Shemaiah the Nehelami: False Prophet or Prince

ANTONY Michael HYLTON,
Master's Student Bible Department, Rothberg International School: Hebrew University Jerusalem, Israel

Introduction
In the Tanakh, in the book of Jeremiah there are but three references to a character called Shemaiah the Nehemalite. With these three references he has gone down in history as a false prophet. In this paper we would like to take a look at the narrative witness about Shemaiah the Nehemelite in the Masoretic text and read it in light of the testimonies of the Chronicler, Ezra, Nehemiah and 2 Kings, Daniel, Haggai and Zechariah. We will first look at his place in chapters 26-29 of Jeremiah among the false prophets and spiritual opponents of Jeremiah, we will then go on to look at his name, we will find the first part of his name is his given name but the second name may be a prophetic insult, he calls Jeremiah Anatoti (perhaps traitor from Abiathur who betrayed David), Jeremiah calls him dreamer from the land of empty dreams, we will then look it more detail at the specific chapter that deals with Shemaiah and see what the letter of Shemaiah tells us about his character. We want to see where he would fit in literary society of Jeremiah, Kings, and Chronicles, this is a world in paper and ink. Having seen his character we will make a suggestion as to who he might be outside of chapter 29 of Jeremiah. Our approach is eclectic with a focus on narrative issues of the Masoretic text not on textual issues or issues regarding different version of Jeremiah represented in the LXX. As a result our results are speculative by I believe we can learn something of how the authorities of the princes, the priests and the prophets interact in the book of Jeremiah. We will finally conclude.

Sources
The sources for our knowledge of Shemaiah the Nehemalite, his friends colleagues and family are almost all literary. Even the bullae of Baruch son of Neriah, although a wonderful timely testimony to the possibility to the name of he who possibly wrote about Shemaiah does not necessarily bring us closer to Shemaiah himself, so we have to accept that without other inscriptions, for example from Babylon or Jerusalem, Shemaiah and the characters around him are literary characters and in particular regarding Shemaiah we cannot be sure that anyone known by that name ever walked the plant, just as no one walked the earth with the name magor misabib his prophetic name, whose given name may have been Pas-hur. Even if Shemaiah was in Babylon if he were employed by the Babylonians in any position the chances are like Daniel and his companions or even Eliakim who became Jehoiakim thanks to the Egyptians, he would have had his name changed and his name would probably have appeared in the Babylonians records as something other than Shemaiah. The nature of our sources, Jeremiah, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Haggai, and Zechariah are not only literary but the writers of the bulk of them are from the same circles (Jer 52, 2 King 25). Some of the editors and writers of Jeremiah are particularly challenging, giving many sons of apparently the same father without informing us if they are brothers for example father(s) Maaseiahand his or their sons Zephaniah, Zedekiah and Neriah and the grandson Baruch, or in the case of Jeremiah using the name Jeremiah the priest with the name of the high priest in the same period without informing us that the Hilkiah who was father of Jeremiah was or was not the high priest. In this paper we will generally assume that when someone is said to be son of the father with the same name, he is brother to someone else from the same period and the same circle called son of the same father unless the evidence points elsewhere for example Levites might be called son of Asaph although Asaph is an ancient ancestor, or a man might be called son of Immer because he belonged to that watch of the priests.

Main Part
Shemaiah Nehelami local context
Shemaiah or Shemyahu the Nehemelite (הַנֶּחֱלָּמִי) bursts dramatically on to the scene of the book of Jeremiah and into human literary history suddenly almost out of nowhere as a major antagonist of the
prophet Jeremiah. He appears at the end of a section of Jeremiah which deals with spiritual opponents of the mission of Jeremiah usually labelled as false prophets by modern scholarship. This section of Jeremiah runs from chapter 26 to 29 and this theme of Jeremiah and the 'prophets' is also a feature of chapter 23 (Osuji, 2010) but actually scattered throughout Jeremiah there is evidence of a sustained opposition to his work by particular houses in particular branches of house of Immer[נותן], a priestly house which may be number sixteen in the priestly mishmaroth of the chronicler (Jer 20.1, 1 Chron 9. 12, 24.14, Neh 11.13), parts of the house of Maaseia[מַעְשֵׁי] (Jer 29.21), the house of Malchijah[מַלְכִי] (Jer. 21.2, 38.1.6, 1 Chron .9.12) but also of sustained support for Jeremiah in particular of the levitical scribal houses of Shaphan2(2Chron 34.8, 2 King 22.3, Jer 36.10) and Neriah(Jer. 32.12)Jeremiah was well connected (leuchter, 2006). For Carroll this section of the book of Jeremiah is unique in that whereas he the rest of the book has little concern with connectedness and chronology the chapters 27-29 are an exception to this rule (Carroll, 1989, p. 57). Also for Carroll whereas Jeremiah is a mixture of poetry and prose the chapters 27-29 to which Shemaiah is the climax are apparently pure prose(Carroll, 1989, p. 41). They are for Carroll 'very much the creation of the editors who put together and developed the text in such a way that what we now read represents a splicing together of a number of strands loosely, for other scholars those 'editors' in this chapter are none other than the levitical scribe Baruch son of Neriah, brother or Seraiah a quiet prince in the land(Jer 51.59) known as Jeremiah's scribe. There are also some special spelling characteristics which set 27-29 apart from the rest of the book(Carroll, 1989, p. 65) If modern studies of Jeremiah have as Diamond maintains "rushed ... into impasse after impasse on almost every major point of the agreed agenda set for reading and resolving the problems of the Jeremiah tradition"(Osuji 2010 p.17, Diamond, 1999,p. 15) the case is doubly so with Shemaiah, he is indeed an enigma. The enigma begins with his name.

The Name Shemaiah Hanehelami

His first name Shemaiah is a popular and beautiful biblical name meaning Yahuah had heard (ABD, vol 5. P. 1199). Dahood (1978, p.92) translates it "hear Oh Yah". No less than 29 individuals are listed as bearing that name in the Bible (ABD Vol. 5, p.1199). Indeed in the book of Jeremiah alone there are three characters that bear the name Shemaiah. Firstly there is Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim the father Urijah the prophet who fled to Egypt was chased down, arrested by Ethan of Jerusalem and executed by king Jehoiakim[Jer 26.20]. Secondly there is Shemaiah the Nehemalite and finally there is the prince Shemaiah father of Delaiah.

Shemaiah's appellation the Nehemalite(nehemalite) has been explained in at least three ways. The first is it could mean "of Nehelam" (Osuji, 2010). That is as Jeremiah is from Anatoth, so Shemaiah is from Nehelem. But the location of Nehelem is unknown. However the Targum derives it from the place called Helam(2 Sam 10.16-17) (Hastings, 1900). The second is it could represent the name of a family. Again the Nehelam family is unheard of elsewhere in the Scripture (Holladay, 1989) (Osuji, 2010), unless we take the suggestion of Hastings that it may be Helem (1 Chron. 7.35, Zech. 6.14) (Hastings, 1900, p. 507). Thirdly it could be a play on the word dreamer based on a comparison with Jeremiah 23:25. This explanation is based on the similarity of the word to the root שָׁמָה to dream and it is said it is the nphaltic participle of that root(Osuji, 2010, p. 257)(Yaure, 1960). In this reading of the name Shemaiah the Nehemalite becomes Shemaiah the Dreamer or perhaps reading as a prophetic insult Shemaiah of the Dream world. This also can derived from the suggestion of Hastings that this play on words was in the prophets mind (Hastings, 1900, p. 507). Also the fact that "This verb and the cognate noun (שָׁמָהּ) are used specifically in Jer (2325,27, 28 32 cf. Deu 132, 4, 6 ) of the dreams of false prophets" (Hastings, 1900, p. 507). Yaure argues he falls in line with the dreamers and false prophets before and after him, Balaam ben Peor who opposed Israel in the wilderness through giving cunning advice to Balak their enemy(Num. 31.6). Moses at the command of Yahuah sent an army of twelve thousand

1Immer means talkative and could refer to the name of one of the priestly watches or to an individual called Immer.
2Coney. Sons of his house included Ahikam, Gamariah, and grandsons included Gedaliah ben Ahikam and Michaiah ben Gemariah (Jer 36.11)
Israel to avenge Israel on the Midianites and Balaam son of Peor was killed in that battle (Num 31.8). Yaure also compared Shemaiah with Balaam’s name, Nephishali, which Yaure suggested was a euphemism for a false prophet. Yaure also compared the name Shemaiah with Bar Jesus who opposed the Apostle Paul and came under the judgemental decree of kurios[yahuah] (Acts 13.11). Yaure shows for all three "false prophets" that there appellations meant "dreamer". Thus Shemaiah is classified with the false prophets as one who was a deceptive dream interpreter [Yaure 1960] one of the kind who was being referred in Jeremiah 23. This reading of his appellation had been noted by David Kimchi and even the King James Version has this as a comment. Yaure also compares Shemaiah with Hanania ben Azur who appears just as suddenly as Shemaiah in Jeremiah 28, clashes head on with Jeremiah, prophet versus prophet, and ends up dead by divine decree (Jer. 28:16)., and Yaure notices the similarity in the language regarding the ideas of the "false prophet" and finally their judgement by Yahuah. They are both charged with teaching rebellion [sarah-apostasy, revolt] against Yahuah. Osuji, Holladay and Yaure see the similar language and thus conclude that they were both prophets if false (Osuji, 2010) (Holladay 1989) (Yaure, 1960). As much however as we can see similarities between the two characters we ought to see the differences. Hananiah is given the title prophet [Jer 28.5] by the narrator, Shemaiah is not. Hananiah's death sentence was given a specific time and was very short, but Shemaiah is not given death penalty, rather he is told he will not have a man to dwell in the midst of the people. Some scholars understand that among the people or in the midst of the people refers to an authoritative position as in the centre of the people (Rosenburg, 1985). Shemaiah is also told he would not live to see the good Yahuah would do to his people. This could clearly refer to a natural death which is unlike Hananiah's drastic and quick death being cast away from the earth [Jer 28.16]. Hastings suggests however that it is worse in that it impacts his seed also (Hastings, 1900, p. 507). The book of Daniel, even if late, testifies to a tradition regarding those who were alive at the beginning of the exile and who lived to see the good Yahuah did to his people under Cyrus (Dan 5.51). Haggai also testifies to the fact that some lived to see the restoration (Hag. 2.3). Hananiah is said to be ben azur whereas Shemaiah is represented as having seed, not as a son perhaps suggesting an elder, we are not told his father's name. Hananiah spoke in the name Yahuah [Jer 28.2]. Shemaiah wrote in his own name [Jer 29.25]. All in all it seems Hananiah was fully exposed but Shemaiah was partially concealed. Osuji following Holladay argues that Yaure's attempt to explain his identity [the nehemalite] founders on the grounds that the designation sounds purely gentilic and in the same section is analogous to Jeremiah from Anatoth (Osuji, 2010, p. 257) (Holladay, 1989). Although sounding gentilic would not be a strong objection to Yaure's position, for sounding and being gentilic are two different things there is another problem. It is problematic to read so much into an appellation that is in itself considered obscure. Even if it did mean dreamer the Hebrew term would not necessarily carry the same connotation in the sixth century BC as it might have done in the time of Bilaam hundreds of years earlier or of Elymas hundreds of years later. Since we are not told Shemaiah literally dreamed or even said kohamar Yahuah, as prophets did or bore the title prophet as Bilaam, Hananiah, and Elymas did it is reading too much into an obscure name to assume even if he had that appellation he would fall into a supposed category stretching across cultures and times. This is not to say that the name and the way the narrator or Jeremiah or Yahuah has given him this name is without significance. Indeed even if we are only seeking to understand Shemaiah in the narrative of this section of Jeremiah within the larger context of the book of Jeremiah and Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Daniel it seems apparent something is going on with the name.

If we look at the named characters of these four chapters and in Jeremiah we find certain kinds of name appear and certain families. For example in Jeremiah 26-29 we have Kings

Jehoiakim ben Josiah king of Judah [the king who killed Urijah ben shamaiah], the second son of Josiah to reign and who was enthroned by the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho in about 609BC, Hezekiah

---

3 We will take up some of these later

4 His given name was eliakim but the writers use the name given by the Egyptian pharaoh Nechoh [2 king 23.34]
king of Judah, Zedekiah[Mattaniah\(^5\)] ben Josiah [last king of Judah who respected Jeremiah and took counsel with him but feared the princes and those who had fallen away to Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon(27.6), Jeconiah ben Jehoiakim (27.20).

Princes
Elnathan ben Achbor[‘police officer’ who arrested Urijah for speaking against the temple],

Scribes
Ahikam ben Shaphan[work colleague of Hilkiah the high priest and son of the scribe Shaphan and defense ‘attorney’ or protector of Jeremiah ben Hilkiah] we have Elasah ben Shaphan [probably brother of Ahikam and uncle of Gedaliah, was entrusted with Jeremiah's letter to the exiles along with Gamara b Hilkiah.], Gemara b Hilkiah[potentially the son of the high priest and potentially brother of Jeremiah, Zedekiah’s ambassador to Nebuchadnezzar, he and Elasah were entrusted Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, Jer 29.3],

Prophets
Micah of Moreshet[from hezekiah's time], Urijah ben Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim [prophesied, fled to Egypt and was tracked down, arrested and killed by jehoiakim], we have Hananiah ben Azur the prophet from Gibeon [who as a prophet directly challenged Jeremiah's prophet word with one of his own in chapter 29,]

Priests or others
Ahab ben Kolaiah[He was considered a prophet by some in the exile. Shemaiah hanehelami [a leader in the exile who had authority to write letters rebuking the first or second priest in Jerusalem, Zedekiah ben Maaseiah a reputed exilic prophet charged with adultery by Yahuah through Jeremiah. Zephaniah ben Maaseiah[the priest who read Shemaiah's letter to Jeremiah and was later executed in Babylon[2 king 25.2]. If we look through the whole of Jeremiah we see then we have names of characters with different roles. We have names of kings[melakim], names of priests [kohanim], names of prophets [neviim] and names of scribes [soferim], names of princes [sarim], names of officers [paqidim], captains of wards[baal peqidut] appear in Jeremiah. If we look at these names we need to observe where the name Shemaiah fits into among the categories. We can say for sure he is not the king. Jeremiah ministered in the reigns of king Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah and Zedekiah. However Shemaiah is not called a priest, prophet, scribe or pakid. The only way we can get an idea of where he belonged is to look at his character as seen from his letter and the response attributed to Jeremiah by the narrator . First though we will quickly look at the outline of the chapter which contains the letter.

The Plot of Chapter 29
We may divide chapter 29 into three sections: Verses 1-23 deal with Jeremiah writing a letter to leaders in exile with Jeconiah the king of Judah. In this Jeremiah encourages the exiles to settle down as part of his planting and building ministry given to him in the call[Jer 1.10] at the same time he gives a prophetic word which will mean the end of Ahab ben Kolaiah and Zedekiah ben Maaseiah\(^6\) two men who are charged with adultery and prophesying a lie in Yahuah's name. They are clearly then charge with using the name Yahuah in vain because they used it but he did not send them. Verses 24\(^7\)-29 deals with a letter written by Shemaiah halNehemeli written to the kohenZephaniah ben Maaseiah the pakid

5 Interesting that his given name was mattaniah but the writers of the bible use the name given to him by Nebuchadnezzar [2 kings 24.17].

6 Ben Maaseiah is a name given also the Zephaniah to whom the letter of Shemaiah is written, if they are brothers then zedekiah is a priest like Jeremiah claiming prophecy. This perhaps does not fit into the picture given by the chronicler where the prophets come from the houses of asaph, jeduthun and heman.

77 Verse 24 seems to indicate the start of a prophecy which is not then given. Holladay thinks the prophetic word would have come from Shemaiah and would have been an optimistic prophecy along the lines of what Jeremiah says in his letter that yahuah would restore the fortunes of Judah, but in a much shorter time than Jeremiah was indicating. He believes the words may have dropped out of the text (Holladay, Jeremiah, 1989).
of the temple and the priest reading of that letter to Jeremiah. This letter is quoted by Jeremiah before giving the sentence of Yahuah regarding Shemaiah. It is this letter which provokes a prophetic reaction. The letter is written on his own authority, he does not claim prophecy in the letter; Verses 30-32 deal with a prophetic word given in response to the letter of Shemaiah hanehelami by Yahuah through Jeremiah. These verses contain the prophetic judgement of Shemaiah, it is in these verses scholars see that he is 'converted' into a prophet causing the people to believe lie. We now take up the letter of Shemaiah and the character which shines forth.

The Letter of Shemaiah
In the literary world of Jeremiah and 2 Kings, the Chronicler, Ezra and Nehemiah our narrator the scribe Baruch son of Neriah(mckane, 1996, p. 744) would most likely have personally known Shemaiah or at least the scribe he used to write the letter if he did not write it himself, as he would have personally known Jeremiah and Zephaniah ben Maaseiah to whom Shemaiah addressed his letter. However whereas Shemaiah was an opponent of Jeremiah in Babylon as Zephaniah ben Maaseiah may or may not have been (mckane, 1996)(Jer 21, 2 Kings 25:16-21), our narrator was Jeremiah's greatest supporter(Jer 36), his servant or amanuensis and scribe(harrison, 1969), because we regularly see Jeremiah commanding Baruch [Jer. 32.13, 36.5] we see they appear to have either an employer-employee relationship or master-servant relationship. In the narrative Yahuah commands Jeremiah and Judah [Jer 1.7], the father of the Rechabites commanded his seed [Jer 35.6], the king Jehoiakim commanded Jerahmeel and Ebed melech and Jeremiah commands Baruch ben Neriah and his brother Seraiah [Jer 36.5, 51.59]. It seems that Jeremiah is a superior to Baruch and Baruch belongs to the scribal family Shaphan.

Baruch by using the term nehelami rather than 'son of so and so' has for future generations concealed the identity of Shemaiah just as he may have concealed Jeremiah's identity as son of the high priest Hilkiah by leaving Hilkiah unspecified in terms of other sons(except perhaps Gamariah, Jeremiah's courier for the letter(Jer 29.) or his brother. In order then to follow the idea that Shemaiah may well be present in Jeremiah without the appellation nehelami we need to study his character and apparent position in relation to Zephaniah the and Jeremiah.

The Character of Shemaiah
There are two main characters in the story of Shemaiah, they are Jeremiah the protagonist and Shemaiah the antagonist. This is because the story is written by those who respected Jeremiah, especially Baruch son of Neriah his secretary. We can learn about Shemaiah from his words, his deeds and what others say about him. Shemaiah is a leader and a man of action. As soon as he saw that Jeremiah was influencing the community of Judah in Babylon through his letter writing and encouraging them to stay in the Diaspora. He took action. He sent letters on his own authority to all the people of Jerusalem (Jer. 29.25). He was no young literary character like Daniel disappearing humbly into the courts of Nebuchadnezzar from day one[Dan 1.19], he was still a leader of the resistance from inside Nebuchadnezzar's camp. The fact that he had the authority to write to all the people of Jerusalem and to do it by letter, implying access to a scribe or scribal ability, that is like Jeremiah the priest from Anatoth, he could command a scribe, and for the priest in charge whilst the main leaders were in captivity to act quickly on the letter all shows that he was a man of authority. Although he has gone down in history as a false prophet (ABD. Vol. 5 1199), here in his action in his letter the fact that he sent the letters in his own name, and not in the name of Yahuah would seem to suggest he was not a prophet or a son of a prophet as Amos would have put it (Amos 7.14). Indeed

---

8 The pakidim are security personnel who are responsible for keeping order in the temple. Pas-hur [son of horus] was the first to beat[vayakeh] and lock up[vayiten oto al hamahpeket] Jeremiah overnight. He does not appear to have given Jeremiah a fair trial or to have taken him to the sarim for a trial [Jer 20.1-2].
9Mckane lists seven scholars who hold that Baruch wrote this section of Jeremiah.
10 Indeed if the writer is Baruch son of Neriah he maybe the nephew of Zedekiah ben Maaseiah.
11The story appears in a section of Jeremiah classified by scholars as Mowinckel B, biographical materials in prose It was written about 580-480 BC.(Osuji, 2010)
Jeremiah could say exactly the same thing that he was no prophet and no son of a prophet until he received his call as a child (Jer. 1). Just before Shemaiah burst onto the scene through a prophetic word spoken against him, we see the clash of two prophets over the wooden yoke of Babylon that is Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jer. 28). They acted like madmen. They shouted in public and made prophetic acts and prophetic declarations preceded by the words kohamar yahuah tzevaoth. These phrases interspersed with neum Yahuah and diberyahuah, chazonyahuah, masayahuah often mark the declarations of the prophets. Thus earlier on in Jeremiah when Jeremiah himself was complaining about the behaviour of the prophets, he uses such phrases and Yahuah charges the prophets of stealing his words from one another and using their tongues a saying "He says", as though Yahuah had spoken when in fact they were just sharing their own dreams (Jer 23). It is true that Shemaiah says to Zephaniah 'Yahuah made you [netanka] kohen [Jer 29.26]', but the tenor of his word is desire for order in the house of Yahuah and he speaks of Yahuah in the third person regarding a past act. Not only did Shemaiah probably not participate in this circus he also wanted to put an orderly control over it. He sent a letter to those left in charge of the temple the pakidim demanding accountability for the fact that they had been appointed to the task of dealing with the mashugot that is keeping order in the Temple and apparently had failed. His problem was with "(בכל איש מﺷׁוּגָע וּמִתְנַבֵּא כל כוֹהֵן זֶרֶךְ ) every man that is mad, and makes himself a prophet " (Jer 23:26). Thus Shemaiah was in some sense an overseer of the overseers of the temple. He was watching that the pakidim were doing their job even from Babylon, showing perhaps it hard to get out of a career long habit. He speaks as a man with the wisdom of years to his younger and as a man who knows exactly what the senior priest Zephaniah should be doing. This suggests that he is either a retired pakid over fifty or a prince to whom the pakidim may have reported. The term pakid occurs about 13 times in the tanakh and can be translated commissioner, deputy or overseer. We can see a number of run-ins between the earlier pakidim and Jeremiah and so can learn something about temple security in this literature. The first pakid to arrest Jeremiah was Pas-hur ben Immer hakohen the pakid nagid of beit yahuah. He first hit Jeremiah apparently interrupting his message (Streane, 1913), then he put him in stocks in the high gate of Benjamin, that is the gate leading to the temple not the lower gate leading out to the city, both face north toward Benjamin. He came as a big shock to Jeremiah and left him very depressed and probably feeling unprotected although Yahuah had promised to protect him (Jer 1.18-19). Pas-hur heard Jeremiah 'street' preaching in beit yahuah [Jer 19.14, 20.1] and acted perhaps in exactly the way Shemaiah is reprimanding Zephaniah for not acting. For example, we see from Shemaiah's words that he did not agree with the idea of self proclaimed prophets. For him there was an order in divine administration of the temple. That order included a class of prophets whom Yahuah had appointed, we assume the cult prophets who prophesied under the king, and for Shemaiah the priests were in that hierarchy and each one given a position were appointed by Yahuah and had a clear duty which included policing especially for the second priest as Kings calls Zephaniah. Their example in this honourable role was the late Jehoiada the priest. This all shows that Shemayah was a man of order, tradition and authority. Today we might call him orthodox or conservative a man serious about the faith and the way things are done. His place in history was perhaps that he did not have the Apostle Paul to tell him "despise not prophesyings", for he despised these self-proclaimed prophets as "meshuga". While some like the Shaphan family felt Josiah was right in the reform and Jeremiah was right about Babylon, Shemaiah did not see it that way. He saw that Jeremiah was mad and making things up as he went along. The fact that he objected to a long exile may actually indicate that he was not against prophesy per se. Perhaps he was in line with the prophecy of the son of a prophet HananiahbenAzur from Gibeon. His name has all the marks of a cult prophet one whom Shemaiah might have considered "appointed by Yahuah", not mad but legitimate, although a little out of order in making the public display against Jeremiah, his heart would be seen as being in the right place.

12 See nelson on prophetic lunacy (Nelson, 2004)
13 This reminds of the words of the prophet Obadiah to Edom, Obad 1.2
14 One scholar thinks this word should be in the singular
Hananiah had prophesied "Thus say Yahuah, I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years" (Jer. 28:2). This timing was more like the timing Shemaiah could have agreed with and it was spoken by a cult prophet son of prophet famed in Judah. This clash between Jeremiah, the self-proclaimed prophet and Shemaiah can only remind us of the clash between Amos the prophet son of a sheepherder and Amaziah the priest incharge of the cult centre at Bethel. Amos to was accused of conspiring against the then king of Israel JereboamII (Amos 7: 10). Amos is told to go out of there and to go prophesy in Judah (Amos 7: 12). Shemaiah sees that his authority can stretch from Babylon to Jerusalem by the letter and that he can still control things as he used to. This leaves two questions regarding the identity of Shemaiah. Is he a false prophet dreamer as Yauare maintains, or just a false prophet as other scholars have maintained (Osuji, 2010) (Hastings, 1900, p. 507). Osuji makes the very important point that he is accused of making the people believe a lie as was Pas-hur the son of Immer the priest (Jer 20.2). Pas-hur had arrested Jeremiah and beaten him, that is he had done the things, as the pakid he was, that Shemaiah is now telling Zephaniah ben Maaseiah he should be doing. In thanks for his treatment of Jeremiah, Pas-hur got his own personal word from Yahuah and a name change and a new future from Yahuah "Yahuah has not called your name Pas-hur but magormisabib (terror from all around") for thus says Yahuah Behold I will make thee a terror to thy self , and to all thy friends…and thou Pas-hur and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity and thou shall come to Babylon , and thou shalt die and be buried there, thou and all thy friends to whom thou hast prophesied lies[nibatalahem basheqer]" (Jeremiah 20.6). Osuji makes the point that Pas-hur is accused of prophesying a lie to his friends. He and his friends will be taken to Babylon and die. He then disappears from the report as quickly as Shemaiah's appears in Babylon seeking to have the same punishments that Pas-hur did done to Jeremiah again. Osuji suggests that Pas-hur is charged with this because he opposed Jeremiah rather than actually prophesying and suggests Shemaiah is going through the same process. But there are some differences in the words used to describe Shemaiah and those charging Pas-hur. Pas-hur seed are not mentioned whereas Shamaiah seed are mentioned. Shemaiah has the additional charge of teaching rebellion against Yahuah, the same crime Hananiah was charged with. Hananiah's judgement fell on him alone and he came to a premature death, but Shamaiah's sentence was on him and his seed and their position in society. It could be that Pas-hur's seed are covered by the fact that they lived in his house or perhaps his friends who are included in the punishment egged Pas-hur on and mocked Jeremiah while he was in the stocks overnight. Pas-hur may have acted illegally against Jeremiah because when Jeremiah is arrested on two other occasions he is taken by the Pakid to the princes for trial and sentencing before punishment and in a sense given an opportunity to defend himself(Jer 26.14, 37.13). He was even willing to accept a death penalty after a trial (Jer 26.15). Pas-hur's violent attack seems to be the first and to have caught Jeremiah off guard and he felt unprotected(Jer 26.7). In the case of the other two arrests , in the first case in the time of Jehoiakim he is taken by priest, prophets and people and the princes of Judah set up court (26.10). The accusers speak (26.11), then Jeremiah presents his case, (26.12-15). It ends up that the princes and the people end up siding with Jeremiah and the priests and the prophets against him (26.16). The elders make a final speech of precedents from the past(26.17), finally Jeremiah is protected by Ahikam ben Shaphan(26.24). In the second example from the time of Zedekiah, Irijah ben Shemlemiah ben Hananiah detains Jeremiah and accuses him of treachery. He does not strike him and Jeremiah denies the charge. He is then taken by Irijah who had a pakid type role at the upper gate of Banjamin to the princes for trial or punishment (Jer 37.13ff). They beat him and imprison him. In these two cases no one gets personal prophecies relating to their friends and seed and the removal of their lives. In two cases the arrest is made by individual priests and in the third case he is taken for trial by a group. From the harshness of the word against Shemaiah it would seem that he was proposing Pas-hur's approach although from his letter it would seem to point to one who would follow legal procedure.

The narrator give details in the various charges against the four main "false prophet". He specifically gives the title prophet to Hananiah and Jeremiah. Hananiah perhaps as a prophet and perhaps as being able to influence public opinion, receives a swift death. Ahab ben Kolaiah and Zedekiah ben Maaseiah

---

16 Some scholars have challenged this interpretation of magormisabib.
are specifically charged with adultery by the divine judge speaking in the mouth of Jeremiah. The narrator does not give them title of prophets. However they are accused of adultery and of prophesying a lie to the people in Yahuah's name. Their punishment, perhaps worse than Hananiah's and Shemaiah's was that they would be delivered to Nebuchadnezzar. Since Jeremiah and those around were in contact with Nebuchadnezzar this public warning to these two characters could easily take wings and fly. But we notice that the narrator introduces information about them and yet we do not see their names anywhere else. Not only so but their seed are not mentioned at all which could mean they did not have any or their seed and family did not agree with them. Finally we can notice that it is the prophecy against Shemaiah wherein it is said he prophesied and caused the people to believe a lie, he taught rebellion against Yahuah. This tells us that he was a man of influence. Ahab and Zedekiah prophesied lies but did not cause the people to trust the lie, perhaps because their adulterous activities were known, but Shemaiah is not accused of adultery he is accused of causing the people to believe a lie, that is he was influential and succeeding in having people believe him. But he was a man of position with a powerful family who sat in the midst of Israel. This suggests that he and his seed from that position of influence worked together on the resistance. Therefore they too would lose their position of influence. Shemaiah would die before the blessing began to flow in Babylon. Perhaps this meant he died before the thirty seventh year of Evil Merodach who took Jehioachin out of prison. The punishment on his seed would be they would lose their position of authority "in the midst" of Yahuah's people (Rosenburg, 1985), this as a result of teaching rebellion against Yahuah plan instead of submission. He was a man of honour and respect and influence, his seed would lose the influence.

The Demise of Shemaiah?

I do not think it unreasonable to imagine that such a man of influence in the exile would have also been among the men of influence in Judah before the exile. In all likelihood he would appear with his real name and not with the prophetic insult name Shemaiah of the dream world. Since the name Shemaiah only occurs three times in Jeremiah we only have two characters to consider, Shemaiah father of Urijah the prophet or Shemaiah father of Delaiah the Prince. Although the fact is he is said to have prophesied I would from his central position in society and desire for order in the temple and his reprimand of the second highest priest in the land be reticent to see in him a cult prophet, although if he were one he would be retired. This leaves us only Shemaiah the father of Delaiah the prince. We find Delaiah ben Shemaiah in the inner counsel of the princes of Judah. Jeremiah sends Barukh ben Neriah to read the word of Yahuah because he was in detention. He was forbidden to go into BeitYahuah. Baruch obeyed Jeremiah and read the sefer in BeitYahuah. He read it in the room of Gamariah son of Shaphan(Jer 36.10). Thus we see the two houses who work with Jeremiah in alliance. Michaiah ben Gamariah ben Shaphan heard the words and went to the kings house. Inside the house is a scribes chamber where all the sarim were sitting,They included Elishama the scribe, Delaiah ben Shemaiah, Elnathan ben Achbor, Gemariah ben Shaphan father of Michaiah, brother to Ahikam and Zedekiah ben Hananiah and all the princes. The princes send Netaniah ben Shelemah ben Cushi to collect Baruch. Shemaiah father of Delaiah is silent in Jeremiah he is only the hidden patriarch, but he would be a Shemaiah in exactly the position to reprimand Zephaniah and Jeremiah if necessary. He is in one sense above them both, perhaps in age, he has a powerful son who is a prince of Judah. The narrator mentions Delaiah in Jeremiah 36.25. He notes that both he and Gemariah interceded with King Jehiakim that he would not burn the scroll of Jeremiah written by Baruch. So a good side to Delaiah is point out but this is qualified by the verse before where the narrator says that when they sale Jehoiakim cutting the book of the words of Yahuah 'they were not afraid, nor rent their garments'(Jer 36.24). Is the narrator telling us something about the future of Delaiah's family by this comment about the lack of fear? If we were to look for the descendants of Delaiah ben Shemaiah we would expect two things in their genealogy. The name of the father Shemaiah would perhaps appear again as of course would the name Delaiah and secondly they would be people who are no longer in the highest positions.
of power but perhaps trying to gain a position of power. We have such a situation in Nehemiah 6. 10ff

Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. 11 And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. 12 And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. 14 My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

We see then around a century later a family bearing these two names looking in at the reigns of power from the outside. The family goes back two generation bringing us into the period of the middle of the exile.

Conclusion

We have looked at Shemaiah, his name, his character, his role and we find a man of nobility to clung to the idea of an invincible Judah based on what Yahuah had established, he clung so hard that when one came claiming to have the living voice of Yahuah for the generation he was perceived as mad even when he appeared to be right. This pattern repeats itself in the religious world in every generation. The priest keeps order, the prophet disturbs it, the princes, judges and the people go back and forth among them. Jeremiah is a beautiful and tragic story and Shemaiah is a part of that tragedy. So many elements of the book leave us with more questions than answers. However one thing is clear, the time of Jeremiah was a time for the rising and falling of many houses in Israel. If indeed Shemaiah avi Delaiah is indeed the same Shemaiah the Nehelami we can all read Jeremiah with new eyes. One question we might want to look into is why the narrators of Jeremiah seem to conceal the identity of many persons in the book or why they decide not to give those extra bits of information which would make all the difference in getting a clearer understanding of the book and the testimony it has to tell.

Bibliography

Nachman, M. (2013). An Investigation into the impact on our understanding of the prophets of the Chronicler changing the term Nebiim to Leviim when coying 2 kings 23.2o and writing 2 Chronicles 34.3o. International Journal of advanced Research, 1(8), 652-666.

For at least one scholar the fact that a prophecy is made with details tells us it was written down after the fulfilment or and even was described as though it were a prophecy after it happened, this is said in the case of Ahab ben Kolaiah.


