



Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Fifth Series: "The Left Edge" Old Testament: Prophets
Lesson 15: Purpose of Prophecy / Impact on New Testament

I. The term "prophet" – See 1 Chron. 29:29

A. Old Testament / Hebrew

1. "Nabhi" - a technical term that means a spokesman, a speaker
"One who is called or appointed to proclaim as a herald the message of Christ Himself" (Example: Aaron was a prophet for Moses – Ex. 4:16)
2. "Roeh" – a more popular term that means "to see"
3. Seer – meaning to see or behold

B. New Testament / Greek

"Prophetes" – a term that is composed of two elements ("to speak" and "forth" or "beforehand"). Thus it can mean to "speak for, to proclaim" or "to speak beforehand."

C. A prophet then is a forthteller as well as a foreteller.

II. Purpose of Biblical Prophecy

- A. To warn Israel that judgment and punishment were inevitable if their wickedness persisted. They were often clustered around a time of crisis.
- B. To reveal God's counsel in a particular circumstance (see Elijah – 1 Kings 17-18 or Jeremiah 26)
- C. Important Note: "While the prophets often deal with contemporary political, social and religious issues, in their utterances, they were also acutely conscious of the fact that the future is inherent in the present. In consequence they experienced little difficulty in surveying the more distant historical scene and predicting the outcome of current political and social patterns with remarkable accuracy. The modern antithesis between forthtelling and foretelling would therefore have been meaningless to the Hebrew prophets." (Old Testament Times, p. 219)
- D. Thus, the prophets called Israel to stay true to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (if/then) and they proclaimed predictive messages.
- E. Prophets were authoritative commentators who spoke under divine inspiration.

III. The office was instituted in Deut 18:15-18:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.”

The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”

IV. Prophetic utterance

- A. Oral transmissions of God’s will. These would have been recorded soon after they were spoken. Examples would be Samuel, Elijah and Elisha.

Prophet “schools” existed during this time. Samuel had such a school in Ramah – see 1 Sam. 9, 10, 19. Elisha helped expand a school in 2 Kings 6. These schools disappeared after the time of Elisha.

- B. Written, literary prophets would emphasize the law and apply it to a contemporary situation. Examples would be Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah.

V. The majority of the prophetic ministry occurs after the United Kingdom.

9th Century BC: Elijah, Elisha, Zechariah and some unnamed prophets

8th Century BC: Jonah, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah

7th Century BC: Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah

6th Century BC: Obadiah, Ezekiel, Daniel

Post Exilic: Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Malachi

VI. Understanding the Predictive element of prophetic works

Caution #1: The vision is not the message.

“Understanding the message does not require an interpretation of everything in the vision, or even an understanding of the chronological placements of the events of the vision.” (A Survey of the Old Testament, p. 407)

The Lord cares re Jeremiah. See vs. 14-17

Example: Zechariah 1:8-11

Caution #2: The message is not necessarily the ultimate fulfillment.

...both need to be considered

“The message is found in the proclamation of God’s word to the contemporary audience (at least initially.) The fulfillment comes in the unfolding of history. Each prophecy had

a message as soon as it was proclaimed, independent of its eventual (and assured) fulfillment. Too often the prophetic books are studied merely by seeking out potential fulfillments while overlooking the inspired message of God's words." (A Survey of the Old Testament, p. 408)

Caution #3: Remember the telescope effect

Caution #4: Remember prophecy is focused on God (not events)

"Prophecy is part of God's self-revelation. We come to know God by what He has done in the past (history) and by what His Plans are for the future (prophecy). The fact that history and prophecy flow together in a single sovereignly devised and executed plan ought to produce a distinctive awe for the creation of that plan." (A Survey of the Old Testament, p. 410)

"...But the final focus does not rest with Israel; it rests with the Glory of God. Isaiah's ministry focused on a holy God (Isa. 6) as did Ezekiel's (Eze. 1). Isaiah spoke of a future kingdom age when only the holy one would fellowship with a holy God (Isa. 35:8); Ezekiel detailed the future worship of holy God, glorious in His appearance with His people (Eze. 43:2, 4, 5). Zechariah concludes with an emphasis on the holiness of God (Zech. 14:20-21). The recognition and adoration of the holiness of God will be achieved in the future kingdom age." (The Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 73)

VII. Impact on the New Testament

A. Exact correlations:

1. Isa. 61:1 – Luke 4:18-19
2. Zech 9:9 – Matt. 21:5

B. More vague correlation

1. Hosea 11:1 – Matt. 2:15

VIII. So what?

A. Consider your attitude towards bible prophecy being literally fulfilled...it directly impacts the impact of what you read in your bible.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the difference between "forthtelling" and "foretelling." Which would you have preferred to do?
2. Why do you think that much of the prophetic ministries occurred after the united kingdom?
3. What is the ultimate purpose for biblical prophecy? How does it affect your relationship with the Lord?