

Introduction to the Prophets

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him” (Deut. 18:15).

While Moses looked ahead to Jesus Christ as the ultimate prophet, there were, between them, a series of prophets sent by God, all of whom pointed to the same fulfillment in Christ (Acts 3:19-26). Many of these prophets never left writings. Men like Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha are well known prophets, but they did not leave behind the types of writings we associate with the corpus of Scripture. There are, however, a number of written records left by the prophets that comprise a significant portion of Scripture. Some of the writings are shorter (cf. Obadiah), while others are lengthy (cf. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). The zenith of the period of the prophets lies between 800 B.C.—400 B.C., during the period of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, through the period of Judah’s exile in Babylon.

A prophet is a mouthpiece for God, who “spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways” (Heb. 1:1). The prophet was charged with a vital task of faithfully transmitted God’s inspired message to the targeted audience. Again, though Moses pointed ultimately to Jesus, the charge of every prophet was the same:

“I will put My words in his mouth, and he



shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not

commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.” (Deut. 18:18-20)

The prophets were sent to the people during tumultuous times. This was not for the light of heart, for their messages were indeed heavy and, sometimes, harsh. Yet this is what it took to wake up a people who had forgotten their covenant with Yahweh.

Each prophet was unique in message and presentation. Though they each have their own contexts and were sent to different groups of people at different times, they also share some common, well-recognized themes. We can boil these themes down to the following three:

1. The Covenant. The people are in trouble because they had broken the covenant. God was longsuffering with them, but the prophets came to tell the people that God was not happy about the way they were treating Him and the covenant under which they were bound. Isaiah says it this way:

“The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a

curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty” (Isa. 24:5-6).

God also had in mind to establish a new, better covenant under the Messiah. Jeremiah says, “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31). This found its fulfillment in Christ, as the writer of Hebrews shows (Heb. 8).

2. The Day of the Lord. This is a day of visitation and judgment upon the nations. Really, anytime a nation faced such judgment, it was the “day of the Lord” for them. For example, Isaiah warned Babylon: “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Isa. 13:6).

Ezekiel prophesied:

“For the day is near,
Even the day of the Lord is near;
It will be a day of clouds,
A time of doom for the nations.
“A sword will come upon Egypt,
And anguish will be in Ethiopia;
When the slain fall in Egypt,
They take away her wealth,
And her foundations are torn down.” (Ezek. 30:3-4)

Every nation, including Israel and Judah, would face the day of the Lord if they failed to repent. The concept of repentance is key here: “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Therefore, repent and live.’” (Ezek. 18:32)

3. The Messiah. The prophets pointed to the Messiah (Acts 3:19-26). They did this in different ways, whether through direct prophecy or through typological prophecy.

Perhaps the most well-known of the Messianic prophecies coming from the prophets would come from Isaiah. Isaiah 53 is a monumental messianic prophecy of Christ’s death on behalf of the sins of the people.

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.” (Isa. 53:4-5)

Yet all the prophets in one way or another pointed to the Messiah. Jesus said that “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

The prophets present great lessons for us even today. Let’s pay attention!

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