An Introduction to the Old Testament

The Nevi’im
(The Prophets)
Books of the Nebi’im/Nevi’im (Prophets)

“Former Prophets”: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

“Latter Prophets”: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets

Attained final form in 1st-2nd c. AD.
Deuteronomistic History

- Book of Deuteronomy key
  - Sets forth the requirements of the law (Dt 4, 44-26,19)
  - Obedience brings covenant blessings (28, 1-14)
  - Disobedience brings curse (28, 15-68)
  - Most important commandment was the first (Dt. 5, 6-7)
  - Exclusive worship critical

- Worship centralized in Jerusalem
- The word of the Lord defines and determines the history of Israel
- Expressed in the deuteronomistic law
- Reiterated by the prophets
What is prophecy?

Dt. 18, 9-20:

- **NOT** a “fortune teller; soothsayer; charmer; diviner; caster of spells; does not consult ghosts or oracles from the dead”

- “I (the Lord) shall raise up for them a prophet like you (Moses)...and will put my words in his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command.”

- Prophet announces word of God and in process puts it into motion (e.g. Jer. 7: 27)

- Prophet compelled by God to deliver message even if unpopular (e.g. Jer. 20: 9)

- Prophets as advisors to kings
Nature of OT Prophecy

1. Prophet
   • Primarily a “spokesperson for God”: prophet delivers a message from God in and for a particular situation.
   • Messenger formula: “Thus says the Lord, ...” – often precedes prophetic speech; claims to speak in God’s name.

2. Prophets and the future
   • Prediction is not essence of prophecy – many prophetic speeches have nothing to do with predicting future.
   • Prophets’ predictions are related to past and present.
     – Prophets do not typically make long-range predictions for benefit of future generations.
     – Usually make near-term predictions for benefit of immediate audience:
       » Warn of impending disaster as judgment for sins of nation.
       » Promise God’s deliverance to give hope in time of oppression.

3. Prophetic literature
   • Prophets were not primarily writers but preachers.
   • Messages were preserved, recorded later; prophetic books are sometimes a bit disorganized.
The Latter Prophets

The Major Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
Books of Major Prophets

Spanning history from before Assyrian conquest in 721 BC to after Persian restoration in 538 BC

Isaiah (c. 742-701): Decline and fall of Israel

Jeremiah (c. 627-587): Decline and fall of Judah

Ezekiel (c. 592-570): In exile
Book of Isaiah – longest prophetic book; not all of it goes back to 8th-century prophet Isaiah; 3 mains sections

(1) ch. 1-39 – Isaiah of Jerusalem – pre-Exilic (742-01)
(2) ch. 40-55 – Deutero-Isaiah – Exile (587-39)
(3) ch. 56-66 – Trito-Isaiah – post-Exilic (539- )
Isaiah (742-01 BC)

- Advisor to Judean kings during Assyrian crisis
- Call: vision of God in holiness (Isa. 6).
- Denounces sins; warns of judgment.
- Warns kings to trust God (not armies/alliances) for security.
- “Immanuel” sign (7:10-17) – impending royal birth is assurance for King Ahaz during military crisis; reinterpreted in Mt. 1:23 as fulfilled in virgin birth of Jesus (doubtful this is what Isaiah had in mind).
- Poems promising “ideal king” (9:2-7; 11:1-9) – his reign of peace will be based on justice/righteousness
Deutero-Isaiah (587–39 BC)

- Announces end of Exile – new Exodus (Isa. 40).
- King Cyrus of Persia will be liberator (Isa. 45) – Cyrus is even called “messiah” (God’s “anointed”).
- Depicts universal God – strong monotheism.
  1) Charged with bringing light, redemption to the nations.
  2) Suffers innocently for the healing of others.
  3) Is the Servant Israel, a remnant of Israel, or an individual?
Third Isaiah (539 - )

- Oracles oriented toward impoverished colony of exiles resettled in Judah which is now under Persian rule
- Offers further comfort of better times ahead
- God is not limited to the temple. Not focused on rebuilding Israel’s physical glory as a nation
- 66:1
  
  >What house could you build for me, what place could you make for my rest?”
1. Prophet to Judah during fall to Babylonia.
2. Called for repentance – warned of judgment.
3. “Temple Sermon” (Jer. 7) – warns against “temple superstition;” people thought temple would keep them safe regardless of how they lived; Jeremiah warns that apart from repentance even the temple would be destroyed; authorities took offense, nearly executed Jeremiah.
4. Saw Babylonia as instrument of God’s judgment – advised surrender.
5. Was viewed as traitor and persecuted.
Jeremiah

• Jeremiah’s message through all of this was that Babylon’s victory couldn’t be avoided since it was Yahweh’s judgment and that the people should submit to it.

• Suffered as a traitor

• Prepare for exile and pray for your captors
  • 597-first deportation from Judah to Babylon (Ezekiel goes with them)
  • 587-burning of temple and city and second deportation
  • 582-third deportation
Ezekiel (593-70 BC)

• Preached judgment until 587 – afterwards, hope for restoration.
• Vision of throne-chariot of God (Ezek. 1).
• Vision of valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37).
• Was contemporaneous with Jeremiah.
• Younger than Jeremiah
• Went into captivity in Babylonia