**Reading the Bible Again…For the First Time**

**(Hermeneutics: The Science and Art of Biblical Interpretation)**

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**LESSON SIX: THE PROPHETS**

1. **The Identity of the Prophets and Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament**
2. Canonical arrangements--The **Hebrew canon**:

**Torah** (Pentatuch): Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut

**Nevi’im** Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jer, Ezek

[Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings

Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah Ezekiel]

**The Book of the Twelve** (“minor” prophets)

**Kethuvim** (“Writings”) Pss, Pro, Job, The Scrolls (SofS, Ruth, Lam, Ecc, Esther), Dan, Ezra, Neh, 1 & 2 Chron

In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel and Lamentations are placed in the section known as the “Writings.” The Greek OT (Septuagint, LXX) placed these books to the section of Prophets. The English Bible follows the LXX.

1. Chronological and national focus of the writing prophets

Book Date\* National Focus

Obadiah 845 Edom

Joel 835 Judah

Jonah 782 Nineveh

Hosea 760 Israel

Amos 760 Israel

Isaiah 739 Judah

Micah 735 Judah (722 Assyrian Exile for the

Nahum 650 Nineveh Northern Kingdom)

Zephaniah 640 Judah

Jeremiah 627 Judah

Habakkuk 609 Judah

Daniel 605 Babylon Exiles

Ezekiel 593 (597, 587, 582 Babylonian Exile for the Southern Kingdom)

Haggai 520 Judah

Zechariah 520 Judah

Malachi 433 Judah

\*Generally accepted, although it is difficult to achieve consensus for exact dating.

**Prominent Non-Writing Prophets**

Samuel (1105 BCE- ?) He monitored the “death” of the Priesthood leadership and the emergence of Prophet leadership…fascinating era.

Elijah, first half of ninth century, 899-850 BCE (1 Kgs 17-19; 21; 2 Kgs 1:1 2:18 );

Elisha, 850-800 BCR (1 & 2 Kgs along with and after Elijah)

1. **The Role of the Prophets and Prophetic Literature in the Old Testament**
2. **Who were the Prophets?**

1. An office provided for in the law (Deut 18:14ff.). These persons would be mediators of God’s words and deeds. BUT Samuel is 300 years away and it is hundreds of years before the Writing Prophets emerge (ca. 1400-845 BCE).

2. A special group which God increasingly **emerged as the priesthood became**

**increasingly corrupt.** The priest originally provided God’s word and guidance, but this role shifted to the prophetic office (cf. 1 Samuel; Jeremiah and Ezekiel were Levites, but most prophets were from other tribes).

1. **What ministry to Israel did the Prophets sustain?**
2. The prophet’s primary role was to be a divine spokesperson (“forth-telling”). They were God’s “mouth” (cf. Moses connection).

1a. The prophets were “voices” calling Israel to have sole allegiance to Yahweh in the idolatrous land of Canaan. This focus was dominantly relational— how Israel relates to her God in the midst of daily life.

Elijah (1 Kgs 18:16-46)

Isaiah (Isa 1)

2a. The prophets were interpreters of Israel’s relationship to the progress of redemptive history with a special focus on failure of covenant and the eventual future.

Isaiah 11

3a. The prophets were God’s “revelation mediators” for the conveyance of his will.

Haggai 1:1-2

4a. The prophets were dominantly “covenant enforcement mediators.”

Hosea 2:13; ch. 3

Amos 2:6-8

Isaiah 1:21-26

The prophets were like “policemen” calling Israel to obey God’s law and covenant stipulations, it is essential in prophetic texts to inquire concerning what aspect of previous divine instruction has been violated.

1. The prophets were also used by God to disclose the future (“fore-telling”)

1a. The prophets often predicted the future by correlating Israel’s violation of law with God’s promise of judgment for such violation and His promise of eventual restoration after repentance.

Hosea 1:10; ch. 3

Lamentations 5:19-22

2a. The prophets provision of “predictive prophecy” (foretelling historical events prior to their fulfillment) was actually a minor aspect of their proclamations (estimates for the entire OT range from 8% to 20%).

**Therefore, contrary to popular assumptions, biblical prophets are more about preaching than prediction. Predictive aspects were packaged within the overall metanarrative of messianic expectation and Israel’s restoration to full covenant loyalty.**

Furthermore, when the NT quotes the OT and uses fulfillment formula, it is **not** necessarily saying that the connection is predictive prophecy. Most usages of the OT in the NT are “analogical” in nature rather than predictive.

1b. Some predictive prophecy has been historically fulfilled

Daniel 7-8, 11

Micah 5:2

2b. Some predictive prophecy is both past and future.

Daniel 9:20-27

3b. Some predictive prophecy is yet future.

1 Corinthians 15

Revelation 20-21

1. **Some unique features of prophetic literature**

The writings/records of the Prophets follow the genre patterns of Narrative and Poetry as already described. The nature of their office reflects more “public discourse” than other books (although Moses did a great deal of this as well).

1. Symbolic actions by the prophets were incorporated into their personal lives.

Isaiah 8:3-4

Jeremiah 16:1ff.

Ezekiel 4

Hosea ch. 1 and 3

1. Legal imagery (“lawsuit”) is used to image Israel’s deviation from law

Jeremiah 11:20; 20:12; 25:31; 51:36

Hosea 4:1; 12:2

Micah 6:2

1. The use of specialized imagery in predictive prophecy passages impacts the reader that the human dilemma requires a divine solution and that God has sovereign control over history.

1a. Some traits of **“apocalyptic”**:

Hopelessness unless God intervenes...and He will

Heavy use of dreams and visions

Theme of hidden-ness except from special messengers

Heavy use of figurative language

Elaborate use of symbolism (e.g. animals)

Elaborate use of numbers as symbols

2a. Some prominent predictive prophetic texts

Isaiah 24-27, the “Little Apocalypse”

Ezekiel 38-39

Daniel 7-12 (future kingdom visions)

Zechariah 9-14

Matthew 24

The book of Revelation

1. **Prophets and Prophecy in the New Testament**
2. John the Baptizer
3. Jesus
4. The Apostolic Church
5. The Apocalypse (Book of Revelation)
6. **Salient Issues** in the Reading of Prophetic Passages
7. It is essential to identify the lines of continuity between the prophet’s speech and the Torah code/stipulations which have been violated. **The prophets are re-preaching the law to Israel.**
8. **Account for symbolic language**.

Symbols are always in terms of the prophets’ own day and must be interpreted from that perspective. Extreme caution must be exercised in assigning present or future correspondence. Statements such as the sun turning dark and the stars falling is usually not literal but figurative language for God’s judgment.

Isaiah 13:9-11

1. **Be aware of the unique feature of “blending” in predictive prophecy passages.**

Isaiah 61:1-2a with Luke 4:18-19

1. **Watch for the ethical dimensions of prophetic passages, especially in the New Testament. Most all predictive prophecy is wrapped in an ethical package.**

2 Peter 3

1. Be aware that the New Testament uses the Old Testament in a variety of ways.
2. It recognizes predictive prophecy

Micah 5:2 with Matthew 2:5-6

1. It utilizes the concept of “analogical” fulfillment

Matthew 2:18 — Rachel weeping

Matthew 2:23 — Jesus called a Nazarene

**NOTE:** This usage category illustrates that the term “fulfill” does not always signal predictive prophecy.

1. It may use the Old Testament in a theological proof text fashion.

Romans 3

1. It incorporates the concept of “divine correspondence” in redemptive history (i.e. typology). Passover Lamb imagery. “Types” require direct statement of biblical correspondence.
2. **Do not read Old Testament (or NT) prophetic texts like a current events newspaper.**