



Teaching the Bible Classically with Dr. Fred Putnam

Lecture 9: Prophecy (II)

Outline:

Historical/Geo-political Background of the Ancient Near East

- The prophets come during the historical books. They are embedded in these histories.
- We read the prophetic books in a particular setting. The ancient near east (ANE) looms in the background.

ANE History

- **Assyria**
 - Assyrian empire was the dominant force across Mesopotamia for hundreds of years.
 - They have conquered Babylonia. The goal is to get to Egypt. Everyone knew that Egypt was made of gold.
 - The Syrians and the Israelites had stopped the Assyrians from moving west, but eventually were overcome and the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom.
 - We find Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah (?) against this background of this constant threat of Assyria.
 - By 607 B.C. the Assyrian empire is brought to an end by the Babylonians.
- **Babylonia**
 - Habakkuk prophesies the beginning of the Babylonian empire.
 - Nahum prophesies the destruction of Nineveh.
 - Jeremiah is called to prophesy in 627 BC.
 - In 605, Nebuchadnezzar takes some exiles back to Babylon. Daniel and Ezekiel are taken back to Babylon.
 - The prophets are talking to people in the midst of huge turmoil.
- **Persia/Medo-Persia**
 - 539 BC
 - Cyrus the Great conquers Babylon.
 - Here we find the last few prophetic books.
 - These nations are living in fear of invasion. They knew that the prophets' message was real.



Compare prophetic ministries: Jeremiah & Ezekiel

	Jeremiah	Ezekiel
Location	Jerusalem	Babylon
Dates	c. 627-580	c. 593-570
Call	Speech	Vision, speech, scroll
Message	Submit to Babylon Don't rebel, you will live in the land judgment on idolatry new covenant (31)	Jerusalem will fall to Babylon you will not return judgment on idolatry new covenant (37)
Audience	Jews in Jerusalem	Jews exiled in Babylon
Enemies	False prophets: Temple of YHWH! (7) Peace, peace! (6.14; 8.11-12)	False prophets Ezk: God left the Temple (10-11) Peace, peace! (13.10)
Allies	Baruch (scribe), some "nobles"	none mentioned
Fall of Jerusalem	Jr 32.1 ≈	≈ Ezk 24.1

Studying Biblical Prophecies

- Start small – Joel, Nahum, Haggai, and Jonah. Read the entire book.
 - Write down what you know about the story.
- Read a prophecy:
 - What is he describing? What is this prophecy actually addressing?
 - What situation gives rise to this prophetic statement?
 - What is this prophecy telling us about the situation of the people?
 - What is background against which this is being spoken?
 - If prophecy is a speech from God through the prophet, what is this prophecy telling us about God himself and his relationship with his people? With nations as a whole?
 - Specific questions:
 - Why are the three prophetic calls that we have in the Major Prophets so different? What does that tell us about the way God deals with his prophets?
 - Why is justice so important that it comes up over and over again in the prophets? What makes justice so important?
 - You may need to discuss the polytheistic world with your students. We live in a monotheistic culture, so it is difficult to imagine polytheism.
 - Avoid the simplistic statement, "Our gods are youth, good looks, and wealth (or success)." Those aren't the gods.
 - Does Jonah repent?