

Handouts

Including

Notes, Questions &

Charts



Prophetic Books

Little understood,
incredibly important

Yvon Prehn, Bible805



What do you think of the Old Testament prophets?

- Do they mostly talk about prophecies of Jesus' coming?
- Or are they mostly a group of angry old guys railing against evil and the coming final judgement?
- As you'll see they are so much more and have challenges that apply to us in our lesson today

Prophetic Books, Little understood, incredibly important

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If people don't stop reading through the Bible when they get to

Leviticus.....

- They often bail out when they get to the prophets.
- They come across as a group of angry men making threats that don't always make sense.
- In our lesson today I want to change all that and introduce you to one of the most fascinating sections of the Bible!
- And one that has surprising relevance for us today.
- Let's look at where we are in going through the Bible chronologically, then we'll talk about what these books are really about, and how we'll spend the next few months studying them.

Review and where we are

- Solomon's reign ends in sin and judgment.
- The Kingdom splits.
- Southern Kingdom is called Judah and it is left to the descendants of David, some kings good, some bad in God's eyes.
- Northern Kingdom, called Israel and it has a variety of kings, all from different families.
- Some families lasted a few generations, some only a few days, but all were ultimately bad and turned the people away from God.
- It is in this setting that the group of books we call the prophets are written.

Content of the prophets' message

- When people think of prophets in the Old Testament, they often think of them prophesying about the birth of Jesus.
- That focus then results in a list of prophecies fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament.
- That can be helpful and encouraging to our faith.
- **However, less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic.**

Or they think of the prophets as talking about end-times

- Fire and brimstone prophecies, end-times events that some try to correlate with contemporary events.
- **But less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come in a future time.**
- **The majority of the content of the prophets concerns what will happen in the near future for the audience they were writing to.**
- They were addressing a contemporary audience reminding them of God's expectations.

What then is a prophet?

What does it mean to prophesy?

- The basic definition of a **prophet** is "one who speaks for God."

- To **prophecy** means to share that message (writing or speaking).
- The **prophecy** is the resulting message.
- One definition of prophecy summed it up by saying that it is more “forth-telling” than “fore-telling.”
- ***Though we often equate prophecy with talking about future events, that is only part of its meaning.***
- ***More than that their message consisted of explaining God’s laws and reminding people of their responsibility to obey them, rebuking and calling people back to God—and in that, their message is timeless.***

Task of the Prophet, according to Stuart and Fee

- ***The prophets were “covenant enforcement mediators”***
- *Israel’s law constituted a covenant between God and his people: Lev 26: 14 – 39; Deut. 4: 15 – 40*
- *The Law contained not only regulations and statutes for them to keep it but the sorts of punishments (“curses”) that God will necessarily mete out if they do not.*
- *God does not merely give Israel his law, but he enforces it. This is the message of the Prophets.*
- *IN summary—God requires His people to act in a certain way and promised blessings for obedience, discipline for disobedience. God was very clear about his requirements (1st 5 books of the Bible), the people agreed.*
- *The prophets were sent to remind them.*

Contemporary application

- God expects a certain behavior from His people—from those who accepted his salvation.
- There are consequences to disobedience, and these are not only for rewards or punishment after we die.
- In some circles there is a belief today that because Jesus died for our sins, past, present and future (He did),
- That we can live how we want to live, do whatever we want to do and belief in God is that His primary job is to make us feel good.

A huge error

- The children of Israel thought the same thing—that just because they were God’s redeemed people (from Egypt), just because they gave Him token worship,
- They could live however they wanted to live.
- These books show how wrong that idea is and how God would punish them for their disobedience.
- And more than that, they did not get to live the fulfilling destiny He had planned for them.
- It is the BEST WAY to live—petrol analogy.....
- We learn from them and their shortcomings because God’s expectations of his chosen people don’t change.

We are now His chosen representatives

- *2 Peter 2: 9, LB, You have been chosen by God himself—you are priests of the King, you are holy and pure, you are God’s very own—all this so that you may show to others how God called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were less than nothing; now you are God’s own. Once you knew very little of God’s kindness; now your very lives have been changed by it.*
- ¹¹ *Dear brothers, you are only visitors here. Since your real home is in*

heaven, I beg you to keep away from the evil pleasures of this world; they are not for you, for they fight against your very souls.

- **Astounding as that is, yes, it means us—representatives of our Lord.**

Application to us, to pay attention as we begin this study

- The Message Translation of 1 Cor 10:11-12 is quite blunt in its application to us of the lessons of the Old Testament.
- *These are all warning markers—danger!—in our history books, written down so that we don't repeat their mistakes. Our positions in the story are parallel—they at the beginning, we at the end—and we are just as capable of messing it up as they were. Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it's useless. Cultivate God-confidence.*

How these books help us please God

- God doesn't change.
- He expects a holy, a set-apart behavior from the people called to represent Him on earth.
- If His people do not act the way they are supposed to act,
- There will be discipline, as Hebrews 12 tells us that God will discipline us if we disobey, like a father who loves his children and wants them to grow up properly, which is why they went through the difficult things they did
- BUT and this is so important, what we also see from book after book

Is the incredible love and patience of God

- Though we will see God's people do horrible things in rejecting Him again and again to the point of burning children alive as offerings to pagan gods.
- God never stops loving His people, sending prophets to them, delaying judgement, caring for people even during and after judgement and captivity.
- And ultimately keeping them intact as a people to be the nation through whom the Messiah will come.
- With all these good reasons to study the prophets, we have.....

A major challenge in studying them

- They aren't in any kind of historical order or context IN OUR CURRENT BIBLES so you can see what was going on that prompted the prophet's message.
- Or what God did about it when they didn't obey (and they never did).
- The usual divisions of the Prophets:
- 5 Major Books (2 written by Jeremiah), called that because of length, not importance—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Lamentations
- 12 Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- They are placed behind the historical and poetic books in your Bible—which makes no sense at all.

Our plan—to read them so they make sense!

- One of the most important things about reading the prophets so they make sense is to put them into the historical context of when their messages were given.
- And that means jumping around quite a bit in your Bible to read them in HISTORICAL ORDER—just follow the reading plan and it will make sense!

- They make NO sense at all if you don't do that.
- We will be doing that with the reading schedule, the chart I have for you and the series of lessons that follow this one.

As an example, a brief look at the story of Jonah

- Many people know that Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for 3 days, but debates about that are all most people know.
- We'll do an entire lesson on Jonah next, and I'll be talking about the major reason we KNOW that the story of being swallowed by a great fish is true.
- But for now, what I want you to see is a preview of all the prophets, to understand the historical context of the book of Jonah.

Jonah started as a popular, successful prophet—which we see in a totally different place than the book about him

- *2 Kings 4: 23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. ²⁴ He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.*
- *²⁵ He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, **spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.***
- *²⁶ The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering and here was no one to help them. ²⁷ And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.*

Jonah was a hero at home

- He was recognized as the one who prophesied a great victory for his homeland.
- At the same time Assyria, whose capital was Nineveh, was becoming a great power on the world stage
- Not only a power, but a vicious and cruel one.
- Jonah may have imagined that after God using him to prophesy about a great victory for his nation, he'd do that for this major enemy—I imagine he'd love to prophesy Assyria's defeat.

But instead

- God tells him to go and preach a message of salvation to them.
- And we know what happens then—Jonah runs the other way.
- We'll go into that story in the lesson on Jonah, but the point for now is that—
- ***The historical context helps you understand why Jonah ran the other way.***
- ***And will help explain his attitude even after the success of his preaching.***
- To properly understand all the prophets a similar approach and understanding of their historical context is essential.

Here is our plan for how we will do this

- This lesson is an introduction to the prophets.
- We've talked about what they are, what they do, and how we can learn from them.
- Now how we will proceed to study them.
- NOTE: lives of the prophets often intertwined with the character of the king at that time.

- A chart that illustrates this is next.

Your reading schedule & a chart

Back to preliminary info—Audience of the prophets

- Though primarily to Israel and Judah.
- Often to the king directly and also to the people.
- Also often spoke to the nations.
- For their own sake—as Jonah preached to Nineveh.
- And or how they treated Israel.
- Obadiah to Edom and Nahum to Nineveh.
- Application—all nations accountable, all know they ought to treat others and worship God.

Authority of the Prophet

- Emphasized that the message was not their own.
- Spoke the words of God.
- Often the repeated phrase “the Word of the Lord.”
- Came from a variety of backgrounds, from farmers to royalty to backgrounds we know nothing about.
- As is often the case, some reluctant, some hesitant, but like Jeremiah, the message burned in them, and they were compelled to speak.

Attitude of the prophet & God

- ***You’ll only see this correctly when you read them completely, not pulling out random passages!***
- Always a message of hope if repentance and ultimately unconditional restoration after judgement.
- In these books we see the heart of God.
- We see God’s patience—warnings repeated—sometimes for hundreds of years.
- His LOVE—no matter how badly He is treated—we’ll see in Hosea.
- His desire for restoration, harsh judgment NEVER his first choice.
- ***He doesn’t send prophets to beat up on people but to restore them, to set them right so He can bless them.***

Prophetic perspective of time

- **Can be difficult to understand because the prophetic books frequently deal with 2 timelines**
- **Can be challenging as Gordon and Fee describe it:**
- *“It should be noted, of course, that some of the prophecies of the near future were set against the background of the great eschatological [end-times] future, and sometimes they seem to blend. . . .*
- *It is like looking at two discs, with a smaller one in front of a larger, straight on; then from the perspective of subsequent history to see them from a side view and thus see how much distance there is between them.”*
- Fee, Gordon D.; Fee, Gordon D.; Stuart, Douglas; Stuart, Douglas (2014-06-24). How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition (p. 207). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Another illustration

- Of the prophetic view of world history.
- If you look at a set of mountain ranges from a straight-on view they look very close together.

Shift the perspective slightly

- From an aerial view
- And you can see there are large valleys between them.
- Since God sees all of time and the prophets speak for God, it can sometimes be a bit confusing to know what is supposed to happen when.

Example of 3 timelines from the same prophetic passage

- Valley of Dry Bones coming to life in Ezekiel 37.
- 1. Near fulfillment: Israel did come together and return to the land (Ezra 1,2).
- 2. Israel became a nation in 1949—unique in the history of the world.
- 3. At the end of time, eternal resurrection of all people.
- You see this expansive view of time, here and now, the future and forever especially in the book of Isaiah—written from God’s viewpoint—and it can make your head spin.....

Challenge of correct dating for the Prophets

- Some contemporary commentators cast doubt **without cause** on the dating of the prophet’s writing, based on an anti-supernaturalist bias.
- But internal Biblical evidence, archeology, and source criticism show validity of traditional dating.
- We will discuss this issue more with individual books.
- The chart has the most Biblically accurate dates (though perhaps not exact).
- **Correct dates important because they show how God, the author outside of time can precisely predict future events.**
- **God is able to give specific names and details hundreds of years in advance, e.g. Cyrus, named by Isaiah (c.44-45) around a 100 years before he was born.**

Key Lesson of the Prophets:

Importance of both Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

- Fee, Gordon D.; Fee, Gordon D.; Stuart, Douglas; Stuart, Douglas (2014-06-24). How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition (p. 211). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
- *“Orthodoxy is correct belief. Orthopraxy is correct living.*
- *Through the prophets, God called the people of ancient Israel and Judah to a balance of right belief and right living.*
- *This, of course, remains the very balance that the new covenant requires as well (cf. Eph 2: 8 – 10; James 1: 27; 2: 18).*
- *What God wanted from Israel and Judah is in a general sense the same as what he wants from us. The Prophetic Books can serve constantly as reminders to us of God’s determination to enforce his covenant.*
- *For those who obey the stipulations of the new covenant (loving God and loving one’s neighbor), the final, eternal result will be blessing (no matter what the troubles of this world)*
- *For those who disobey, the only result is an eternal curse, removal not just from the land, but the presence of God.”*

Concluding comments

- My prayer is that as we start on this adventure of going through the prophets in their historical settings,
- That we will have an experience like the prophet Isaiah, who when he saw God’s majesty and was cleansed from his sin, responded to the needs of his world.
- We may never speak with his power, but our world still needs people to live for and serve our God.
- To do that, may we respond to the Lord as he did when he prayed,
- **“Here am I, Lord—send me.”**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Prophetic Books, little understood, incredibly important

1. Contrary to what many people think that the Old Testament prophet's messages are primarily about the coming of Jesus and end times, correctly what percentage about Jesus (or Messianic) and what percentage are about end times?
2. Instead, what is the time frame the prophets primarily preach about?
3. What is one of the biggest challenges in understanding them correctly that reading our Bibles in Chronological order corrects and why is this important?
4. What is the view of time that we need to keep in mind with the prophets? How does God's view of time fit into it?
5. What is Orthodoxy? What is Orthopraxy? Why is it important that we are correct in both areas.
6. APPLICATION—How can we be a prophet (one who tells, shows the truth about God) in our daily lives? Not in big preaching from the street-corner ways, but in your home and work? Be very specific and practical.

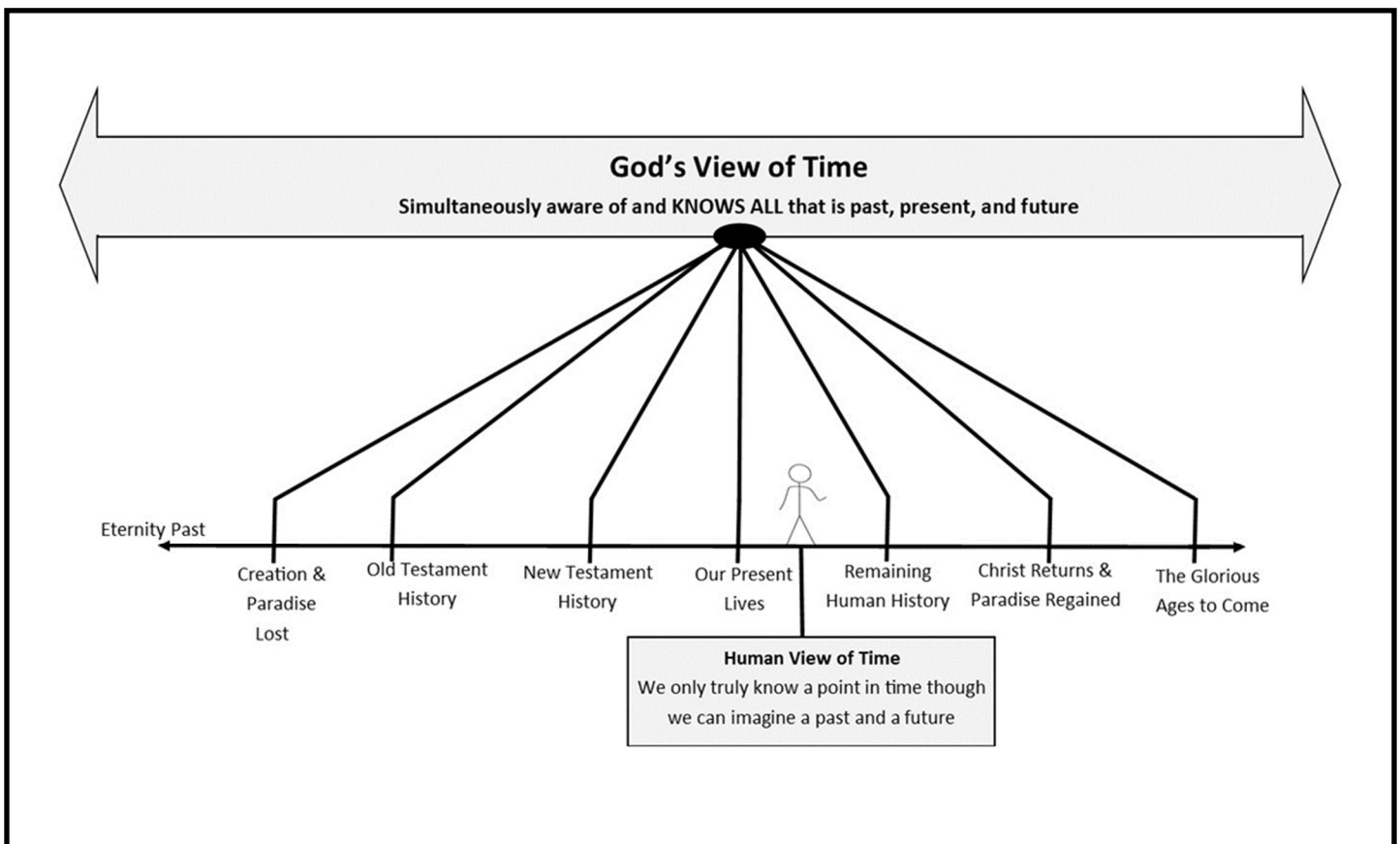
Illustration of God's View of Time

This illustration shows how God is simultaneously aware of and knows all of time, past, present, and future and in contrast how we humans only experience one particular point of time.

This illustrates also how God can tell us in the Bible what will happen because He knows all of it in advance of us encountering it on our timeline.

Prophecy is not some mysterious thing, but simply how a caring God communicates what His people need to know.

Links to a podcast and video on this topic are also on www.Bible805.com



Old Testament Prophets' Timeline

AUDIENCE COLOR KEY: green=Israel; blue=Judah; pink=Exiles in Babylon; tan=misc. nations

note: exact dates approximate as many reputable sources vary, though general history and timeline valid.

Historical setting: After division of the kingdom into Israel and Judah, recorded in 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 17

Prophet	Audience	Kings who ruled at the same time	Approximate Dates, all BC	Historical happenings at the time of the prophet, plus comments on the content of their books
Elijah	Israel	Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram	870-845	Kingdom split about 930, all sinful kings in Israel through Israel's history, kings a mixture of good and bad in Judah.
Elisha	Israel	Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz	845-800	Disciple of Elijah. Preaches to a sinful people who worshipped idols, not Jehovah God. Some individual (e.g. Naaman) success, no national repentance.
Jonah	Nineveh	Jeroboam II	760-753	Jonah first a prophet of victory to Israel; then called to preach to Nineveh capital of Assyria, a violent and cruel enemy. Finally obeys and Nineveh repents, though it doesn't last.
Amos	Israel	Jeroboam II	765-754	Israel powerful and complacent, pagan worship, neglect of the poor, calls for justice. Resotoration after judgement promised which is a pattern in many prophets.
Hosea	Israel	Jeroboam II	758-725	Though his message is of love and forgiveness, Israel does not repent, continues in spiritual decline. Though materially prosperous and religiously active, Israel goes into captivity in 722, conquered by Assyria.

Historical setting: Israel conquered by Assyria, prophecies now warning Judah, recorded 2 Kings 18-2 Kings 25

Additional history of Judah primarily in 1-2 Chronicles; fall of Jerusalem and edict to return in 2 Chron. 36

Isaiah	Judah	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	760-673	Begins preaching to Judah before Israel falls. Assyria threatens but does not conquer Judah. Book reflects God's eternal view.
Micah	Judah	Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	738-698	Preaches same time as Isaiah, warns of judgement if no repentance. Defines what God requires in Micah 6:8.
Nahum	Nineveh	Manasseh, Amon, Josiah	658-615	Assyrian repentance under Jonah doesn't last. Final destruction of Assyria/Nineveh by Babylonians.
Zephaniah	Judah	Josiah	640-609	Last revival in Judah under Josiah, but not enough.
Habakkuk	Judah	Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin	608-598	Babylon conquered Assyria; Judah in process of its downfall. Questions why God uses pagan nations for His purposes.
Jeremiah	Judah	Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	650-582	Messages not in order. Records the last days of Judah, the prior series of deportations before final destruction in 587 BC. Wrote at the same time as Ezekiel and Daniel who were deported early on. Writes Lamentations after fall of Judah.
Obediah	Edom	uncertain	?	Judgement of Edom. Date not certain, message timeless. Do not rejoice over or take advantage of the fall of others.

Historical setting: Babylon conquers Judah, a series of deportations, final destruction 607 BC, recorded in 2 Kings 24, 25

Ezekiel	Exiles in Babylon	Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, in Judah; Babylonian rulers there	620-570	Under captivity, God continues speaking to his people; obedience still required, he was a priest and spoke to the people in Babylon. Also numerous future, end-time prophecies.
Daniel	Exiles in Babylon	Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah in Judah; Babylonian rulers there	620-540	One of the earliest deported to Babylon, lived there during the destruction, deportation, and return of the people. His prophecies span human history.

Historical setting: Israel allowed to return & rebuild, recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, captives who stayed in Esther

Joel	Judah	Governor Zerubbabel?	?	Date not certain, message timeless. Restoration promised.
Haggai	Judah	Governor Zerubbabel	520	Returned to the land, Temple rebuilding stalled, preached priority of finishing God's work. Preached with Zechariah.
Zechariah	Judah	Governor Zerubbabel	522-509	Messages, challenges to complete the tasks of God.
Malachi	Judah	Governor Zerubbabel	465	People back in the land, Temple rebuilt. The people persisted in sin. Challenges to repent. Blessings for obedience.

After these books 400 "Silent years" No written word from God, but God at work in history preparing for the Messiah.

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