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An Introduction to the Prophetic Ministry and Office, Part 4

Over the past chapters, we have arrived at the conclusion that the prophetic office and calling are no longer operative in the church. If you want to read the words of a prophet, you have to go back to the prophetic books of the Bible. Yet that raises the question, why would we want to read the words of a prophet who wrote over 2,400 years ago (in some case, almost 3,000 years ago)? Why study the Old Testament prophets.

In answer to this I have given the anecdotal account of how I became a “fan” of the prophets. Early in my ministry I was discipling a man who wanted to understand the prophets better. This forced me to study them at a deeper level than I had ever done in seminary or before. What I found with each book was NOT irrelevant messages from an out-of-touch holy man, BUT the word of God to a covenant people who were struggling with many if not all of the issues we face today as a church.

- Mysticism.
- False doctrine.
- Worldliness.

- The push for entertainment in our services.
- Division and conflict in the body.
- Wicked, corrupt and immoral leaders.
- An evil day.
- An uncertain tomorrow.
- The issues arising out of false worship.
- And much, much more.

From this I concluded those of us in the church need the prophets. We need to study them. To neglect this corpus is to miss a large commentary on the part of God regarding many of the issues we face today as a people, congregation, and denomination. And yet I realize that this is my personal conviction and not one that may move you to open this portion of God's word. So the questions are these: Is there a more objective reason to study the prophets? Is there anything in the Bible that would compel us, New Testament, to study this portion of the Old Testament?

Indeed there is! And we are going to look at three of them.

The Intent, Design, and Value of the Prophets

The office and calling was given so that God's people might enjoy fellowship with their Lord.

Exodus 19:10-13, "The Lord also said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day [God's people were to prepare two full days to meet the Lord], for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, "Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live." When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.'"

Now, recall the context of this passage. God's people have just been delivered from slavery in fulfillment of God's plan to redeem a people to Himself, thus partially restoring the communion which had been lost through the fall. And so Moses brought God's people to Mount Sinai to fellowship with the Lord; yet he gave them a stern warning: whatever you do, don't violate the holiness of God!

We know the rest of the story. God's people were brought to the Mountain. On account of His awesome character, the mountain was quaking, shaking, with smoke, thunder, and lightning. Fearing for their lives, Israel made the desperate plea for Moses to intervene between God and them such that Moses could receive God's word and relate it to God's people. This pleased the Lord such that He instituted an office which would NOT simply convey the words of God, BUT would in fact be the medium by which God conveyed His word...

Deuteronomy 18:18, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

This is what the prophetic calling was all about! The prophet didn't relay the word of God; rather, what was spoken WAS the word of God! And it was at this point we ask ourselves, "Why the trauma? Why did God bring His people to the mountain only to terrorize them?" The answer is found in Exodus 19.

Exodus 19:16-17, "So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to MEET God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain."

Before sin entered into the world, man enjoyed a love-relationship with God in which the Lord walked among His people, Genesis 3:8! What is man's chief end? Is it not, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever! Well this is what Adam and Eve had with God at creation! But then came their sin and rebellion, and this love-relationship was destroyed, (Genesis 3:24)! No longer would God and man enjoy deep and abiding communion!

Now this separation, this breach of fellowship would give way to God's plan of redemption (which is first referenced in Genesis 3:15). And thus we read this:

Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish My covenant [a relationship based upon promise] between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."

In essence, this was the promise of a restored relationship between God and man in which the communion that man once had with God someday would be enjoyed. Now by way of footnote, with the coming of Christ, this relationship came in its fullness.

Matthew 1:21-23, "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins. Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"

Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan of redemption. In Christ man can enjoy a relationship of "peace with God" (cf. Romans 5:1) that which Adam and Eve enjoyed with God prior to the fall. What does all of this have to do with the prophetic office? Notice again the implications:

Exodus 19:17, "And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain."

God's people weren't brought to Sinai to be terrorized. They were brought there "to meet God." In the context of redemptive history, this speaks of a vivid, deep, and personal communion with God. In other words, Moses brought Israel to Sinai that they might "enjoy God forever!"

Yet the Lord's design behind the Exodus was complicated on account of the glorious and awesome character of God which traumatized His sinful yet redeemed people. So what did God do? He instituted an office, the office of prophet, that would "go between" the Lord and His people such that His people might enjoy deep and abiding communion, yet without the trauma. That is what the prophetic office and minister were all about!

From this we see first and foremost the purpose not only of the Old Testament prophetic witness but every prophetic word: the fellowship and communion of God. Thus, when we turn to the prophetic corpus found in the Old Testament which consists of nothing less than sixteen books or 245 chapters, and 5,336 verses. We must know and understand that every one of them was given that we might fellowship and so commune with God.

You say, "But the Old Testament prophets are hard to read... understand... and so know!" o is Chinese, but I dare say that if a loved one sent you a letter in Chinese prior to their demise, you'd do everything you could to read and understand the letter as originally given. Christian, don't let the age, language, or culture of these books be a hindrance to communing with God through them. Again they were given for this very purpose.

As a Means of Proclaiming Christ

Yet that is not all, the office and calling was given as a means of proclaiming Christ. To see this, let's first consider, the overarching, underlying assumption behind all prophecy. Notice Pater's commentary on the prophetic office:

Acts 3:22-23, "Moses said, 'The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'"

We've examined the verse referenced in this passage. It is found in Deuteronomy 18. Again, the office of prophet was established when God's people sought Moses to be their intermediary between God and them. Through this office Moses became the mouth of God. Yet by the time God's people were ready to enter the Promised Land Moses was an old man! Recall, on account of their rebellion, God's people spent forty years living in the wilderness waiting for God to raise up the next generation who would trust the Lord.

On account of Moses' advanced age God was pleased to pass the prophetic-baton to the next generation. So prior to his death Moses assembled the people of God before Mount Nebo on the northeast side of the Dead Sea. There he gave a final series of sermons to the people. These sermons are recorded in Deuteronomy.

In this sermon series, Moses announced that he was going to be replaced "by a prophet like him." Now, in the short term, this was a passing of the baton to Joshua! Now this brings us to the announcement of Peter in Acts 3 where he informed the people of God that THE Prophet which Moses had in mind when he penned Deuteronomy 18 ultimately was not...

- Joshua.
- Amos.
- Samuel.
- Hosea.
- Joel.
- Isaiah.

Although they all would have been included in the instruction Moses gave the people in Deuteronomy 18. Rather, THE PROPHET that Moses ultimately had in mind was CHRIST! That is Peter's point in Acts 3.

From this I want you to see that God instituted the office of prophet so that ultimately God's people might be introduced to their Lord and Savior! And thus we read as Peter continued.

Acts 3:24: "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, also announced these days"

You must see that Christ wasn't a high point in the history of the prophetic movement; He was THE point and so the fulfillment of every prophetic calling and office. As such we read these words:

1 Peter 1:10-11, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow."

Acts 10:43, "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Truly, Christ is THE prophet whom Moses had in mind. If this is true, what ought we to expect when it comes to the focus and content of the prophetic message?

The Prophetic Message

Revelation 19:10, "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'"

This is an incredible statement at which we briefly looked last time; Christ is the substance and subject of every prophetic work. Did you get that? Now as glorious as this may be, unfortunately it is a potentially misleading statement today. For you see, when Christ came to this earth, He did far more than simply provide the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin; when Christ came in His first advent, He labored to present to God living and holy sacrifices.

John 4:23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

Now, don't miss; the implications here. A major plank in our understanding of God's ultimate plan is the bringing of true worshippers to Himself! Insofar as this is correct, it informs as we seek to understand the redemptive work of Christ!

John 6:38-39, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."

indeed Christ came for the forgiveness of sin, but that was only the beginning. Christ came ultimately to raise a people up on the last day, a work and a grace which has as its focus not so much the beginning of the race, but the end! In fact this colors how we read such statements like this:

Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

If Christ came to present His people to God as true worshippers, we must understand the "salvation" referenced here as involving far more than just redemption, but all that accompanies this glorious work; justification and adoption, yes!; but also sanctification, perseverance in the faith, and glorification. This truly is the salvation Christ came to provide.

When we say that Christ is the subject and substance of the prophetic message, we understand this in its entirety such that we expect a study of the prophets to yield much by way of instruction on the gospel. But as we shall see, it will not end there. We also will be instructed on these themes:

- The Nature of the Kingdom.
- The Essence and Elements of true worship.
- Kingdom Living.
- What service in the Kingdom of God is all about.
- The nature of God-endorsed leadership.
- What it means to live and function as a covenant community.
- The nature and essence of true religion.
- And much, much more.

Our Relationship to the Prophetic Office and Word

Now if Christ is the subject and substance of the prophetic word, and hence its fulfillment, what impact ought this to have on our relationship to the gift and office?

Acts 3:25-26, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways."

This is an interesting passage in that Peter is referencing two of the most revered traditions/doctrines of the Old Testament; the prophetic ministry and the covenant. His point was that both of these find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Speaking of the covenant in Acts 3:25, Peter speaks of the “seed” of Abraham. We know from Paul that the ultimate reference here was Christ...

Galatians 3:16, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ.”

Furthermore, in Acts 3:25 we note the language of “His Servant” which has two Old Testament references:

- The Old Testament Prophets (cf. 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 38:17; Zechariah 1:6).
- “THE Servant of God” as referenced by Isaiah 49:5; Psalm 35:27; Jesus Christ whom we know came as a prophet (Isaiah 50:10).

What’s the point? As we already know Christ is THE fulfillment and essence of the prophetic gift and office we are NOT surprised to read this:

Acts 3:26, “God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.”

What is a surprise is the consequence that this has on our relationship to the prophetic office and ministry. What is that relationship? We now have become, “...the sons of the prophets...” (Acts 3:25a)! In the context of a covenant community, the kingdom of God, or the church, what relationship is involved when we say that someone is the son of someone or something?

Simply that they are disciples, students, and so people who now have an allegiance where there was none before. Such a relationship now exists between us and the prophetic ministry, we have become. Sons and daughters of the prophets! Heirs of their estate which is comprised of sixteen books! Disciples, beneficiaries, and so students of their word!

Having this conviction:

Acts 3:26, “For you first, God raised up His Servant...”

In other words, we aren’t as the people who sat on the outer circle of a meal in which Christ broke bread with His disciples and discussed the nature of the Kingdom of God. Rather we are participants in the meal, ever mindful that each and every word that has proceeded from the mouth of God was/is intended for us!

I hope you claim your inheritance as “a son of the prophets.” Their word and witness belongs now to you!

A Means of Directing God's People TODAY

There is a third reason why the prophetic corpus is valuable to us, the office and calling was given as a means of directing God's people today. In Paul's attempt to correct the mess called the Corinthian church, he instructed God's people as to the nature of the prophetic office and ministry.

1 Corinthians 14:3-4, "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church."

In Paul's attempt to correct the mess called the Corinthian church, he instructed God's people as to the nature of the prophetic office and ministry; later he wrote this:

1 Corinthians 14:31, "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted."

There are many assumptions that we as moderns have when it comes to the Biblical gift of prophecy. Some are good, some are bad, and some are down-right harmful. One such "harmful" assumption is that the prophetic gift/office was not given to produce Scripture BUT to:

- Warn Old Testament Israel that if they didn't repent God would get them.
- Rebuke Old Testament Israel on account of their sin.
- Cry out in the wilderness.
- Generally stir the muck at the bottom of the barrel called Israel.

It is little wonder that most think the Old Testament Prophetic witness as outdated and irrelevant.

Yet look again at the verses we just read. Notice the benefits associated with the Biblical gift of prophecy:

- Edification, 1 Corinthians 14:3.
- Exhortation, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 31.
- Consolation, 1 Corinthians 14:3.
- The Building up of the church, 1 Corinthians 14:4.
- Teaching, 1 Corinthians 14:31.

All of this is a facet of the ministry of "refreshment" (Acts 3:19; Philemon 7); which is such a crucial part of Biblical fellowship and so the body life of any church. Well don't miss it, these things are a major focus and concern of the prophetic witness! If you want to be...

- Edified in your walk?
- Exhorted to keep going when the going gets tough?
- Consoled when you're alarmed, worried, and bothered about so many things?

- Instructed as to the nature, purpose, end, function, and outworking of the Kingdom of God?

Then submit yourself to the prophetic word for that and nothing less is its purpose.

You say, “Indeed I will submit myself to the prophetic word... as it is found in the New Testament, for I doubt that the Old Testament prophetic corpus was written with me in mind!” Family of God, think again, during this trial Stephen told the Sanhedrin:

Acts 7:37-38, “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.’ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers [once again, Christ was the focus of Moses’ words in Deut. 18]; and he [Moses] received living oracles [this is a description of the 16 prophetic books. They aren’t dead works, but living oracles to be read by all God’s people at all times...] to pass on to you.”

Did you get that last phrase? Through the prophetic ministry of Christ, Moses received prophetic oracles to pass on to YOU, which was the Sanhedrin which functioned 1,500 years later! How can this be? We conclude from this that the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament was written with us in mind those living in the last days! Speaking of the Old Testament prophet, Peter said this:

1 Peter 1:12, “It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven- things into which angels long to look.”

Amazing! From this we conclude that when Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, etc. penned their prophetic writings they did so knowing that a later generation would be the ultimate beneficiary. Who is this later generation? All in the inter-adventual period which is YOU and ME! And that is why we are not shocked to read Peter’s exhortation:

2 Peter 3:1-2, “This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles.”

Today when we think of the Old Testament prophetic corpus many emotions and thoughts enter the mind, such as...

- Dread.
- Boredom.
- Intimidation.
- Inaccessibility.

Yet so few experience the thoughts and/or emotions of: anticipation, excitement, zeal, or curiosity. Let’s face it. Few of us have ever considered Isaiah, Haggai, or Malachi as exciting books written

with us in mind. Yet we discover that a large intent on the part of God when He placed these sixteen Old Testament prophetic books in the Bible was so that you and I would be blessed!

Christian, if you have never read the prophets as love letters written with you in mind, you've missed a glorious portion of God's word. Paul wrote:

Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Paul made no qualification in this passage to let us know that he was only speaking about the Psalms and Proverbs- well-beloved and oft-read books of the Old Testament. Indeed. ALL THAT WAS WRITTEN IN THE Old Testament was given that it might encourage us so that we might not lose hope!

Thus, it behooves us all as we approach the Old Testament prophetic witness to wake up, sit up, and, with the zeal and eagerness that always accompanies fellowshiping with Christ, eat up the words of this prophecy. It will at times taste like honey; it will at times leave our bellies feeling sick (cf. Revelation 10:9); but it will at all times be and remain the living and abiding word of God!

May God so bless us as we proceed in our study of this incredible portion of Scripture!

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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