

Prophets and Prophecy

by Pastor Mark Perkins

In order to understand a book of the Bible written by a prophet, we must first come to an understanding of the message and role of the prophet.

The purpose of prophecy was to communicate the message of God to the people of Israel.

- The prophet received his inspiration from God the Holy Spirit.
- The prophet communicated in the written mode, and indeed the Old Testament canon of Scripture was written entirely by men with either the gift or office of prophecy.
- Prophets were responsible for the communication of the ritual plan of God. All of the information concerning the system of feasts, sacrifices, and the tabernacle/temple was communicated through prophets.
- Prophets were also responsible for the spoken communication, which interpreted the symbology of the ritual system.
- The priests did not hold this responsibility. Their job was to go through the ritual system exactly as prescribed.

Scripture tells the Levites to do, do, do, hundreds of times. But they do not ever tell them to interpret.

The prophets communicated the ritual plan of God, and they interpreted it as well. They were the ones who told the people what it all meant.

Prophecy would also fill in the gaps left by the ritual system.

- Whereas the ritual system communicated truth about God and His plan for Israel, the prophet would communicate something more pertinent.
- The message was pertinent for the person or people for whom it was intended.

- The message was appropriate to the time in which it was spoken.

- Whereas the ritual system was not behavior specific, prophecy was.

The nature of prophecy is twofold.

1. To interpret historical trends, and to tell the people where those trends are leading. This is called 'forthtelling'.

It is important to understand that events in this category do not have to come to pass.

Many of the future events related are contingent upon the fulfillment of some condition.

The future of these events which are forthtold is still dependent upon human volition.

2. To relate with perfect accuracy certain future events which relate to the nation of Israel. This is called 'foretelling'.

The predicted events still remain pertinent to the time in which they were predicted.

In other words, there is always a message for the present time in the prediction of the future.

Even though the events predicted may not come to pass for hundreds, or even thousands of years, they have some impact, some bearing on the people to whom they were predicted.

Our understanding of the events of the tribulation and millennium have an impact on how we conduct our lives today.

Understanding the tribulation gives us an idea of the consequences of giving in to the cosmic system, for the tribulation reveals the cosmic system in its unrestrained state.

Understanding the millennium gives us an idea of the consequences of living according to the laws

of Divine establishment, for the millennium reveals the kingdom of God in its full glory.

There is a difference between the gift of prophet and the office of prophet.

- The office of prophet was an appointed post in the nation of Israel.

Those who served in the office of prophet functioned exclusively in the communication of prophetic information.

There are two categories of Old Testament writings written by those who had the office of prophet. All together, this part is called "The Prophets".

The "former" prophets wrote the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

The "latter" prophets wrote the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets.

The one in the office of prophet did not hold another job, but instead, prophecy was his job.

- The gift of prophecy was an ability given by God to prophesy to one who did not hold the office of prophet.

When God had something to say to His people, but the office of prophet was vacant or spiritually bankrupt He gave to a few people the gift of prophet.

These people received direct revelation from God, which led to their communication to the people.

There are three parts to the Old Testament written by those with the gift of prophecy. All together, this was called "The Writings".

The prophetic books include Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.

The Megalith included those books which were read at the feasts. The Song of Solomon was read at Passover. Ruth was read at Pentecost. Lamentations and Ecclesiastes were read during Tabernacles. Esther was read at Purim.

The historical books include Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

- Moses had both the gift and the office of prophet. He wrote the Pentateuch, which contained the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers. He had both because his role in life changed from time to time.
- Elisha and Elijah held the office of prophet, but did not write. The important parts of their ministries are recorded by other writers of Scripture.

The nature of prophetic inspiration

- The prophet was inspired according to the standard of verbal plenary inspiration.

- The prophet was always aware of his inspiration.

The Word of the Lord came to him (many times).

God's hand touched his mouth, Jer 1:9.

He was standing in God's counsel, Jer 23:22.

- The inspiration always came by the Spirit, Num 24:2; 11:29; 1 Sam 10:6,10; 19:20,23; 1 Ki 22:24; Joel 2:28-29, Hosea 9:7, "The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac."

- The intermediate means were many.

Life experience, Hosea.

A visible symbol, Amos 7:7.

A dream (the subconscious mind, while asleep), Jer 31:26.

A vision (the conscious mind, while awake), Zechariah.

Direct teaching from God, Isaiah 6.

The interpretation of historical trends from Bible Truth in the right lobe of the soul.

From training, 1 Sam 10:5, "After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying."

- The exhale of the prophet.

He explained the meaning of the ritual system.

He used the parable, or allegory. Hosea 6:4, "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears."

He acted his message out in order to graphically illustrate it.

He foretold certain future events, all of which had a relevant message during his day.

These prophecies now stand in two categories:

Those which have been fulfilled - for example, more than 300 related to the life of Christ.

Those which have yet to be fulfilled - for example, the book of Revelation, and parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, and other prophets.

Summary

- The Old Testament prophet was the rough equivalent of the New Testament pastor.
- He interpreted God's Word, he exhorted the people, he observed and interpreted historical trends.
- He was, however, different in a few ways:

He had a lesser understanding of the full revelation of God, Mat 13:17, "For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

This is because of the age in which he lived.

This is because he lived before the incarnation of Christ.

He did not have the gift inside of himself, as those with the gift of pastor do.

He did not have the full-time availability of the power of the Spirit, but instead he only had it for the purpose of prophecy.

He had the power to foretell certain future events.

- The Old Testament prophet was the one who brought the Word to the people, the one who made it clear to them. The priests did nothing of the sort.
- The Old Testament prophet had the supernatural ability to foretell certain future events.