

MOST OF THE MATERIAL IN THE PROPHETIC BOOKS ISN'T ABOUT PREDICTING THE FUTURE¹

(Michael S. Heiser)

In popular usage, Christian or otherwise, the word "prophet" is associated with foretelling the future. That's understandable when it comes to the Bible, since both testaments have prophetic figures making predictive statements about what will come to pass in the future. Despite that truth, it doesn't take long when reading the prophets to discern that most of what they do isn't about predicting anything. More than anything else, prophets were actually preachers. Scholars like to say that a prophet spent more time "forth-telling" than "fore-telling."

What did prophets preach about? Righteousness, mostly. To be more precise, prophets spent most of their ministry railing against the sin and idolatry of the people of Israel and Judah. They were constantly reminding the people of their covenant relationship to God—how they had been rescued from Egypt, delivered at the Red Sea, and given the Law so that they could live happy, productive lives in accord with the God who loved them.

Israel as a nation had publicly proclaimed at Sinai that they would obey God's law (Ex. 24). Prophets were vocal reminders of that promise. In that respect, they were basically covenant enforcers.

They demanded that the people honor their relationship to God. In essence, they were preachers.

It's because of this role that we have the modern expression about "speaking with a prophetic voice

'. When you hear that phrase, it doesn't concern predicting the future. Rather, the point is that some man or woman is bold enough to tell the truth when it's unpopular or even dangerous. That's what prophets did. And they paid dearly for it.

Modern Bible readers have largely lost the correct orientation for reading the prophets. Talk about the future and discerning "the signs of the times" is more titillating than having someone tell about your sin. But that's crucial for walking with God. Someone needs to tell the truth. Prophets didn't do it because they enjoyed it. They knew their ministry wasn't going to make them popular. They did it because God wanted to rescue people from judgment.

That alone is a lesson for us today. Most contemporary preaching is about making us feel good about ourselves. There is no warning. It's more important to realize that God loves us and wants us to turn from sin so he can bless us. Our Maker knows that a clear conscience and forgiveness are keys to happiness on earth.

Without a prophetic voice, we deceive ourselves into defining a rewarding life as self-gratification and "looking out for number one." The prophets force us to be honest with ourselves and with God. We can heed their words or reap what we sow. May Scripture awaken us to return to a forgiving God and trusting him with life and salvation.



¹ This is taken from a book I highly recommend, *Brief Insights on Mastering the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), pp.113-114.