

## HOW TO READ THE PROPHETS

Practical suggestions

Banska Bystrica, 18th May 2014

LITERATURE: WILKINSON & BOA: *Talk Thru the Bible*; MEARS, H. *What the Bible is All About*; HILL, H. *A Journey through the Bible*; PAWSON, D. *Unlocking the Bible*.

### 0. INTRODUCTION

- motivation - looking for the main ideas
- helps: *Biblical Atlas*; *Bible Dictionary*

#### 0.1. THE OLD TESTAMENT (HEBREW CANON)

- (1) Moses, (2) history, (3) the Prophets, (4) Wisdom
- history: the Former prophets

נְבִיאִים רִאשׁוֹנִים	<i>Joshua</i> .....	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
	<i>Judges</i> .....	שׁוֹפְטִים
	<i>Samuel</i> .....	שְׁמוּאֵל
	<i>Kings</i> .....	מְלָכִים

- prophetic books: Later prophets

נְבִיאִים אַחֲרֹנִים	Major	<i>Isaiah</i> .....	יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ
		<i>Jeremiah</i> .....	יִרְמְיָהוּ
		<i>Ezekiel</i> .....	יְחִזְקֵאל
נְבִיאִים אַחֲרֹנִים	Minor	<i>Hosea</i> .....	הוֹשֵׁעַ
		<i>Joel</i> .....	יוֹאֵל
		<i>Amos</i> .....	עָמוֹס
		<i>Obadiah</i> .....	עֲבַדְיָה
		<i>Jonah</i> .....	יוֹנָה
		<i>Micah</i> .....	מִיכָה
		<i>Nabum</i> .....	נְבוּזַנְאֲדַן
		<i>Habakuk</i> .....	חַבְקוּק
		<i>Zephaniah</i> .....	צְפַנְיָה
		<i>Haggai</i> .....	חַגִּי
		<i>Zachariah</i> .....	זְכַרְיָה
		<i>Malachi</i> .....	מַלְאָכִי

### 1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 1.1. A PROPHET

- “typical” prophet: Elijah (the mount of transfiguration)
- **Nu 11:29** Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"
- **Psalms 105:13-15** And they wandered about from nation to nation, From *one* kingdom to another people. <sup>14</sup> He permitted no man to oppress them, And He reprov'd kings for their sakes: <sup>15</sup> "Do not touch **My** anointed ones, And do **My** prophets no harm."

- **Gn 20:6-7** Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."
  - The Hebrew word used in Genesis 20:7 is nabi' or nabiyy' and is defined by Strong's as, "a prophet or (generally) inspired man." Nabiyy is a cognate of naba', which means, "To prophesy, i.e. speak (or sing) by inspiration (in prediction or simple discourse)." The word has a possible cognate in Akkadian. It occurs about 309 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods.

### 1.2. PROPHECY

- "speaking for God"
- "ecstatic" – speaking under the power of the Spirit of God
- purpose: the will/revelation of God that is time-bound
- predictions: to show/prove that God is the Lord of history – He knows the future
- reception: dreams, visions, voice
- message: speeches, prophetic acts, writing "to testify"
- enigmatic style – to reserve the interpretation for the Spirit of God: **2Pt 1:20-21** First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation,<sup>21</sup> because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.

### 1.3. PROPHECY AND THE TORAH

- always to *endorse* Torah

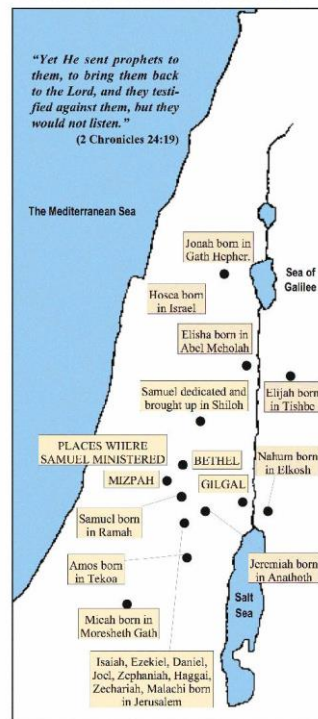
## 2. HISTORICAL SEQUENCE/CONTEXT

- writing prophets ↔ Torah (written prophecies as warnings)
- **Hosea 6:5** I have hewn *them* in pieces by the **prophets**; I have slain them by the words of **My** mouth;
- one possibility:

## A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

## PUTTING THE PROPHETS IN THEIR PLACE

## THE PROPHETS BY THEIR PLACE OF BIRTH:



## THE PROPHETS BY THEIR PLACE IN TIME:

<i>I. The Pre-Exile Prophets</i>	
Joel	c. 850-700 B.C.
Jonah	c. 800 B.C.
Amos	c. 780-755 B.C.
Hosea	c. 760-710 B.C.
Micah	c. 740 B.C.
Isaiah	c. 740-680 B.C.
Nahum	c. 666-615 B.C.
Zephaniah	c. 630-620 B.C.
Habakkuk	c. 627-586 B.C.
Jeremiah	c. 626-580 B.C.

*II. The Exile Prophets*

Daniel	c. 604-535 B.C.
Ezekiel	c. 593-570 B.C.
Obadiah	c. 585 B.C.

*III. The Post-Exile Prophets*

Haggai	c. 520 B.C.
Zechariah	c. 520-518 B.C.
Malachi	c. 450-400 B.C.

## THE PROPHETS BY THEIR PLACE OF MINISTRY:

*I. To Israel*

Hosea
Amos
Jonah (also to The Nations)

*II. To Judah*

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Joel
Micah (also to Israel)
Habakkuk (also to The Nations)
Zephaniah
Ezekiel
Daniel
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

*III. To The Nations*

Nahum (also to Judah)
Obadiah

- Pawson: Jonah (with Nahum), Obadiah (845), Joel (quotes Obadiah), Amos and Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah,
- → there are more important themes in the Prophets than time determination

## 3. PROBLEMS READING PROPHECIES

- **1 Peter 1:10-12** Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, <sup>11</sup> inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.
  - TIMING: immediate predictions mixed with remote in time
  - VOICES: the voice of the Lord ("Thus says the Lord" formula); the voice of the prophet (often complaints); historical narrative
- **Acts 8:34** And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"
- **Acts 1:7** "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.
  - Dispensationalism? – careful!

## 4. PRACTICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Who is talking? – the prophet; the LORD; the people (quoted?)
- To whom is it addressed? – North/South/gentiles/individuals
- What is the timing? – immediate, distant future – or both?
- What does it teach me personally? – is it applicable under the New Testament? Is it a general rule or does it speak into the concrete situation only?
- What is the genre/style? – open; enigmatic; ironic/satirical; complaints

## 5. NEW TESTAMENT APPLICATIONS

- the character of God: God's goodness ↔ God's severity (**Rom 11:22** Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity:)
- the power of the Word: the Word of God ↔ human response (the life of the prophets, emotions, prayers etc.)
- authority: the passage – Ask: which covenant does it endorse? – Torah?, the New Covenant? (prophets *always* endorse what was written – this is so under the New Covenant as well)
- history: the future depends on obedience – not fate (see Jonah)

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

- Look for what is accessible (God's principles, His character, ...)
- Check by the rules and interpretations of the New Testament (reading with "NT glasses" on)
- Allow for enigmatic "multilayer" interpretation (immediate & future; literal & metaphorical etc.)