

THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

“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.”

(Deuteronomy 18:18)

I. Eighth Century BCE

Amos & Hosea, the only writing prophets from the northern kingdom (Israel), worked at this time, as did Isaiah & Micah in the southern kingdom (Judah). Isaiah addresses three separate situations, which are noted separately.

Amos

Situation: Great prosperity & great corruption in the northern kingdom.

Message: God’s judgement on injustice must be taken seriously.

Hosea

Situation: Great prosperity & great corruption in the northern kingdom.

Message: God loves the people deeply & is hurt by their idolatry & corruption. Because he takes them seriously, they will be judged.

Isaiah 1-39

Situation: The country was prosperous, profiting from problems in surrounding countries & enemies being occupied elsewhere. A big gap had opened up between rich & poor, & the judicial system benefitted the rich at the expense of the poor.

Message: God is great & will judge injustice & oppression.

Isaiah 40-55

Situation: The exile is assumed to have happened, judgement has fallen & Israel can now look ahead to a new future.

Message: God is great & will save. Includes some of the greatest statements about God’s nature in the OT, looking forward to the coming of the Servant of God, the Messiah.

Isaiah 56-66

Situation: This looks further ahead to the situation after the return from exile, when the nation was re-established. But there was disappointment that hopes for the future had not worked out as the people expected.

Message: God is great, even when life does not appear to be so great.

Micah

Situation: Great prosperity & great corruption in the southern kingdom.

Message: God will judge the people for their injustice & immorality; but for those who repent there is a great future & hope.

2. UP TO THE EXILE

Four prophets – Nahum, Zephaniah, Habbakuk & Jeremiah – began working during the 7th cent. BCE. The dating for Obadiah, Jonah & Joel is less clear.

Nahum

Situation: Cruelty & sin in Nineveh, Assyria’s capital.

Message: Judgement upon Nineveh.

Zephaniah

Situation: Sin & irreligion in Judah.

Message: Repent while there is still time.

Habbakuk

Situation: Corruption in Judah & her enemies.

Message: Amidst confusion & doubt, the reality of God remains.

Jeremiah

Situation: Babylon was attacking & Judah was about to be conquered.

Message: Be realistic about the situation. This is a well-deserved judgement from God, who will not intervene to save his people. Transform your lifestyle, accept punishment & wait in hope for God to bring salvation.

Obadiah

Situation: Trouble from enemies.

Message: Watch out, Edom! Israel's God is sovereign.

Jonah

Situation: Cruelty & sin in Nineveh, Assyria's capital city.

Message: Repent or face destruction. God cares about the nations. Repentance is followed by mercy.

Joel

Situation: Life - & sin – continues.

Message: God will act. Calamity follows disobedience & blessing, righteousness.

3. THE EXILE & BEYOND

Ezekiel

Situation: In Babylon during the exile.

Message: Accept your punishment, love God & hope for the future.

Haggai

Situation: Returned from exile, the Temple has not been rebuilt.

Message: Put God first if you are to prosper.

Zechariah

Situation: Back from exile; but where was the glory?

Message: Visions & God's coming day.

Daniel

Situation: In Babylon.

Message: Stories of honour & resistance, dreams & visions of the future.

Malachi

Situation: The ongoing struggle in Judah. The people believed but were uncommitted.

Message: Get your act together! If you do, you will be overwhelmed by blessings; if you don't, you will be overwhelmed by judgement.