

Knowing the Old Testament II

Part 2

How do the Prophets fit in with the broader purpose/narrative of the Bible?

“The unifying center of all God’s activity is to glorify himself by establishing a universal rule of righteous sovereignty over his whole creation and a peculiar relationship of righteous fellowship with his elect.” (Mark Snoeberger)

I. Dispensations (the following notes are from Mark Snoeberger)

a. Innocence (non-mediated accountability)

In the dispensation of innocence, focus is entirely upon non-redemptive concerns. The whole creation is designed to bring glory directly and immediately to God, and man was given a vice-regency over creation for God’s glory (note the civic, regal language in Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:5–6): man was, in Erich Sauer’s words, the “king of the earth.” This rule was in a husband-led and wife-subordinate, but complementary, family configuration. Successfully implemented, it would have resulted in perpetual and perfect fellowship with God on the earth.

b. Conscience

In the inscrutable wisdom and sovereignty of God he introduced sin into his universe so that he could have richer fellowship with his image-bearers and receive greater glory. Nothing new is implemented in this dispensation relative to *civic* structures (except that the curse made it increasingly difficult for man to execute his civic responsibilities). Led by his conscience, each person was to fulfill the dominion mandate as God’s vice-regent on earth and thus glorify him.

Peace with God, however, eluded mankind, so provision for reconciliation and fellowship was instituted in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. By faith in this promise a person could be “commended as a righteous man” (Heb 11:4), and thus fall under God’s benevolent favor.

c. Human Government

In a stark reversal of the pattern in the previous dispensation, the dispensation of human government offers nothing new by way of redemptive truth. An enormous change, however, occurred in the civic realm. In Genesis 9:1–7 God introduces the idea of organized civil government (rather than individual and family structures) as the mediating form of God’s vice-regency on earth. *Collective* man was now the agent of God’s civic rule. Together, and armed with the God-given responsibility and

blessing of capital punishment, mankind would be more effective in preventing man from destroying himself through a wanton disregard for human life (Gen 9:5–6).

d. Promise

The dispensation of promise is perhaps the most difficult dispensation to fit into this schema. As noted above, the world was not to be governed by Abram—national distinctions were to continue (Gen 24:4; 26:34–35; 27:46; 28:1–4). However, the whole world, severally governed in their respective civic arrangements, were to honor Abram as the special conduit of redemptive blessing. No provision is made at this time for proselyte inclusion in Abram’s growing family: one could remain a faithful believer apart from any civic allegiance to Abram. Nonetheless, it became clear at this time that God had set apart Abram’s family as a microcosm in which the civic and spiritual realms would eventually be merged.

e. Law

The dispensation of Law represents an anticipation of the Millennial arrangement in which the two governments will be successfully merged into one kingdom. This kingdom was equipped with a full battery of civil structures, including officers, a constitution and laws, judges, and even foreign policy. The latter, in fact, was so specific that it guaranteed Israel’s supremacy over all of the other nations if the Law would only be kept. God’s rule through Israel also touched other nations, who in isolation from their pagan presuppositions paid tribute to Israel’s God (Exod 15:15–16; Josh 2:9–11; 4:24; 1 Kgs 8:43, 60; Psa 59:13; cf. Deut 2:25), and could even participate in the sacrificial arrangement whereby peace with God could be found.

Also a part of the theocratic arrangement was the continuous dwelling of God on earth with his people. During this administration, however, God came down out of heaven to dwell with his people (note that the *Shekinah* is lit. the “settling” or “dwelling” of God on earth) as the visible and perpetual symbol of God’s theocratic presence and rule among the tribes. The central sanctuary had various designations that depicted the dwelling of God among the people.

While the obedience to the Law could not save (except in a hypothetical sense) and the sacrifices had no value in finally take away sin, their practice within the congregation was a necessary indicator of true faith, and thus offered an advance, as well, on the redemptive expression of God’s people. As noted above, too, they supplied additional anticipation of a sacrifice that could do in the redemptive realm what the animal sacrifices could only do in the civic realm.

f. The Church

g. The Millennium

The Messianic kingdom of God on earth is the goal and climax of God’s historical activity. At that time the messianic king, Jesus of Nazareth, God in the flesh, will take

up his royal residence in the millennial Jerusalem (Isa 2:3; 24:23). The Glory Cloud, the visible symbol of God's theocratic presence, will return to the millennial temple (Ezek 43:1-6). God will again dwell with his people in near-Edenic conditions.

The civic and spiritual kingdoms will again be united under the divine mediator-king, never to be separated again. Nonetheless, both redemptive *and* civic elements will be clearly present and independent within the kingdom.

This arrangement seems to merge into the eternal universal kingdom on the sinless new earth (1 Cor 15:24; Rev 21:1). Here is the absolute consummation of the goal and climax of God's activities. God's ultimate purpose of receiving exclusive self-glory throughout the entire universe will be realized. Everything and everyone will be in absolute conformity to God's will and design, and all opposition and contradiction will be eliminated. All rebels against God and his purposes will be incarcerated forever in God's eternal penitentiary, and he will force even from them an everlasting confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil 2:11). In that day, the dwelling of God will be with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev 21:3).

II. **The Message of the Prophets** (the following are a slightly modified version of notes from Jeremy Farmer)

a. **The Necessity of Repentance**

- i. The Broken Mosaic Covenant (*Isaiah 1:16; Hosea 6:7, 8:1*)
- ii. Necessity of Heart Obedience (*Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21*)
 1. The Futility of Sacrifices / Temple / Circumcision Apart from Heart Obedience (*Jeremiah 4:4; 7:1-15,21-24; 9:25, 26*)
 2. I hate all the things which I commanded when they are unaccompanied by the heart.
 3. The prophets were reformers. "Let's get back to Moses."

b. **The Inevitability of Judgment**

- i. The Instrument of Judgment
 1. Assyria
 2. Babylon
- ii. The Recipients of Judgment
 1. Israel
 - a. Leadership (The kings, priests, and false prophets had abused their authority.)
 - b. People (their rejection of the law)
 2. Nations (Nahum, Amos 1-2)
- iii. The Timing of the Judgment: in the Day of the Lord
 1. the day, that day, the latter days
 2. Often from a human enemy
 3. Often from Yahweh himself
 4. Often from Yahweh who is leading a foreign nation

5. Often from a Davidic king who is coming to judge Israel / sinful enemies of Israel
 6. The Israelites perceived “that day” (exile) as “the end.”
 7. The day of the Lord had multiple manifestations within history.
- iv. The Extent of the Judgment: Complete (... almost) - *Zephaniah 1*
1. God will destroy all of the disobedient (Jews and Gentiles). Some Israelites failed to see that the Jews were included in the judgment. As a result, they wanted the day of the Lord to come (Amos 5:18). No can escape the day of the Lord. The Jews also longed for the day because of the institution of the reign of Messiah.
 2. A Remnant (a few repentant survivors) - *Isaiah 10:20-21*

c. Hope: The certainty of God’s promises (to David, Abraham)

- i. Restoration of the Davidic Line (*Isaiah 9:1-5; 11:1-10; 65:17-25*
Jeremiah 23:1-6; Amos 9:11-15)
 1. The Root of Jesse (The tree had been cut.)
 2. Restoration will affect every part of reality (animals, etc.). Is 65:17-25; Amos 9:11-15
 3. The Arrival of Utopia (link to Eden)
- ii. Restoration of Israel
 1. Linked closely with the restoration of the Davidic line
 2. An Emphasis upon the Spiritual Restoration (cf. the New Covenant) Jer 31:31-33; Ezek 36:22-33
- iii. Atonement for Sins
 1. *Isaiah 53* - A Davidic Servant of Yahweh will atone for the sins of His people.
- iv. Universal Outpouring of God’s Spirit
 1. *Joel 2* (Spirit on all flesh)
- v. Worldwide Conversion (*Isaiah 49: 6, 7*)
 1. The Davidic servant will bring salvation to the ends of the earth (cf. *Genesis 12*).
 2. Worldwide peace following worldwide conversion (*Isaiah 2:1-4*). This peace is through the knowledge of Yahweh...the Gospel.