

A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN PROPHECY IN LIGHT OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0346

Accepted Date: 11/05/2026

Published Date: 28/05/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of prophecy within contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity in light of Old Testament theology. It investigates the nature, function, and theological orientation of prophetic ministry as presented in the Hebrew Bible and evaluates its continuity and discontinuity in present-day Pentecostal practices in Southwest Nigeria. Grounded in a biblical-theological and hermeneutical framework, the study draws extensively on Old Testament prophetic traditions, particularly the ministries of Amos and Jeremiah, which emphasize covenantal accountability, ethical responsibility, and social justice as the core of prophetic activity. The study employs a qualitative, library-based research design involving critical textual analysis of biblical passages and scholarly literature on prophecy, African Pentecostalism, and Nigerian prophetic movements. Findings reveal that Old Testament prophecy is primarily covenantal and ethical in nature, with emphasis on forth-telling, social critique, and moral transformation rather than predictive or prosperity-oriented declarations. In contrast, contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal prophecy is largely characterized by predictive utterances, personal revelations, spiritual diagnosis, and solution-driven messages addressing individual and socio-economic challenges. The study further identifies a growing commercialization of prophetic ministry and increased emphasis on material and personal success, which diverges from the communal and justice-centered focus of biblical prophecy. However, areas of continuity are also observed, particularly in the belief in divine communication and the perceived relevance of prophecy in addressing existential human concerns. The study concludes that while contemporary prophetic practices remain a significant feature of Nigerian Christianity, there is a pressing need for theological reorientation. It recommends a renewed engagement with Old Testament prophetic principles to recover the ethical, communal, and covenantal dimensions of prophecy. Such re-engagement is essential for fostering a biblically grounded and theologically responsible prophetic ministry within Nigerian Pentecostalism.

Keywords: Prophet, Prophecy, Prophetism, Old Testament, Pentecostalism

Introduction

The phenomenon of prophecy has become one of the most visible and contested features of contemporary Christianity in Nigeria, particularly within Pentecostal and neo-prophetic movements. While prophecy has long been acknowledged within Christian theology as a manifestation of divine communication, its present expressions in Nigeria have generated intense theological debate and public scrutiny. The central concern is not whether prophetic phenomena have antecedents within the biblical and historical traditions of Christianity, but rather the nature, function, and legitimacy of contemporary prophetic practices within the Nigerian religious landscape. Within this context, prophecy is variously understood as a spiritual gift, a ministerial office, and, in some instances, a controversial religious practice that raises questions about its theological authenticity and social implications. Scholarly engagement with prophecy demonstrates that the concept has remained a subject of enduring interest across biblical studies and theological discourse. Classical studies such as those of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Joseph Blenkinsopp emphasize that prophecy in the Old Testament was fundamentally rooted in covenantal consciousness, ethical responsibility, and divine accountability (Heschel; Blenkinsopp). Biblical prophets functioned primarily as spokespersons of God, addressing moral, social, and religious deviations within their communities. However, contemporary Nigerian expressions of prophecy appear to exhibit a significant shift in emphasis, often centering on predictive declarations, personal revelations, and solutions to existential challenges (Ogidiolu 1–11; Awojobi 2020, 207–215; Bobai 59–70; Awojobi and Adesina 185–193).

The rapid expansion of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria has contributed significantly to the proliferation of prophetic practices. As Kwabena Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu observes in his broader analysis of African Pentecostalism, prophetic ministry has become a major avenue through which religious actors claim to mediate divine power and address human needs (Asamoah-Gyadu 51–66). In Nigeria, this development is closely tied to socio-economic realities, where individuals seek spiritual solutions to challenges such as unemployment, health crises, and social instability. Consequently, prophets are often perceived as possessing unique spiritual authority capable of revealing hidden causes of problems and prescribing solutions for personal and communal advancement. Within this framework, prophetic activity in many Nigerian Pentecostal contexts tends to emphasize foretelling, the prediction of future events, and the provision of spiritual direction for navigating life's uncertainties. This aligns with observations in African Pentecostal studies that contemporary prophecy frequently involves the disclosure of past events, diagnosis of present conditions, and prediction of future outcomes (Aryeh 70; Ahiamadu 14–26; Bobai 59–70; Ngwoke 2024). Such practices have elevated the status of the prophet as a central religious figure whose authority is often derived from perceived access to divine revelation. As Paul Gifford argues, the growth of new Christian movements in Africa is partly sustained by leaders who present themselves as possessing solutions to pressing existential and economic concerns (Gifford).

Notwithstanding these developments, the proliferation of prophetic practices in Nigeria has also been accompanied by notable controversies and criticisms. Recent Nigerian scholarship has increasingly highlighted the ethical and institutional challenges associated with prophetic ministry, particularly its commercialization and commodification (Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Ngwoke 2024; Diara, Onukwufor, and Uroko 1–6). Reports of financial exploitation, manipulation of vulnerable individuals, and the commercialization of prophecy have raised serious ethical and theological concerns (Adekunle 264–275; Agazue 1–16; Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Ogidis 2025). In some instances, prophetic declarations, particularly those predicting calamities or misfortunes, have generated fear and anxiety within society (Arogbonlo). The narrative of Simon in Acts 8 has

also been used in recent Nigerian scholarship to critique the commodification of spiritual gifts in contemporary prophetic movements (Ogidis 2025). These developments call into question the character, purpose, and theological grounding of contemporary prophetic ministry. They also raise critical concerns regarding whether such practices align with the biblical understanding of prophecy as reflected in the Old Testament. From a biblical perspective, prophecy encompasses both foretelling and forth-telling, with greater emphasis on the latter. The primary function of Old Testament prophets was not merely to predict future events but to proclaim the will of God in relation to the moral and spiritual condition of the people. As Steven L. McKenzie notes, prophecy is essentially an act of critique, addressing social injustice, idolatry, and covenantal unfaithfulness (McKenzie). Prophetic messages were often directed toward reforming society, calling individuals and communities to repentance and ethical transformation. This is evident in prophetic traditions found in texts such as the Book of Amos and the Book of Jeremiah, where the emphasis is placed on justice, righteousness, and fidelity to God. In contrast, many contemporary prophetic expressions within Nigerian Pentecostalism appear to prioritize personal benefit, material success, and individual destiny over communal ethics and social transformation (Uroko and Enobong 1–8; Abioje 787–810; Abolaji and Ajide 2025). This apparent divergence raises an important theological question: To what extent do contemporary prophetic practices in Nigerian Christianity reflect the theological foundations of Old Testament prophecy? Addressing this question is crucial, not only for theological clarity but also for the broader implications of prophetic ministry on Christian life and societal development in Nigeria.

This study, therefore, explores the concept of the prophet and prophecy within the framework of Old Testament theology and examines their relevance to contemporary Nigerian Christianity. It seeks to analyze the nature, function, and significance of prophecy as presented in the Bible and to evaluate how these elements are reflected, or distorted, in present-day Pentecostal practices in Southwest Nigeria. By engaging biblical texts and relevant theological scholarship, the study aims to provide a critical yet constructive assessment of prophetic ministry, highlighting areas of continuity and discontinuity between biblical and contemporary expressions. Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing discussions within African theology and Pentecostal studies by offering a biblically grounded perspective on prophecy that is attentive to contemporary realities. It underscores the need for a re-examination of prophetic practices in light of scriptural principles, with the goal of fostering a more authentic and responsible exercise of prophetic ministry within the Nigerian Church.

The foundation for understanding prophecy in Christian theology lies within the Old Testament, where prophets functioned primarily as mediators of divine will within the covenantal framework of Israel. Classical scholarship emphasizes that prophecy was not merely predictive but fundamentally ethical, corrective, and covenantal in orientation. Abraham Joshua Heschel argues that the prophets were deeply concerned with issues of justice, righteousness, and the moral condition of society, rather than simply foretelling future events (Heschel). Similarly, Joseph Blenkinsopp traces the historical development of prophecy in Israel, highlighting its role in shaping religious consciousness and communal accountability (Blenkinsopp). Biblical texts themselves reinforce this understanding. The prophetic message in the Book of Amos underscores social justice as central to divine expectation, as seen in the call for justice to “roll down like waters” (Amos 5.24). Likewise, the Book of Isaiah presents prophecy as a vehicle for moral exhortation and national repentance (Isa. 1.16–17). In the Book of Jeremiah, prophecy is portrayed as a confrontation with societal corruption and covenantal unfaithfulness (Jer. 7.5–7). These texts collectively demonstrate that the primary role of the prophet was to call people back to fidelity to

God, often through critique of prevailing injustices. Scholars such as Johannes Lindblom and Martti Nissinen further situate Israelite prophecy within the broader context of the Ancient Near East, noting similarities in prophetic phenomena while emphasizing the distinctive ethical monotheism that characterized biblical prophecy (Lindblom; Nissinen). Ronald E. Clements also highlights the relationship between prophecy and tradition, arguing that prophetic messages were deeply embedded in Israel's theological heritage and covenantal history (Clements).

Beyond the Old Testament, the concept of prophecy continued to evolve within Jewish and Christian traditions. Niels Christian Hvidt examines the development of Christian prophecy in the post-biblical era, noting both continuity and transformation in its function within the Church (Hvidt). Similarly, Francis A. Sullivan explores charismatic gifts within the Christian tradition, arguing that prophecy remains a legitimate expression of the Spirit, though it must be subjected to theological discernment (Sullivan). New Testament perspectives also contribute to the understanding of prophecy, particularly in relation to spiritual gifts and community edification. While not the central focus of this study, texts such as 1 Corinthians 14 emphasize prophecy as a means of strengthening, encouraging, and comforting believers (1 Cor. 14.3). Max Turner underscores the role of the Spirit in empowering prophetic witness, linking Old Testament expectations with New Testament fulfillment (Turner). However, some scholars adopt a more critical stance toward contemporary claims of prophecy. Richard B. Gaffin questions the continuation of certain charismatic gifts, emphasizing the sufficiency of Scripture as the primary mode of divine revelation (Gaffin). This tension within theological discourse highlights the need for careful evaluation of prophetic practices in light of biblical teaching.

The rise of Pentecostalism in Africa has significantly reshaped the discourse on prophecy. Asamoah-Gyadu identifies prophecy as a central feature of African Pentecostal spirituality, often associated with healing, deliverance, and divine guidance (Asamoah-Gyadu 51–66). In many African contexts, prophecy addresses existential concerns, providing explanations for misfortune and offering solutions to life's challenges. Recent Nigerian scholarship further emphasizes how prophetic movements have expanded within rapidly growing Pentecostal environments, often reflecting both spiritual vitality and institutional complexity (Ngwoke 2024; Abolaji and Ajide 2025). Studies focusing specifically on Ghana and Nigeria, such as those by Paul Gifford, highlight how prophetic movements thrive within socio-economic contexts marked by uncertainty and hardship (Gifford). Gifford argues that prophets often gain influence by presenting themselves as intermediaries capable of resolving both spiritual and material problems. Similarly, Cephas Omenyo and Opoku Onyinah examine the development of charismatic renewal and prophetic ministry within African Christianity, noting both its transformative potential and its susceptibility to excesses (Omenyo; Onyinah). In contemporary practice, prophecy in African Pentecostalism frequently involves the revelation of hidden information, diagnosis of spiritual problems, and prediction of future events. Aryeh observes that such practices often include the provision of "spiritual directions" aimed at securing success and averting misfortune (Aryeh 70). While these functions resonate with traditional African religious worldviews, they also raise questions about their alignment with biblical prophetic models. Critiques of contemporary prophetic practices have also emerged in recent scholarship, particularly regarding ethical abuse, commercialization, and institutional distortion of spiritual authority (Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Diara, Onukwufor, and Uroko 1–6; Ngwoke 2023). These critiques echo earlier concerns within biblical scholarship regarding the misuse of prophetic authority.

This study is anchored on a biblical-theological and hermeneutical framework, which provides the conceptual lens for examining the nature and function of prophecy in both its Old

Testament context and its contemporary expressions within Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity. The framework integrates insights from biblical theology, prophetic hermeneutics, and contextual theology, enabling a critical engagement between scriptural norms and present-day religious practices. At the core of this framework is the assumption that the Old Testament provides a normative theological foundation for understanding prophecy. Biblical theology emphasizes the progressive unfolding of divine revelation within the historical context of Israel, where prophets functioned as mediators of God's will. As demonstrated in prophetic traditions such as the Book of Amos and the Book of Jeremiah, prophecy was fundamentally oriented toward covenantal accountability, social justice, and moral transformation (Amos 5.24; Jer. 7.5–7). This theological orientation serves as the benchmark against which contemporary prophetic practices are evaluated. The study also draws on prophetic hermeneutics, which concerns the interpretation and appropriation of prophetic texts within new contexts. Scholars such as Niels Christian Hvidt and Johannes Lindblom highlight the importance of understanding prophecy within its original socio-religious setting while recognizing its ongoing relevance for contemporary faith communities (Hvidt; Lindblom). This hermeneutical approach allows for a careful distinction between the original intent of biblical prophecy and its modern reinterpretations, thereby preventing anachronistic or selective applications. In addition, the study incorporates elements of contextual theology, which emphasizes the interaction between biblical texts and the lived realities of specific communities. Within the Nigerian context, prophetic practices are shaped by socio-economic conditions, cultural worldviews, and religious expectations. Recent scholarship underscores how commercialization and institutional expansion shape these practices in contemporary Nigeria (Ngwoke 2024; Abolaji and Ajide 2025). This contextual dimension is essential for understanding why prophecy remains a dominant feature of contemporary Nigerian Christianity, even when its expressions diverge from biblical models. The integration of these perspectives results in a normative-critical framework. In this approach, the Old Testament serves as the normative standard, while contemporary prophetic practices constitute the empirical reality to be examined. The goal is not merely to describe these practices but to evaluate their theological validity, identifying areas of continuity and discontinuity between biblical prophecy and modern expressions.

Despite extensive scholarship on prophecy, a significant gap remains in the systematic theological evaluation of contemporary prophetic practices in Nigerian Pentecostalism in light of Old Testament theology. While African Pentecostal studies have provided valuable sociological and descriptive insights, fewer studies engage in rigorous biblical-theological critique that directly compares contemporary practices with scriptural models. Recent Nigerian scholarship has begun to address this gap through exegetical and ethical analyses of prophecy and its abuses (Bobai 59–70; Ogidis 2025; Awojobi and Adesina 185–193). However, existing literature often emphasizes either the historical development of prophecy or its contemporary expressions, without sufficiently bridging the two through a coherent hermeneutical framework. This creates a need for studies that integrate biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and contextual analysis in order to assess the authenticity and relevance of modern prophetic ministry. This study seeks to address this gap by offering a theological and hermeneutical evaluation of prophecy in contemporary Nigerian Christianity, drawing explicitly from Old Testament prophetic tradition. By examining both the biblical foundations and contemporary expressions of prophecy, the study provides a critical framework for understanding the role of prophets and prophecy within the Nigerian Church. It contributes to ongoing debates within African theology and Pentecostal studies by emphasizing the need for prophetic practices that align with the ethical and theological principles of Scripture.

Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory research method and a descriptive-analytical approach. Exploratory research is particularly suitable for examining theological concepts that require deeper clarification and critical engagement within specific contexts. In this case, the study explores the concept of prophecy as presented in the Bible in contrast to its interpretation and practice within contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity. The study relies primarily on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, biblical commentaries, theological expositions, and edited scholarly volumes. Key biblical texts such as the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Jeremiah, and the Book of Amos are examined to establish the theological foundations of prophecy within the Old Testament. These are complemented by recent and foundational scholarly works on prophecy, Pentecostalism, and African Christianity, including studies that critically engage Nigerian prophetic practices and their ethical implications (Bobai 59–70; Awojobi and Adesina 185–193; Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Ngwoke 2024; Ogidis 2025). The scope of the study is limited to the biblical understanding of prophecy and its relevance to contemporary Pentecostal practices in Southwest Nigeria. It does not engage prophecy as understood in non-Christian religious traditions or contexts outside Nigeria. Rather, the focus is on evaluating how prophecy is conceptualized and practiced within Nigerian Christianity in light of Old Testament theology. Unlike empirical studies, this research does not employ primary data collection methods such as interviews or surveys. However, it draws on documented practices and publicly available materials, including sermons, online prophetic declarations, media reports, video recordings, and existing scholarly analyses of prophetic ministry in Nigeria. These sources are treated as secondary observational data insofar as they have been previously documented and critically analyzed within academic literature. In particular, recent studies on prophetic commercialization, ethical concerns, and institutional expansion in Nigerian Pentecostalism provide important contextual evidence for interpreting contemporary practices (Ngwoke 2024; Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Diara, Onukwufor, and Uroko 1–6).

Data Sources

The data for this study are derived from four main categories of secondary materials:

1. Biblical Texts – Selected Old Testament prophetic books, particularly Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, used to establish the normative theological framework for prophecy.
2. Scholarly Literature – Peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and edited volumes on prophecy, Pentecostalism, and African Christianity, including recent Nigerian-focused studies such as Bobai (2025), Awojobi and Adesina (2024), and Ngwoke (2024).
3. Edited Volume Contributions – Chapters from *Prophetism from Scripture to Practice: African and Afro-Caribbean Perspectives* (Aryeh, 2025), including Ogidis (Acts 8 reinterpretation) and Abolaji and Ajide (ethical commercialization of prophecy), which provide contemporary analytical perspectives on Nigerian prophetic practices.
4. Documented Media and Public Discourse Materials – Recorded sermons, online prophetic utterances, religious broadcasts, and media reports that have been analyzed in existing academic studies. These are not independently interpreted as raw empirical data but are engaged through the interpretive lens of published scholarly works.

The study explicitly acknowledges that claims about contemporary prophetic practices are not derived from direct fieldwork but from triangulated interpretations found in existing academic literature and documented sources. For instance, concerns regarding commercialization and institutional expansion of prophecy are supported by recent empirical and analytical studies that have examined Nigerian Pentecostal contexts using interviews and ethnographic observation

(Ngwoke 2024; Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Diara, Onukwufor, and Uroko 1–6). The collected materials are subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring motifs such as predictive prophecy, personal revelation, prosperity-oriented messages, commercialization of spiritual gifts, and ethical tensions within prophetic ministry. These themes are interpreted within a biblical-theological and hermeneutical framework that prioritizes Old Testament prophetic theology as the normative standard. The study therefore serves as a theological and analytical contribution to ongoing discussions on prophecy within African Christianity. It aims to enhance Christian understanding by providing a biblically grounded framework for evaluating prophetic ministry and guiding both church leaders and adherents toward practices that are consistent with scriptural teachings.

Findings and Discussion

1. The Nature and Function of Prophets in the Old Testament

Findings from the biblical analysis indicate that prophets in the Old Testament functioned primarily as spokespersons of God within a covenantal framework, mediating between YHWH and the covenant community of Israel. Their authority was neither institutional nor hereditary in the strict sense but derived from divine commissioning, often authenticated through revelatory encounters and call narratives. A classic example is found in the Book of Jeremiah, where the prophet's vocation is grounded in divine election and consecration prior to birth (Jer. 1.4–10). This underscores the theological premise that prophetic authority originates from God rather than human endorsement or self-assertion. The prophetic role encompassed the communication of God's will across moral, social, political, and religious dimensions of Israelite life. Prophets addressed kings, priests, and the general populace, often confronting systemic injustice, idolatry, and covenantal disobedience. As Abraham Joshua Heschel argues, the prophets were not mere predictors of future events but moral critics of society, whose messages were deeply rooted in divine concern for justice and righteousness. This is vividly illustrated in the Book of Amos, where prophetic proclamation is directed against social oppression and economic exploitation, culminating in the call for justice to “roll down like waters” (Amos 5.24). A recent contextual reinforcement of this interpretation is provided by Akande, who reads Amos 5:21–24 within the Nigerian religious landscape as a critique of empty religiosity and performative worship, thereby extending the relevance of prophetic critique to contemporary ecclesial practice (Akande 1–6). In a similar vein, the Book of Isaiah presents prophecy as a summons to ethical renewal, urging the people to “cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice” (Isa. 1.16–17).

A critical finding of this study is that forth-telling (proclamation) constituted the primary function of prophecy, while foretelling (prediction) was secondary and often conditional. Prophetic predictions were typically embedded within calls to repentance and warnings of impending judgment, contingent upon human response. Steven L. McKenzie supports this view by asserting that prophecy is fundamentally an act of theological critique, addressing present realities in light of divine standards. Thus, prophetic speech was less about speculative future-telling and more about interpreting current events through a covenantal lens. Furthermore, prophets in ancient Israel functioned as agents of social transformation, challenging structures of power and advocating for marginalized groups. The conflictual dimension of prophetic ministry has been further highlighted in recent scholarship by Awojobi and Adesina, who demonstrate that prophetic engagement in ancient Israel often generated resistance and confrontation, both with political authorities and within religious institutions, thereby reinforcing the inherently oppositional nature of authentic prophecy (Awojobi and Adesina 185–193). This aligns with broader Old Testament scholarship,

such as that of Joseph Blenkinsopp, who situates prophecy within the socio-political realities of Israel, emphasizing its role in shaping communal ethics and identity.

Another defining characteristic of Old Testament prophecy is the emphasis on accountability and personal integrity. Prophets were not only messengers but also embodiments of the message they proclaimed. Their lives often reflected the cost of obedience to divine calling, including rejection, persecution, and suffering. The experience of Jeremiah, for instance, highlights the existential burden of prophetic ministry, as he laments the personal consequences of his calling (Jer. 20.7–9). This illustrates that prophetic ministry was not a platform for personal gain but a vocation marked by sacrifice and fidelity to God’s mandate. Akande’s contextual study on Amos 5:21–24 further reinforces this ethical demand, arguing that prophetic authenticity is inseparable from moral integrity and rejection of hollow religiosity (Akande 1–6). In addition, the Old Testament provides criteria for discerning true and false prophecy, emphasizing alignment with divine revelation and moral integrity (cf. Deut. 18.20–22). False prophets were condemned for speaking presumptuously or for leading the people astray, often motivated by personal or political interests. This concern for authenticity further reinforces the seriousness with which prophecy was regarded within the biblical tradition. In summary, the Old Testament presents a coherent model of prophecy characterized by divine commissioning, ethical proclamation, social critique, and personal accountability. Prophets were central figures in maintaining covenantal fidelity, serving as instruments through whom God addressed the spiritual and moral condition of the community. Awojobi and Adesina prophetic conflict further strengthens this framework by showing that tensions between true and false prophecy are not only theological but also sociological realities that shape religious communities, both in ancient Israel and in contemporary Nigerian Christianity (Awojobi and Adesina 185–193). This foundational understanding therefore provides a critical benchmark for evaluating contemporary expressions of prophecy, particularly within contexts where the emphasis has shifted toward prediction and personal benefit.

2. Contemporary Prophetic Practices in Nigerian Pentecostalism

The analysis of contemporary Nigerian Pentecostalism reveals a marked reconfiguration in the understanding and practice of prophecy, shaped by theological innovation, socio-economic pressures, and cultural worldviews. In contrast to the Old Testament model, prophecy within this context is largely characterized by predictive declarations, personalized revelations, and solution-oriented interventions directed at addressing immediate existential concerns. This development reflects the broader dynamics of African Pentecostal spirituality, where religion is often engaged as a practical resource for navigating life’s uncertainties. A central finding of this study is the emergence of what may be described as a “prophetic economy,” in which prophetic services are, in some instances, intertwined with financial expectations and material transactions. Adekunle observes that the commercialization of prophetic ministry became particularly visible during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where prophetic pronouncements were sometimes linked to economic exchanges and spiritual services (Adekunle 268). Similarly, Agazue documents cases of exploitation within prophetic settings, including instances where vulnerable individuals, especially women, were subjected to manipulation and exploitation under the guise of spiritual intervention (Agazue 1–16). Expanding this concern, Ngwoke provides empirical documentation of commercialization practices in Nigerian Pentecostal settings, including elaborate seed-sowing schemes, prophetic extortion, and the monetization of spiritual products such as anointing oils, miracle stickers, and access fees for prophetic encounters (Ngwoke 2024). Collectively, these studies indicate that prophecy, in certain contexts, has evolved into a form of religious capital, where spiritual authority is commodified and exchanged for material benefit. Diara, Onukwufor,

and Uroko further reinforce this trend by describing the broader structural commercialization of religious communities in Nigeria, where financial sustainability and spiritual authority increasingly intersect (Diara et al. 1–6). This phenomenon must be understood within the socio-economic realities of Nigeria, where widespread poverty, unemployment, and insecurity create a fertile ground for the appeal of prophetic ministry. In such a context, prophets are often perceived as spiritual specialists capable of diagnosing hidden causes of misfortune and providing divine solutions. This aligns with the broader observation that African Pentecostalism tends to emphasize power encounters and pragmatic spirituality, addressing issues such as illness, financial instability, and relational challenges through prophetic intervention. However, Bobai's exegetical-theological critique of Joel 2:28–32 warns that contemporary prophetic expressions in Nigeria often drift toward problematic practices that require theological re-evaluation, particularly where prophetic authority is exercised without adequate biblical grounding (Bobai 59–70).

Another significant dimension of contemporary prophetic practice is its increasing intersection with political discourse and national life. Ikem, Ubiebi, and Ononogbu highlight the growing trend of prophetic declarations concerning elections, governance, and national events, noting that such prophecies have become a recurring feature of Nigeria's political landscape (Ikem et al. 240). In some cases, prophets publicly predict electoral outcomes or national crises, thereby positioning themselves as influential voices within the public sphere. While this reflects the enduring relevance of prophecy as a tool for societal engagement, similar to the role of prophets like Nathan in ancient Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 12.1–7), it also raises concerns about credibility, accountability, and the potential politicization of prophetic authority. Furthermore, contemporary Nigerian prophetic practices frequently involve spiritual diagnosis and prescriptive rituals, often framed within a cosmology that acknowledges the reality of spiritual warfare. Prophets commonly identify issues such as generational curses, ancestral influences, witchcraft, and demonic oppression as underlying causes of personal and communal problems. This emphasis resonates with African traditional religious worldviews, where spiritual causality is central to understanding misfortune. As Kgatle observes, Pentecostal prophecy in African contexts often engages deeply with fears related to witchcraft and spiritual attacks, providing interpretive frameworks and solutions for these concerns (Kgatle 135). While such practices enhance the relevance of prophetic ministry within the Nigerian context, they also raise important theological questions regarding alignment with biblical prophetic priorities, which are primarily centered on covenantal fidelity and ethical transformation rather than elaborate systems of spiritual causation.

Additionally, contemporary prophetic practice places significant emphasis on individualized revelation, where prophetic messages are tailored to specific persons, often revealing personal details about their lives. This has contributed to the elevation of the prophet as a central figure whose perceived spiritual insight grants access to divine knowledge. While this may be seen as a continuation of the biblical notion of divine revelation, it also introduces the risk of subjectivity and unverifiability, especially in the absence of structured mechanisms for testing prophetic utterances (cf. Deut. 18.21–22). Moreover, the mediatization of prophecy has amplified its reach and influence. Through television, social media, and digital platforms, prophetic messages are disseminated to a wide audience, transforming prophecy into a public spectacle. This has contributed to the popularity of prophetic ministries but has also intensified scrutiny, particularly when predictions fail or when controversial practices are exposed. In summary, contemporary prophetic practices in Nigerian Pentecostalism are characterized by pragmatic orientation, personalization of revelation, socio-political engagement, commercialization tendencies, and spiritual diagnosis, all of which reflect the complex interplay between theology

and context. While these developments demonstrate the adaptability and relevance of prophecy, they also highlight significant departures from the biblical model, thereby necessitating a critical theological evaluation.

3. Divergence between Biblical and Contemporary Models

A major finding of this study is the substantive divergence between Old Testament prophetic paradigms and contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal practices. While certain structural similarities exist, such as the claim to divine inspiration, the orientation, function, and ethical grounding of prophecy in both contexts differ in significant ways. These divergences are examined under three interrelated dimensions.

a. Shift from Communal Ethics to Individual Benefits

One of the most pronounced departures from the biblical model is the shift from communal, covenant-centered ethics to individualized, benefit-driven prophecy. In the Old Testament, prophecy functioned as a corporate corrective mechanism, addressing the moral and spiritual condition of the entire community. Prophets spoke against systemic injustice, economic exploitation, and covenantal unfaithfulness, often confronting both political authorities and the general populace. This is clearly illustrated in the Book of Amos, where prophetic critique is directed at societal structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression (Amos 5.11–15). The prophetic message was not designed to secure individual advantage but to restore communal righteousness and covenantal fidelity. Similarly, prophetic literature consistently emphasizes the collective responsibility of Israel as a covenant people, where individual actions are inseparable from communal outcomes.

In contrast, contemporary Nigerian prophetic practices tend to prioritize individual success narratives, including financial breakthroughs, career advancement, marital solutions, and personal deliverance. Prophecy is frequently framed as a means of accessing divine favour for personal upliftment, often detached from broader ethical or societal concerns. Uroko and Enobong attribute this development to the emergence of “professional prophets,” whose ministries are structured around personalized spiritual services rather than communal moral transformation (Uroko and Enobong 1-8). This shift can be partly explained by the socio-economic context of Nigeria, where individuals seek immediate and tangible solutions to pressing challenges. However, the theological implication is a reduction of prophecy from a communal ethical institution to a privatized spiritual utility, thereby diminishing its transformative potential within society.

b. Emphasis on Prediction over Proclamation

A second critical divergence lies in the disproportionate emphasis on predictive prophecy (foretelling) in contemporary practice, often at the expense of proclamatory prophecy (forth-telling). In the Old Testament, while predictive elements were present, they were typically subordinate to ethical proclamation and served as warnings or assurances contingent upon human response. Prophets functioned primarily as interpreters of divine will, addressing present realities rather than speculating about distant futures. Their messages were grounded in covenantal theology and aimed at eliciting repentance, obedience, and social reform. However, in contemporary Nigerian Pentecostalism, prophecy is frequently equated with the ability to predict future events, including personal destinies, economic outcomes, and political developments. Abioje critiques this trend, arguing that authentic prophecy should engage critically with issues of leadership, governance, and societal ethics, rather than being reduced to predictive performance (Abioje 795). The overemphasis on prediction has, in many cases, transformed prophecy into a form of religious spectacle, where the perceived accuracy of forecasts becomes the primary measure of prophetic authenticity. This development has several implications. First, it narrows the

scope of prophecy, limiting it to foreknowledge rather than moral guidance. Second, it fosters a culture of dependency, where individuals rely on prophets for direction rather than engaging in personal discernment grounded in Scripture. Third, it raises questions about verifiability and accountability, particularly when predictions fail or remain ambiguous.

c. Issues of Accountability and Ethical Integrity

A further area of divergence concerns the decline in accountability structures and ethical oversight within certain segments of contemporary prophetic ministry. In the Old Testament, prophetic authority was accompanied by stringent expectations of moral integrity and theological fidelity. False prophets were explicitly condemned, and mechanisms existed for testing prophetic claims (cf. Deut. 18.20–22). The Book of Jeremiah provides a strong critique of false prophecy, condemning those who speak visions of their own minds rather than from the mouth of the Lord (Jer. 23.16–22). Such denunciations underscore the seriousness with which prophetic authenticity was treated, as well as the potential consequences of misrepresentation. In contrast, contemporary Nigerian contexts reveal significant gaps in accountability, particularly within independent prophetic ministries that operate outside formal denominational structures. Agazue documents instances of financial exploitation and sexual abuse, highlighting the vulnerability of congregants who place unquestioned trust in prophetic figures. These practices represent a profound deviation from the biblical expectation of selflessness, integrity, and accountability in prophetic ministry. Moreover, the personalization of prophetic authority, where the prophet becomes the central figure of spiritual mediation, can lead to the consolidation of power without adequate checks and balances. This raises important theological and institutional concerns regarding the regulation, validation, and ethical conduct of prophetic ministry in contemporary settings.

Taken together, these divergences point to a broader transformation in the nature of prophecy, from a covenant-driven, ethically grounded, and communally oriented institution to a contextually adapted, individualized, and pragmatically oriented practice. While this transformation reflects the dynamic interaction between theology and context, it also exposes the risk of theological dilution and functional distortion. The findings suggest that contemporary prophetic practices, while addressing genuine human needs, often operate within a framework that redefines the purpose and scope of prophecy, thereby necessitating critical theological engagement. Without such engagement, the prophetic institution risks losing its biblical distinctiveness and transformative capacity, becoming instead a tool for personal empowerment devoid of its original ethical and communal mandate.

4. Areas of Continuity

Despite the evident divergences between Old Testament prophetic models and contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal practices, this study identifies significant areas of continuity that underscore the enduring relevance of prophecy within the Christian tradition. These continuities demonstrate that, although the form and emphasis of prophecy have evolved, its core theological assumptions and existential functions remain operative.

a. Belief in Divine Communication

A fundamental point of continuity lies in the shared conviction that God actively communicates with humanity through chosen individuals. Both the Old Testament tradition and contemporary Pentecostal Christianity affirm that prophecy is a legitimate medium of divine revelation. In ancient Israel, prophets were regarded as recipients of divine speech, often introduced with the formula “Thus says the Lord,” indicating the immediacy and authority of their message. This theological premise persists within Nigerian Pentecostalism, where prophets are similarly perceived as channels of divine insight and revelation. The prophetic promise articulated

in the Book of Joel (Joel 2.28–32) provides a crucial theological bridge between the biblical and contemporary contexts. The text envisions a democratization of the Spirit, where prophetic experience is extended beyond institutional boundaries to “all flesh,” including sons, daughters, the young, and the old. This expansion of prophetic participation finds resonance in Pentecostal theology, which emphasizes the universal accessibility of the Holy Spirit and the continuation of spiritual gifts. Nigerian scholarship reinforces this continuity. Ahiamadu’s exegetical work on Joel 2.28–32 highlights its implications for sustaining charismatic and Pentecostal movements, particularly in affirming the legitimacy of prophetic manifestations within contemporary Christianity (Ahiamadu 1497–1519). Similarly, Bobai situates modern Nigerian prophetic expressions within the framework of Spirit-empowerment, arguing that they can be understood as part of the ongoing realization of Joel’s vision (Bobai 59–70). Importantly, Bobai also cautions that such practices must be theologically evaluated to avoid distortion of biblical intent. A further strengthening of this continuity is provided by Esu and Galleh, who compare prophetic practices in mainline and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Their study demonstrates that prophecy is not exclusive to Pentecostal movements but is also recognized, though more cautiously and institutionally regulated, within mainline denominations. This comparative insight shows that prophecy remains a shared Christian phenomenon, even if its expression differs across ecclesial traditions (Esu and Galleh 2025). This broadens the continuity argument beyond Pentecostalism alone and situates prophecy as a wider ecclesial practice within Nigerian Christianity.

b. Relevance to Existential Realities

Another significant area of continuity is the pragmatic and existential relevance of prophecy. In both the Old Testament and contemporary Nigerian contexts, prophecy functions as a means of addressing real-life challenges and human concerns. In ancient Israel, prophets confronted issues such as social injustice, idolatry, political instability, and covenantal unfaithfulness. Their messages were deeply embedded in the lived experiences of the people, offering both critique and hope. Similarly, contemporary Nigerian prophecy engages with pressing socio-economic and spiritual realities, including poverty, illness, unemployment, insecurity, and relational difficulties. Prophets are often consulted for guidance, healing, and intervention, reflecting a worldview in which spiritual and material dimensions of life are deeply interconnected. This aligns with the broader African religious consciousness, where divine activity is perceived as directly relevant to everyday existence. Scholars such as Ugwu argue that prophecy retains its potential as a tool for societal engagement and transformation, particularly when it addresses issues of leadership and governance in ways that reflect biblical principles (Ugwu 74). In this sense, prophecy continues to function as an interpretive framework through which communities make sense of suffering, uncertainty, and aspiration.

c. Continuity in Prophetic Mediation and Spiritual Authority

A further continuity can be observed in the role of the prophet as a mediator of divine knowledge and authority. In both contexts, prophets occupy a position of spiritual significance, often serving as intermediaries between God and the community. This mediatory function is central to the prophetic office, whether in the structured setting of ancient Israel or the dynamic environment of Nigerian Pentecostal and mainline churches. In contemporary practice, this role is manifested through prophetic counseling, spiritual diagnosis, and intercessory prayer, which parallel, albeit in modified form, the biblical understanding of prophetic mediation. While the modalities differ, the underlying assumption, that certain individuals are endowed with heightened spiritual perception for the benefit of others, remains consistent. The continuities identified above suggest that contemporary prophetic practices in Nigerian Christianity are not entirely

disconnected from their biblical antecedents. Rather, they represent contextual adaptations that retain key theological elements, including belief in divine communication, relevance to human experience, and the mediatory role of prophets across denominational traditions. However, these continuities also intensify the need for critical theological evaluation. The presence of shared foundations does not automatically validate all contemporary expressions. Instead, it calls for careful discernment of how these practices align with the ethical, communal, and covenantal dimensions of biblical prophecy (Bobai 59–70; Esu and Galleh 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has examined the concept of the prophet and prophecy within the framework of Old Testament theology and evaluated its expression in contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity. Drawing from biblical texts and relevant scholarly literature, the study established that prophecy in the Old Testament was fundamentally covenantal, ethical, and reformative in nature. Prophets functioned as divinely commissioned messengers whose primary task was not merely to predict future events but to proclaim God's will, confront injustice, and call people to repentance and righteous living. This is clearly reflected in prophetic traditions such as the Book of Amos and the Book of Jeremiah, where the emphasis is placed on justice, moral accountability, and covenantal faithfulness (Amos 5.24; Jer. 7.5–7). In contrast, the study found that contemporary prophetic practices within Nigerian Pentecostalism are largely characterized by predictive declarations, personal revelations, and solution-oriented messages that address individual needs and existential concerns. While these practices demonstrate the continued relevance of prophecy in addressing human challenges, they often diverge from the biblical model by prioritizing individual benefit over communal ethics, and foretelling over forth-telling. The increasing commercialization of prophecy, as well as concerns regarding ethical accountability, further complicates the theological legitimacy of some contemporary prophetic expressions.

Nevertheless, the study also identified important areas of continuity, particularly in the belief that God continues to communicate with humanity and that prophetic ministry remains a vital aspect of Christian spirituality. The enduring appeal of prophecy in Nigeria reflects the socio-economic realities of the context, where individuals seek divine intervention in navigating life's uncertainties. This underscores the need to understand prophecy not only as a theological concept but also as a lived religious experience shaped by cultural and social dynamics. Importantly, the study's findings are consistent with existing empirical and contextual research on prophetic practices in Nigeria. Prior studies have already documented commercialization, ethical tensions, and structural abuses within prophetic ministries (Ngwoke 2024; Abolaji and Ajide 2025; Diara et al. 2020), as well as theological critiques of contemporary prophetic interpretation (Bobai 2025). These works confirm that the issues identified in this study are not isolated observations but part of a broader and well-established scholarly discourse on Nigerian Pentecostal prophetism. Furthermore, recent research on the integration of prophetic ministry within institutional frameworks, such as the study on reclaiming the prophetic mandate among Anglican clergy in Ibadan, demonstrates that structured prophetic and accountability mechanisms are both possible and already being implemented within mainline denominational contexts, offering a practical model for reform (Olajide 99-113). Overall, the study concludes that while prophecy remains central to contemporary Nigerian Christianity, there is a significant need for theological recalibration. A return to the foundational principles of Old Testament prophetic tradition is essential to ensure that prophetic ministry remains both biblically grounded and socially transformative. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Church leaders and prophetic ministers should prioritize the ethical and reformative aspects of prophecy as reflected in the Old Testament. Prophetic messages should address issues such as justice, righteousness, and social responsibility, rather than focusing predominantly on personal success and material gain. There is a need for improved theological training among prophets and church leaders to ensure a proper understanding of biblical prophecy. Institutions and churches should emphasize biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, enabling ministers to interpret and apply scriptural teachings accurately. Churches and Christian bodies should develop mechanisms for accountability and ethical oversight in prophetic ministry. This includes addressing issues of financial exploitation, manipulation, and abuse, which undermine the credibility of the Church and the integrity of prophetic practice. In line with emerging institutional efforts within mainline Christianity, such as Anglican frameworks for reclaiming the prophetic mandate in Ibadan, structured accountability systems offer viable models for balancing charismatic expression with ecclesial oversight. A balanced understanding of prophecy that integrates both spiritual experience and scriptural authority is essential. While the experiential dimension of prophecy should not be dismissed, it must be guided and tested by biblical standards (cf. 1 Cor. 14.29). Prophetic ministry should remain sensitive to the contextual realities of Nigerian society while maintaining fidelity to biblical principles. This involves addressing contemporary challenges such as poverty, corruption, and social injustice through a prophetic voice that is both relevant and scripturally grounded. This study aligns with existing scholarship that has already begun mapping the empirical realities of Nigerian prophetic practices (Ngwoke 2024; Bobai 2025; Awojobi and Adesina 2024; Aryeh 2025 volume contributions), and therefore serves as a further theological synthesis rather than a standalone empirical investigation. It provides a foundation for future research, particularly comparative and interdisciplinary studies that further examine how prophetic ministry is being structured, regulated, and experienced across different Christian traditions in Nigeria.

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