CHAPTER FOUR

DIRECT DISCOURSE IN THE PROPHETS

The following investigation of DD in the prophets is designed to be an exploration of ambiguity, not an attempt to conjure up a pellucid reading. The discussion is designed to move in the direction of making sense not necessarily of the text but of the phenomenon itself. Removing the uncertainties of the text would be an injustice to the artistry that the present text unfolds; explicating the phenomenon should assist in explaining why often opaque texts resist elucidation.

One may appreciate the broad latitude available for the interpretation of speaking voices in the prophets by a glance at later targumic attempts to resolve some of the text's vagueness. Whose voice identifies with a group in saying that, "a child has been born to us" (Isa 9:5)? Who cries out, "Oh, my anguish, my anguish—how I writhe!" (Jer 4:19)? The Targum clarifies each with the insertion, "the prophet said." Who says, "I say" (Isa 24:16)? The Targum changes this to, "the prophet said." The book of Ezekiel commences with no identification of the "I" who begins speaking, but the Targum prefaces a clarification (italics): "The prophet said, 'Now I was among the exiles by the river Chebar..." (Ezk 1:1). Where the text reads, "a watchman said," the Targum rephrases as, "the prophet said" (Isa 21:12). In some verses where no pronouns are present to suggest a speaker, the Targum may nevertheless still specify, "the prophet said" (Isa 33:15).

Not all of these clarifications are readily obvious as the voice of the prophet. The lack of clarification on the one hand (the Hebrew text) and the penchant to remove ambiguity on the other (the Targum) emanate from distinctly different conceptions of how to read a text. Even the Hebrew prophets themselves are not uniform in their discourse strategies. How is one to evaluate a lack of resolution in prophetic literature when alongside such vague passages in the Hebrew text also occur other passages saturated

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1 This reminder that "the prophet said" appears elsewhere in the prophets to reaffirm that an otherwise unidentified "I" of the Masoretic text is the prophet (e.g., Isa 6:1; 8:17; 21:2, 8, 10; 22:14; 28:23; 48:16; 61:1; 63:7; Ezek 14:1; 20:1; Am 9:1; Mic 7:1; Hab 2:1; 3:18). Its insertion to endorse homiletical expansions is particularly striking (e.g., Isa 5:1; Jer 8:22; Ezek 16:23; 19:14; 32:16): "When the meturgeman speaks in the name of the prophet, his innovations show he does so with almost prophetic authority.... The usage of 'the prophet said' suggests the meturgeman took his quasi-prophetic status quite seriously. He specifically claims to articulate not only what Isaiah the prophet said, but what Isaiah meant to say, or should have said" (Chilton 1987:xiii-xiv).
with DD markers such as, "Thus said Yahweh," (בַּהֲדוֹי הָאֱלֹהִים) or "oracle of Yahweh" (נֶפֶשׁ יְהוָה)? Therefore, the special problems and techniques characterizing the prophetic literature require that it be treated separately from other biblical literature in the analysis of the marking of DD.

Careful work has already borne much fruit in the analysis of selected portions of the prophetic material or isolated markers of DD. One of the achievements of Wolff (1937) was to show how prophetic texts contrast the word of God to the words of men whom they quote. Rendtorff's (1954) careful analysis of "הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה" in Jeremiah is another example among many upon which we intend to build in the following pages. What is needed is a synthesis of all material—not simply the marking of divine speech, but the marking of all discourse—in order to place the problems of divine speech and the data of individual books into perspective. Such a synthesis must move beyond a mere listing of occurrences (as Bretón [1987] provides1) to an analysis of all speech marking in the prophets. "Thus said Yahweh," is a marker of divine speech that must not be treated in isolation from other means (or lack of means) for marking speech in general. These and other phrases are not used consistently when describing divine speech, and special attention must be focused on the variability of conventions which vary among, and even within, documents.

What clues can be used to discern changes in speaking voices when they remain unmarked from without, lacking any verbal notification that an embedded discourse is present? Is a change in person or number a reliable guide for tracing speaking voices? In the first chapter we discussed asteismos and the problems associated with quasi-direct speech. Some languages "can slip quite naturally from direct to indirect speech in the middle of a long quotation, without any indication other than the change of a pronoun referent" (Callow 1974:18). If Hebrew poetry exemplifies such a style, pronominal referents may be illusory guides to sorting out who speaks what words. If God can speak of himself in the third person (Wildberger 1942:15-17; cf. Jos 24:6-7), or use the first person plural (Holladay 1989:171), pronominal shifts by themselves are a shaky foundation for distinguishing divine from human speech.

Along similar lines, phrases such as "my people" must be used with caution in discriminating God's voice. The words, "my people," come comfortably from the mouth of God,2 but since they are found also on the lips of others, the phrase is not a dependable gauge for confirming the

1 Lists of data available in such works will not be reproduced here unless there is a point to be made. One must use Bretón's "Masora Magna of prophetic formulas" (Becker 1990:307) with care, since his lists can be incomplete (e.g., Ps 110:1 is omitted from his charts on pp. 214-15 for insufficient reason [see his n. 532]; Isa 28:13 is omitted from the chart on p. 33 despite meeting the criteria he proposes on p. 32).

2 E.g., Isa 40:1; Jer 7:12; Ezk 13:9; Hos 6:11; Joel 4:2; Am 7:15; Mic 6:3.