

10. The Enforcers (The Prophets)

Introduction

There are **sixteen** 'prophetic' books in the Bible - more than any other type of book. Two groups:

- Four: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel
- Twelve: (the others)

Each prophet has his own style.

Prophets were called (Hebrew for prophet is 'nabi' which means 'called')

Some terms in the N.T. originate in the prophets:

Activity: Read Habbakuk 2:4 (Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11) and Hosea 1:10 (Romans 9:26)

1. What is biblical Prophecy?

a) The Meaning of Prophecy

Biblical prophecy is +99% **not** about our future.

- -2% is Messianic
- -5% describes age to come (N.T. age)
- -1% describes events yet to come

Biblical prophecy (in general) announced immediate future of Israel, Judah and other nations.

b) Prophets were Spokespersons

- The primary function was to **speak for God**.
- The prophetic books say little about the writers but are in a spoken form (oracles).
- Not chronological or intended to be read in one sitting.
- Most are poetry – helps to remember!

2. What was Prophecy for?

Remember that there were consequences associated with keeping or not keeping the law? The Prophets announced the blessings or woes from the law (enforced the covenant).

Activity: Read Leviticus 26:1-13 (blessing) Leviticus 26:14-39 (woes).

The prophets **reproduced** the blessings or woes from the law in their own style and wording.

Blessings: life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety.

Woes: death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace.

1. The Prophet identifies Israel's sin or God's love for Israel.
2. The Prophet predicts a blessing or woe depending on the circumstance.

3. Understanding the Prophets

We are far removed from the religious, historical and cultural life of Israel. Even though we have the Holy Spirit – we cannot understand some parts of the Bible without patient time and study.

You may need resources: Bible Dictionaries, Commentaries and Handbooks.

All sixteen books come from a three hundred year period of history 760-460BC:

1. great upheaval (political, social, economic)
2. great religious unfaithfulness to the covenant
3. great shifts in power and boundaries

e.g.

- 760BC Civil war Israel (N) and Judah (S)
- 722BC Israel falls to Assyria (superpower)
- 587BC Judah falls to Babylon (superpower)
- 528BC Judah returns from exile.

Do not think in paragraphs but in oracles – and yes, you're going to need a guide.

Styles of prophetic writing:

- **Lawsuits:** (e.g. Isaiah 3:13-26)
- **Woes:** (e.g. Habakkuk 2:6-8)
- **Promises:** (e.g. Amos 9:11-15)
- **Enactments:** (e.g. Isaiah 20)
- **Speeches:** (e.g. Malachi 1:2-5 – says the Lord)

4. Applying the Prophets to us today

If the Prophets are still God's word, how can it be God's word to us today?

Hear it in our own setting and be reminded of God's commitment to fulfilling his covenant but BEWARE:

1. Do not transpose or re-write predictions that were fulfilled in the past to our future!
2. Sometimes the inspired N.T. writers give O.T. passages a fuller meaning. We must not do the same.