

III. Insights for Reading the Prophets

- A. Read them as anthologies, not journals:** Most of the prophetic books are **collections** of oracles uttered over a period of time. They are usually not chronological but often arranged by theme and topic. Some prophecies are dated (e.g. Jeremiah & Daniel), but most are not (e.g. Isaiah).
- B. Read them as Targeted Messages, not Universal Proverbs:** The prophets were usually addressing particular audiences & making promises to them.
1. While all God's Word is relevant, remember the difference between to-ness & for-ness.
 2. **Example: Jer. 29:11** is about Israel's restoration after Babylonian captivity. It is not a direct promise to you. But it is instructive of God's desire to bring blessing to his people, and there are parallel promises to Christians in the **Gospel**.
- C. Understand that Visions are not always Videos:** The Prophets often write out amazing scenes, but not all of these futuristic visions are videos of the future.
1. Sometimes the sights in the vision are communicating a message, not a video.
 2. **Example: Ezek. 37:1-14**, The valley dry bones scene is not a video of future events but a vision of God's plan to bring life back to **Israel**.
 3. That said, don't to turn everything into a **metaphor**. The oft recurring message of the prophets is that God has a glorious future outlined for a redeemed Israel.

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE PROPHETS: GUIDELINES FOR READING PROPHETIC LITERATURE

JUNE 13, 2021 – PASTOR M. SCOTT BASHOOR

1. **Various Kinds of Prophecy:** Prophecy is inspired insightful speaking whether about the past, present, or future.
 - A. Prophetic Histories:** In the Jewish tradition, many books of history in the Bible are actually regarded as prophetic books.
 1. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, & Kings all provide a prophetic evaluation of Israel's past (un)faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant.
 2. These books are traditionally called the "**Former Prophets**" because their books come earlier in the order of books in the Old Testament.
 - B. Prophetic Messages:** These prophetic books are mostly anthologies of individual messages collected over a prophet's span of ministry.
 1. These include the Major Prophets (larger books) & the Minor Prophets (smaller books)
 - a. Major Prophets:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, & Daniel
 - b. Minor Prophets:** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, *Jonah*, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, & Malachi.
 2. **The Latter Prophets:** In the Jewish tradition, most of these (except Daniel) are called the "Latter Prophets" because their books are placed later in the Bible.
 - C. Prophetic Stories:** Among the Latter Prophets are two books with significant amounts of narrative.

1. The book of **Daniel** features many prophetic messages, but about half of the book also contains narratives about the life of Daniel and his godly friends.

a. The large amount of stories in the book led Jewish thinkers to categorize this book as one of “The Writings,” a number of books which tend to highlight the character of individuals.

b. The stories in Daniel actually **reinforce** the main prophetic message: God will one day restore the kingdom to Israel, but until then the godly must wait with endurance as ungodly kingdoms of men dominate the world until God’s appointed time.

c. **Jonah** is unique among all the Latter Prophets in that it is entirely a story.

(1) The only futuristic prophecy is in **3:4**, but that word is uttered as part of the story.

(2) The story itself is a prophetic message, a correction to self-righteous Israelites who thought God cared only for Israel & denied His sovereign right to show mercy to others.

II. **Kinds of Prophetic Oracles:** Most of the individual oracles (inspired utterances) of the prophets can fit into one of these four categories.

A. **Instruction:** This is one of the less common types of writings in the prophets, but not unimportant.

1. In instructive oracles, the prophet lays out a code of conduct for his audience to follow. Usually these instructions focus on repentance, godly living, and faithfulness to the covenant.

2. Examples: **Jeremiah 3:12-13; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 6:8; Haggai 1:8, Malachi 3:10.**

B. **Indictment:** This quite common form of prophetic word preaches against sin and reveals guilt.

1. Israel is often indicted for not keeping the covenant, and committing idolatry, ritualism, & social injustice. The nations are often indicted for idolatry & violence.

2. Examples: **Isaiah 1:10-15, Jeremiah 2:2 – 3:5, Micah 3:1-4, Zechariah 7:5-6; Malachi 1:7-14**

C. **Judgment:** These futuristic prophecies lay out God’s plan to bring judgment against Israel and/or the nations for their sins.

1. About ½ of the prophecies are futuristic judgments, varying from being short term (such as the Assyrian & Babylonian invasions) to long term (such as foretelling Armageddon).

2. Occasionally a prophet reveals that recent events were divine judgment. **Isa 1:5; Hag 1:6-11.**

D. **Aftermath Restoration:** These futuristic prophecies describes times of rebuilding and greater glory after God’s judgment is over. **Isa. 40.**

E. **Additional Comments.**

1. It’s not uncommon for a prophetic writing to have a mixture of these elements. Cf. **Isa 1.**

2. Messianic prophecies may appear in any of these kinds of oracles.

a. **Isaiah 1** contains most of these elements

b. **Psalms 2** contains all 4 elements.