

Reading the OT
Week 7

Prophecy

[RECOMMENDED:

"The Storied World of the Bible" N.T.Wright. Online course, Udemy, on sale.

Scot McKnight blog "JesusCreed" at Patheos.com]

What comes to mind when you hear the word "prophecy"?

If you were to hear that there was going to be a "prophecy" conference in Regina, what would you expect?

PROPHECY An oral, divine message mediated through an individual that is directed at a person or people group and intended to elicit a specific response.

THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

- Biblical prophecy is more than “fore-telling”: two-thirds of it involves “forth-telling,” that is, setting the truth, justice, mercy, and righteousness of God against the backdrop of every form of denial of the same.
- Thus, to speak prophetically was to speak boldly against every form of moral, ethical, political, economic, and religious behaviour observed in a culture that was intent on building its own pyramid of values vis-à-vis God’s established system of truth and ethics.
- However, prediction was by no means absent from the prophetic message. The prophets were conscious of contributing to the ongoing plan of God’s ancient, but constantly renewed promise.
- They announced God’s coming kingdom and the awful day of the Lord when God’s wrath would be poured out on all ungodliness. In the meantime, before that eschatological moment, there would be a number of divine in-breakings on the historical scene in which the fall of cities such as Samaria, Damascus, Nineveh, Jerusalem, and Babylon would serve as foreshadowings of God’s final intrusion into the historical scene at the end of history.
- Thus each mini-judgment on the nations or empires of past and present history were a foreshadowing of God’s final day of coming onto the historic scene to end it in one severe judgment and blast of victory. So said all the prophets.
- And in so saying they exhibited the fact that all their messages were organically related to each other; they were progressively building on one another.

Most of what the prophets "prophesied" concerned the present.

When they did speak about the future, it was in order to make people think and act differently in the present. Future predictions, in other words, when they happened, were intended to affect the present (their own day), not just leave people gazing into the distance.

(Wright, Christopher J. H.. *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth*)

All of the Old Testament prophets called the people back to the covenant and the law.

How did the prophets know what they were supposed to say?

Sometimes prophets received a message from God in a vision.

Sometimes it was just by seeing something ordinary around them (like a blossoming almond tree, two baskets of figs, or a potter working).

Sometimes it felt like an almost physical pressure.

Jeremiah says that when he decided not to speak any more for God, the word was like a fire burning him on the inside.

Isaiah and Ezekiel speak of feeling God's "hand" on them.

Ezekiel speaks of "eating the scroll" of God's words — meaning that whatever he spoke was the "digested" word of God from within him.

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah had the feeling of God "touching their lips." God told Jeremiah, "I will put my words in your mouth."

Hosea heard God's message through the very painful experience of his broken marriage.

The main point to remember is that what they spoke is what they had heard from God (by whatever means). So whenever the Israelites listened to the prophets, they were listening to God. When they refused to listen to a prophet whom God had sent, they were refusing to listen to God. God made that very clear from the start (Deut 18:15 – 20). And that means, in turn, that when we listen to the prophets by reading their words in the Bible, we too are listening to God through those words now stored in Scripture.

Most of the prophets in the OT spoke in the years that led up to the exile.

Some prophesied to Israel, some to Judah, some to both.

Some dates:

Division of the kingdom: 931

Assyrians conquer Israel: 722

Babylonian captivity 598-586 (they invaded several times)

Return from exile 538 (beginning)

Prophets:

Elijah, Elisha 800

Isaiah, Micah 740 (the year that "King Uzziah died")

Hosea, Amos 8th century

Jeremiah, Ezekiel 7th-6th century

Haggai-Malachi 5th century

The prophets didn't say anything particularly new.

They were sent by God to call his people back to the covenant relationship, either by reminding them of God's warnings to those who broke the covenant or by promising salvation and blessing to come.

Deut 27:12ff.

Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Be silent, Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the Lord your God. Obey the Lord your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today.”

On the same day Moses commanded the people:

When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.

The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:

“Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor’s boundary stone.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

etc.

Deut 28: 1-15

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. etc.

16-68. See esp. 58-68

If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name—the Lord your God—the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. He will bring on you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. The Lord will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God. Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess.

Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart.

You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, “If only it were evening!” and in the evening, “If only it were morning!”—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. The Lord will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.

