

NEBIIM

THE PROPHETS—FORMER AND LATTER



PROPHETIC VOICES TODAY

The role of Israel's prophets was often to critique the nation's establishment.

Who fills that role in our society today?

Newspaper editors?
Op-ed columnists?
Political bloggers?
Stand-up comedians?

Conservative clergy?
Liberal clergy?
The National Council of Churches?

The second major division of the Jewish scriptures is the Nebiim or Prophets. It is divided into the Former Prophets, composed of four historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; and the Latter Prophets or writing prophets, also composed of four books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve.

THE FORMER PROPHETS

Joshua through Kings presents a historical survey of the life of the people of Israel in Canaan from the time of the Conquest to the Exile. It is a selective history and was given its shape by the Deuteronomic writers during the time of the Exile.

This history was shaped by a religious aim: to show how God kept his promises to his people by giving them a land, a king, and a temple; and to show how God allowed the Israelites to be defeated and lose those gifts when they broke his covenant with them.

Numerous sources were used in compiling the Deuteronomic history. There is some evidence of the J, E, D, and P sources. It may be that much of the material came from sources related to individual persons or institutions, such as legends about judges, prophets and heroes. Several written histories, some of which are named, were used; these include a source favorable to the monarchy, a source critical of the monarchy, and an extract from a formal court history.

MEANING IN HISTORY

This historical account of the rise and fall of the Jewish nation is important on its own terms. In many ways the literary quality of this narrative is superior to those that were being produced by contemporary historians in Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

Modern readers also need to appreciate this history's theological function. Its purpose was not merely negative, to account for the downfall of Israel and Judah. Its positive function was to demonstrate the pattern of divine judgment and forgiveness, a pattern which offers encouragement for the future.

We can apply sequences of promise and fulfillment, punishment and restoration, not only to our national and social processes but also to our individual and family issues.

THE LATTER PROPHETS

The prophets in Israel functioned as rather independent preachers who spoke a word from Yahweh to their contemporary historical situations. Some of the prophets appear to have belonged to prophetic groups or schools, and some may have been associated with the temple or the court. However, that did not prevent them from speaking out against other prophets, against the cultic practices of their day, or against the policies of the monarchs.

The basic prophetic utterances were short, almost poetic oracles. These were combined into longer sermons. Some of the other literary forms in the prophetic literature include:

- narrative legends and autobiographies
- visions and auditions
- confessions and apologies
- law suits and judicial proceedings
- dirges and laments
- liturgies, songs, and hymns
- prophetic or priestly torahs

The oracles, sermons, and other accounts of the prophets were no doubt written and collected by their disciples. These were compiled in their present form during and after the Exile. And the collection of the Latter Prophets was completed after 300 BCE.

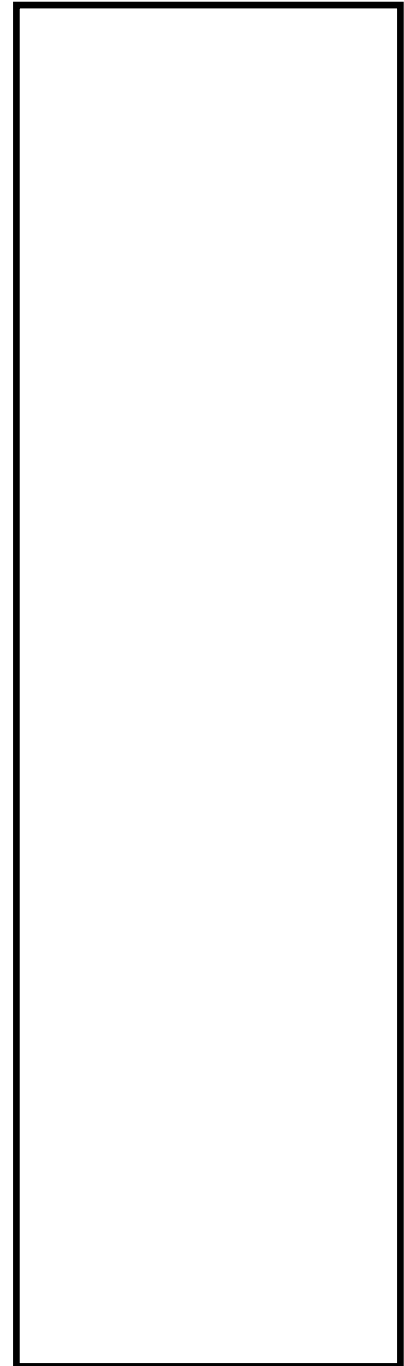
THE IMPACT OF PROPHETS

Within the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures the Latter Prophets have been shaped into a collection not unlike the legal codes gathered in the Torah. The laws were intended to define the cultic, social and political structures of the nation. Then the prophets served to critique the way those structures developed. Thus they accented the ethical response which the people of God were expected to make in relation to their fellow citizens.

The prophets' ethical exhortations emphasized such qualities as integrity, justice, and fair play. In particular they focused on the way marginal members of society are treated—the poor, widows and orphans, and foreigners—and called for mercy and compassion. Conversely, they frequently castigated the self-complacent and self-serving attitudes of the established institutions—the royal family, priestly hierarchy, and landed aristocracy.

The fact that so much of the prophetic material has a negative thrust but was nevertheless accepted into the canon is remarkable in itself, because religious communities tend to preserve materials which are complementary, not those which are derogatory.

Modern readers can learn to apply similar criteria to our contemporary social and ethical issues. We can also learn to hold out the positive hope of renewal in the future, as did the biblical prophets.



JOSHUA

THE GREAT INVASION



Joshua is an anonymous writing; it takes its name from its chief character. The book was probably written in its present form sometime near the end of the Exile, that is, around 450 BCE.

Some scholars have tried to find the same sources in Joshua as are found in the Pentateuch, but as a result of the editing process this attempt is only partially successful. Joshua 1-12 show signs of the E source with D revisions; chapters 13-21 are largely from the P source; and chapters 22-24 are largely from the D source.

Several complementary perspectives can be traced through the several sections of the book:

- In Joshua 1:1-13:7 & 23:1-16 the conquest of the land is partial but completely successful; in 13:8-17:18, it is complete but only partially successful. The chief city is Gilgal in both sections.
- In Joshua 18:1-22:34 the conquest is complete, but only partially successful. The chief city is Shiloh.
- In Joshua 8:30-35 & 24:1-33 the stress is on the covenant Yahweh made with Israel, not the conquest. The chief city is Shechem.

A JUST WAR

Joshua pictures the Hebrews' occupation of Canaan as a war of aggression.

Many people today believe that no war can be justified unless it is necessary for self defense. And some hold that in a nuclear age no wars can be tolerated.

Does God approve of any wars today? Can people participate in any war with a good conscience?

Do the criteria for a "just war" apply in today's world?

A. *The Conquest of Canaan*

1. *the Crossing of the Jordan River (1:1-5:12)*
2. *the Earliest Conquests (5:13-8:35)*
3. *Successes in South-Central Canaan (9:1-10:27)*
4. *the Southern Campaign (10:28-43)*
5. *the Northern Campaign (11:1-15)*
6. *Summary of the Conquests (11:16-12:24)*

B. *The Allotment of the Land*

1. *the Land Still Unconquered (13:1-7)*
2. *the Inheritance of the Trans-Jordan Tribes (13:8-33)*
3. *the Allotment of Canaan (14:1-19:51)*
 - a. *the Tribe of Judah (14:6-15:63)*
 - b. *the Joseph Tribes (16:1-17:18)*
 - c. *the Other Tribes (18:1-19:51)*
4. *the Cities of Refuge (20:1-9)*
5. *the Levitical Cities (21:1-45)*

C. *The Departure of the Trans-Jordan Tribes (22:1-34)*

D. *Joshua's Last Days*

1. *Joshua's Farewell Address (23:1-16)*
 2. *the Covenant at Shechem (24:1-28)*
 3. *the Death and Burial of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazer (24:29-33)*
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CONQUEST AND COVENANT

On the one hand, Joshua must be connected with the Pentateuch because it relates the last of Yahweh's saving acts, namely, the granting of the land of Canaan to the people of Israel. In fact, the promise of the land is part of the larger theme which forms the outline of the Pentateuch.

On the other hand, Joshua must also be connected with the Former Prophets as part of the Deuteronomic History which tells how God established the Israelites in the land and why he later took them out of the land. Thus a handful of crucial themes are repeated again and again throughout the narrative:

- Yahweh appointed Joshua as the legitimate successor to Moses.
- Yahweh led the Israelites in their holy war of conquest.
- The goal was to take the land, occupy it and distribute it among the twelve tribes of Israel.
- The tribes were not separate but interdependent, and made up a united Israel.
- Israel was to keep the covenant and obey the law of Moses if the nation wanted to remain in the land.

LIFE IN A CONQUERED LAND

Modern readers must balance our appreciation for living on the land against our distaste for the campaigns to exterminate the people who originally inhabited that land.

On the positive side is the picture of God's people living in concert with his will and enjoying the land which they received as a gift. This of course implies rejecting alien gods and not despoiling the land.

On the negative side is the picture of God's people being directed to eliminate those who seem to have a prior claim on the land.

It helps to remember that these stories were compiled and told in retrospect, after the Jewish people had returned from exile in Babylon. The retelling of these stories, which relate how a marginal confederation of peasant tribes came to control the territories formerly ruled by autocratic kings, aided their sense of nationalistic legitimacy and purpose.



COLONIZATION

We could draw uncomfortable parallels between the biblical stories of the conquest of the Promised Land and European efforts during the past 500 years to colonize the Americas, Africa and parts of Asia.

Are these comparisons fair? If not, why not?

If so, what should we do about it, if anything?

JUDGES

THE SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE



Originally the stories of Israel's tribal warrior heroes were no doubt preserved in oral traditions at the ancient sanctuaries. Some of these materials, such as the Song of Deborah, probably originated as early as the 12th century BCE. Some of the stories of the judges may have been written in the form of narrative poems before the period of the monarchy.

These stories were probably collected and edited sometime between 1000 and 700 BCE. The central core of the book was the product of the Deuteronomic editors of the 7th and 6th centuries. During the Exile later editors gave the book its final outline by adding the prefatory summaries and the supplementary stories.

CHILD ABUSE

Perhaps the most poignant of the violent stories in Judges is the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter.

Today anyone who would value a religious vow over the safety of a child would be accused of child abuse.

How can one explain the growing awareness of such abuse? Which is worse: emotional, sexual, or physical abuse? Does it matter?

What should you do if you discover a child is being abused?

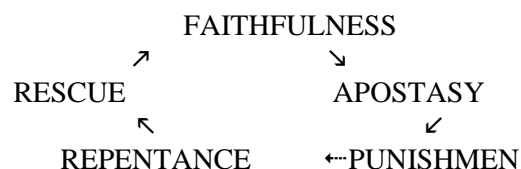
Do abused children turn into abusive parents? How can adults who were abused as children best find help?

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- A. *Preface: Summary of the Conquest*
 - 1. *The Southern Tribes (1:1-21)*
 - 2. *The Central and Northern Tribes (1:22-36)*
 - 3. *Religious Implications (2:1-5)*
 - B. *The Careers of the Judges*
 - Introduction: the Role of the Judges (2:6-3:6)*
 - 1. *Othniel and Cushan-rishathaim (3:7-11)*
 - 2. *Ehud and the Moabites (3:12-30)*
 - 3. *Shamgar and the Philistines (3:31)*
 - 4. *Deborah and the Canaanites (4:1-5:31)*
 - 5. *Gideon and the Midianites (6:1-8:35)*
 - 6. *Supplement: Abimelech's Kingship (9:1-57)*
 - 7. *Tola and Jair (10:1-5)*
 - Review and Further Introduction (10:6-16)*
 - 8. *Jephthah and the Ammonites (10:17-12:7)*
 - 9. *Ibzen, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15)*
 - 10. *Samson and the Philistines (13:1-16:31)*
 - C. *Supplement: Two Tribal Movements*
 - 1. *The New Sanctuary of the Danites (17:1-18:31)*
 - 2. *The War against the Benjaminites (19:1-21:25)*
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SIN & SALVATION, AGAIN & AGAIN

In their present cyclical pattern, the stories of the judges were intended to interpret the history of Israel's repeated apostasy and Yahweh's continued mercy:

When the Israelites worshiped the Baals, Yahweh punished them by permitting oppression by an enemy. When the people repented, Yahweh sent a judge to deliver them. While the judge lived, Israel remained faithful. Then the cycle repeated itself again and again.



It is nearly impossible to harmonize the chronology of the book of Judges within the 480-year period purported between the Exodus and the dedication of the Temple (see 1 Kings 6:1). Rather, the editors of the book molded their materials into an overly schematized system. This can be seen not only in the cyclical pattern of each story but also in the fact that the twelve judges represent the twelve Israelite tribes.

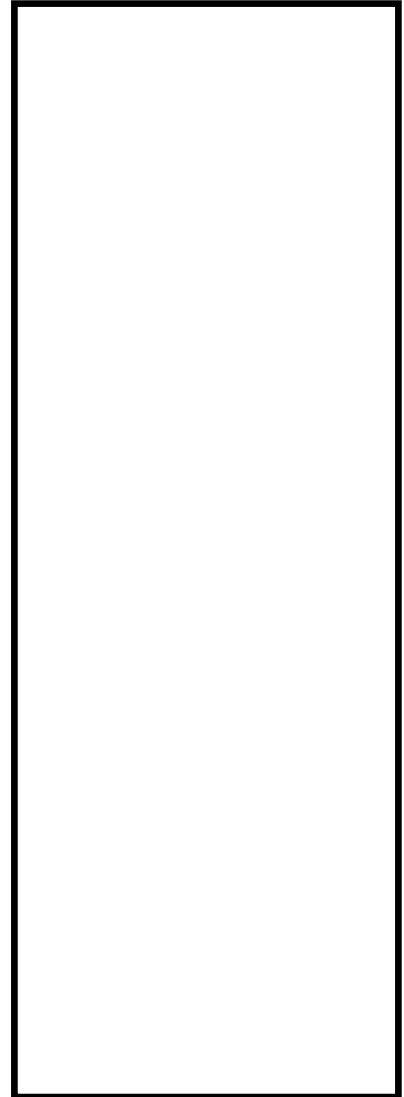
In the context of the Deuteronomic history, these stories are bracketed by materials which explain why the conquests under Joshua did not eliminate the Canaanite nations completely (namely, so they could serve to test Israel's faith-fulness) and why the monarchy was instituted (namely, because the people had become lawless).

All this was a prophetic interpretation of history which was designed to establish the pattern of God's dealings with his people, a pattern which could offer hope to the remnant of the Jewish people who survived the Exile.

THE CYCLE OF OUR LIVES

One of the quests of modern historians is to try to uncover some overarching pattern to the course of human affairs. The editor of the book of Judges offers one such pattern for consideration. The scheme includes a thoroughly pessimistic evaluation of human nature, which repeatedly deserts its best orientation Godward. But it also embraces a decidedly optimistic opinion of divine grace, which never fails to rescue a repentant people.

Modern readers are challenged to determine whether our own pattern of failure, repentance and rescue is still a viable way of evaluating either our social history or our personal biographies. In any event, it is a realistic pattern, for it reflects our experience as people who never seem to "get it right" on our own. We may habitually repeat the same mistakes, but we also know how to respond anew to the offer of forgiveness, and we welcome the chance to resolve to improve.



1 & 2 SAMUEL AND 1 & 2 KINGS

THE RISE AND FALL OF A KINGDOM

The two books of Samuel and Kings, also called the four Books of the King-[dom]s, were originally closely linked together; they represented a unified theological history. They were not put into their final form by the Deuteronomic editors until after 560 BCE, either during the Exile or after the Return.

HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Many of the sources used in Samuel-Kings were written much earlier even before the time of David, around 950 BCE. We are not able to identify all of them, although some of them are named, nor to equate them with the sources in the Pentateuch. Yet the following types can be identified on the basis of their content:

- story about the Ark
- legends about Samuel
- biography of Saul
- biography of David
- Davidic Court History
- editorial comments
- *Book of the Acts of Solomon*
- prophetic legends about Elijah
- prophetic legends about Elisha
- *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*
- *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*
- official lists and accountings

HISTORY WITH A PROPER BIAS

Samuel-Kings traces the history of the people of Israel from the pre-monarchial times around 1000 BCE, through the establishment of the monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon, to the division of the kingdom in 922, the fall of Samaria and Northern Israel in 722 and the fall of Jerusalem and Southern Judah in 587.

This history is retold in a way which interprets it as a crisis in the relationship between the people and their God. In some cases the prophets affirm the nation and in other cases denounce it. In some cases the request for a king is condemned as tantamount to a rejection of Yahweh; in other cases the monarchy is valued as a gift from God.

These tensions reflect the real ambiguities of the historical context of the events themselves, but they also reflect the later editor's attempt to understand and restructure the relationship between Yahweh and the remnant people. This selective history uses the patterns of prophecy and fulfillment, judgment and forgiveness, blessings and curses both to explain why the Kingdom was destroyed as well as to give hope for its future restoration.

PROGRAMMATIC PASSAGES

These summaries clearly outline the perspective of the Deuteronomic editors:

- Moses' introductory speech on conquering the land (Deut 1:1-4:40)
- Moses' summary speech on prospering in the land (Deut 31:1-29; 32:44-47)
- Yahweh & Joshua's introductory speeches on obeying the law (Josh 1:1-18)
- Joshua's summary speech on keeping separate from the nations (Josh 23:1-16)
- Introductory discourse on apostasy and rescue by the judges (Judg 2:5-3:6)
- Samuel's summary speech on the choice for monarchy (1 Sam 12:1-25)
- Nathan's speech & David's prayer for a dynasty and a temple (2 Sam 7:1-29)
- Solomon's blessing & prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:14-61)
- Editorial discourse on the fall of Northern Israel (2 Kgs 17:7-23)
- Editorial discourse on the fall of Southern Judah (2 Kgs 21:2-16)



CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION

King David is pictured in realistic, often unflattering terms, as a man who sins and is forced to admit his faults.

What is the psychological impact of confession and absolution?

How can people today experience repentance and forgiveness?



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- A. *The Institution of the Monarchy*
1. *The childhood of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1-2:11)*
 2. *Samuel's growth in popularity (2:12-4:1)*
 3. *The adventures of the Ark (4:2-7:1)*
 4. *Israel's request for a king (7:2-8:22)*
 5. *The choosing of Saul to be king (9:1-10:16)*
 6. *Saul's accession as king (10:17-12:25)*
 7. *The consolidation of Saul's rule (13:1-14:52)*
- B. *The Establishment of the Davidic Monarchy 16:23)*
8. *Saul's rejection and David's selection (15:1- /*
 9. *David's growth in popularity (17:1-18:16)*
 10. *David's escapes from King Saul (18:17-20:42)*
 11. *David's exploits as an outlaw (21:1-26:25)*
 12. *David among the Philistines (27:1-30:31)*
 13. *The death of Saul (31:1-2 Sam 1:27)*
 14. *David's accession as king over Israel *
(2:1-5:25) (6:1-8:18)
 15. *The consolidation of the House of David /*
- C. *The Accession of a Successor*
16. *David's kindness to Mephibosheth (9:1-13)*
 17. *The sin of David and Bathsheba (10:1-12:31)*
 18. *Absolom's intrigues and rebellion (13:1-19:8)*
 19. *The restoration of David's rule (19:9-20:26)*
Six Appendices (21:1-24:25)
 20. *Solomon's accession as king (1:1-2:46)*
- D. *The Height of Solomon's Kingdom*
21. *Solomon's wise rule (1 Kgs. 3:1-4:34)*
 22. *The construction of the Temple (5:1-9:9)*
 23. *The expansion of Solomon's fame (9:10-10:25)*
- E. *The Decline of the Kingdom of Israel*
24. *The division of the Kingdom (10:26-12:24)*
 25. *The sin of Jeroboam (12:25-14:20)*
 26. *Rulers of Israel and Judah (14:21-16:20)*
 27. *The sin of the House of Omri (16:21-22:50)*
including the stories of Elijah the prophet
 28. *The fall of the House of Omri *
(22:51-2 Kgs 10:31)
including the stories of Elisha the prophet
 29. *Rulers of Israel and Judah (10:32-13:23)*
 30. *The fall of the Kingdom of Israel (13:24-17:6)*
Deuteronomic Conclusions (17:7-41)
- F. *The Decline of the Kingdom of Judah*
31. *The reform of Hezekiah (18:1-20:21)*
 32. *Rulers of Judah (21:1-26)*
 33. *The reform of Josiah (22:1-23:30) 25:21)*
 34. *The fall of the Kingdom of Judah (23:31- /*
Two Postscripts (25:22-26, 27-30)
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A MORE HONEST ASSESSMENT

In comparison with the overly mythological stories of the Greeks and Mesopotamians, this is a lively, realistic and unflinchingly honest portrayal of the history of the people of God. It is a refreshing alternative to the uncritical self-serving propaganda offered by many nationalistic historians.

As modern readers, we can use the biblical perspective to evaluate our own histories. Today we also need to assess the accuracy of the view of Samuel-Kings that God exalts the poor and debases the proud. We can still debate with profit whether this is a realistic perspective for critiquing life.

CHURCH & STATE

In biblical times the religious and governmental institutions, represented by priests and kings, were intertwined. Modern western democracies, however, generally keep church and state more or less separate.

How absolute should this separation be?

Should there be more intentional cooperation between the civil and religious spheres?

When is it proper for the laws of the state to control the church?

When is it proper for the church to criticize or disobey the state?



SUFFERING

The Servant Songs picture the servant of Yahweh as one who suffers for the people.

Can such suffering ever be redemptive?

Would we be willing to suffer for others?

PEACE MAKING

Scattered throughout the book of Isaiah are prophecies which look forward to a time of peace and blessing, a time beyond the tensions of political intrigue and war.

Is this mere wishful thinking? Or are there concrete, realistic steps we can take in order to work for peace?

Is there any connection between keeping peace in our own families and pursuing peace in the family of nations?

ISAIAH

THREE PROPHETS ROLLED INTO ONE

The book of Isaiah is a collection of writings from at least three distinct eras: First Isaiah (chs. 1-39) is set in the Kingdom of Judah in the 8th century BCE; Second Isaiah (chs. 40-55) is set in 6th century Babylon during the time of the Exile; Third Isaiah (chs. 56-66) originated in 5th century Judah after the Return.

FIRST ISAIAH: POLITICAL JUDGMENT

First Isaiah owes its origin to Isaiah ben Amoz, who ministered in Jerusalem from 746 to at least 701 BCE. He interpreted the political events of his day (such as the Syro-Ephraimite war in 733-721, the Assyrian defeat of Northern Israel in 721, and the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701) as part of Yahweh's dealings with his people. The accounts of his oracles, sermons and symbolic acts were collected by his disciples and expanded over the years. Largely judgmental in tone, they emphasize the holiness of Yahweh and the unconditional obedience due him.

SECOND ISAIAH: HOPE IN EXILE

Second Isaiah, which offers hope and salvation, originated among the exiles, probably during the decade before 539 BCE when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon. Its carefully crafted arguments were intended to encourage the people. The "Servant Songs" proved particularly effective, whether they refer to the entire nation or to a specific individual such as the prophet himself.

THIRD ISAIAH: FUTURE HOPE

Third Isaiah, which also conveys optimistic expectations, is aimed at the returnees who rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple on Mount Zion during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and was likely written sometime between 538 and 515 BCE. The emphases on rituals of worship, Sabbath observance and keeping the law have become "spiritualized" to some degree.

FROM JUDGMENT TO HOPE

Modern readers of Isaiah may notice how the prophets' oracles, which were originally rooted in historical events, have been collated and shaped according to the following pattern:

- condemnation of God's people for their sins,
- judgment upon their enemies, and
- promises for their future restoration.

This editing process helps redirect the prophetic message toward the future and enables it to serve as a grid for analyzing every generation. In this way it has become a continuing source for encouragement and hope for us today.

The prophetic movement associated with the name of Isaiah first emphasized the nationalistic conviction that the people of Judah were obligated to live out their destiny as the people of God. Eventually it shifted to a belief that the people were destined to suffer in order to fulfill their calling. Finally it broadened into a larger, more inclusive perspective which brought insiders into the company of the chosen people on an equal basis.

Such a perspective is valuable for individuals and nations today, as social trends continue to vacillate between policies which are needed to protect our own safety or wellbeing and those which try to expand the benefits of good living to those who would otherwise be left out.

FIRST ISAIAH

- A. *Early Sermons against Judah*
 - 1. *Yahweh's Indictment against Judah (1:1-31)*
 - 2. *Oracles of punishment (2:1-4:6)*
 - 3. *Yahweh's "Love Song" for Judah (5:1-30)*
 - 4. *Isaiah's Inaugural Vision (6:1-13)*
 - 5. *The Syro-Ephraimite War (7:1-9:1)*
 - 6. *Oracles of punishment (9:2-10:32)*
 - 7. *Oracles promising salvation (10:33-12:6)*
- B. *Oracles or "Burdens" against the Nations*
 - 1. *Babylon (13:1-14:32)*
 - 2. *Moab (15:1-16:14)*
 - 3. *Damascus (17:1-18:7)*
 - 4. *Egypt (19:1-20:6)*
 - 5. *Desert of the Sea (21:1-10)*
 - 6. *Dumah (21:11-12)*
 - 7. *Arabia (21:13-17)*
 - 8. *Valley of Vision (22:1-25)*
 - 9. *Tyre (23:1-18)*
- C. *"Apocalyptic" Visions and Hymns (24:1-20)*
 - 1. *1st Prophetic Liturgy: End of the World /*
 - 2. *2nd Liturgy: Messianic Banquet (24:21-25:10)*
 - 3. *Oracles, Hymns & Prayers (25:11-26:21)*
 - 4. *3rd Liturgy: Restoration of Judah (27:1-13)*
- D. *Oracles for Judah: Woes on...*
 - 1. *Ephraim (28:1-29)*
 - 2. *Ariel (29:1-14)*
 - 3. *Hiders (29:15-24)*
 - 4. *Rebels (30:1-33)*
 - 5. *Escapees (31:1-33:1)*
 - 6. *4th Liturgy: Prayer for Deliverance (33:2-24)*
- E. *"Apocalyptic" Oracles*
 - 1. *Destruction of Yahweh's Enemies (34:1-17)*
 - 2. *Restoration of Zion (35:1-10; see 2 Kings 18-20)*
- F. *Narrative of Isaiah and King Hezekiah*
 - 1. *Assyrian Invasion of Judah (36:1-37:38)*
 - 2. *Hezekiah's Illness; Babylonians (38:1-39:8)*

SECOND ISAIAH

- G. *Predictions of the Destruction of Babylon*
 - Prologue (40:1-11)*
 - 1. *Oracles of Yahweh as Almighty (40:12-41:29)*
 - 2. *1st Servant Song: Just and Righteous (42:1-9)*
 - 3. *Oracles of Yahweh as Redeemer (42:10- 44:20)*
 - 4. *Oracles depicting Cyrus as Messiah *
(44:21- 45:13)
 - 5. *Oracles contrasting Yahweh with Idols *
(45:14- 48:22)
- H. *Promises for the Restoration of Judah*
 - 1. *2nd Song: Call and Commission (49:1-6, 7-12)*
 - 2. *Assurance that Yahweh Remembers /*
(49:14-50:3)
 - 3. *3rd Song: Indictment and Defense (50:4-9)*
 - 4. *Summons for Israel to Prepare (50:10-52:12)*
 - 5. *4th Song: Suffering & Exaltation (52:13-53:12)*
 - 6. *Conditions after Deliverance (54:1-55:5)*
Epilogue (55:6-11, 12-13)

THIRD ISAIAH

- I. *Calls for Justice and Righteousness*
 - Prologue (56:1-8)*
 - 1. *Oracles Threatening Punishment (56:9-57:13)*
 - 2. *Oracles Promising Salvation (57:14-58:14)*
 - J. *Calls for Repentance and Response (59:1-64:12)*
 - 1. *Communal Lament & Confession (59:1-21)*
 - 2. *Oracles of Salvation (60:1- 62:12)*
 - 3. *Communal Lament & Prayer (63:1- 64:12)*
 - K. *Prophecies of Final Judgment and Salvation*
 - 1. *Oracles of Destruction for the Wicked *
(65:1-16)
 - 2. *Oracles Promising a New Creation *
(65:17-66:17)
Epilogue (66:18-24)
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JEREMIAH

SUCH A WET BLANKET



FOREIGN POLICY

Jeremiah's ministry addressed the interaction of the Kingdom of Judah and the Empire of Babylon.

How should we assess our nation's relationships with other countries?

The demise of Communism, the growing impact of the nations along the Pacific rim, the solidification of the European community, the development of countries in Central and South America, the ferment among the Arab states—all affect the shape of world politics.

What biblical insights can help direct our nation's foreign policy?



The book of Jeremiah ben Hilkiah, who ministered in Jerusalem during the years leading up to its destruction in 586 BCE, contains many literary forms which were not always assembled according to a clearly defined outline. It owes its origin to the oracles, sermons, confessions, symbolic acts and writings of Jeremiah himself, largely in poetic form. These were expanded and arranged by later editors—including Baruch, Saraiah, and the family of Shaphan—so that it is hard to separate the three or more sources from which the book was compiled.

The expanded materials include prophetic legends and historical notes, largely in biographical prose. The final redaction reflects the agenda of the Deuteronomistic reformers, and offers an alternative to the royal political ideology with its disastrous results, as well as grounds for reforming the community in the years beyond the devastation by the Babylonians and their demise.

THE PROPHET'S LIFE AND TIMES

627 BCE When Ashurbanipal of Assyria died, his vassal states revolted.

626-621 Jeremiah was called to be a prophet as a young man. During King Josiah's reign he summoned Jerusalem and Judah to repent and escape punishment.

621-609 After Josiah's "Deuteronomistic" reform, Jeremiah was encouraged and continued to preach repentance.

609-605 Early in Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah continued to preach repentance. But in 605 the king burned his book, and the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish.

605-598 After that time, Jeremiah's message turned to doom: God will use Nebuchadnezzar to punish Judah.

598-586 During Zedekiah's reign from the first deportation to the Fall of Jerusalem, he continued to prophesy destruction.

post-586 Jeremiah warned those who remained in Judah not to flee to Egypt, but to submit to Babylon.

A sample of Jeremiah's dated materials summarizes his life and message.

26:1-24 After Jeremiah spoke against Jerusalem, the priests and the other prophets tried to have him executed.

46:1-12 Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco at the Battle of Carchemish.

25:1-14 "He will destroy the land and keep the people captive for 70 years."

36:1-32 Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch, who read them in the temple. When the princes read the scroll to Jehoiakim, he cut it up and burned it.

45:1-5 Jeremiah predicted his own suffering to Baruch.

35:1-19 "The Rechabites obey their father and refuse to drink wine, but the people of Jerusalem refuse to obey Yahweh."

22:13-30 "Jehoiakim will die, and Nebuchadnezzar will catch his son Coniah."

24:1-10 "God approves of the 'good figs' who went into exile but disapproves of those who fled to Egypt."

29:1-32 "The exiles will be brought home after 70 years."

27:1-22 "Neighboring kings must wear the 'yoke' of Babylon."

28:1-17 The prophet Hananiah contradicted Jeremiah, and died.

51:59-64 "Babylon will eventually be destroyed."

19:1-20:6 Jeremiah broke a potter's flask to show Jerusalem's destruction, and so was beaten and put in stocks.

49:34-39 "The Elamite nation will be destroyed."

- 38:1-28 Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern but later he was rescued to advise Zedekiah to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar.
- 21:1-10 “Jerusalem will be destroyed, but those who surrender will be spared.”
- 34:1-7 “The city will be burned, but King Zedekiah will be spared.”
- 37:1-21 Jeremiah was suspected of being a deserter and put in prison, but Zedekiah allowed him to live.
- 32:1-44 Jeremiah bought a field, indicating that the land will eventually be restored after it is destroyed.
- 33:1-26 “God will restore the land after the Babylonians destroy it.”
- 34:8-22 “The princes who first freed and then reclaimed their Jewish slaves will be destroyed and exiled.”
- 39:15-18 “Yahweh’s prophecies will be fulfilled.”
- 39:1-14 Nebuchadnezzar captured Zedekiah and destroyed Jerusalem.

A NEGATIVE BUT ENDURING IMPACT

It is remarkable that a book so negative in tone, which shows how the Lord’s word was rejected by his people, was retained by those same people after they were ruined politically. Jeremiah’s way of telling the truth about his nation eventually vindicated his message. The addition of promises of restoration and oracles directed to other nations enables later readers to live with a sense of positive expectation even though we may be experiencing despair in our their own world.

We can thereby move beyond an overwhelming sense of loss to an experience of newness and hope. Modern men and women still need to assess our own political and social climate from a prophetic stance, that is, by being informed by our religious convictions, by building on honest analyses of our present situation, and by offering hopeful prospects for the future.

The Greek text of Jeremiah in the LXX is about one-eighth shorter than the Masoretic Hebrew text, and in some places has a different arrangement.

The oracles against the nations (46:1-51:64) come after 25:13, and are in a different order.

Superscription (1:1-3)

Jeremiah’s Call Narrative (1:4-19)

A. *Primarily First-Person Oracles of Repentance and Destruction*

1. *Accusations and Calls to Repentance (2:1-4:4)*
2. *Predictions of the Enemy from the North (4:5-6:30)*
3. *A Sermon against the Temple (7:1-8:3) 6:30*
4. *Oracles on Coping with the Catastrophe (8:4-10:5)*
5. *Concluding Hymns & Laments (10:6-25) 10:5*
6. *1st Complaint: Broken Covenant (11:1-12:17)*
7. *2nd Complaint: Lost Heritage (13:1-27) 15:22*
8. *3rd Complaint: Drought and Famine (14:1-17:18)*
9. *4th Complaint: Broken Families (16:1-17:18)*
10. *5th Complaint: Broken Sabbath (17:19-27)*
11. *6th Complaint: Broken Pot (18:1-20:18)*
12. *Introduction: Yahweh vs. the Nation (21:1-14)*
13. *A Word to the Royal House (22:1-23:8)*
14. *A Word to the Prophets (23:9-40)*
15. *The Vision of the Figs (24:1-10)*
16. *Conclusion: Yahweh vs. the Nations (25:1-38)*

B. *Primarily Third-Person Predictions of Defeat and Restoration*

1. *Jeremiah’s Opposition to the Temple (26:1-24)*
2. *Oracles following 1st Deportation (27:1-29:32)*
3. *The “Little Book of Consolation” (30:1-31:40)*
4. *Oracles during Siege of Jerusalem (32:1-34:22)*
5. *The Example of the Rechabites (35:1-19) 34:22*
6. *The Destruction of Jeremiah’s Scroll (36:1-32)*

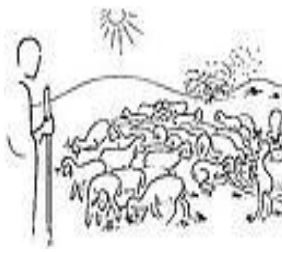
C. *Jeremiah’s “Passion History”*

1. *His Imprisonment before the Siege (37:1-39:18)*
2. *His Opposition to the Plans for Revolt (40:1-42:1)*
3. *Oracles to the Jews in Egypt (44:1-30) 43:13*
4. *Oracle to Baruch (45:1-5)*

D. *Oracles Directed against the Nations*

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| 1. <i>Egypt (46:2-28)</i> | 5. <i>Edom (49:7-22)</i> |
| 2. <i>Philistia (47:1-7)</i> | 6. <i>Damascus (49:23-27)</i> |
| 3. <i>Moab (48:1-47)</i> | 7. <i>Kedar (49:28-33)</i> |
| 4. <i>Ammon (49:1-6)</i> | 8. <i>Elam (49:34-39)</i> |
| 9. <i>Babylon (50:1-51:64)</i> | |

Historical Appendix (52:1-34; 2 Kings 24:18-25:30)



SCHIZOPHRENIA

There was a time when “crazy” people were isolated in insane asylums. Today people who live with extreme forms of mental illness can often be treated with medications and enabled to live in normal society.

Do you know people—perhaps your own family members—who live with schizophrenia or bi-polar disorders or severe depression?

How are they treated by the general public?
By your own family?

What resources are available to them? Or to you?

Do we treat mental illnesses with the same skill and seriousness as we do physical illnesses?

EZEKIEL

SCHIZOID DREAMS AND WEIRD VISIONS

The prophet-priest Ezekiel ben Buzi ministered for some twenty years among the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The fifty smaller units in his book contain his oracles, visions and symbolic actions. Their often tortured language and imagery reflect the wrenching experience of being removed from the homeland. These were subsequently explained and elaborated by later editors, including the Priestly redactors, before they were collected and compiled in their canonical form in Judea after the return from the Exile, around 539-520 BCE.

THE LIFE OF EZEKIEL

pre-597 Ezekiel grew up in Jerusalem and was trained to serve as a priest in the temple like his father Buzi.

597 He was one of the captives taken to Babylon when King Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar.

597-592 Ezekiel and his wife lived at Tel-Abib near the Canal Chebar.

592 He was called to be a prophet after seeing a vision.

592-586 He warned against false hopes of a quick return to Jerusalem.

pre-586 Pelatiah died while Ezekiel was prophesying; then his wife died suddenly.

586 The exiles learned that Jerusalem had fallen and the temple destroyed.

post-586 Ezekiel's visions and oracles offered the hope of restoration to the now despondent exiles.

BIZARRE AND STRIKING IMAGES

Ezekiel's oracles and vision reports contain innovative forms and images. In some cases the dramatic and poetic impact of his work and his visionary experiences have raised the suspicion that he was mentally ill or that his personality should be analyzed by psychological methods. In any case, the evidence indicates that he was an extra-ordinarily sensitive person who mixed symbolism and reality in creative ways.

From the opening visions of God's glory to the closing vision of the restored people giving proper worship to God, Ezekiel projects a radically theocentric perspective which seems to transcend time and space. Thus concrete historical issues in the prophet's own time are spiritualized and idealized so they can apply to all future times. Modern readers can still marvel at Ezekiel's exquisite imagery and symbolism and, more importantly, we can learn to identify with the predicament of upper-class people demoted to next to nothing.

DISASTER AND RENEWAL

At a time when the Israelites held an almost superstitious belief that the temple in Jerusalem could never be destroyed, Ezekiel warned both his fellow exiles and those who remained in Judea that their hopes were false. He held that Yahweh was using the armies of Nebuchadnezzar to punish his own people.

After the morale of the exiles was shattered by the fall of Jerusalem, the prophet began to offer them the hope that Yahweh would resurrect the nation and restore it to an almost ideal state of worship and obedience. In both circumstances, whether in suffering or in restoration, Yahweh would prove to be faithful to his covenant, yet free to rule all nations and history as he will.

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- A. *Prophecies of Judgment before the Fall of Jerusalem*
1. *Vision of God's majesty and Ezekiel's call (1:1-3:21)*
 2. *Instructions for symbolic acts of judgment (3:22-5:17)*
 3. *Oracles of judgment against Jerusalem (6:1-14)*
 4. *Oracles of disaster for Jerusalem (7:1-27)*
 5. *Vision of abominations in the temple and its destruction (8:1-11:12)*

The death of Pelatiah (11:13)

6. *Promise of restoration for the exiles (11:14-25)*
7. *Oracles prophesying exile for the rulers (12:1-28)*
8. *Oracles against the prophets and prophetesses (13:1-23)*
9. *Oracles against the elders and their idols (14:1-11)*
10. *Oracles of inevitable judgment (14:12-23)*
11. *Allegory of the useless vine (15:1-8)*
12. *Allegory of the unfaithful lover (16:1-63)*
13. *Allegory of the two eagles (17:1-24)*
14. *Oracles on individual responsibility (18:1-32)*
15. *Lament for the princes: the lioness and her cubs (19:1-15)*
16. *Review of Israel's history (20:1-44)*
17. *Oracles against the Negev, Jerusalem and Ammon (20:45-21:32)*
18. *Oracles against Jerusalem's sins (22:1-31)*
19. *Allegory of the two sisters (23:1-49)*
20. *Allegory of the pot: the siege of Jerusalem (24:1-14)*

The Death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-18, 19-27)

B. *Oracles against the Nations*

1. *against Ammon (25:1-7)*
2. *against Moab (25:8-11)*
3. *against Edom (25:12-14)*
4. *against Philistia (25:15-17)*
5. *against Tyre (26:1-28:19)*
6. *against Sidon; Israel's restoration (28:20-24, 25-26)*
7. *against Egypt (29:1-32:32)*

C. *Prophecies of Restoration after the Fall of Jerusalem*

1. *Ezekiel's call to be a Watchman (33:1-20)*

The Announcement of the Fall of Jerusalem (33:21-22)

2. *Oracles of Israel's destruction (33:32-33)*
 3. *Oracles of Yahweh's promise to shepherd Israel (34:1-31)*
 4. *Oracles against Mount Seir and for Israel (35:1-36:15)*
 5. *Explanation of Israel's destruction and restoration (36:16-38)*
 6. *Vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones (37:1-28)*
 7. *Oracles against Gog and Magog (38:1-39:29)*
 8. *Vision of the new temple and city: "Yahweh Is There" (40:1-48:35)*
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PORNOGRAPHY

A number of Ezekiel's sexual images are so graphic they seem nearly pornographic.

Can the prophet's symbolic pictures still be used in religious circles today?

Can we make a valid distinction between sensuality, erotic art, and pornography?

Do pornographic materials cheapen society? Are they demeaning to women?

Should they be outlawed? If so, who should decide what is acceptable?