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Prophetic Literature
Diocese of Crookston
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Prophet: Navi (Hb.): meaning “*mouth*”. The prophets are God’s mouthpiece (gives new meaning to getting in trouble for being a big mouth). Being a popular prophet is a contradiction in terms. Being unpopular does not make you a prophet but being a prophet makes you unpopular. Prophets tells us what we do not want to know but what we need to know. Prophets often find themselves not profiting from being a prophet!

“A prophet is one sent by God to form the people of the Old Covenant in the hope of salvation. The prophets are often authors of books of the Old Testament. The prophetic books constitute a major section of the bible. John the Baptist concludes the work of the prophets of the Old Covenant” (CCC Glossary, 895).

- I. Function of a Prophet: Like fax machines they are wired to get God’s urgent message to the people. Their message is more than just speech but the embodiment of God’s word. Their essential function is to bring people back to God. How can you tell a true prophet from a false prophet? In principle, there are two reasons.
 - A. (1) Jesus: “By their fruits you shall know them” (Mt. 7:16); (2) Moses: At the end of Moses’ life, he warns the people of God that there will be false prophets and the way you can tell is just wait. In time you will know if their word is true or not (James 1:4). Only God bats 1000!
 - B. Why does Paul rank prophesy as the greatest among the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:13, 14:1). Because it edifies and builds up the Church. The will of God expressed in the word of God is food for the body of Christ. To know the right thing to do is food for the journey (scripture passage for scripture being reproachable for all things). A true prophet makes the gospel message compelling to an outside observer. There are three essentials to knowing how a prophet edifies his Church: (1) Knowing God’s mind; (2) Doing God’s will; (3) Sharing in God’s life. These three are interconnected!
 1. We cannot do the will of the Father and participate in his divine nature if we do not know his ways. Prophets are our lifelines and our eternal destiny is at stake. We must live with a sharper understanding of that “Thus says the Lord”.
 - C. Among OT Judaism leadership, there were always three key roles: Priest, Prophet, and King (we are baptized into this threefold office). Every society needs these three. Consider the ship with his navigator, first mate and captain. We see this just not in OT literature, but in literature classics as well.
 1. Lord of the Rings: Gandalf/Frodo/Aragorn...Star Trek: Mr. Spock/Dr. McCoy and Captain Kirk...and even Jesus had his inner three in James/Peter/John.

- D. Understanding and Reading the Prophets: The earliest prophets wrote either historical books (Moses and Samuel) or no books at all (Elisha/Elijah). Collectively, there are 16 prophetic books: 4 major and 12 minor. The four major books are more profound, exalted, and wide-ranging (Isaiah/Jeremiah/Ezekiel/Daniel). The 12 minor, no less important in the story of salvation history are comprised of...
1. Each prophetic book must always be read in light of the historical context, which includes the background stories and the problems confronting the prophets.
 - a. In addition, we must understand the kind of poetry being unleashed in the OT prophetic literature. We must understand that OT poetry are words being unleashed upon the canvas of salvation history. Remember it is God who speaks, we need to have more than just a good ear and mind, but a good ear and mind to the heart (Prov.4:23). We must read it with an intuition. Some have said that it is mystical.
 2. OT prophet vs. prophet of today. The OT gift of prophecy was a select few for the whole of the Church. These prophets are canonical prophets. The gift of prophesy waters the trees in the Deposit of Faith, again, edifying the Church from within.
 - a. Who are today's prophets? The Popes and Bishops for sure. The Church as a whole is a prophet as she is a sign of unpopularity. Unwilling to edit her message, she continues to provoke the most emotional of sentiments. In the words of G.K. Chesterton: "I don't want to tell me when I'm right, but a Church that tells me when I'm wrong". In the words of kreeft, just as the cavity does not like to see the dentist so the world is not fond of the church.
 - b. The twofold message of the prophet: Repent...a turning away to turn towards (*Consult Word of the Week on Repentance from website*). This message reminds us of the reality of two: roads that need maps and signs towards destination/rooms that need doors and knobs to enter!

II. History surrounding the prophets: 1 and 2 Kings: The story of Israel and its fall. Solomon was a man of wisdom for many reasons. One to note here is his ability to handle wealth and not be corrupt by it (sign of the beast). He built the most beautiful temple man had ever seen (the passion and commitment was just as admirable as the handling of finance)...truly a place for the holy of holies to reside. In light of this it is important to consider what the destruction of the temple meant to the Israelites.

- A. Later in life, Solomon's pagan wives would turn him away from God. Ultimately, he would no longer worship God, but gods and a man with a divided heart left a divided kingdom (deeper spiritual truth). Solomon let the woman choose the gods and not God to choose the woman. He left

mixed signals for his son to interpret. Ultimately, this would lead to civil unrest and the first Camelot was no more.

B. First Kings ends with a divided Kingdom and is a commentary to the slippery slope of the wayward lifestyle of the two Kingdoms to destruction. It is a commentary of two kings and two set of Kingdoms with the Assyrian exile of Israel in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian captivity of Judah in 586 B.C (three-phase deportation).

1. The nine dynasties that came into power in the N did so by murdering the previous kings
2. One dynasty, the line of David, remained in the house of David (2 Sam.7:10-17).
3. It was during this period that we have entering the stage of salvation history most of the great prophets (remember the essential role and function).
 - a. Elijah is among the greatest of all prophets as he represents the whole people of prophets in the Transfiguration. Consider how he prepares the way for Christ in more than just a symbolic way, but in concrete tangible meaning.

Elijah	Christ
1) 1 kings 17:22-23...healing child and giving Child to mother	Lk.7:14-15
2) 1 Kings 19:8...fasted for 40 days/night on behalf of Israel	Mt.4:1-11
3) ...Ascended to Heaven (chariot of fire)	Mk.16:19

C. Jeroboam II: During the reign of this Israelite King, the commercial and colonial activity of the Phoenicians was at its peak in the Mediterranean world, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel shared in its profits that flowed from the exchange of goods and services. Moreover, Jeroboam's conquests in the Transjordan region gave him control of the trade route from Syria and evidently of the commercial highways from Arabia. Samaria thus became an epicenter luxurious capital and wealth.

1. The price for this prosperity, however, was an oppressive social pyramid with royal courtiers and the merchant class at the top of people ground into the poverty at the bottom.
 - a. Amos prophesied against this social injustice (Amos 3:9-10).
 - b. Hosea excoriated Israel for supposing that its agricultural prosperity sprang from worshiping the Baal (Hebrew word meaning "husband"—cf. Jn.4:16-26) and their illicit sexual activity, sacrifice at high places, and worship in the form of bulls (Hos2:2-13, 4:13-14, 13:1-2).

D. Hosea and Amos: Both of these prophets have enormous roles in the time of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam II. They are contemporaries of

each other. I would like to briefly discuss the inner themes of both. Consider how their vocational experience prophets reveal their characteristic styles and themes (true of larger prophetic picture).

1. Hosea: Name means “salvation”. Closely related to Joshua and Jesus. Hosea is indeed a Christ like figure (also a derivative of Israel’s last King, Hoshea. Again, in antiquity, the name is the message (consider archangels). Hosea saved and redeemed his wife (bought back) from the slave market, as God was to redeem his people from the slave market of sin at the price of his own blood.
 - a. The Lord calls Hosea to take an unfaithful wife to show Israel what it means to be betrayed, Hosea’s grief and personal suffering (the call to marry a harlot) is that of God’s with Israel.
 - b. What is seen as unjust punishment to the secular eye is nothing more than radical love. Forgiveness and punishment go hand in hand. God the Father teaches this truth to all parents! Essentially, the prodding, pruning, edging, etc...of this lifetime is to purify us for the nuptial chamber! The deeper truth of Hosea is rooted in contrition and covenant relationship. God is a jilted lover!
 - c. Suffering is part of God’s allurements, the essence of courtship (Deus Caritas Est).
 1. Three stage cycle of Hosea, which is a microcosm of salvation history: sin (spiritual adultery); suffering (consequence of sin); and redemption...crime and punishment is only 2/3 of the story.
- E. Amos: Name means “burden”. For a prophet loves his people and must bear the burden of announcing doom upon a nation, the burden that only love can know. He is most noted for his condemnation of external religious ceremony that is not accompanied by interior conversion of heart. The OT prophet of social justice prophesies that the tribes in the north will be carried of into exile, and a generation later, this takes place when the Assyrians destroy Samaria in 722 B.C.
 1. Like that of Hosea, God uses Amos to remind them that their ways of evil will demand his punishment (expression of love), especially because they were a people that once belonged to God and no longer heed the Law of Moses. Divine punishments are divine goodness. Three principle sins were condemned: (1) Liturgical abuse; (2) Sexual sin (3) social and economic sin.
 2. Amos offers a message of hope that is not camouflaged. A message of restoration that details a plan of exile and suffering. Remember that hope sees the potential of the yet unseen, and the prophets are mouthpieces that offer the workout for the prize yet unattained. Recall, despite being dubbed the prophet of doom, he does offer respite in his promise, “*there will be a remnant of Joseph that will survive and practice justice*”.