
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 19: PROPHETS

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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3. Fall
4. Noah
5. Abraham
6. Patriarchs I
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- 19. Prophets**
20. Exile
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Lecture 19

PROPHETS

Lecture Theme:

God raised up prophets to pronounce judgment and proclaim salvation to his disobedient people, calling them to look to the Savior who would come and serve as God's final Word.

Text:

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 19

A microphone is a tool to communicate and amplify the human voice. It serves to deliver the message of a person speaking through it to those who hear him. The microphone itself does not create the message; it merely brings the words of the speaker to the ears of the intended audience. God used His true prophets in the Old Testament to communicate His Word and will to His people. The prophets were never permitted to concoct their own ideas. God laid a burden on them that constrained them to deliver a message from God Himself. They delivered that message boldly, loudly, and clearly to the nation of God's people. They served as vehicles of the inspired revelation of God Himself. They came from God with, "Thus saith the Lord."

So, who were the prophets? Who was the greatest Old Testament prophet? What function did their God-ordained office include? What were the dominant points of the content of their message? What role did they have in connection to recorded Scripture? What was the prophetic interpretation of what we learned about in the previous lecture regarding idolatry? What does the Bible say about false prophets? And, what is the relationship of the prophets to Christ? What about New Testament prophecy? And, does the threat of false teachers and prophets continue? In the last lecture, we explored the history of Israel from the division of the kingdom until the period prior to exile, but what was God saying to His people during that period? In this lecture, we will consider the place of the Old Testament office of prophet, focusing our attention on God's Word to Israel and Judah during the same period that we covered in the last lecture. In the next two lectures, we'll consider the prophetic message surrounding their exile, and then God's Word to Judah after their return from captivity.

And so, first of all, let's give some consideration to the office of prophet. The prophet was the official spokesman for the Lord. They served as the inspired mouthpiece of God to His people. Some people make the mistake of thinking of prophets and prophecy as referring only to the prediction of future events, but this definition is far

too narrow. Prophets proclaimed God's Word, and sometimes that Word spoke of future events, but more often it was God's message to that current generation. Whenever they spoke, they proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord." Prophets also served as watchman. They reasserted and enforced the law of God given through Moses. They called Israel back to the covenant promises and obligations. Consequently, their dominant call was to repentance: turning from sin and in faith to the Lord. To cite one example, we read in Jeremiah 11:6, "Then the LORD said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them." You will find references to all of the biblical covenants in the prophets, even back to the covenant of works in the garden, the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and reference to the new covenant. But the Mosaic and Davidic covenants are of course prominent.

The prophets also reported inspired writings, so their prophecies, which you find in the books of the prophets, historical books, and Psalms, as we saw in a previous lecture. God commissioned the prophets to reveal the inspired message of God's will to mankind. You will note their repeated introductory phrase, "Thus saith the Lord." This message was rooted in the history of redemption and His previous Word, especially God's law. That means you must know the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, well in order to recognize the connections that you'll find in the prophets. Moses was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament. He alone spoke with God face to face. In Numbers 12:6-8 we read, "And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye afraid not to speak against my servant Moses?" Moses delivered the law and the covenant from God to His people at Sinai. For this reason, all of the subsequent prophets build on the foundation that God laid through Moses.

You will remember that it is two great Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah, [who] appear with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration in the Gospels. In the New Testament, you'll notice many references to the law and prophets. These were held together. For example, note Christ's words in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Later in that same gospel, chapter 22:40, Jesus summarizes the law under love to God and love to neighbor saying that "on these two hang all the law and the prophets." You'll note in Acts 13:15 and 27 that it was still the practice of the synagogue to read and expound the law on the prophets every Sabbath. Prophets have a prominent place in the minds of those living during the New Testament era.

We should also note the presence and threat of false prophets throughout the Old Testament. A man who spoke his own thoughts and words, or who spoke a false message in God's name, was actually to be put to death as you see in Deuteronomy 13. The false prophets often tailored their message to the desires of the people. Jeremiah 6:14 says, "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." In other words, they steered the people away from the Lord's true Word. Micah 3:5 says, "Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him."

Lastly, under this first point you should also remember my counsel in the previous lecture. It is essential that you associate each prophetic book with their audience whether that be northern Israel or Southern Judah or even Gentile nations, such as Nahum speaking to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, or Obadiah speaking to Edom. You also need to connect the prophets with the time period in which they served. This will help with putting the pieces of Old Testament theology together. In this lecture, we are focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on earlier prophets. That would include Isaiah of course and Hosea, Micah, Amos, as well as Elijah, Elisha, and others.

So, we've considered the office of prophet. Second, let's consider the message of the prophets, and here, we begin to see the theology. First of all, the message concerned revelation of God Himself. As with all that we've seen in this course, the prophets, first and foremost, provided a revelation of God Himself. You will see this for example in the repeated words, "that they may know that I am the LORD." For example, you'll find this kind of phrase over 70 times in Ezekiel alone. This was the purpose of the well-known account of Elijah's confrontation of the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He said in I Kings 18:37, "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." You see the same all through the prophets. Remember the words of Isaiah in chapter 40:9 where he proclaims, "Behold your

God!” The whole of that remarkable chapter sets forth the incomparable glory of the Lord. What God’s people needed most was to see, to understand and know God Himself, His character, and His glory. That remains the case in all ages as we saw in our very first lecture.

God’s people were also called to repentance, faith, and obedience, and they were warned of the consequences of refusing God’s call. This message was not just dire gloom and doom. God was actually displaying mercy, calling them to turn from God-defying, soul-destroying sin. One of God’s purposes is for the warning of judgment to turn people from sin. If you saw a neon sign on the side of the road warning drivers that the bridge was out ahead, you wouldn’t be annoyed. You’d be grateful for the merciful warning. The prophet Jonah is a perfect example of this theological point that the pronouncement of judgment served mercifully to turn people from destruction. He was sent by God to proclaim His Word of judgment against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, Israel’s greatest national enemy.

Did you ever wonder why Jonah did not want to deliver this message to the enemies of his people? Well, he delivers the message, and the people repent. And after the repentance of Nineveh and God’s mercy on them, which we read about in Jonah 3, we read Jonah praying in chapter 4 verse 2, “And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.” The message of judgment resulted in mercy. What’s the background for all of this? This is why you need to know the details of your Bible. Go back and read II Kings 14:25. Jonah had experience. He had previously seen God’s proclamation of judgment turn Israel from their sin and display God’s mercy. He understood the theology that you’re learning here, so he feared that his prophetic warning might result in Nineveh finding mercy, and he hated Assyria, so he didn’t want to proclaim judgment. This lesson is why God could say through Ezekiel in chapter 33 verse 11, “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

But, there’s another important theological point in their message. In the previous lecture, we noted the most frequent sin of this period, which was idolatry. We spoke at length about that. In the prophets, we learn how God viewed that sin. So, this is an important theological point. The prophets made clear that idolatry is spiritual adultery and harlotry. Now, this is covenantal language. The imagery of marriage, as you know, was established exclusively between one man and one woman at creation. Then in the giving of the Law, 10 Commandments, at Sinai, we saw that God’s first demand of His chosen people was, “I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods beside me.” The same message is repeated by Christ when He said the first and great commandment was to love God chiefly and comprehensively. God requires an exclusive relationship as a jealous God between Himself and His people. You see this in the second commandment. You see it in places like Exodus 34:10 and verse 14. The Lord’s jealous love for His chosen redeemed wife, His people, demands that she give her heart to no other lover. Isaiah develops this point clearly and fully, repeatedly making reference to *none else* and *no other God*. If you want to consider this briefly, just look at Isaiah 43 through chapter 46 and notice how this is combined with the bridal language throughout his book.

When Israel forgets and forsakes the Lord, she is guilty of gross spiritual adultery. This theme continues through the prophets, and the whole book of Hosea is about this. Or, consider Jeremiah, especially chapters 2 and 3. If you want to get an introduction in Ezekiel, read chapter 16, Isaiah 57, and so on. Even the biblical references to backsliding are set in the context of graphic imagery about spiritual whoredom. To fail to love the Lord with the whole being is to take what rightfully belongs to Jehovah, the Lord’s people’s heavenly Husband, and to offer wicked, perverted spiritual adultery to other lovers, idols. A holy and jealous God is justly offended by this. This explains why the prophets are given by God such graphic imagery to express this concept. We should never be tempted to avoid or soften such language. It is necessarily distasteful, but the cause, the offense, lies with God’s people, not the Lord, Who is a righteous and faithful Husband.

Lastly under this point, the prophetic message also revealed more about the coming Messiah. We learned that deliverance would come through God’s anointed (Habakkuk 3:13). God would raise up unto David a righteous branch and a king that would prosper (Jeremiah 23:5). His name would be Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), and the government would be on his shoulders (Isaiah 9:6). He would be the stem of Jesse and bring the sure mercies of

David. There are so many references to Christ that you must learn to read with an eye for detail and careful study. When you read the New Testament, you'll be struck by the references to seemingly obscure texts in the prophets referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament writers knew their Old Testament well. So should you. You can learn much from studying this New Testament use of the Old Testament references to Christ.

Thirdly, we can connect all of this to the New Testament fulfillment. First of all, of course we must consider the connection to Christ Himself. The prophets pointed forward to Christ. I Peter 1:10–11 says, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and search diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." But not only did they point forward to Him, Christ also became God's last and greatest prophet. Now, we were told this all the way back in Deuteronomy. God had promised to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." Flip forward to the New Testament and there's Peter in Acts 3:22–24 and he proclaims that this text from Deuteronomy was fulfilled in Christ. He says, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A PROPHET SHALL THE LORD YOUR GOD RAISE UP UNTO YOU OF YOUR BRETHREN, LIKE UNTO ME; HIM SHALL YE HEAR IN ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER HE SHALL SAY UNTO YOU. AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT EVERY SOUL, WHICH WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET, SHALL BE DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." Christ is, in other words, the fulfillment of all that the office of prophet represented.

You'll remember that we learned previously the three Old Testament offices that were anointed, prophet, priest, and king, and that all three pointed forward to God's Anointed, the Messiah or Christ. Shorter Catechism question 24 says, "How does Christ execute the office of a prophet? Christ executeth the office of a prophet in revealing to us by His Word and Spirit the will of God for our salvation." Christ reveals God's mind and will to us. He reveals our sinful misery, His provision of salvation, and the fruit of thankfulness born in the life of the believer. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ serves as God's final Word to the world. Remember the words of Hebrews 1 how it opens in verse 1 and the beginning of verse 2, "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." In the New Testament, Jesus is called the Truth (John 14:6), the Word or logos (John 1:1), the Messenger of the Gospel (Luke 4), the giver of the Old Testament, and so on. Christ continues as Prophet in heaven. He reveals to us by His Word and Spirit the will of God. We see the exercise of Christ's prophetic ministry whenever the Bible is read, preached, or sung.

Secondly, we need to consider the New Testament prophets and their relationship to Scripture because we also read in the New Testament of the role of the office of prophets. They had a role in bringing about the completion of New Testament revelation. Thus, they served as a foundation, along with the inspired apostles, for the New Testament church. Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the church "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." After the completion of the Bible, the New Testament office of prophet expired along with the cessation of special revelation from God. All direct revelation from God is now confined to His complete, fully sufficient, and inspired Scriptures. Peter refers to the superiority of our Bibles in II Peter 1:19–21, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." All we need is found in this more sure Word of the Holy Scriptures.

We also need to be mindful of the ongoing threat of false teaching and prophets in the present day. Though the office of prophet has ceased, pretenders and false teachers continue to exercise a threat to the contemporary church just as they did in the Old Testament. Jesus warned in His sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets." The New Testament is full of these warnings calling true believers to exercise spiritual discernment. We find this everywhere. Whenever we hear of God's true message, we also find the rebukes of the counterfeit message of false prophets. So, we read in I John 4:1, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Peter issues the same

warning in II Peter 2:1, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

False teachers are not usually obvious. They sound good. They may seem to be speaking about the Bible, while they are actually really twisting what the Scriptures teach. We cannot be fooled by what initially looks and sounds good. When men come claiming new light, you can be sure it is old error. The time-tested biblical truths contained in the historic creeds and reformed confessions provide an aid in recognizing these old recurring errors. We must hold fast to the truth. Galatians 1:8–9 says, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you then that you have received, let him be accursed.” For this reason, it is essential that believers study diligently their Bibles.

We have to know what God says and why He says it. All teaching must be tested and held up to the Word of God. I Thessalonians 5:21 says, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” The Bereans provide a good example of this in Acts 17:11, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” The Ephesian church was also commended by Christ Himself in Revelation 2:2, “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” These courses that you are studying aim to acquit you in your study of the Bible so that you, in the words of Paul (II Timothy 2:15), can “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” But we need to go on.

We also need to consider spiritual adultery in the New Testament. As should be expected by this point in our course, Jesus also continues into the New Testament with His references to “an evil and adulterous generation,” as you see in Matthew 12:39. Paul speaks several times of keeping the church as the bride of Christ, pure and separate from the world, from idolatry. He says to the Corinthians in II Corinthians 11:2, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” James also employs the same language in chapter 4:4–5, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”

This is covenantal language. You should see that is essential for you to know the vast Old Testament background of this New Testament language in order to appreciate and understand its meaning for the contemporary church. The threat of idolatry continues to the present hour, and God’s view of that idolatry also continues to the present time. The New Testament has a great deal to say to us, warning the New Testament church about the threat of spiritual adultery.

In conclusion, God is never silent. Even in the face of His people’s grave sins, He continued to speak to them through His inspired prophets. The Word of God echoed through the land, calling His people to turn to Him and live. We learn from the prophets the same lesson that Jesus taught in Matthew 4:4, “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” In the next lecture, we will consider the prophetic message that was associated with exile.