

Historical Settings of the Prophets

The writing prophets wrote between 760 B.C. and 460 B.C. - only 300 stormy years out of nearly 1400 years of Israel's history. The prophets spoke in large measure to their contemporary events. These years were characterized by : unprecedented political, military economic and social upheaval; an enormous level of religious unfaithfulness and disregard for the original Mosaic covenant; and Shifts in populations and national boundaries. The nation was been divided by civil war into two kingdoms in conflict with each other and with the nations around them - both their neighbors: Edom, Ammon (Syria), Moab, and Tyre; and caught in the middle of the struggles of the superpowers: Assyria, Eygpt, Babylon, and Persia, etc.

Obediah and **Joel** were likely 9th Century B.C. contemporaries of Elijah and Elisha.

Three crises struck in the 8th Century: an alliance of Syria and Israel in 734 B.C.; the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722; and the invasion of Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 B.C. **Hosea** and **Amos** were prophets in Isreal in the North, **Isaiah** to Judah in the South, **Micah** was at work in both kingdoms and **Jonah** met his whale during these times.

Nahum and **Habbakuk** foresaw Assyria's destruction (with the rise of Babylon), as **Zephaniah** prepared the way for reform. Judah experienced a revival under Josiah in 621 B.C. abruptly ending with his death in 609. **Jeremiah's** "weeping" ministry began with that hope, but he saw the tragic decline and fall of Jerusalem in 686 B.C. before being carried off to Eygpt.

Ezekiel (carried off to Babylon as a captive in 597 B.C.) ministered to the exiles explaining "why?" then offering hope. **Daniel's** 70 years as a prophet saw Babylon fall to Persia and far beyond them to Greece and Rome and inter-Testamental times.

Haggai, **Zechariah** and **Malachi** were prophets among the remnant that returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Prophetic “Language”:

The **Prophetic “Perfect”** - is frequently used, using the “completed action present tense” to show certainty concerning future events - since Hebrew lacks a future tense - usually translated with a future tense in our translations - (Isa 9:6; 11:9).

Formulas: Some phrases are used so frequently they became technical terms:

“Thus says the Lord ... or the Word of the Lord to ...”; “In the latter days, ... or in the last days, ...” ; “The day of the Lord ...”; “The Lord comes ...”

“Restore the fortunes of my people or return the captivity”; “The remnant shall return” “The dwelling (or tabernacle) of God is with men”; “The kingdom of God”

Illusions:

to life & nature

many allusions to the past: events such as creation, Paradise with its rivers and trees, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, The Exodus, the wilderness experience with pillar of fire and cloud, the valley of Achan, etc. and to historical persons: Elijah, Joshua, David, etc. (Haggai 2:20-22 cf. Deut 29:23, Exo 15:1,5, Judg 7:22) ;

Objects and Actions: examples: Jeremiah’s linen waistband (13), the potter’s jar (18, 19), Baskets of figs (24); Ezekiel’s “toy soldiers” (4), sleeping habits (4), shave and hair cut (5), vine allegory (15), Whoring sisters allegory (25), Valley of bones (37), New Temple (40ff); Daniel’s statue (2), The 4 beasts (7); Zechariah’s myrtle trees (1), Measuring line (2), gold lampstand (4), Flying scroll (5), chariots (6), Joshua’s crowning (6)

Types: an action that represents a teaching of double import: its truth was a reality to its contemporaries (the shadow), and yet it pictures an aspect of Gods redemption (the reality) at the same time. Types may be events, persons, things, institutions, or ceremonies. Types must: 1) be of divine origin; 2) be redemptive in focus; 3) be pictorial; and 4) be future. Most Biblical types have are identified as such by Scripture.

Symbols: objects from life that are used to represent concepts or ideas, past, present or future. Something may be used as a symbol of more than one thing, such as “lamb”, “lion”, etc

Predictive Statistics (Compiled by J. Barton Payne)

31,124 Verses in the Bible

8,352 Verses with predictive material (27%)

OT - 6,641 verses out of 23,210 total (28.6 %)

NT - 1,711 verses out of 7,914 total (21.6 %)

737 Separate Predictive Topics are dealt with.

65% are simple oracles,

9.5% figurative predictions

4.5% symbolical dreams and object lessons

21% "types" (34% of verses)

The only books without predictive material are:

Ruth, Song of Songs, Philemon and 3 John.

Books with highest percentage of predictive prophecies:

OT Ezekiel (63%), Jeremiah (60 %) and Isaiah (59%)

NT Revelation (63%), Matthew (26%) and Luke (23%)

Less than 2% of OT Prophecies are Messianic

Psalms - 101 verses of 13 Psalms, Isaiah - 59 verses,

Less than 5% describe the New Covenant Age,

Less than 1% - events yet to come.

Of the hundreds of prophets which God raised up in Israel's history, we have only written collections of oracles of just sixteen prophets. The only difference between "major" and "minor" prophets is the amount of written oracles collected.

"The bulk of prophecy in both the earlier prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings), the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the twelve minor prophets), and the New Testament prophets actually involved God's messengers speaking the word of God to a contemporary culture that needed to be challenged to cease its resistance to the word of God. As such, these prophets were "forth-tellers." " (Kaiser and Silva, An Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 139)

Their primary role was as "enforcers of the Covenant" - preachers calling the people back to obedience. The prophetic books teach us much about God's character - His Holiness, Justice, Mercy, Love, Patience and Sovereignty over the nations; as well as how He responds to our sin.