

Interpreting the Bible

Lesson 5: Old Testament Prophets

What do you think of when you hear the word prophecy?

The Nature of Prophecy:

A. They were spokespersons for God. A typical formula went: "And the word of the Lord came upon..."

B. Not Predicting the Future. Less than 2 % of OT prophecy is foretelling

C. Prophets as "covenant executors"

- The Prophets' message was unoriginal! For the most part they were comparing the nation of Israel in their time with the Law stated in Deuteronomy and Leviticus.
- The Mosaic Covenant spells out the blessings and curses that will result from obedience and faithfulness or disobedience and idolatry. I.e. They didn't invent curses, blessing or message, but came from Mosaic Covenant, see especially Deut. 27-28 which clearly spells out what will happen.
- How does this relate to our impressions of prophecy?

Types of Blessings and Curses in Mosaic Covenant

Types of Curses warned about in Leviticus and Deuteronomy

- God's anger
- War and siege from a foreign nation
- Exile/captivity
- Loss of possessions and family
- Desolation of the Holy Land and Holy Places
- Suffering, Illness, and Death

Types of Blessings promised in Leviticus and Deuteronomy

- God's love
- Power over enemies
- Return from exile
- Reunification and increase population
- Restoration of land and temple
- Prosperity, Health, and Life

Events of the Time of the Prophets, 760-460 BC.

A. Israel's history (found in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles) during this era was one of great spiritual decay:

- Idolatry, syncretism (mixing true faith with idolatry), ignoring God's law, spiritual neglect or mere formalism, moral corruption, neglect of the weak and poor.
- These were clear violations of the Mosaic Covenant

- Prophets **warned** about sanctions, **called for repentance**, and in the aftermath pointed to God's faithfulness to his promises.

B. Two Major Events in Israel's History

- 722 **Assyrian** Invasion and the fall of Samaria (North): Amos, Jonah, Hosea
- 586 **Babylonian** Invasion and the fall of Jerusalem (South): All others

The Context of the Prophets

- **Major Prophets:** Isaiah (740), Jeremiah (627), Daniel (605), Ezekiel (597)
- **Minor Prophets:** Amos (760), Jonah (760), Hosea (755), Micah (742), Nahum (660), Zephaniah (640), Habakkuk (640), Joel (after 586) Obadiah (after 586), Haggai (520), Zechariah (520), Malachi (460)
(NB: major and minor refer to book length)

Literary Forms

A. Covenant Lawsuit

(Example: Is. 3:13-26; Hos. 3:3-17, etc.)

1. Court convenes: (Isa 3:13-14)
2. Indictment: (14b-16)
3. Evidence: context
4. Judgment sentence: (17-26)

B. Woe oracle: A cry of "grief" when facing disaster or death like at a funeral.

(Example: Habakkuk 2:6-8; Micah 2:1-5; Zeph. 2:5-7)

1. Announcement of distress
2. Reason for distress
3. Prediction of doom.

C. Promise Oracle: or "salvation oracle"

(Example: Amos 9:11-15)

1. Future mentioned "in that day"
2. Restoration described as a radical change
3. Blessing in covenantal categories (see redemptive historical chart)

I.e. Temporal covenant = temporal categories = prefiguring blessing in Christ

The Message of the Prophets Fulfilled in Jesus

If it is true that all the Prophets speak of Jesus, how can we read them this way? How does what we've learned thus far point to the gospel? The answer is found as we understand what the prophets meant by the Day of the Lord

The Day of the LORD

At the time of the Babylonian Exile, the Temple was destroyed, the King was taken prisoner, and Israel was kicked out of the Promised Land. Temple, King, and Land were the pillars of Israel's religion. The question the prophets had to address was: "Is God finished with His covenant people?"

The Day of the LORD

- “Day of the LORD,” “that day,” “the day of,” and “the day when” at least 200 times in prophets
- Sacred Time and Sacred Space: The Day of the Lord is a time in the future when God is present.
 - God has always been **omnipresent**, yet the Bible distinguishes his ongoing providential presence with his special presence to act.
 - Similarly, one could say that **every day** is sacred because God is always active, yet there is a time when God does something new.

Examples of Day of the LORD in the prophets:

Joel 2:1–3

[1] Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, [2] a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

[3] Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them.

Isaiah 63:3–6

[3] “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. [4] For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. [5] I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. [6] I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

Isaiah 13:9–11

[9] Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. [10] For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. [11] I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

What imagery do you notice? Sights, sounds, feel?

- God is Present

- Not Natural Disaster
- Not Human Warfare
- A day or days: future period of time
- Darkness and Fire
- Death and destruction
- War imagery, blood
- Trumpet/Loud Voice/Battle cry
- Weeping/Mourning
- End of world imagery: earthquakes, mountains crumble, sun blotted out

Malachi 3:18-4:2

[18] Then once more you shall see the **distinction between the righteous** and the **wicked**, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

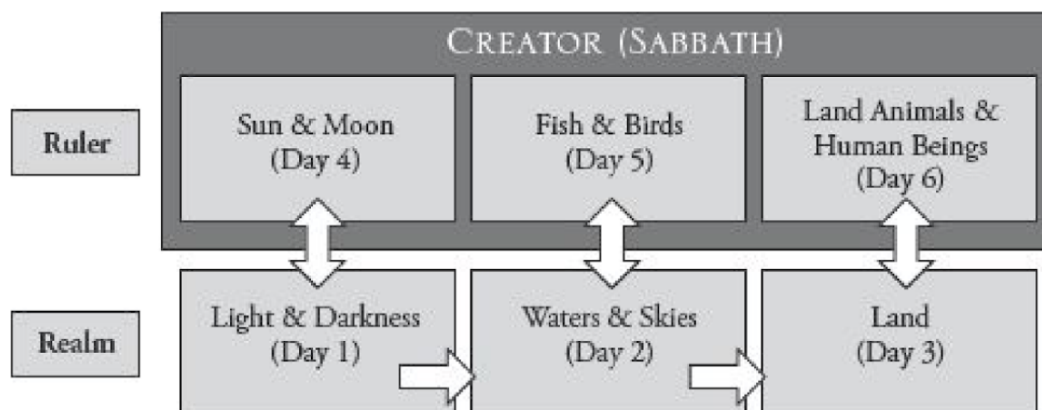
[1] “For behold, the **day is coming**, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all **evildoers will be stubble**. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] **But for you who fear my name**, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall **go out leaping like calves from the stall**.”

Origins of the Day of the LORD, Genesis 1

- Creation days of Gen 1 depict this pattern of God seeing and pronouncing judgment.
 - “And God saw that the light was good.” 1:4
 - Day 1-5 “it was good”
 - Completion of Day 6 “very good”
- God rested on the seventh day; this Sabbath of God is a royal resting, an enthronement on the judgment seat.

1. Drama of Creation Depicts Our Purpose (Gen. 1)

- Notice the movement forward →



The Sabbath is the consummation where God pronounces his verdict.

- Adam and Eve entered the week looking toward the consummation day when the Lord would pronounce their work “good” and they would enter into his glory.

2. Adam’s Fall and the Day of the LORD

- Humanity fails to keep/guard the sanctuary of the Garden. Genesis 3:8 God approaches them in the “cool of the day”.
- Genesis 3:8
- *[8] And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*
 - The translation “cool” (also word for wind or Spirit) makes little sense in the context. The passage depicts the trial and sentencing of Adam and Eve.
- Instead, the “Spirit of the Day” or the “Spirit’s Day” fits with the coming Judgment day that the Day of the Lord invokes. The Lord comes in judgment to prosecute Adam who defiled the sanctuary instead of guarding it.
- He did not exile the serpent, so Adam will be exiled.
- God’s compassion, however, delayed Final Judgment Day
 - Yet, God sets up a weekly Sabbath
 - It is human history in miniature with the Day of Rest

3. Israel under the Covenant of Moses

- Like Adam, Israel is to keep the commandments of God
- Like Adam, if they fail they will be exiled from the Land (stipulations of the covenant in Dt. 28)

4. After Israel’s continual sin, prophets like Amos predict the Day of the Lord

- Judgment comes on Israel, often at the hands of other nations.

Amos 5:18–24

[18] Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light,

[19] as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.

[20] Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

[21] “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

[22] Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.

[23] Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

[24] But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

5. Exiled Israel was not forgotten, though, God would remember his covenant.

- The Day of the Lord becomes
 - A Day of Deliverance for Israel
 - And, A Day of Judgment for the Nations (those outside of Israel)
- Nations subdued and brought into the kingdom of God. Nations bring tribute to Israel's God.
 - Isa 2:2-4
 - Micah 4:1-3
 - Isa 11:10, 19:18-25

Joel 3:18

[18] "And in that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Valley of Shittim.

Isaiah 13:11

[11] I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant,
and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

Judgment against foreign nations

- Jer 50:31 to Babylon
- Ezek 21:29 to Ammonites
- Ezek 26:18 to Tyre
- Ezek 32:10 to Egypt

6. Key on that day will be that the dead will be brought back to life: Resurrection of all of God's people is a sign of that day!

Isaiah 26:19

[19] Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Daniel 12:2

[2] And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

See also: Ezek. 37 "Dry bones coming to life"

Jesus sees these Prophecies fulfilled in His Day

Jesus' first sermon: Luke 4. His text is from **Isaiah 61**: future Jubilee/Sabbath

- Luke 4:18-21

[18] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

[19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

[20] And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. [21] And he began to say to them, "**Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**"

But, why didn't Jesus preach the whole text of Isaiah 61?

Isaiah 61:1-2

[1] The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

[2] to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;

Day of the Lord: Now and Not Yet

- These are the "last days" (1 Pt 1:20, Heb 1:2, 9:26, Act 2:17)
- But not everything predicted about the last days are present now.

1. Sign of the Day of the Lord happens, but only to Jesus and not at the end of time but in the middle of time

- Christ first fruits of the new creation
- Jesus is the first human to enter into consummation rest.
- Christ appeared to his disciples on the first day of the week (Lk 24:13, 24:36 John 20:19, 26)

2. Seventh Day Sabbath moves to First Day Lord's Day

What is significant about the change from

- 6 days of work to enter into the Sabbath Rest to...Rest on first day that leads you into the week.
- What difference does this make to your work week?

3. The Day of the Lord and the Lord's Day

- The uninterrupted rest of the age to come has already begun. By faith we lay hold of Christ's rest and enter into the enjoyment of it (Heb. 4:1-11). We have

put aside our own righteousness and now serve the living God with a clear conscience as the fruit of that rest, not in order to earn it by our sinful works (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Thus every day is a Sabbath rest in Christ.

- However, there is also a not-yet aspect of our rest. We still live in mortal bodies that are weary from earthly toil and labor. We have not yet entered into the final rest that will be given to us when our bodies are raised incorruptible and we behold the Lamb in Immanuel's land.

Lee Irons

The Sabbath is a weekly "rest stop" on our journey to heaven, a foretaste of the eternal rest that awaits us at the end. It is the lamp that lights our path to heaven. It is the downpayment of the future possession.

Lee Irons

Now

- Verdict for God's People: Vindication!
- Blessing of Holy Spirit
- New Creation Begins in Us (2 Cor 5:17)
- Nations come to worship God

Not Yet

- Final Verdict for Godless: Condemnation
- New Creation Fulfilled: all resurrected
- God's Presence Forever

Delay will not last forever

2 Peter 3:8-13

[8] But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

[11] Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! [13] But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Jesus describes a day in the future when he will return.

- It will be with authority, imagery from Daniel 7 "riding clouds"
 - Judgment will be swift and without warning
- (Mt 24:43-44, Luke 12:39-40)

Jesus will sit on the throne and judge sheep and goats

- Matt 25-26
- 1 Thess 5:1-3; 2 Thess 1:7-10

Is the Day of the Lord good news?

"...there must be such a thing as judgment. Judgment—the sovereign declaration that this is good and to be upheld and vindicated, and that is evil and to be condemned—is the only alternative to chaos. There are some things, quite a lot of them in fact, that one must not tolerate lest one merely collude with wickedness."

N.T. Wright Surprised by Hope

"If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence—that God would not be worthy of worship...The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God...My thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many...in the West...[But] it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human non-violence [results from the belief in] God's refusal to judge. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die...[with] other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."

Miroslav Volf *Exclusion and Embrace*

"Can our passion for justice be honored in a way that does not nurture our desire for blood vengeance? Volf says the best resource for this is belief in the concept of God's divine justice."

Tim Keller