

The Prophets: Isaiah and Hosea

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Growing up the son of a staunch Pentecostal pastor, we fellowshiped with many churches that did not necessarily believe in the same theological principles. As right winged Apostolics, we shared many services with the Baptist (Southern, Missionary, etc.), Churches of God in Christ (COGIC), to even sharing a corporate worship services with a local Catholic church. Throughout my formative years, I recognized that there was a sincere respect for the offices and titles represented in our churches. Respected offices that were once coveted has seemingly become a common place for many ministries and ministers present day. Present day, deacon, elder, or pastor or no longer desirable mantles to carry or represent. The once coveted responsibilities have been replaced with more power representing titles and offices; Apostle, Chief Apostle, Bishop, and Arch-Bishop, not to mention the highly coveted office of Prophet or Master Prophet which a term or title that has garnered a hierarchal platform within the office. In the last twenty years, we have witness in some cases the ordination process for some is merely the click of mouse on a website to official credentials to hold any desirable religious office. Furthermore, you cannot even log onto any social media platforms daily without some Facebook preacher saying, “God told me to tell you...” and “Thus sayeth the Lord...” But, the office of prophet found in the Old Testament seemingly operated much differently than we see in action present day.

The Bible is made up of sixty-six books, the New Testament compiling the sum of twenty-seven books and the Old Testament contains thirty-nine books. Out of the thirty-nine books there are seventeen books that are attributed to prophets and nearly eighty accounts of named prophets. From Moses to John the Baptist, we witnessed throughout Scripture how their ministries transformed a generation and continues to do so present day. The intent of this

research paper is to clearly define the office of prophet and prophecy specifically to the Old Testament, identify the Major and Minor Prophets, chronicle two fascinating accounts of one of each: Isaiah and Hosea; their authorship, their lives, settings and their target audience, their distinct message communicating God's word.

Defining Prophets and Prophecy in the Old Testament

The office of prophet is defined from Greek origin meaning “spokesperson.” Prophets are believe to be recipients of direct communication from God.¹ Prophecy is the function performed by the prophet. Prophecy has been defined as a “miracle of knowledge, a declaration or description or representation of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to foresee, discern, or conjecture.”² The primary content of these messages, was interpretation of phenomena and events from a divine perspective. The prophetic pronouncements by the Deuteronomistic Historians in the books of Samuel and Kings as a kind of running commentary on the historical narrative and also in the canonical division of the Bible in Jewish tradition.³

The first recorded prophet in biblical history is accredited to Moses. Even the first five books of the Bible are attributed to his authorship. The Bible itself is attributed to being a prophetic writing. In fact, the entire Jewish Bible/Protestant Old Testament was considered prophetic. Moses, who is credited for writing the first five books of the Old Testament, was a prophet, “God, your God, is going to raise up a prophet for you. God will raise him up from among your kinsmen, a prophet like me. Listen to him. (Duet. 18:15),”⁴ and the rest of the Old

1 Coogan, Micheal D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. Third Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press), 2014, 557.

2 Easton, Matthew G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. (Logos Bible Software, 2015), eastonsbibledictionary.org/3005-Prophecy.php.

3 Coogan, *The Old Testament*, 302.

4 Deuteronomy 18:15. *The Message Bible*.

Testament books were known as “the Prophets”. “The Prophets” were later divided into Prophets and Writings. “The reasons are not clear, but some believe the division was based on whether the author was a prophet by office or only by gift, while others claim it was for topical use at Jewish festivals.”⁵

One question that has puzzled scholars alike for centuries, is how Moses was able to account for the authorship of these books when he was not alive to witness the information that is recorded in Scripture. There are some believers that take the stance that God inspired Moses during his lifetime to detail the first five books. While other scholars believe that the authorship of large number of his contributions were from authors writing in his name. A common process referred to redaction criticism. The document that God is responsible for writing exclusively are the Ten Commandments. The remainder of Scripture was recorded and inspired by man. Either direct participants or stories that were told and passed down through tradition until recorded. The prevailing belief that we hold to is that God inspired all writings represented in Scripture just like He did in the lives he used in the office and the gift of prophet.

Beginning in the eighth century BCE, the nature of prophetic material that we have changes significantly.⁶ What was referenced above, there were some prophets/prophecy that walked in the office of prophet, those that studied under someone. Then there were others that had the gift of prophecy, for example, during the time of the festival of Passover the Spirit of God would speak through someone in the moment they would operate in the gift of prophecy. The significant change became the discovery of material about and authored by individual prophets, which were edited and formed into their own books.

Prophets and Prophecy

⁵ Geisler, Norman L. “The Second Coming and the Millennium: Systematic Theology: In One Volume” Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2011, p. 390.

⁶ Coogan, The Old Testament, 312.

The phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel is extraordinarily diverse. Some prophets, if not most, were trained professionals who earned their livelihood as prophets [office].⁷ Old Testament prophets had an amazing responsibility – they were able to speak and write words that had absolute divine authority. They could say, “Thus says the Lord,” and the words that followed were the very words of God. The Old Testament prophets wrote their words as God’s words in Scripture for all time. Therefore, to disbelieve or disobey a prophet’s words was to disbelieve or disobey God (Deut. 18:19; I Sam. 8:7).⁸

The books that comprise the accounts of the former and latter Prophets are: (former) Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; latter Prophets are broken down into two categories Major Prophets which consist of the longer books of Isaiah (sixty-six chapters), Jeremiah (fifty-two chapters), and Ezekiel (forty-eight chapters); The Minor Prophets are the twelve shorter books from Hosea through Malachi. The Minor Prophets or the Book of the Twelve as a whole emphasizes the relationship between Yahweh and his people, Israel. The prophets explain Israel’s historical experience of the fall of both the Northern and Judean kingdoms in terms of their covenantal relationship with Yahweh.⁹

The arrangement found in the Old Testament follows one ancient tradition and is roughly chronological: First, the prophets from the Assyrian era, then there are those that the date of origin could be solidified, then the resurgence later in the Assyrian era, ending with the Persian period.¹⁰ The distinguishing characteristics between the Major and Minor Prophets chronicled in

⁷ Ibid., 303.

⁸ Gruden, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, 1050.

⁹ Boda, Mark J., and Wray Beal, Lissa M. *Prophets, Prophecy, and Ancient Israelite Historiography*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2013, 331.

¹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 313.

the Old Testament are the lengths of each of the contributions. In the next two sections we will highlight in depth one book from each of the Minor and Major Prophets' Hosea and Isaiah.

The Book of Isaiah

The prophetic book of Isaiah whose authorship is self-titled was recorded during the eighth century during the reign of several kings of Judah: Uzziah (785-733), Jothan (759-743), Ahaz (745-715), and Hezekiah (715-687) is when Isaiah prophesied.¹¹ During the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (745-727), Judah's king Ahaz chose to be an Assyrian vassal (treaty of negotiated terms of surrender) rather than to join a coalition that opposed the Assyrian growing super power. The vassal continued your decades until King Hezekiah assumed power and asserted Judah's independence. Assyrian ruler Sennacherib (705-681) responding by attacking in force, and Judah had no choice but to resubmit to Assyrian rule.¹²

Along with archaeological evident sources, King Hezekiah was in power for almost thirty years. For Deuteronomistic Historians, Hezekiah was one of the most important kings of Judah; they state "there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those before him" (2 Kings 18:5).¹³ The prophet Isaiah is attributed for being a vital contemporary to Hezekiah.

Isaiah warned his target audience, the southern region of Judah of the destruction and devastation that would come to Israel because their rejection of God, but he also prophesied the restoration that would follow.¹⁴ The book of Isaiah falls under the heading of being a part of the Major Prophets given its length of sixty-six books. The book of Isaiah is divided into three

11 Coogan, *The Old Testament*, 330.

12 *Ibid.*, 329.

13 *Ibid.*, 330.

14 Smith, Chuck. *Old Testament Study Guide*. Costa Mesa, CA: The Word for Today, 2006, 239.

subcategories: (1) First-Isaiah (1-39); (2) Deutero-Isaiah (40-55); (3) Trito-Isaiah (56-66).¹⁵ Until the late nineteenth century, the entire collections of books were considered penned in his authorship. Beginning in the latter part of the twentieth century, some scholars found that the book was edited through canonical criticism. This type of criticism emphasizes the traditional shape of the book and its unifying themes rather than its compositional history; hence the subcategories.¹⁶

The Life of Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah was the son of Amoz. According to rabbinic tradition, Amoz was the brother of Amaziah, king of Judah, the father of Uzziah. This would conclude that King Uzziah was the first cousin of Isaiah, making him a part of the royal lineage of Israel.¹⁷ Isaiah was husband to one wife and a father to two/three sons recorded in Scripture. His wife was also a prophet; the interpretation of “prophetess” in Isaiah 8:3 translates to “Mrs. Prophet”. The children had symbolic names, one son, Shear-jashub meaning a remnant will return (Isaiah 7:3). The second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz which meaning, “Quickly the plunder, hastily the spoil” (Isaiah 8:1-3), and the third son Immanuel meaning “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). All three sons represent both a positive and negative significance in the book.¹⁸

Given his royal status and his training, Isaiah served as a court prophet given his meetings between the kings in rule, much like Nathan served during David’s reign. Like Nathan, too,

15 Blank, Sheldon, H. Isaiah Hebrew Prophet. (2013), www.britannica.com/biography/Isaiah

16 Coogan, The Old Testament, 333.

17 Smith, Old Testament Study Guide, 239.

18 Coogan, The Old Testament, 335.

Isaiah was an independent voice, criticizing as well as supporting the political and religious establishment in Jerusalem.¹⁹

The Message of Isaiah

The message of Isaiah is to proclaim divine judgement and lay the foundation of introducing the earthly presence of the coming Messiah. It begins with his name, “Isaiah, is Hebrew for Yesha‘yahu (“God Is Salvation”).”²⁰ “Isaiah is not a reluctant prophet; he volunteers to be the council’s emissary” “Here I am send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). He is instructed [by God] to deliver a message that ultimately dampens his enthusiasm.²¹ The bulk of those early chapters in Isaiah detail judgments against the people who have turned their backs on the Lord, showing us that those who persist in their rebellion will receive judgment. On the other hand, we also see God’s faithfulness to His promise.²² Almost one-third of the chapters in Isaiah contain prophecies about Jesus Christ, addressing both His first and second comings. “Isaiah provides more prophecy of the second coming of Christ than any other Old Testament prophet.”²³

The Book of Hosea

The prophetic book of Hosea whose authorship is also self-titled, was recorded during the eighth century. While Isaiah was prophesying in the southern region of war stricken disobedient Israel, the Prophet Hosea was in the northern region of Israel doing the same thing during the invasion of the Assyrian army. The book of Hosea is the longest book of the Minor Prophets, chronicles the life Hosea, the continued disobedience of Israel by not worshipping God

¹⁹ Ibid., 335.

²⁰ Blank, Sheldon, H. Isaiah Hebrew Prophet. (2013), www.britannica.com/biography/Isaiah

²¹ Coogan, The Old Testament, 335.

²² Swindoll, Charles. Isaiah. (2017), www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-major-prophets/isaiah

²³ Haeffele, Jim. Isaiah the Prophet. (2017), <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/prophets/prophets-of-the-bible/isaiah-the-prophet/>

exclusively, and the message of hope through forgiveness and the grace God offers through repentance. Hosea was the first Hebrew prophet we find in Scripture where we witness the marital relationship is metaphorically compared to the spiritual relationship between God and Israel. “The theme of God’s steadfast love, which is dramatized magnificently in Hosea 11, where God is depicted as in agony over his people, also reappears in the dire utterances of the prophet Jeremiah to Judah, when that southern kingdom faced the peril of invasion. Most distinctively characteristic of Hosea, however, is his desire for “love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings”” (Hosea 6:6).²⁴

The Life of Hosea

The prophet Hosea’s name translates to savior. Hosea life in Scripture was one of tragedy. The one story one might not wished to be remembered for: God called him to marry a prostitute named Gomer. After they had several children, Gomer left her family and sold herself into prostitution again. God called Hosea to buy her back out of slavery to prostitution and to forgive her and love her.²⁵

The Message of Hosea

The message of Hosea is found in the metaphor God used to describe his relationship with Israel. The idea that the very woman that has turned her back on you and her children is the correlation that God used to describe his relationship with Israel is sobering because even in their disobedience, Yahweh loved Israel so much, he used messengers like Hosea as divine carriers of his message to convey instruction, correction, and a plan to adhere to the covenant and bring them back into right standings.

²⁴ Hosea. Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia 1p. 1. Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia, (2014).

²⁵ Smith, The Old Testament Study Guide, 301.

Israel returned to worshipping Baal who was a Canaanite deity that was responsible for the agricultural produce, winter rains, and the abundance of rain. By recounting Israel's unfaithfulness of breaking the covenant with Yahweh, Hosea sets the stage for the history of Israel to unfold. He warns the Israelites of the imminent divine judgment and calls for repentance, as well as promises restoration.²⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper clearly defined the office of prophet and prophecy specifically to the Old Testament, identified the Major and Minor Prophets, chronicle two fascinating accounts of two pinnacle figures in Israel's history: Isaiah and Hosea; their authorship, their lives, settings and their target audience, their distinct message communicating God's word. Isaiah was responsible for introducing the coming and the second coming of Christ and Hosea biographical contribution highlights Yahweh's undying love for Israel and us all.

²⁶ Boda and Wray Beal, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 331.

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