

Chapter 27: Introduction to Prophetic Literature

Key Terms

- eschatology: that branch of theology concerned with end-time events (i.e., the doctrine of the last things)
- *nabî*: OT title for a prophet that indicates the prophet is “one who is called”
- seer: a technical term applied to certain Old Testament prophets, especially signifying divine revelation received in the form of a dream or vision
- Baal: the Canaanite storm god, deity of agriculture and reproductive fertility
- preclassical prophecy: prophecy before the eighth century BC; we have no books written by preclassical prophets, who ministered primarily to the monarchy
- classical prophecy: prophecy that began in the eighth century BC; we have many writings from these prophets who ministered to both kings and people

Key Ideas

- The prophetic office existed across the ancient Near East.
- Prophecy in Israel is divided into preclassical and classical prophecy.
- Classical prophecy has no ancient Near Eastern counterpart.
- The role of the prophet was to communicate God’s message.
- Prediction and fulfillment must be understood correctly to avoid misperceptions about the nature of prophecy.

Chapter Summary

Within the context of the OT, the prophet is the mouthpiece of God. Prophets were common in the ANE; their messages were often addressed to the king, usually encouraging him to pursue a particular activity. Within Israel, before the time of the monarchy, prophets often held positions of leadership. This period of prophecy is only part of the period of preclassical prophecy in Israel. During that time, prophets primarily served the leadership/monarchy. After the monarchy, they took on an advisory role to the king. The prophetic books of the OT were written during the period of classical prophecy; the prophets of this period addressed their messages primarily to the people, becoming social-spiritual commentators of their times. This unique manifestation of prophecy resulted from the covenant between Israel and Yahweh. The classical period of prophecy was also marked by its emphasis on eschatology, another concept unique to Israel. Apocalyptic literature shares many similarities with classical prophecy and performs much the same function. Apocalyptic literature utilizes a slightly different medium for conveying God’s message. It generally includes symbolic messages and actions. Generally speaking, the seer in apocalyptic literature is communicating a vision of the future, and the message was predicated on the information in the vision.

The message of the prophet is best defined as the proclamation of God's words to the contemporary audience; the oracles can be categorized as indictment, instruction, or aftermath/hope. Rather than viewing prophecy as predictive, we would better see it as God declaring his intention for the future. Fulfillment is best viewed as a correlation between the prophetic word and its related event.