., 9:4-6)

These leaders (self-declared prophets, priests, rulers, elders, etc.) ultimately proved to be the most treacherous adversaries of all. No greater testimony, therefore, can be presented than the fact that the loyal prophets of Yahweh were willing to oppose these forces, overcome fear, and die if necessary for using the sacred name.

Yahweh Versus Baal

To demonstrate the attitude of Yahweh's loyal prophets in Israel on the issue of using the sacred name we must first consider the almost continuous effort by the greater portion of the people and leaders of the Israelite tribes to subvert the doctrines of Yahweh. They accomplished this subversion by transforming their national religion into one much more suitable to their own personal tastes. The religion they most wanted to emulate was the worship of Baal (plural "Baali," collective noun "Baalim"), meaning "Lord."¹ Their motives for following Baal (who is Satan)² and Baalism will be fully studied in our Volume II. For now we need only deal with the fact that the people of

¹ See above Chap. I, n. 38.

² That Satan is Baal see our Vol. II, Chaps. XII and XIII. In the NT, for example, Satan is identified with Baal-Zubul (KJV "Beelzebub"), the ruler of the demons (see Matt., 12:22-27; Mark, 3:20-27; Luke, 11:14-19). Baal-Zubul is an epithet for the Kanaanite deity Baal (DCR, p. 124, s.v.). Therefore, Satan, the ruler of demons, is identified with Baal, the chief deity of the pagan world.

Israel desired in their hearts to follow after the licentious tenets of this pagan religion. Their latent passion to worship ha-Baal (the Lord), which was the religion practiced by the people surrounding them, caused the Israelites to look for any pretext to change the Yahwehist faith into something resembling that of Baalism.

Knowledge and understanding of true scriptural doctrines had become so poor that, as the prophet Jeremiah states, the priests and those handling the Law of Yahweh did not even know who Yahweh was.³ These Israelite leaders had convinced themselves that they were not really following the pagan eloahim named Baal. In their minds Yahweh was their baal (lord).⁴ Reasoning that they were following Scriptures they “prophesied by Baal and caused my people Israel to go astray.”⁵ In the exhortation found in chapter two of Jeremiah, Yahweh chastised the religious leaders of Israel asking:

How can you say, “I am not defiled; I have not gone after Baalim.” See your way in the valley, know what you have done! (Jer., 2:23)

Put another way, what these people “believed” they were doing did not matter. For Yahweh, truth was based upon their actions. Yahweh elsewhere in Jeremiah adds that the Israelites had forsaken Yahweh’s laws and failed to obey his voice, having “walked after the stubbornness of their own heart and after הבעלים (ha-Baalim; the lords), which their fathers had taught them.”⁶

How could they deny their worship of Baal? Because in their own minds their Baal (Lord) was the eloahi of Scriptures.⁷ They had deliberately blinded themselves to the difference. Accordingly, they prophesied and swore by Baal believing this name to be a title for a universal deity. Into this anomaly walked the prophets of Yahweh. When Yahweh sent his loyal prophets in his sacred name to correct the error, they were rejected. The message sent in the name of Yahweh was, to put it mildly, not what the people wanted to hear.

And they refused to listen and gave a stubborn shoulder and made their ears heavy against hearing. Yes, they made their hearts adamant against hearing the Torah and the words which יהוה of hosts has sent by his ruach (spirit) by the former prophets. (Zech., 7:11-12)

Their inward desire to follow the things of Baalism resulted in a plot to remove the personage of Yahweh out of the Scriptures and replace him with a universal “Lord” who was much more permissive. Yahweh’s laws

³ Jer., 2:8-13.

⁴ For a complete discussion of Yahweh as baal see Vol. II, Chap. XIV entitled, *Israel and Baal Worship*. Also see Isa., 54:5; Jer., 31:32, and Hos., 3:16-17.

⁵ Jer., 23:13.

⁶ Jer., 9:14.

⁷ That the Israelites construed that Yahweh was Baal see Vol. II, the Chap. XIV entitled, *Israel and Baal Worship*. That Yahweh was identified with Baal by the rebellious Israelites also see ERE, 2, pp. 284, 289; NSBD, p. 86.

and commandments were viewed as far too restrictive for their taste. At the same time, they wanted to retain the idea of antiquity for their own religion. With Yahweh gone the religious and political leaders could utilize human interpretations and ideas from the neighboring Baal cults. They could set aside Yahweh's commands with words of their own choosing and device. In the book of Jeremiah we read this condemnation against these religious leaders (prophets) of ancient Israel:

I (אֶתְּאֶתְּ) have heard what the prophets said, who prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have had a vision, I have had a vision! How long is this there in the heart of the prophets, the prophets of lies, and the prophets of their own heart's deceit? (THEY) PLOT TO MAKE MY PEOPLE FORGET MY שֵׁם (SHEM, NAME) by their visions, which they tell each man to his neighbor; AS HAVE FORGOTTEN THEIR FATHERS MY שֵׁם (SHEM, NAME) FOR (THAT OF) BAAL! (Jer., 23:25-27)

The priestly conspiracy taught Baal (Lord) instead of Yahweh. The Israelites soon forgot the name Yahweh and in time treated the title baal as a personal name for the eloahi of Scriptures. In turn, those advocating the new interpretation reacted violently against the prophets who remained loyal to Yahweh and came using his sacred name.

Moses

The true character of the people of Israel proved to be rebellious against Yahweh from the very beginning. It reared its ugly head from the time that Moses was sent to the Israelites while they were in servitude in Egypt. Both Moses and Aaron were priests and prophets "who called on his name; they called to אֶתְּאֶתְּ, and he answered them."⁸ At first, when the people thought they would easily be delivered from their enslavement, they readily followed Moses. But when Pharaoh refused to let them go and placed them under even more severe servitude the people blamed Moses and rebelled from Yahweh.⁹

Regardless of the fact that Yahweh appeared personally to the Israelites on numerous occasions and showed them many signs,¹⁰ the Israelites revolted from Yahweh ten times between the arrival of Moses in Egypt until their first attempt from Kadesh Barnea to enter the Land of Promise, a time of less than one and one half years.¹¹ During these rebellions the people desired to

⁸ Ps., 99:6.

⁹ Exod., 4:29-5:21.

¹⁰ For examples of the numerous appearances of Yahweh (i.e. Yahweh the angel) to the Israelites between the event of the Exodus and their first stay at Kadesh Barnea see Exod., 13:20-21, 14:19-25; 16:9-10, 19:16-25, 20:19-20, 24:9-11, 33:8-11, 40:34-38; Num., 11:24-25, 12:3-10, 14:13-14. For examples of the signs Yahweh showed the Israelites see Exod., 4:1-9 (cf. 4:30-31), 7:8-12:36 (the ten plagues), 14:13-31, 15:22-26, 16:4-35, 17:1-7; Num., 11:1-35, 12:1-16.

¹¹ For the ten rebellions of this period as mentioned in Num., 14:20-22, see the following:

- Revolt in Egypt: Exod., 5:1-6:9; Ezek., 20:5-9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 2:13:1-4; Yashar, 79:20-54.
- Revolt at Pi-ha-Khiroth along the Suph Sea: Exod., 14:1-25; Jos., *Antiq.*, 2:15:1-2:16:4; Yashar, 81:7-42.

reject both Yahweh and his prophet Moses and return to Egypt to serve the Egyptians (and therefore the Egyptian gods as well). During the revolts at Rephidim and Kadesh Barnea the Israelites were on the verge of stoning Moses to death when Yahweh personally intervened and stopped the revolts.¹² At Mount Sinai the people went so far as to build an image of a twin-headed, golden bull, calling it Yahweh.¹³ This idol was conceived out of pagan bull worship common in Baalism throughout the Middle East, the Apis and Horus bulls being part of the Baal ritualistic practice in Egypt from whence the Israelites had recently come.¹⁴ An example of this type of idol was found on an axe head from Egypt dated to a period earlier than the XVIII Dynasty (see figure 2).¹⁵



Figure 2. Bronze parade axe.

Just before Moses died he wrote a song for the Israelites, the opening words which said:

Give ear the heavens and I will speak, and hear the earth the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drip as rain, my speech shall distil like dew; as the light rain upon fresh grass, as the showers upon the green herbs; **BECAUSE I WILL PROCLAIM THE NAME** אֱלֹהִים. (Deut., 32:1-3)

- Revolt at Marah: Exod., 15:22-26; Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:1:1-2; Yashar, 81:45.
- Revolt at Sin: Exod., 16:1-26; Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:1:3-6; Yashar, 81:46-49.
- Disobedience on the sabbath day at Sin: Exod., 16:27-35.
- Revolt at Rephidim: Exod., 17:1-16; Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:1:7-3:2:5; Yashar, 81:51-62.
- Revolt at Mount Sinai: Exod., 32:1-35; Yashar, 82:6-23.
- Revolt at Taberah: Num., 11:1-3.
- Revolt at Qabroth Hattaauh: Num., 11:4-34; Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:13; Yashar, 83:26-29.
- Revolt at Kadesh Barnea: Num., 13:1-14:19; Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:14:1-3:15:3; Yashar, 83:33-43.

¹² Exod., 17:4; Num., 14:10.

¹³ Exod., 32:1-6. In this passage the bull image is called the "eloahi" who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. The next morning a "feast to אֱלֹהִים" was declared in celebration of the golden עֵגֶל (bull). The Hebrew term עֵגֶל (agel; 'égel) is often but mistakenly translated as "calf." As A. R. S. Kennedy correctly observes "'égel is the appropriate term for a young bull just arrived at maturity" (ADB, 1, p. 340). The idea that the golden bull [agel] built at Mount Sinai was in the image of a small calf is, therefore, mistaken. The bull was the size of a 2 or 3 year old animal (cf. Gen., 15:9, where an עֵגֶלָה [agelah], the fem. form of עֵגֶל [agel], was 3 years old). We also should notice that this bull most likely was in the form of a two headed creature—no doubt symbolizing the two Yahwehs. This detail is indicated by the fact that Aaron tells the Israelites, "אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים (These are your eloahi)," clearly describing the animal in the plural and not in the singular (Exod., 32:4). Moses similarly refers to the bull as "an eloahi of gold" (Exod., 32:31). Yet the animal itself is defined in the singular "עֵגֶל (agel)." A two-headed animal would fit this description (see fig. 2).

¹⁴ For an examination of the bull cult involved in Baal worship among the Egyptian and Semitic people around the Israelites see Vol. II, Part IV, *Yahweh Versus Baal*.

¹⁵ The axe head shown in fig. 2 is similar to those found at Denderah in the First Intermediate or early Middle Kingdom context (SE, 2, p. 213, fig. 126). Many of these axe heads, likewise, bear representations of deities. The appearance of a twin-headed, bull image in Egypt at this early date demonstrates the high probability that it was this type of idol that was constructed by the rebellious Israelites at Mount Sinai soon after coming out of Egypt.

Elijah

Another great prophet that suffered for coming in the name of Yahweh was Elijah. Elijah lived in the time of King Ahab (870–849 B.C.E.) who had brought the nation of Israel into complete Baal worship and had married the Baal worshiper Jezebel, daughter of the king of the Zidonians.¹⁶ Ahab permitted Jezebel to kill the prophets of Yahweh, from which extinction only a few survived, having been hidden from their adversaries in caves.¹⁷ Elijah, a man of Yahweh, was also hunted. He too had been kept in hiding.¹⁸ Yet, when Yahweh sent Elijah to speak to King Ahab, he sent word in the name of Yahweh.¹⁹ Meeting the king, and knowing full well he was under a sentence of death, Elijah told him that it was not Elijah that disturbed the country of Israel but “you and your father’s house, when you forsook the commands of אֱלֹהִים and went after Baalim.”²⁰

At this point Elijah challenged the king to test and see whether calling upon the name of הַבַּעַל (ha-Baal; the Lord) or calling upon the name of Yahweh would prove successful. The test was to see which eloahim would light a fire under their sacrifices made by prophets from each group. The king agreed and sent 450 of the Baal prophets to Mount Carmel to meet Elijah in the contest.²¹ While at Mount Carmel the 450 Baal prophets “called on the name of הַבַּעַל (ha-Baal; the Lord), from morning until noon, saying ‘ הַבַּעַל (ha-Baal) answer us.’ But there was no sound and no answering.”²² At noon Elijah began to taunt them, questioning whether their eloahim was not yet awake or was off on some distant journey. These Baal prophets, in their vain attempt to make Baal respond, even went so far as to cut themselves with swords and spears until blood gushed out all over them.²³

Now it was Elijah’s turn. After setting up his sacrifice, Elijah came near to it and said:

אֱלֹהִים , eloahi of Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob, today let it be known that you are eloahim in Israel and that I am your servant, and by your word I have done all these things. Answer me אֱלֹהִים , answer me that this people may know that you are אֱלֹהִים ha-eloahim and you have turned back their hearts again.
(1 Kings, 18:36–37)

With these words fire ignited the wood under his sacrifice. The people bowed down and said, “ אֱלֹהִים , he is ha-eloahim; אֱלֹהִים , he is ha-eloahim.”²⁴ Elijah then ordered the people to seize the prophets of הַבַּעַל (ha-Baal; the Lord) and slaughter them.²⁵

¹⁶ 1 Kings, 16:30–32.

¹⁷ Ibid., 18:3–4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 17:1–18:15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18:7–15.

²⁰ Ibid., 18:16–18.

²¹ Ibid., 18:19–24.

²² Ibid., 18:25–26.

²³ Ibid., 18:27–29.

²⁴ Ibid., 18:38–39.

²⁵ Ibid., 18:40.

Upon hearing of the victory of Elijah, Queen Jezebel did not repent. Rather, she sent word to Elijah that she had ordered his execution. Receiving this warning Elijah fled Israel and eventually came to Mount Sinai where he hid in a cave.²⁶

Zechariah, Son of Yahuida

Unlike the nation of Israel (all of whose kings were considered wicked), the Israelite nation of Judah had periods during which they clung closer to Yahweh. Nevertheless, they often vacillated between the worship of Yahweh and Baalism. During those periods when Baalism was flourishing the prophets of Yahweh had much to fear. One notable example comes with the events surrounding the prophet Zechariah, the son of Yahuida. In the latter part of the reign of Joash (831–792 B.C.E.), after the death of Yahuida the priest of Yahweh, “the leaders of Judah came in and bowed themselves to the king; then the king listened to them.”²⁷

Up until this time Joash had remained loyal to Yahweh. Yet, these leaders convinced the king that they should also serve the symbols of Baal (the Asherim [Asherah-images] and idols).²⁸ Yahweh’s response was to send some of his prophets to the Judahites in an effort to correct their error. We read:

And he sent prophets among them to bring them back to 𐤀𐤃𐤃𐤅; and they testified against them, but they would not listen. And the spirit of eloahim clothed Zechariah the son of Yahuida and he said to them thus, “Why do you transgress the commandments of 𐤀𐤃𐤃𐤅 and do not prosper? Since you have forsaken 𐤀𐤃𐤃𐤅 he shall forsake you.” (2 Chron., 24:19–20)

What then was the response of these leaders?

And they conspired against him and stoned him with stones by the king’s command in the court of the house of 𐤀𐤃𐤃𐤅. And Joash did not remember the kindness that Yahuida his father had done to him, and he killed his son. AND AS HE DIED, HE (ZECHARIAH) SAID, “MAY 𐤀𐤃𐤃𐤅 SEE AND SEEK YOU!” (2 Chron., 24:21–22)

In the first century text entitled *Lives of the Prophets*, we read:²⁹

Zechariah was from Jerusalem, son of Jehoiada the priest, and Joash the king of Judah killed him near

²⁶ Ibid., 19:1–8.

²⁷ 2 Chron., 24:17.

²⁸ 2 Chron., 24:17–18. That the Asherim (Asherah-images) were part of Baal worship see NBD, p. 95; EBD, p. 93.

²⁹ Lives, 23:1.

the altar, and the house of David poured out his blood in front of the *Ailam* (Temple porch), and the priests took him and buried him with his father.

If these leaders were not trying to disguise Baal worship as scriptural they would not have been offended by Zechariah's words. They would have instead responded that they worshiped the pagan deity Baal and the commandments of Yahweh were not valid for them. But it is clear by the above passage that these men took offense at being accused of forsaking Yahweh. It is also important to note that even at the death of Zechariah, the son of Yahuida, he uttered a condemnation against the king in the name of אֱלֹהֵינוּ .

Jonah

Jonah was also a prophet of Yahweh. He lived in the reign of Jeroboam II (792–752 B.C.E.).³⁰ We read in the book bearing his name that Yahweh sent Jonah to the city of Nineveh, the powerful capital of the Assyrian empire, to cry out against that alien metropolis for its wickedness.³¹ Jonah was “afraid” that he would be tortured by the Assyrians for coming to them with this message,³² having been sent by Yahweh and not by one of their own Assyrian eloahi. So he instead fled by ship from Joppa to go to Tarshish in Asia Minor hoping to avoid the task.³³

During this voyage a powerful storm struck the sea and the ship and all aboard were in threat of perishing. In an attempt to discover if this disaster was brought upon the ship by one of its passengers, lots were drawn. The lot fell upon Jonah. Jonah then admitted he was a prophet of Yahweh that had not performed his duty.³⁴ He advised the men to throw him into the sea because of his error and that the sea would then be calmed. The men, not wanting Jonah's blood on their hands, at first refused and tried to return to shore, but to no avail.³⁵ When they finally did throw Jonah into the sea, the sea immediately became calm. This sign impressed those aboard the ship, “And the men respected אֱלֹהֵינוּ with great respect and they offered a sacrifice to אֱלֹהֵינוּ and vowed vows.”³⁶

After being cast into the sea Jonah was swallowed by a large fish, in whose stomach he lay dead for three days and three nights.³⁷ Jonah prayed to

³⁰ 2 Kings, 14:23–25; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:1–2.

³¹ Jon., 1:1–2; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2.

³² Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2, notes that when Jonah “arrived there, to preach in that city that it would lose its power, (he) was afraid and did not set out, but fled from eloahim to the city of Jope (Joppa).” This statement shows that Jonah only became afraid after he arrived in Nineveh. We must, therefore, conclude that Jonah had indications from the inhabitants of that city that his life would be threatened if he carried out his duty. Since Jonah was not fearful of death later on, asking the men of the ship to throw him overboard, we must conclude that it was not simply death that caused Jonah to run. Rather, he must have recognized the Assyrian proclivity to torture her enemies and became anxious over a prolonged, agonizing death.

³³ Jon., 1:3. Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2, adds the clarification that Jonah left from Joppa on the Palestinian coast and then defines Tarshish as the region by that name located in Cilicia, Asia Minor.

³⁴ Jon., 1:4–10; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2.

³⁵ Jon., 1:11–14; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2.

³⁶ Jon., 1:17.

³⁷ Jon., 1:15–16; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2.

Yahweh for forgiveness just before his death, for which cause at the end of the three day period the fish regurgitated Jonah out onto dry land along the Black Sea.³⁸ Being resurrected back to life, the prophet realized his sin and knew that he must remain loyal to Yahweh by completing his duty. Yahweh, accordingly, again sent Jonah to the city of Nineveh to proclaim what Yahweh had ordained.³⁹ This time, and despite his fears, Jonah went. He foretold that Nineveh was to be destroyed in forty days because of its sins. Remarkably, the king and people of Nineveh did not kill Jonah as the prophet expected but believed him. They even repented of their evil deeds. In turn, Yahweh repented of the evil of which he was about to bring on Nineveh and did the city no harm.⁴⁰

Jeremiah

The prophet Jeremiah met with the same trouble among the Israelites as did Elijah and Zechariah, son of Yahuida, for using the sacred name. Jeremiah did his prophesying among the Israelites of Judah. To demonstrate his problem, Jeremiah speaks of how the people of Anathoth, a Jewish city located about three miles from Jerusalem,⁴¹ “plotted schemes” to murder him, warning:

Do not prophesy in the name of יהוה, that you do
not die by our hand. (Jer., 11:18-21)

In fact, the threat of death and oppression became so great that Jeremiah, like Jonah, contemplated not using the sacred name at all. He writes:

Then I said, I will not mention him (יהוה) or speak
in his name any more. But (his word) was in my

³⁸ Jon., 1:17, 2:10; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2. That Jonah had died while in the fish is indicated by the fact that during the prayer which he gave after he had been delivered Jonah notes that he had been in the “belly of sheol” (the place of the dead) and Yahweh had “brought up my nephesh (life) from שחַת (shachath)” (Jon., 2:5-6), shachath meaning “to decay,” “corruption, destruction, ditch, grave, pit” (SEC, Heb. #7843-7845). His three day long death is also indicated by the fact that the messiah used Jonah’s death and resurrection as a prophetic type of his own (Matt., 12:38-41, 16:1-4; Luke, 11:29-30).

We should also mention the timing of the prayers given in Jon., 2:1-7. Verses 1-7 actually represent two prayers, not one as often assumed. In Jon., 2:1, we read that “Jonah prayed to יהוה his eloahi from the belly of sheol.” This statement is followed by, “and he said.” But what is mentioned next (Jon., 2:2-9) was not the prayer from the belly of the fish to save him but the prayer given after he was delivered from death and the fish. For example, in this prayer Jonah recounts the events of his death noting that “out of the belly of sheol I cried for help” and that Yahweh heard (Jon., 2:2). Jonah would only know that Yahweh heard after Jonah was delivered. He adds, “but you brought my nephesh (life) from shachath (decay)” and then states, “when my nephesh (life) fainted within me, I remembered יהוה; and came to you my prayer” (Jon., 2:7). Jonah is here mentioning his earlier prayer to Yahweh, a prayer given while he was dying in the belly of the fish. This means that the present prayer was composed after Jonah’s resurrection.

This detail is further supported by the words of Josephus. Josephus states that after lying in the large fish for three days and nights Jonah was cast out onto the land; “Then, having prayed to eloahim to grant him pardon for his sins, he went to the city of Nineveh” (Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2). Josephus, accordingly, confirms that the Jewish priests of the first century C.E. recognized that the prayer reported in Jon., 2:2-7, fit chronologically after Jonah’s resurrection.

³⁹ Jon., 3:1-2.

⁴⁰ Jon., 3:3-10; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:10:2.

⁴¹ Located in the tribal territory of Benjamin, Josh., 21:18; 1 Chron., 6:60; DB, p. 39.

heart like a burning flame shut up in my bones, and
I was weary holding it, and I could not endure it.
(Jer., 20:9)

Knowing that his conscience would not allow him to refrain from speaking Yahweh's words, Jeremiah disregarded the death threats and continued to prophesy in the sacred name. Eventually, Jeremiah was thrown into prison because of his prophecies concerning the revelation that Yahweh had destined the city of Jerusalem and its Temple to fall into the hands of the Babylonians. During the last stages of the Babylonian siege against Jerusalem, Jeremiah, in an act of trust that Yahweh would again return the Judahites from their impending captivity in Babylonia, bought the land belonging to his cousin in Anathoth, the district that had previously condemned him for coming in Yahweh's name (Jer., 32:1–15). The *Lives of the Prophets* informs us that Jeremiah "died in Taphnai of Egypt, having been stoned by his (own) people."⁴²

Zechariah, Son of Berechiah

The same problems faced the prophets of Yahweh when a remnant of the Jews returned to Judah after their Babylonian exile and established the state of Judaea in 538 B.C.E. Shortly after this time the Temple was rebuilt and "the sacred works prospered when Haggai and Zechariah the prophets prophesied" and the people were "blessed through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the (grand-)son of Iddo."⁴³ As the prophets of Yahweh before them, they "prophesied unto the Jews in Jewry and Jerusalem IN THE NAME OF YAHWEH, the eloahi of Israel, which was upon them."⁴⁴ Ezra writes that they prophesied "in the name of the eloahi of Israel (who was) over them."⁴⁵

As long as these prophets spoke things that men wanted to hear (e.g. the Temple would be rebuilt)⁴⁶ there was no problem; but when Yahweh informed the people that they were still in their iniquities and that they and their city would suffer punishment, these same believers quickly changed their allegiance. "Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet," being a prophet along with Haggai after the Jews returned from Babylon,⁴⁷ was the author of the book of Zechariah.⁴⁸ One of Zechariah's

⁴² *Lives*, 2:1.

⁴³ 1 Esd., 7:3; Ezra, 6:14; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:4:5, 7.

⁴⁴ 1 Esd., 6:1. The book of Esdras was originally composed in Hebrew, our present copies coming down to us in Greek (SVA, p. i). Therefore, the Greek expression "Κυρίου Θεού Ἰσραήλ (lord deity of Israel)," as demonstrated by the translations of the LXX, comes from the original Hebrew "יהוה אלהי ישראל" (Yahweh eloahi Israel)" (e.g. compare the MT with the corresponding verses in the LXX text of Judg., 5:5, 21:3; 1 Kings [3 Kings], 8:17, 20, 16:26; 2 Kings [4 Kings], 18:5; and so forth).

⁴⁵ Ezra, 5:1.

⁴⁶ For example see Zech., 1:1–2:13, 4:1–10.

⁴⁷ The Hebrew-Aramaic term בַּר (bar), used in these passages about Zechariah, means much more than simply one's immediate "son." It often refers to a "grandson" or any subsequent descendant and to one's "heir" (SEC, Heb. #1247–1248). In Ezra, 5:1, and 6:14, "Zechariah bar Iddo" is easily recognized as meaning Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo and therefore one and the same with Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo (e.g. see DB, p. 758; EJ, 16, p. 953; JE, 12, p. 645). Neh., 12:4, 12, 16, mentions Iddo, from whom a Zechariah was descended, as one of the chief priests during this early Temple period.

⁴⁸ Zech., 1:1, 7. That Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo is the same as Zechariah, the son of Iddo see above n. 47.

assignments was to inform the Jews of their sins and to chastise their evil religious leaders. For their crimes Yahweh was going to inflict punishment on them.⁴⁹ As a result, regardless of the prosperity brought to the Jews when Zechariah first prophesied about the rebuilding of the Temple, his new message about the punishment of these people for their sins was not greeted with the same enthusiasm and support. For this deed the religious leaders of Judaea murdered him “between the Temple and the altar.”⁵⁰

Murder of the Prophets

We do not know the ultimate fate of each and every prophet who came in the name of Yahweh (our records lacking on this issue). Nevertheless, we do know that all were persecuted. Stephen, for example, after the death of Yahushua the messiah, chastised the Jewish leaders of his day, saying:

Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the sacred ruach (spirit); as your fathers also you. Which one of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who before had announced concerning the coming of the just one (the messiah), who betrayers and murders you have now become! (your fathers) who received the Torah by the disposition of angels and kept it not. (Acts, 7:52–53)

About the prophet Ezekiel, to demonstrate, we are told that, “The ruler of the people Israel killed him there (in Chaldea) as he was being reproved by him concerning the worship of idols.”⁵¹ The prophet Micah was hanged by the Israelite King Joram, the son of Ahab, “because he rebuked him for the impieties of his fathers.”⁵² Amos was tortured by King Amaziah of Judah and “at last his son also killed him with a club by striking him on the temple.”⁵³ Even

⁴⁹ For example see Zech., 11:10–17, 12:1–14, 13:1–9.

⁵⁰ Matt., 23:35; Luke, 11:51. Because the murder of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, is not mentioned in the Jewish sources outside the New Testament it has been improperly reasoned by some that the book of Matthew was in error and meant to say Zechariah, the son of Yahuida, a prophet who had lived several centuries earlier and was killed in the court of the Temple (2 Chron., 24:20–22). Nevertheless, there is absolutely no reason to doubt the account in Matthew. In the first place, Yahushua the messiah made his statement as a charge against the Jewish religious leaders, who doubtlessly were embarrassed by the fact that their forefathers had been a part of this murder. The Jewish leaders, therefore, had every reason not to publish the crime.

Second, the naming of Abel and Zechariah in these verses is equivalent to saying “from the first prophet killed until the last.” Zechariah, the son of Yahuida, was certainly not among the last. Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, on the other hand, was among the last three prophets of the OT. Third, Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, is also found in the Jewish version of Matthew by Shem Tob, which represents a primitive text (Howard, *Matthew*, p. 118). This text is important not only because it descends from an early text of Matthew but because it also correctly gives Zechariah as the author of the quote in Matt., 27:9, while our present Greek texts contain the scribal error of Jeremiah (ibid., p. 142). Therefore, it is truer to the original and gives added weight to the reading of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, since the Jews of the Middle Ages did not disagree with it.

⁵¹ Lives, 3:1–2.

⁵² Lives, 6:1–3.

⁵³ Lives, 7:1.

the prophet Obadiah is said to have “endured much” because he was a disciple of Elijah,⁵⁴ whom Ahab sought to kill because he opposed Baal worship.

The murder and persecution of these prophets was the direct result of their coming in, and therefore using, the name יהוה . James, for instance, relates this detail when he speaks of the prophets as our model for endurance:

Take as an example, my brothers, the evil sufferings and the patience of the prophets who spoke IN THE NAME OF יהוה (YAHWEH).⁵⁵ Lo, we call those who endure (these sufferings) blessed. (James, 5:10–11)

This murder of the prophets because they used the sacred name is also testified to by the messiah. On two different occasions Yahushua chastised the Jewish religious leaders of his day as being, like their fathers before them, prophet killers. When we examine the accounts of these two speeches it is obvious that both are a repetition of the same charge. It is also clear that there is a strong connection between the death of the prophets and their use of the sacred name. These two exhortations are recorded in Matthew, 23:29–39, and Luke, 11:47–52. We place them below in parallel so that their full impact can be measured:

Matt., 23:29–39

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you build the sepulchres of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous, and you say, ‘If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ So that you bear witness to yourselves, that sons you are of those who murdered the prophets; and you fill up the measure of your fathers. (23:29–32)

Serpents, offspring of vipers, how shall you escape from the Judgment of Ge-henna?

Luke, 11:47–52

Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets and your fathers killed them. Hence you bear witness and consent to works of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. (11:47–48)

Because of this also the wisdom of יהוה said, I will send to them prophets and apostles,

⁵⁴ Lives, 9:2.

⁵⁵ ROSNB and BE correctly restore the name Yahweh to this verse.

Because of this, behold, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes; and out of them you will kill and put on torture stakes, and from them you will scourge in your synagogues, and will persecute from city to city; (23:33-34)

so that should come upon you all the righteous blood poured out upon the earth from the blood of Abel the righteous, to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. Verily I say to you, these things shall all come upon this generation. (23:35-36)

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her, how often I would have gathered your children, in the way a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, is left to you your house desolate; for I say to you, In no wise shall you see me henceforth until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of ㄱㅇㄱㅇ." (23:37-39)

and out of them they will kill and drive out, (11:49)

that may be required the blood of all the prophets from the foundation of the world, of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house; yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation. (11:50-51)

Woe to you the doctors of the Torah (Law), for you took away the key of knowledge; yourselves did not enter, and those who were entering you hindered. (11:52)

As can readily be discerned, Matthew, 23:29–36, and Luke, 11:47–51, are essentially the same. The blame for the death of the prophets from the foundation of the world—from righteous Abel (the first prophet named in Scriptures as murdered) until Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, (the last prophet murdered among those listed in the Old Testament) is placed squarely upon the shoulders of the religious leaders.⁵⁶ These words agree with those of Stephen to the sanhedrin: “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts, 7:51–53).

It is also clear that Matthew, 23:37–39, provides us with a reason. Jerusalem (where the leading religious leaders of Judah lived), being the home of the prophet killers, would remain a condemned place until the day when its people would say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of אֱלֹהִים ,” a direct quote from Psalm, 118:26.⁵⁷ This detail proves that the opposite had been true up until the time of the messiah, i.e. the people were killing, stoning, and cursing those who came in the name of Yahweh! Nevertheless, these religious leaders never saw themselves as killers of the prophets but as men serving the eloahim. Indeed, Yahushua warned his followers, “out of the synagogues they will put you; but is coming an hour that everyone who kills you will think a service to אֱלֹהִים is rendered.”⁵⁸

The passage from Luke, 11:52, is actually parallel in thought with Matthew, 23:37–39. Matthew refers to Jerusalem as home of the prophet killers who, because of their destruction of those who came in the name of Yahweh, have prevented Yahweh from gathering the children of Jerusalem together in salvation. Luke, 11:52, meanwhile, refers to these same religious leaders as “the doctors of the Torah (Law)” who “took away the key of knowledge” (i.e. they suppressed the use of the sacred name Yahweh and killed those who came in that name). They therefore prevented themselves from entering salvation and hindered those who were entering.

Conclusion

These details verify that the prophets of Yahweh were severely oppressed for using the sacred name. Out of fear for their lives some contemplated abstinence, some even fled for a time, but at the end all fulfilled their duty and spoke in the name of Yahweh. At no time did any of them contemplate using, as others had done, an innocuous term like “baal.” They were sent with a message from Yahweh, therefore they would come in Yahweh’s name. The very fact that these loyal prophets of Yahweh used the sacred name when they knew that torture and death were likely to follow further confirms the importance of using the name Yahweh.

⁵⁶ For the murder of Abel see Gen., 4:1–16.

⁵⁷ SRB, p. 657, n. q.; AB, NT, p. 37, Matt., 23:39.

⁵⁸ John, 16:2; cf. Isa., 66:5–6.