

SECTION 18

Proverbs and Prophecy

TYPES OF PROVERBS

1. *Descriptive Proverbs* make a simple observation about life without dealing with exceptions or applications (11.24; 15.23)
2. *Prescriptive Proverbs* state a truth with the goal of influencing behavior (19.17; 14.31; 15.33)
3. *Antithetical Proverbs* are the most common and dominate chapters 10-15. (15.18; 12.12)
4. *Numerical Sayings* usually contain a number and/or a list (cf. 30).
5. *Paradoxical Proverbs* cause the reader to ponder more complex levels of thought.

PROVERBS ON MONEY: WEALTH AND POVERTY

1. God blesses the righteous with financial security. (3.9-10; 3.15-16; 10.22; 10.15-16a)
2. The behavior of fools can result in poverty. (26.13-15; 10.4-5; 6.6-11; 21.17; 22.16; 11.24)
3. A fool's wealth is temporal. (11.18; 13.11; 21.6; 22.16; 11.4; 23.4-5)
4. Some are impoverished as a result of injustice and oppression. (13.23; 16.8; 22.2)
5. Those who have money should be generous with the poor. (29.7, 14; 28.27; 11.24; 6.1-5; 3.27-28)
6. It is better to be wise than to be wealthy. (15.16,17; 16.8, 16; 17.1; 22.1; 28.6)
7. Financial riches are of limited value. (11.4; 13.8; 19.10; 14.20; 30.7-9)

Proverbs on the Tongue/Words

1. Words are a reflection of the heart (12.23; 16.23; 18.4; 10.20; 26.23-26)

2. Words are a reflection of reality (12.17, 19; 18.13, 17)

3. Evil speech takes many forms (10.6; 12.6; 22.10)
 - Lies (14.5, 25; 13.5; 25.18)
 - Argumentative (26.17, 21)
 - Insult and Slander (10.18; 20.20)
 - Gossip and Rumors (11.13; 18.8)

4. The words of the wise (8.7-9; 10.11; 13.3; 17.28; 15.4; 16.24; 27.5)

5. One's speech has consequences (18.13, 21; 12.13; 14.3; 13.2-3a)

Prophecy

Stein: Chapter 16

Introduction: For many people the term prophecy is a synonym for prediction. As a result many people think of the prophetic books of the Bible as just a long list of predictions concerning future events. Yet when one reads these books it is clear that much of the material is proclamation and narrative material. This can be seen that in the Hebrew canon the books of Joshu-2 Kings are called the Former Prophets.

1. Judgment Prophecies

- Jonah 3.4 (cf. 3.5-10)
- Judgment prophecies in the ancient world carried the understanding that destruction could be avoided if the people repented from their sins.
- The principle stated: Jeremiah 18.7-8 (vv. 9-10; cf. Ezek. 33.13-15)
- Another example of this rule is found in Micah 3.12. In Jeremiah 26.16-19 this prophecy is quoted and its lack of fulfillment noted. However, Micah was not considered a false prophet.
- Another example of a judgment prophecy averted is in 1 Kings 21.0-29.
- All of this is part of the “norms of language” concerning judgment prophecies.

2. The Language of Prophecy

- Isaiah 13.9-11 (cf. 13.1, 19) – This prophecy was fulfilled with the rise and rule of the Persian Empire
- Isa. 24.23
- Jer. 4.28; 13.16; 15.9
- Ezek. 32.7-8
- Joel 2.10, 31; 3.15
- Amos 8.9
- Hab. 3.11
- Matt. 24.29; Mk. 13.24-25; Lk. 21.25
- Rev. 6.12
- Acts 2.14-21

3. The Figurative Nature of Prophetic Language

A clear example of a “nonliteral” prophecy is found in Isa. 11.6-9 and 35.8-10. In describing the peace and prosperity of the millennial/messianic age the author writes what appears to be contradictory descriptions. If interpreted literally there is a conflict, however, the willed meaning of the author is that the messianic age will be one of peace and security.

Luke 3.4-6: This is a quote from Isaiah 40.3-5 and is found in each of the gospels (Mk. 1.3; Matt. 3.3; John 1.23) but only Luke includes the topographical/geographical references. Obviously he is speaking of the proud being humbled and the humble being exalted (a theme in Luke’s Gospel; cf. Mary’s Magnificat).

Revelation 21: The description of the New Jerusalem.

- The walls are described as 144 cubits thick (note the symbolism 12 x 12 (v. 17) [cf. also 7.4-8; 21.12]. The thickness indicates the safety and security of the city, but notice as well the gates are never shut. What good re thick walls if the gates are never closed. Once again the prophet has used imagery that appears contradictory, but the open gates communicate the concept of safety as well, there is no need to close the gates.
- Other example of figurative terminology in prophecy – Isa. 3.24-4.1; 34.1-17; Jer. 4.23-31; 15.8-9; Nah. 1.4-5; Hab. 1.6-9; Mk. 13.14-16.

4. The Sensus or “Fuller” Meaning of the Text

There are times when a prophetic text appears to have a fulfillment other than what the prophet himself apparently expected. Some frequently cited examples are:

- Matt. 1.22-23; 2.15, 17-18; Jn. 12.15; 1 Cor. 10.3-4

The thought would be that this fuller sense could only be known after the fact since the prophet himself did not envision it.

Stein prefers to see it as an implication of the author’s conscious meaning.

Much OT prophecy was future to the prophet and his audience but is past as far as we are concerned; however, there are still some prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled. Stein lists the following:

Prophetic predictions that have been fulfilled:

- The fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah, Ezekiel)
- The judgment of Samaria (Hosea, Amos, Micah)
- Babylon (Isa. 13-14, 21, 47; Jer. 50-51, Daniel)
- Edom (Obadiah)
- Moab (Isa. 15-16); Damascus (Isa. 17); Ethiopia (Isa. 18); Egypt (Isa. 19); Tyre (Isa. 23)
- Nineveh (Nahum, Zeph. 2)
- Etc.
- The birth, ministry, death, and resurrection (Isa. 4, 7, 9, 11, 40, 53; Jer. 23, 33; Mic. 5; Zec. 3)
- The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Jer. 31, Joel 2)

There are other prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled

- The great tribulation (Matt. 24; Mk. 13; 2 Thess. 2)
- The glorious appearing of the Son of man (Matt. 24; Mk. 13; 1 Thess. 4; 2 Thess. 1-2)

By seeking to interpret the willed meaning of the author for the situation in which he wrote, we shall avoid interpreting certain prophecies that have already been fulfilled.

Old Testament Prophets: Covenant Mediator Enforcers

Difficulties with reading the prophets (especially the longer prophetic books)

- They are collections of spoken oracles
- The oracles are not always in chronological order.
- There are often no hints as to where one oracle begins and another ends.
- There is often no historical setting provided to interpret the oracle.
- We are so far removed from their religious, historical and cultural context that we can fail to understand the issues being addressed by the prophets.

I. The Nature of the OT Prophetic Literature

The Prophetic books include:

- *The four major prophets*: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel
- *The twelve minor prophets*: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

1. The OT prophetic books primarily contain numerous short spoken or preached messages/oracles, usually proclaimed by the prophet to either the nation of Israel or the nation of Judah.

2. Only a small percentage of OT prophecy deals with events that are still future to us.

3. The prophets use poetry for much of their message, and it is the poetic aspect of their message that is the most foreign to us.

4. The prophetic books are primarily anthologies.

Amos 5.1-27

5.1-3: a lamentation over Israel's destruction

5.5-6, 14: an invitation to seek God and live

5.7-13: attacks on social injustice

5.16-17: a description of miseries

5.18-20: a description of the day of the Lord

5.21-24: a rebuke of hypocritical worship

5.25-27: a brief review of Israel's sinful history culminating in a prediction of exile.

II. The Historical-Cultural and Theological Context

THE LARGER HISTORICAL CONTEXT

760-460: The 16 prophetic books come from a rather narrow span of time in Israelite history (ca.760-460 B.C.).

The reason for this concentrated time between Amos (ca. 760), the earliest of the writing prophets, and Malachi (ca. 460) is that this period of time called for covenant enforcement mediation.

Israel - NORTHERN KINGDOM: ANNOUNCING IMPENDING JUDGMENT - in the northern kingdom disobedience to the covenant went far beyond anything yet known in Judah and was slated for destruction by God because of her sin. Amos (ca.760) and Hosea (ca. 755) announced impending destruction. The northern kingdom fell to the superpower Assyria in 722 B.C.

Judah – SOUTHERN KINGDOM: INCREASING SINFULNESS OF JUDAH AND RISE OF BABYLON- Thereafter the increasing sinfulness of Judah and the rise of another superpower, Babylon, constitutes the subject of several prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (Obadiah probably fits in here). Judah was destroyed for her disobedience in 587 B.C.

After 587: Afterward Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi announced God's will for the restoration of his people (beginning with a return from exile in 538 B.C.)

III. The Basic Prophetic Message: Covenant Enforcement Mediators

1. Repent for you have broken the covenant.

- Idolatry
- Social Injustice
- Religious Ritualism

2. God will judge you if you do not repent and will bless you if you live in obedience to the law.

- The blessing of faithfulness: Lev. 26.1-13; Deut. 4.32-40; 28.1-14
- The punishment for disobedience: Lev. 26.14-29; Deut. 4.15-28; 28.15-32

Categories of Corporate Blessings: Life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect and safety.

Categories of Corporate Punishments: Death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, defeat, deportation, destitution and disgrace.

3. There is hope beyond judgment for a glorious, future restoration.

SUMMARY: Interpreting the Prophets

1. The prophets were God's spokespersons.
2. The prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.
3. The prophet's message was not original (for the most part).
4. Understanding the historical context is very important to understanding the prophet's message.
5. It is important to isolate the various forms of oracles/messages.
6. The prophetic message can be summarized under the three ideas:
 - You have sinned against God - repent
 - God will judge you if you do not repent and will bless you if you live in obedience to the law.
 - There is hope beyond judgment for a glorious, future restoration.
7. When teaching and preaching the prophets look for similarities in settings (greed, injustice, etc.)
8. Understand that the prophets are excellent in teaching a balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Old Testament Prophets: Covenant Enforcers¹

Introduction: The OT Prophetic books contain some of the most inspiring passages in the Bible:

- Isaiah 40.28-31
- Isaiah 53.1-6

The prophets also contain their share of obscure and difficult verses:

- The rather gruesome text from Amos 3.12
- Passages very insulting to their original audience – Jer. 2.23b-24
- As well as strong passages of judgment – Jer. 15.1-2

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The term major and minor have nothing to do with importance but only with the length of the books.

The writing prophets take up about as much space in the Bible as the entire New Testament.

Yet of all the genre types in the Bible the prophetic literature may be the most difficult to understand because we really have nothing similar to it in the English language.

1. The OT prophetic books contain primarily numerous short spoken or preached messages/oracles, usually proclaimed by the prophet to either the nation of Israel or the nation of Judah. They also contain visions from God as well as short narrative sections and symbolic acts.

¹ This material is a summation of Duvall and Hayes

2. Only a small percentage of OT prophecy deals with events that are still future to us.

Douglas Stuart says,

- Less than 2% of OT prophecy is messianic
- Less than 5% specifically describes the new covenant age
- Less than 1% concerns events that are still yet to come.

The role of the prophets was to proclaim that as a result of disobedience of Israel and/or Judah that they were in danger of imminent judgment.

3. The prophets use poetry for much of their message, and it is the poetic aspect of their message that is the most foreign to us. The prophet's use of poetry by makes their message even more powerful and gripping.

- Amos does not just say, "God is angry." Rather, he proclaims, "The Lion has roared."
- Isaiah does not analytically contrast the awfulness of sin and the amazing wonder of forgiveness; he uses figurative language, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."
- Jeremiah is disgusted with Judah's unfaithful attitude toward God and wants to convey the pain the Lord feels because Judah has left him for idols. Thus throughout the book he compares Judah to an unfaithful wife who has become a prostitute. "You have lived as a prostitute with many lovers."

The power of poetry is its ability to affect the emotions of the reader or listener.

The prophets also use parallelism to communicate their message.

- Synonymous parallelism: The second or subsequent line repeats or reinforces the sense of the first line, as in Isaiah 44.22
 - A: I have swept away your offenses like a cloud/B: your sins like the morning mist.
- Antithetical Parallelism: The second or subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first, as in Hosea 7.14
 - A: They do not cry out to me from their hearts,/B: but wail upon their beds.
- Synthetic Parallelism: The second or subsequent line adds to the first line in a manner which provides further information, as in Obadiah 21:
 - A: Deliverers will go up from Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau/B: And the kingdom will be the Lord's.

4. The prophetic books are primarily anthologies.

By this we mean that the prophetic books are collections of shorter units, usually oral messages that the prophets have proclaimed publicly to the people. Other literary units such as narrative, and visions are mixed in.

It is important to note the collective nature of the books. Like a contemporary collection of a writer's poetry, the prophetic books contain primarily independent, shorter units. These units are not normally arranged chronologically and often do not have any thematic order as well. Occasionally a broad overall theme (judgment, deliverance) will unite a large unit of material, but for the most part tight, thematic unity is absent. Because of this aspect it is almost impossible to outline a prophetic book as one would outline an epistle or gospel.

When one comes to the actual study or informed-reading of the prophetic books, the first thing to do is to think oracles (much as one will think in paragraphs when reading the epistles). This is not always an easy task but it can be very helpful in gaining a better understanding of the prophets. Some prophecies are dated, notably Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Ezekiel: Oracles Against Egypt

1. 29.1-2: First Oracle against Egypt - Jan 7. 587 B.C. (this is the sixth date in Ezek. [1.2; 8.1; 20.1; 24.1; 26.1].
2. 29.17: Second oracle against Egypt (Apr. 26 571 B.C)
3. 30.1: The third oracle against Egypt Jerusalem was under siege at this time) [probably between January-April 587]
4. 30.20: Fourth – April 29 (587)
5. 31.1: Fifth – June 587
6. 32.1: Sixth Mach 3 585
7. No month is given – the entire year dates from April 13 586 to April 1 585.

However, it is not that easy most of the time. Amos 5 contains what is normally thought to be three oracles. Note the changes in subject in Amos 5:

- 5.1-3: a lamentation over Israel's destruction
- 5.5-6, 14: an invitation to seek God and live
- 5.7-13: attacks on social injustice
- 5.16-17: a description of miseries
- 5.18-20: a description of the day of the Lord
- 5.21-24: a rebuke of hypocritical worship
- 5.25-27: a brief review of Israel's sinful history culminating in a prediction of exile.

Most commentators understand this passage to consist of three oracles

- 5.1-3: forms a single short lament oracle announcing punishment.
- 5.4-17: forms a single (though complex) oracle of invitation to blessing and warning of punishment
- 5.18-27: forms a single (though complex) oracle warning of punishment.

Oracles are isolated according to the known forms. All three oracles in this chapter were given in the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel (793-753) to a people whose relative prosperity caused them to consider it unthinkable that their nation would be devastated as to cease to exist in just a generation.

Forms of Prophetic Oracles:

Lawsuit (Isa. 3.13-26; Hosea 4.1-19)

Woe (Hab. 2.6-8; Mal. 2.1-5; Zeph. 2.5-7)

Promise (Amos 9.11-15; Hosea 2.16-22); Isa. 45.1-7; Jer. 31.1-9)

II. The Historical-Cultural and Theological Context

One must be careful to interpret the OT prophetic literature within its historical context. This may require the interpreter to seek outside assistance from Bible Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, and a Bible Handbook.

1. The prophets primary role is as spokesmen for God. To understand them as primarily predictors of the future is to miss their primary importance as men who spoke for God to their contemporaries.

Of all the OT prophets only 16 were chosen to speak oracles that would be collected and written into books. For example Elijah and Elisha spoke for God but we know more about what they did than what they actually said. Due to their place in narrative literature we know more about their historical context than we do the writing prophets. In the writing prophets we hear from God but we learn little about the prophets themselves.

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The reason for this concentrated time between Amos (ca. 760), the earliest of the writing prophets, and Malachi (ca. 460) is that this period of time called for covenant enforcement mediation.

Three things characterized those centuries:

1. Unprecedented political, military, economic and social upheaval.
2. An enormous level of religious unfaithfulness and disregard for the original Mosaic covenant.
3. Shifts in populations and national boundaries

Israel - NORTHERN KINGDOM: ANNOUNCING IMPENDING JUDGMENT - in the northern kingdom disobedience to the covenant went far beyond anything yet known in Judah and was slated for destruction by God because of her sin. Amos (ca.760) and Hosea (ca. 755) announced impending destruction. The northern kingdom fell to the superpower Assyria in 722 B.C.

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SPECIFIC EXAPLES – Fee pages 157-158; How to read the Bible (p. 178 Isaiah 2.6-5.30; Ezekiel's oracles against Egypt (single sheet) includes dates of the oracles.

III. The Basic Prophetic Message: Covenant Enforcement Mediators

The prophets write in the theological context of Deuteronomy and in the historical context of an imminent invasion by either the Assyrians (against Israel) or the Babylonians (against Judah). What is their message in this context?

The prophets serve as prosecuting attorneys, that is, as covenant enforcers. While there are numerous nuances to their proclamation, their overall message can be boiled down to three basic points.

1. You have broken God's covenant and therefore you must repent.
2. God will judge you if you do not repent.
3. There is still hope beyond judgment for a glorious, future restoration.

1. Repent for you have broken the covenant.

The prophets emphasize how serious the nations covenant violations have become. Evidence of their sin normally falls into three categories: idolatry, social injustice, and religious ritualism.

- a. Idolatry is perhaps the most flagrant violation of the covenant and the prophets preach continuously against it. Israel engages in it from its political beginnings, with the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. But even Judah falls into serious idolatrous worship. The nation sought to maintain some semblance of the worship of the one true God while blending in worship to local pagan deities.

This syncretistic worship climaxes in Ezekiel 8. The Spirit takes Ezekiel on a tour of the temple in Jerusalem. There he sees

- An idol at the entrance to the north gate
- Drawings and carvings of animals on the walls
- Women burning incense to Babylonian god Tammuz
- And the elders with their backs to the presence of the Lord facing east and bowing down to the sun.
- "This the Lord declares will drive me from my sanctuary. Indeed in Ezekiel 10 the glory of the Lord departs from the temple. (The old mosaic covenant as defined in Deuteronomy comes to an end with the departure of the Lord's presence.

Idolatry strikes at the very heart of the relationship between the Lord and his people. The central covenant formula in the OT was the statement by the Lord, “I will be your God; you will be my people, I will dwell in your midst.” Idolatry was rejection of this relationship. The prostitute/unfaithful wife imagery runs throughout Jeremiah and Hosea who has to live it out in his own life. Ezekiel uses the same imagery in chapter 16.

The prophets not only proclaim that idolatry is a violation of their relationship with God but that to worship idols is both irrational and foolish.

- Isaiah 1.22-24
 - Jeremiah 10.5
- b. **Social Injustice** - The covenant in Deuteronomy bound the people to more than just the worship of God. A proper relationship with God required a proper relationship with people. The Lord was concerned with social justice for all people, and he was especially concerned with how weaker individuals in society were treated. The prophets would cite the treatment of orphans and widows as the social failure of the people. The prophets would also state how these violations of the covenant would invalidate the sacrifices offered.

Examples of prophetic condemnation of social injustice:

- Isaiah 1
 - Jeremiah 5.28-29
 - Micah 6.7-8
- c. **Religious Ritualism** – The prophets denounce the people of God for their religion has become one of ritualism that lacks heart. The ritual has become a replacement for relationship with Almighty God. They think that the ritual will exempt them from their sinful acts involving idolatry and social injustice.
- Isaiah 1.11-13a
 - Isaiah 58.6-7

Even as the prophets proclaim that judgment is imminent they plead for the nation to repent.

2. God will judge you if you do not repent and will bless you if you live in obedience to the law.

The prophets announced that if the law was kept blessing would follow and if not punishment would come.

- The blessing of faithfulness: Lev. 26.1-13; Deut. 4.32-40; 28.1-14

- The punishment for disobedience: Lev. 26.14-29; Deut. 4.15-28; 28.15-32

One must remember that the prophets did not invent the blessings and curses they announced. They may have announced them in their own style but their content goes back to Lev. and Deut.

Categories of Corporate Blessings: Life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect and safety.

Categories of Corporate Punishments: Death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, defeat, deportation, destitution and disgrace.

- Amos 9.11-15
- Hosea 8.14; 9.3

3. There is hope beyond judgment for a glorious, future restoration.

Statistically, a majority of what the prophets announce in the 8th, 7th and 6th centuries is curses because the major defeat of the northern kingdom did not take place until 722 B.C. The fall of the southern kingdom of Judah did not take place until 587 B.C. The Israelites were headed toward punishment during these years, so naturally warnings of curses rather than blessings predominate as God seeks to get the people to repent.

After 587 the prophets preached more often of blessings because after the punishment of the nation is complete God resumes his basic plan, which is to show mercy.

- Look for this simple pattern: (1) identification of Israel's sin or of God's love for her. (2) A prediction of curse or blessing depending on the circumstances.

This helps us to understand the prophet's message was not primarily his own. The prophets were inspired by God to present essentially the content of the covenants' warnings and promises of blessing. The newness to the prophetic message was the structure or means by which the prophet's message was delivered. Even the messianic prophecies had their origin in the Law (Deut. 18.18).

SUMMARY

1. The prophets were God's spokespersons.

2. The prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.
3. The prophet's message was not original (for the most part).
4. Understanding the historical context is very important to understanding the prophet's message.
5. It is important to isolate the various forms of oracles/messages.
6. The prophetic message can be summarized under the three ideas:
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7. When teaching and preaching the prophets look for similarities in settings (greed, injustice, etc.)
8. Understand that the prophets are excellent in teaching a balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Principles for Prophecy not classified “Straightforward Prophetic Prediction”

(1) In some cases, the NT authors use Old Testament language or images in a rhetorical fashion – without attempting to link the Old Testament language and NT events in a clear logical fashion.

(2) There may be a blending of more than one event in the prophecy. We should look for explicit statements in the original prediction and later progressive revelation to clarify this distinction.

(3) The authors of Scripture had a concept of “Corporate Solidarity.” The individual is often representative of the community and vice versa.

(4) The biblical authors had as a presupposition – the correspondence in historical events – brought about because of God’s divine purposes and sovereignty over history.

Three assumptions of typological interpretation in the NT: (Seifrid)

- a. A continuity of God’s dealings with Israel, so that earlier events foreshadow later ones.
- b. A prospective aspect to God’s dealings with Israel, so that earlier deliverance and judgment is incomplete.
- c. The arrival of salvation and the fulfillment of God’s purposes in Jesus.

(5) The NT authors understood themselves as living in days of eschatological fulfillment.

(6) The NT authors (like most of Judaism) assumed that the Scriptures were Christological.

(7) We need to understand that the range of meaning of the word “fulfill” in the Biblical languages is broader than our modern English usage.