

Introduction to Prophetism:

Paul R. Shockley

I. Background to Prophetism:

- A. Abrahamic Covenant: Land, Seed, and Blessing: unconditional, unilateral covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:7-8; 22:17-18).
 - 1. To the Nation (Israel):
 - a. The Land—the nation was promised possession of the land (Genesis 15:18-21);
 - b. The Ruling Seed (Genesis 17:18-19)
 - 1) The line of the seed is narrowed to one son of Abraham (a specific heir of the covenant promises).
 - 2) In each generation there is a particular recipient of the promise.
 - c. The Natural Seed—the nation would be great and innumerable (Genesis 12:2; 13:16; 15:5).
 - d. To the Nations—all families of the earth are promised blessing (Genesis 12:3).
- B. The Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10):
 - 1. This covenant elaborates upon Israel's relation to the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 17:1-18).
 - 2. The land is the everlasting possession of the physical seed of Abraham (Israel, Genesis 3:5; 17:8; Ezek. 16:60).
- C. The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16):
 - 1. The promise of a ruling seed is made more specific in the Davidic Covenant.
 - 2. The Covenant promises:
 - a. A Son (house): the line of David would always be the royal line.
 - b. A Throne: the right to rule would always belong to a Davidic heir.
 - c. A Kingdom: a political kingdom of Israel over which the Davidic heir would rule.

D. The New Covenant:

1. The promise is to the nation, to bring spiritual blessings on the people.
2. The New Covenant promises:
 - a. Forgiveness of sin;
 - b. Spiritual blessing (a changed heart, fellowship with God, knowledge of God).
 1. Some Christians argue that this spiritual blessing included the indwelling Holy Spirit and that the covenant was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; Hebrews 12:24). Thus, Gentiles enter into the spiritual provisions of the New Covenant through faith in Jesus Christ (its Mediator: 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; Hebrews 10:16-17; 12:24).

E. Mosaic Covenant: Blessings and Curses: conditional, bilateral covenant (Exodus 10:1-31:18; stipulations unpacked in Deuteronomy 28-30).

1. The fulfillment of this conditional covenant is based on human obedience and faithfulness to God.
2. Interestingly, some observe that the covenant was broken almost immediately after it was made (Exodus 32:15-29).
3. Call to repentance in view of Mosaic Covenant. Repentance leads to blessing. Cyclical pattern in prophetic literature: Sin; call to repentance; promise of blessing.
4. Consider the Mosaic Covenant against this backdrop following the Mosaic Era: decline and disintegration:
 - a. Private concern vs. national unity;
 - b. Religion became corrupt;
 - c. Ordinances of the Mosaic Law were neglected;
 - d. Heathen ideas;
 - e. Baal Worship;
 - f. Central place of worship was abandoned;
 - g. Judgeship failed.

II. The Prophetic Period:

- A. The judgeship having failed, prophetism arises to take its place. In view of the establishment of the monarchical kingdom, and the final captivity the prophetic order is instituted.

- B. The prophetic office was created as a necessary adjunct to the theocracy.
- C. Organization of the theocracy under a human ruler produced a new body of revelation known as prophetism.
- D. The second of the three divisions of the Hebrew canon is the Prophets or Nebhiim, consisting of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings (four books), called the Former Prophets and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (four books), called the Latter Prophets.
 - 1. They were so called by the ancient Jews not because they were regarded as particularly prophetic in content, but because they viewed as having held the office of a prophet.
 - 2. The Former Prophets not only continued the interpretative history of the divine dealing with the theocratic nation where the Pentateuch leaves off, but traces the sequence of events important to the history of redemption to the Babylonian Captivity. Thus, they form an important connection or link with the Latter Prophets, offering a vital introduction to their meaning and message.
 - a. Joshua: aim is to demonstrate God's faithfulness to God's promises by leading Israel into the Land of Canaan as He has previously led them out of Egypt (Genesis 15:18; Joshua 1:2-6). The events are highly selective, illustrates God's special intervention in behalf of his people. Summary statements emphasize that God did not fail to perform all that he has promised (21:43-45). In view of God's faithfulness to His people, Joshua, warns Israel to continue to be faithful to God or they will experience consequences in view of Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 28-30; Joshua 23:11-24, 28).
 - b. Judges: This book takes its name in the oldest Hebrew records and in the various versions from the charismatic military leaders (*shofetim*), who delivered and ruled over the 12 tribes of Israel in their national youth when they were only a loose confederacy (without a central government, subject to enemy incursion).
 - 1. Hebrew word "to judge (*shft*) not only denotes, "to settle a dispute and to maintain justice both for the individual and the people," but also implies the idea of liberating or delivering.
 - 2. Judges performed a two-fold function: They personally delivered their people from enemy oppression and ruled over them, ministering justice (like the Roman consuls).
 - 3. The purpose of Judges: It is designed to continue the history of God's people through the era (about 300 years) intervening

from the death of Joshua (c. 1375 B.C) to the time of Samuel (approx. 1075 BC). A central theme of this book is that apostasy from God is followed by servitude and punishment. On the other hand, repentance brings restoration. Once again, the events discussed are selective, illustrating the Mosaic Covenant. They are selective events and not necessarily in chronological sequence.

- c. 1 & 2 Samuel: Originally a single book, was divided by the Septuagint (Greek translation of the O.T.) translators into 2 books: 1 and 2 Kings. This book continues the closing years of the judges to the establishment of the Kingdom under David. In fact, it traces the personal history of Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. The moral failure of the priesthood and the judgeship is recorded in the death of Eli and his house. This is further evidenced in Samuel's unsuccessful attempt to make the office hereditary in his sons (1 Samuel 8:1).
 1. Rise of the prophetic office alongside of the kingly office is described.
 2. Samuel is both prophet and judge.
 3. Samuel establishes the schools of the prophets (1 Samuel 19:20; 2 Kings 2:3-5; 4:38).
 4. He anoints Saul, and after his rejection, David. However, Samuel died before David came to the throne.
 5. The establishment of Israel's political center in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6-12), religious center in Zion (2 Samuel 5:7; 6:1-17), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7) are recorded here.
 - d. Kings: Originally a single volume in the Hebrew Bible, it takes its name from the opening word in the Hebrew text, *wehemmelek*, "*And the king*," and from the contents describing the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. Kings continues the narrative of Israel's history where Samuel leaves off: just previous to the death of David and carries the account of Israel to the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. and the history of Judah until the 37th year of King Jehoiachin's captivity in Babylon (c. 972-560 BC).
3. The second part of the second division of the Hebrew canon is the Latter Prophets. Like the Former prophets: Judges, Joshua, Samuel, and Kings, the latter prophets are four in number: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (the twelve minor prophets being counted as one).

- a. Latter prophets are sometimes called the “writing prophets” because they wrote down their utterances (Isaiah 8:1; 30:8; Habakkuk 2:2) for preservation in permanent form.

II. The Connotation & Conception of the Prophet:

- A. The Connotation & Conception of the Prophet:
 1. Forth-teller (Isaiah 43:27);
 2. Seer (1 Samuel 9:11, 18, 19; 1 Chronicles 9:22);
 3. Watchman (Jer. 6:17);
 4. Man of the Spirit (Hosea 9:7), & a man of God (1 Kings 12:22; 1:12).

III. The Commission & Call of a Prophet:

- A. The Commission & Call of a Prophet:
 1. Not confined to one family;
 2. Not confined to one external institution;
 3. Chosen from the Covenant People;
 4. Prophetic call came in the midst of crisis and so overwhelmed the prophet that there was no release until he had performed his commission.

IV. The Certification and Credentials of a Prophet:

- A. The Certification & Credentials of the Prophet:
 1. The clarity of the word which came to him indicated that it had come from beyond himself.
 2. The compulsion to declare God’s word even when it opposed his own will demonstrated that there was an objective communication present.
 3. The consciousness of an enabling power from without, strengthening and supporting him, gave evidence of a divine commissioning.
 4. The consistency of the revelation with the terms of an original commission and with Jehovah’s previously revealed plan proves the authenticity of the commission.

5. The contradiction to what the people wished to hear pointed to the fact that the utterance came from a true prophet.
6. The crisis of the time bestoke an urgency amid moral and spiritual decline. This compelled the true prophet to speak the whole counsel of God.
7. The caution against divination and other forms of false prophesy brought a necessary contrast to genuine prophesying.

V. The Classification and Connections of the Prophet:

- A. The Classification & Connections of the Prophet:
1. Elijah & Elisha are “*oral prophets*” because they did not commit their prophecies to writings.
 2. Daniel and David may be classified as “*unofficial prophets*” for they occupied another position or had another title yet spoke important prophecies.
 3. Some assert that the “*former writing prophets*” consists of the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings whereas the “*latter writings prophets*” consists of the books of the major and minor prophets. Daniel is listed among the writings rather than among the prophets because the book is apocalyptic and not purely prophetic.
 4. There is a prophetic succession in the history of Israel the like of which cannot be duplicated in any other nation. The formal prophetic tradition was continuous from Moses forward. After Moses the prophet appear as “actors” in the national drama. Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, Shamaih, Ahijah, and others maintain continuity. The biographical or pre-literary prophets like Elijah appear first, then comes the classical prophetic literature of the Golden Age of prophecy in which the prophecies (oracles) were written down. Lastly, there are the prophets of the post-exilic era.

VII. The Prophetic Perception:

- A. In determining the manner in which divine communication came to the prophets we are left to the statements of the prophets themselves, who sincerely believed that they were recipients of objective revelation.
1. The mode of reception remains one of the great mysteries of prophetism.
 2. Its inexplicable character is the result of a supernatural operation.
 3. The prophet is aware that the revelation is directly given and that is not the product of his own agency.

4. He recognizes in himself an organ of revelation.
 5. He distinguishes between his words and the words of Jehovah. He knows he is under divine influence, entirely distinct from his own subjectivity.
- B. Perception through the outward sense (1 Samuel 3:8-9; Moses' experience at the burning bush illustrates the perception of the eye).
 - C. Perception through the inward sense (2 Kings 6:17); it has objectivity apart from his own thinking processes; it is an inner experience.
 - D. Perception through ecstasy (i.e., enhancing the natural activities of the human mind); e.g., dreams.

VIII. The Prophetic Perspective:

- A. Sees the future as past;
- B. Near future;
- C. Remote future.

IX. The Prophetic Prediction:

- A. Gentile Prophecies: Four Kingdoms of the book of Daniel: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.
- B. Nationalistic Prophecies: Woe judgments against Edom, Damascus, Tyre, and Egypt.
- C. Hebraic Prophecies: 12 tribes of Israel and Israel's over-all destiny amid the nations.
- D. Messianic Prophecies reveal the truths of both advents
- E. Ponerologic Prophecies announce the outcome of the enemies of the kingdom of God. The destiny of Satan is forecast.
- F. Personal Prophecies name individual men before their actual birth-Cyrus, John the Baptist, & Jesus Christ.
- G. Theocratic Prophecies anticipate the glorious kingdom.
- H. Municipal prophecies touch certain cities: Jerusalem, Nineveh, Babylon.
- I. Ecclesiastical prophecies predict the course of the church (in the N.T.; church was never revealed in O.T.).

- J. Last-day prophecies describe the conditions before the inauguration of the kingdom age.
- K. Cosmic prophecies disclose the changes to take place both celestially and terrestrially.

X. The Prophetic Presentation:

- A. The Audience.
- B. The Form:
 - 1. Spoken Prophecies;
 - 2. Written Prophecies;
 - 3. Enacted Prophecies;
 - 4. Symbolical Prophecies.
- C. The Content:
 - 1. Pleading;
 - 2. Prediction;
 - 3. Promise.

XI. The Prophetic Philosophy (part 1):

- A. Prophetism is an interpretation of history, a philosophy of history.
- B. The account of Israel's doings are interpreted to be an account of God's doing (e.g., deliverance from the bondage of Egypt; Babylonian Captivity).
- C. Hebrews possessed a philosophy of history which related all events to an over-all transcendent purpose.

XII. The Prophetic Philosophy (part 2):

- A. The former prophets were prophets of action.
- B. Moses was a legislative prophet.
- C. Joshua, Judges, and Samuel were executive prophets.
- D. David and Solomon were devotional prophets.
- E. Prophetism in the O.T. never degenerates into the mystical or metaphysical.