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THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

"Does the trumpet sound in the city without the populace becoming alarmed?
Does misfortune come to a city if God has not sent it?
No more does the Lord God do anything without revealing his plans to his servants the prophets."
---Amos 3:6-7

"From the beginning I foretold the future, and predicted beforehand what is to be." ---Isaiah 46:10
Things now past I once revealed long ago,
they went out from my mouth and I proclaimed them;
then suddenly I acted and they happened."
---Is.48:3

The Book of the Law

While Ezra in about 400 B.C., divided the Old Testament scriptures into three sections ('The Law', 'the Prophets' and 'the Writings') we must approach those same scriptures differently today because of the impact of Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles there are several paragraphs describing one of the earliest Jerusalem Councils. It details the twelve Apostles repealing the 'Law of Moses'. With that one sweeping decision, the Apostles discarded almost every tenant of the Hebrew Law, replacing it all with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see Acts 15:5-29).

That action brought into question the validity and nature of the Old Testament in man's relationship to God. Within 30 to 60 years of Christ's death on the cross, the writer of the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament (some think it was Paul), outlined the dictates of the Holy Spirit on this subject. The Old Testament, with all its rules about outward life and sacrifices, gives us a "reflection" of the heavenly realities, not reality itself, the book tells us. It is all symbolism. For that reason, it is incapable of giving life (Heb.10:1-18). Eternal

life comes only from Jesus Christ.

The rules of the Old Testament have been superseded by those of the Gospel. God does not want us offering sacrifices to Him. He does not want the rules the Law lays down. Jesus came to sacrifice Himself for us, not the other way around, and His sacrifice ended sacrifice once and for all:

"When all sins are forgiven, there can be no more sin offerings." (Heb.10:18).

"You, who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin; then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will'." (Ps.40:6-8)

"Notice that he says first: 'You did not want' what the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblations, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ." (Heb.10:5-10).

"We have seen that (Jesus) has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the mediator, founded on better promises. If that first covenant had been without a fault, there would have been no need for a second one to replace it. And in fact God does find fault with them" (Heb. 8:8-13) See also, Jer. 31:31-34.

"By speaking of a new covenant, God implies that the first one is already old. Now anything old only gets more antiquated until in the end it disappears". (Heb.8:13).

"By this, the Holy Spirit is showing that no one has the right to go into the sanctuary as long as the outer tent remains standing; it is a symbol for this present time. None of the gifts and sacrifices offered under these regulations can possibly bring any worshipper to perfection in his inner self; they are rules about the outward life, connected with foods and drinks

and washing at various times, intended to be in force only until it should be time to reform them." (Heb. 9:8-10)

That reformation came with Christ. It was officially announced in Jerusalem by the twelve Apostles in Acts 15:5-29. On the template of the Old Testament (i.e, on Exra's concept of Law, Prophecy and Writing) was constructed the New Testament of Christ, giving us the divine 'law' of the Gospels, the 'writings' of Peter and Paul and the Apostolic 'prophecies' that permeate throughout and culminate in the Book of Revelation.

No longer a book of divine Law, the Old Testament is now for us a book of divine prophecy.

As each prophecy unfolds, the Old Testament gets older. Prophecy by prophecy its reflections of God's truth are coming into the focus they were designed from the beginning to reveal. At the end of this unfolding process the Old Testament will disappear. But it will not disappear until its entire symbolism is made known.

"Seventy weeks are decreed for your city and your holy city...for setting the seal on vision and prophecy..."
(Dan.9:24).

Looking at the Old Testament as a book of prophecy, we find prophecy in it everywhere. It's visions are not restricted only to the defined prophets. Because it is written in symbolism, even the Torah (the Law) is filled with prophecy. God has given us in the words of this holy book enormous insight into the mysteries of His kingdom.

It is important to keep this in mind when examining the listed prophets of scripture. Before the prophets most of us are familiar with came on the scene there was Moses and David and many, many others. Some of them have given us prophecies that are prodigious in number and importance. The Psalms of David, for instance, are a chronicle of predictions which, in their scope outstrip most of those made by the labeled visionaries of scripture.

This proves once again that God chooses the prophets, not man. God has kept His promise to reveal His plans to His prophets before He takes any action on earth. Through their visions and voices the Lord has kept vibrant and alive the messianic expectations promised by Moses, and in the same way, and just as powerfully, these same visions testify to Christ's Second Coming in our time as well.

THE EARLY PROPHETS

The prophets in the Hebrew Bible are divided into two groups, the "Earlier Prophets" and the "Later Prophets".

In the Hebrew Bible, the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are called "The Early Prophets". It is in these books that we find listed many prophets of ancient Israel. Joshua, Nathan, Gad, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha all testified during these early days

No one knows exactly when the institution of prophecy began in Israel. Tradition traces it back to Moses. From ages old, the religions surrounding the Hebrew world presented with those who claimed they could speak for God. The Book of Kings describes 450 such ecstasies under the tutelege of Jezebel confronted and destroyed by Elijah on Mount Carmel. Similar groups of visionaries, many false, abounded during these times and were accepted by the Hebrew officials as occupying a legitimate service in their territory. Their visionary powers were often utilized by the officers of the Hebrew government.

Such groups could be found accompanying Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. As a confraternity, there was a harmony between them, but also, the distance of rank. There is no question in scripture as to which prophets commanded the awe and respect of the lesser visionaries. All were chosen by a simple rule: no one was permitted on his own to be a prophet. He had to be selected by God and inspired to speak. No one was permitted to turn God down. In the chronicle of Jonah we learn that when asked to speak, the prophet has to speak.

As it grew, the institution of prophecy became enormously important in Israel. It formed the third office of the Hebrew government. Although the period of prophecy was short, one has only to look at the large quantity of prophetic books chosen for scripture to see how reverently it was received by priests, people and governing officials alike. After the Jewish Return from exile to Babylon, Hebrew visions began to fade in importance. With the appearance of Christ, Jewish prophecy disappeared altogether. That house of Israel has yet to see it return.

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost a new wave of prophecy appeared on earth heralding the Messiah that was promised, and declaring the salvation that He had brought down to the world from heaven. That same Spirit and the prophetic voices it inspires continue to this day.

Samuel

Jesus called Samuel the first of the prophets heralding His appearance. He lived about 1100 years before Christ. Samuel was consecrated to God at Shiloh, then the center of Hebrew worship in Israel. While there, he became

famous for his prophetic powers throughout the nation. He lived to see the Ark of the Covenant stolen and later returned by the Philistines, and the death of Eli, the high priest of Shiloh and his two wicked sons. He anointed Israel's first king, Saul, who was chosen by lot, but later removed him from office at God's instruction and replaced him with David, the shepherd boy from Bethlehem. The Books of Samuel cover a period from the rise of the monarchy to the end of the reign of David.

Nathan

The prophet Nathan was associated with David during his reign as king of Israel. David was concerned that he had a home, but the house of God, i.e., the dwelling which housed the Ark of the Covenant, was only a tent. He told Nathan to ask God if he (David) could build a fine house for Him. God told Nathan that He had not stayed in a house from the time He brought the Israelites out of Egypt until the present time, and that He would build a house for David to live in, instead. Not only that, but God told Nathan to tell David that the Davidic throne would be made secure for all eternity. This prophecy was messianic and revealed the Davidic nature of Christ's dynasty. And it established Bethlehem, David's home village (the 'House of Bread') as the birthplace of that Royal dynasty.

Elijah

Over the centuries the prophet Elijah has grown in stature with the Jewish people. He combated pagan cults and destroyed Jezebel's false prophets on Mount Carmel. He disappeared mysteriously taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. His ascent was viewed by Elisha. It was believed that he would one day return, and it was concerning this return that the prophet Malachi foresaw him coming in advance of the anticipated Messiah to herald His coming. Jesus said that John the Baptist was the "Elijah" they were waiting for.

Because they don't believe in Jesus as Messiah, the Jewish people still await the return of Elijah. At every Passover celebration, a cup is placed on the Seder meal table in anticipation of his return.

Elisha

A disciple of Elijah, Elisha witnessed the former prophet's fiery ride into heaven. The brotherhood of prophets were at first opposed to his becoming a prophet by appointment from Elijah, arguing among themselves that prophets could not be appointed, but had to be divinely selected by God.

That opposition quickly faded. Elisha played an important part in governmental decisions and came to be highly regarded by his peers in the prophetic brotherhood.

THE LATER PROPHETS

Surprisingly, the great age of scriptural prophecy occupies only a small segment of Hebrew history, a 250-year period beginning in the mid-8th century, and continuing only until the end of the 6th century B.C.. It began with the appearance of Amos, and fell into decline with the Jewish Return from exile to Babylon. It is a period dominated by the preaching of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Issuing an eleventh hour call to repentance couched in severe warnings of impending and unprecedented catastrophe, these men occupied an amazing and inspired moment in human history. There has never been anything like it before or since.

Israel had fallen into profligacy and corruption. Consumed by greed and driven by hatreds, internecine violence consumed all factions of the Jewish government. Merchant crime raged. The Jewish people had left the ways marked out for them by the Law of Moses and were pursuing courses in all other directions. Times had become so wicked that those still righteous feared the wrath of God. Into this circumstance appeared the prophets of scripture. They confirmed the fears. This fall into sin had, indeed, sparked a divine wrath that was about to fall on Judah and Israel. Only heartfelt repentance and a return to the path of the Lord could delay its coming.

Theirs was a call ignored.

What makes these prophets so stunning is that all their words circulated around events and disasters that were to be replicated on mankind's national stage in a distant future when like circumstances would once again bring the forces of nature and God against a people bathing themselves in corruption. God inspired the prophets to foresee, in the events of their time, the Christ, and to define everything about Him and the future of the world all the way to its end.

They were born for scripture.

By 500 B.C., with the preaching of Zechariah and the Jewish Return from Babylon, prophecy in Israel fell into populist disfavor as false prognosticators began issuing flawed

and spurious visions. Not until messianic expectations in the 1st century B.C. (as the countdown to John the Baptist neared its moment) did a new host of prophets rise up to bring it to life again. By that time, Old Testament scripture was all but sealed so their words were not recorded and little is known of them outside of Essene writings.

Most of the prophets addressed their messages to the south (i.e., to the House of Judah). Isaiah, Joel and Micah preached there before the nation was exiled to Babylon in 587 B.C. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk and Zephaniah voiced their messages at the time of the fall of Judah and its exile to Babylon. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi issued their prophecies to Judah after the return.

Hosea prophesied in the northern kingdoms (i.e., to the House of Israel). Amos, a shepherd from a Judean village called Tekoa also issued his warnings to the northern kingdoms. Both preached to the House of Israel before those northern tribes fell to the forces of Assyria and were spirited off in 722 B.C to a captivity from which they were never permitted to physically return.

Jonah and Nahum prophesied in the Assyrian capitol of Nineveh. Daniel prophesied in Babylon at the time of its fall to the Persians, and Obadiah preached to Edom.

The Later prophets are divided into two groups: The 'Major Prophets' and the 'Minor Prophets'.

The Major Prophets (4)

Isaiah

Isaiah began prophesying in 740 B.C. Every prophet had his own cluster of disciples, forming what scholars term a "school". In Isaiah's case, his school was as profound as the prophet himself, raising other prophets in his name as significant as Isaiah, but unknown. The book of Isaiah shows us, probably more than any other, the impact on prophecy and scripture of the Holy Spirit. We are reading the work of Isaiah, but the words we read are those of the Spirit of God. The verses in his book are profound. The poetic nature of his sentences and the accuracy of his incredible prophecies have elevated his work to a level surpassing that of all the other prophets. When Handel wrote "The Messiah", the lyrics of that work were composed entirely of Isaiah's words. Two virtually complete scrolls of the Book of Isaiah, dating before Christ, were discovered at Qumran, near the Dead Sea.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah began prophesying in 626 B.C., about a hundred years after Isaiah preached. He came from a priestly family near Jerusalem. He wrote autobiographically, so more is known of him than any other prophet. He lived through the fall of Jerusalem and its exile to Babylon, which were the subjects of much of his prophecy. It is Jeremiah who prophesied the 70-year exile to Babylon. According to one report, he is responsible for the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant. At the time of the fall of the Temple, he is said to have rescued the Ark, taken it to the Dead Sea and sealed it in a cave there to keep it from falling into Nebuchadnezzar's hands. Because the symbolism of the Babylonian exile expanded to profound dimensions with the current Diaspora, both are recognized to be two parts of the same event, thus his words have enormous contemporary importance.

Ezekiel

The end of the ministry of Jeremiah coincides with the beginning of the prophecy of Ezekiel. His whole ministry is among the exiles in Babylon between 593 and 571 B.C. With Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile, the prophetic form becomes sweeping and apocalyptic as interest in the concept of the last days begins to increase among the despairing Jewish people held captive at the Euphrates. Writing as the "son of man", there is a Davidic character to his visions that is unmistakable. It is easy to imagine him, verse to verse, moving symbolically in the shoes of the coming Messiah.

Daniel

Daniel's remarkable verses, written about 165 B.C., stand with the Book of Revelation in their importance. His words define in almost chronological detail the activities that lead to the end of the world. Jesus referred His apostles to Daniel's words when they questioned Him about the future of the Temple in Jerusalem. Daniel deciphered the "handwriting on the wall" of Babylon, described the heavenly coronation of Jesus Christ and provided vivid details of the impending Christian era. Daniel's prophecies were ordered sealed by the angel of God until the time of the End. For this reason, the recent understanding of his words in our time is certain proof of the meaning of the age we now occupy.

The Minor Prophets (12)

Hosea

A powerful prophet to the northern House of Israel, Hosea began his ministry in association with the troubled times leading up to Israel's capture by Assyria in 734 B.C. He married a woman who became a prostitute who later returned to him, and God showed him, through her, that He, too, had married a prostitute. God's wife was a people that had abandoned Him to take their pleasure with other gods. They, too, would return and He would take them back just as Hosea took his wife back. Hosea attacked the Israelites idolatrous worship at Bethel.

Joel

Written about 400 B.C., the book of Joel graphically portrays the apocalyptic invasion and utter destruction of the nations by enormous forces swathed in cloud and darkness. They inflict enormous damage on earth, but at the last minute, God counters them with an army they have no power to defeat and in one terrible day, terminates their march. Joel tells us it will be a time on earth when the sun is turned into darkness and the moon into blood. In this, he foresees, not just the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but, more accurately, the tribulation which is to follow the Christian era. Joel interrupts his dark forecast of the judgments of the nations to say that before this day comes to pass, God will pour out His Spirit on all mankind. In this, he foretells the Christ and God's era of salvation.

Amos

The ministry of Amos dates to about fifty years after the death of Elisha. He was a shepherd in Tekoa near the Judean desert. He did not belong to any prophetic brotherhood, and was called out from the flocks independently by God to go up to prophesy to the people of Israel in the northern kingdom. After a brief ministry there around 750 B.C., condemning their blasphemous shrine at Bethel, and warning of coming misfortune for their apostasy, he was expelled and went back to tending his sheep. As with all the prophets of scripture, his words, though directed at a segment of the Hebrew people, were symbolically universal applying to all men in the name of God. It was through the words of Amos that God instructed us of His intent to reveal His plans to the prophets before He took any action on earth.

Obadiah

The book of Obadiah is the shortest of all the prophets, consisting of only 21 verses. Its exact date is unknown. While some scholars place it 900 years before Christ, most feel that it was likely written between 400 and 500 B.C. It is directed against Edom, and carries symbolic messages directed at Jerusalem's enemies not to gloat over the city's apparent downfall, warning that as they have done, so it will be done to them. His phrase "as barbarians passed through his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem" seems to foretell the actions of the Roman soldiers at Golgotha.

Jonah

The book of Jonah, written about 450 B.C., is entirely narrative. It is about a disobedient and fearful prophet who tries to run away from God's call only to be 'swallowed by a whale' for his disobedience. Returned to the sunlight, Daniel goes to Nineveh where he issues God's warning and call to repentance. He is astonished when the population and leadership of Nineveh heed his words and do, indeed, repent. Jonah did not expect that and expressed his dissatisfaction to God for relenting on the destruction he prophesied. The most important point shown in this story is the merciful nature of God who pardons at the first sign of repentance.

Micah

Voicing his messages around 721 B.C., the prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. He was born a peasant in the area west of Hebron. It was Micah who foretold the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, "the one who is to rule over Israel" and whose origin "goes back to the distant past, to the days of old". He warned the people of Judah that God was going to destroy Jerusalem, raze their Temple and deport them all to Babylon, a captivity from which God would later rescue them out of the power of their enemies.

Nahum

Prophesying to Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria, this book dates before 612 B.C. just before the city was captured by the Medes. It shows the dangers courted by those who are antagonistic to Israel, but more, that all nations are subject to the laws of God's righteousness.

Habakkuk

This book is thought to date from about 600 B.C. The prophecies are aimed at Babylon and its people, the Chaldeans, who are shown to be not only the weapon of God used to punish a sinful Israel, but also the subject, themselves of punishment for their violent and oppressive behavior in wielding that punishment. Habakkuk is dismayed by his own prophecies, wondering why a God of infinite mercy and purity would punish a bad people by those even worse. God answers his question, saying that by trusting in God the virtuous man's life will be made secure. At least one of Habakkuk's prophecies, quite pointed and specific, has particular relevance to the post-exilic Israel of our own time.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah's prophecies date from the reign of Josiah, about 635 B.C., and just before the appearance of Jeremiah. He prophesizes the end of the world. Testifying to a rebellious and tyrannical Jerusalem, Zephaniah foresees a cataclysmic "day of God" when not only Judah but all the nations of the earth will be brought together en masse before the divine judgment seat of the Lord on account of their sins. In his messages, Zephaniah reveals God offering His own sacrifice, His personal appearance on earth, and issues a call to humility, revealing that only a humble and submissive "remnant" will be saved. The salvation of God, he shows, will not be universal.

Haggai

A very short discourse, written in 520 B.C., Haggai's prophecies issue a call to rebuild the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem. As it is with all the prophecies of scripture, Haggai's references are symbolic. Christ later showed that this call related, not to an external building, but to the "House" of our soul within which God had imbedded Himself. It was our behavior that needed rebuilding so that our body would be as pure as the Holy Spirit it housed.

Zechariah

With the appearance of Zechariah about 500 B.C., the ancient prophecies leap into the Christian era. Forseeing a new outpouring of God's spirit in the messianic age, Zechariah anticipates Pentecost, the miraculous appearance of Christ's Spirit in Jerusalem. In the visages of a seven-lamped lamp-stand and two olive trees, the angel of God imaged for Zechariah Peter and Paul

(Cornerstone and Tent-peg) and the seven churches that constitute the Church of Christianity. He forseees the Bible as a flying scroll sweeping the face of the country and banishing from it all who do evil.

In an angelic vision, Zechariah is shown Wickedness personified in the image of a woman being taken to Babylon where a temple for her was to be built. That temple to wickedness is the statue of the beast in the Book of Revelation. Zechariah reaffirms Jeremiah's message that God intends to call His lost people from the land of the North to come and rebuild His sanctuary. He reveals the new king (Christ) coming on the back of a donkey and being sold for 30 pieces of silver. He describes the Davidic nature of the coming king and reveals that he will be "pierced" and mourned for by the people as a first-born son. "When that day comes, a fountain will be opened for the House of David and the citizens of Jerusalem for sin and impurity".

With its luster dimmed by numerous false prophecies, Zechariah forecasts the end of the prophetic office in Israel, "I will also rid the country of the prophets". He describes the "shepherd" being struck and the sheep scattered, the salvation of only a third of the people (2/3rds being cut off), and the trek of that "remnant" through the fire of purification to refine and purify them to become the people of God. Finally, Zechariah forseees the final battle for Jerusalem, the great earthquake splitting in two the Mount of Olives and the coming of God and all the Holy Ones with him,, bringing a new age in which there is no cold and no frost, a day of wonder, a day when the ban is lifted.

Malachi

Composed around 450 B.C., the prophecies of Malachi fortell the coming of a day of God which will purify the priesthood, consume all who are wicked, and secure victory for the virtuous. He reveals that God will raise up a messenger to herald His coming. It is on a passage in Malachi's book that the people of Judah anticipated the return of the prophet Elijah. Malachi's words bear testimony to the divinity of the coming Messiah, showing that it is God, Himself who is coming and God Himself that will suddenly enter His Temple. Coming with God and His messenger will be the "angel of the covenant", the guardian of the people of Israel. This is Michael the archangel. Described by Joshua, Zechariah and Daniel, Michael is closely associated with the Holy Spirit, the "refiner and purifier" of the people of God whose names are written in God's book of remembrance, a divine document listing all who fear God and take refuge in His name

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**"I Will Speak To The Prophets,
I Will Increase The Visions"**

Hosea 12:11

