**An Introduction to Types of Prophetic Literature**

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*In modern study of the prophets, the most important aspect of study is to know the historical setting.*

*As you read the prophetic books, understand that they’re a scrapbook compilation. Ezekiel is the exception to the rule. It’s organized from start to finish as one formal, organized work. Most of the prophetic works aren’t chronological – sort of like a snowball; it’s sometimes easier to add things at the beginning or at the end. Note that some forms used in prophetic literature will be prose, while some are poetic.*

***Prose Forms:***

* Symbolic action (Is 20:1-6; Ez 4:1-3; 5:1-4)
* Commissioning report (Is 6; Jer 1:1-10; Ez 1-3)
* Vision report (Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4 – move from clearly understood to needing interpretation)
* Legend (2 Kgs 2:23f; 4:1-7)
* Prophetic historiography (Is 36-39; Jer 50)
* Biography (Jer 37-44)

***Introduction to Hebrew Poetry:***

While we are aware of English poetic convention (verses, meter, rhyme), pursuit of patterns of stress has been so inconclusive in Hebrew writing that Many modern interpreters have given up trying. In its place, Israelite poetry is more easily identified by the heightened frequency of qualities present even in prose:

* Terseness
* Metaphor
* Parallelism/repetition (classically seen in three forms)
  + Synonymous (see Ps 91:14; 117:1)
  + Antithetic (see Pro 10:1; 11:1,6)
  + Synthetic (perhaps better seen as a type of intensification, advancing a though forward; see Ps 18:4; Sgs 2:4)

***Poetic Speech Forms in the Prophets:***

Proclamations of judgment: often in legal form (imitating elements from the law court):

* Indictment and sentence/judgment oracle (Jer 6:16-21; Is 9:7-20 + 5:25-30; 10:5-11)
* “Woe oracle – public grief (Is 10:1-4)
* Covenant lawsuit (Mi 6:2-7)

***Oracles of Salvation (as with the above, delivered in divine 1st person):***

(See Is 2:2-5; 4:2-6; 9:1-6; 30:18-26; 35:1-10; 41:1-20

***Forms from the sphere of ritual/worship (imitating elements of Temple worship):***

* Lament (Jer 8:18-9:3)
* Hymn (Hab 3:2-15)
* Song (Is 5:12)

***“Sensus plenior”***– *Older writings can give a fuller sense of the promise (Jn 11:49) - Caiaphus was saying more than what he understood. OT prophetic texts can have deeper meaning than what was originally intended. Namely, that prophecy was written for an age, but increases in meaning over time.*

**AMOS**

Amos was from Tekoa, which is in the south, but prophesied in the north. Amos references Bethel in Samaria, which is right on the border between the north and the south – prophesying c. 760-750 BCE. Expelled from the royal sanctuary at Bethel and commanded not to prophesy there again, Amos perhaps returned to Judah and wrote down the essence of his public preaching in substantially its present form.

***The book falls into three parts:***

* Chapters 1 - 2, oracles (speeches) against Israel’s neighbors
* Chapters 3 – 6, indictment of Israel itself for sin and injustice; words of denunciation
* Chapters 7 – 9, visions (appearances) of Israel’s coming doom.

Amos became the first in a brilliant succession of prophets whose words, now preserved in written form, have left heir indelible stamp on later thought about God and human history.

**THEMES**

* **Yahweh is sovereign over all the nations:** Chapters 1-2; the prophet begins a word addressed to all kingdoms, mainly to the house of Israel, which is part of a series of tiny kingdoms. Amos points his finger at all the other nations, then turns on the people of Israel. Yahweh is at work in all nations, and is interested in justice in the land of Israel.
* **Social Justice begins with Amos** (Chapter 2:6-8; 8:4-6); changing the measure by what we sell/market; the same people who are cheating others during the week are going to church and confessing their sins each Sunday
* **Covenant promises lead to covenant threats:**

Amos reminds the Israelites of the covenant promise at Sinai – “If you keep my commandments…” Israelites lost a sense of the power/meaning/purpose of the word of God.

* **Amos warns of coming doom:** Chapters 7 – 9; regardless of how wealthy Israel has become, the culture is rotten at the core.
* **Care for the community**: Chapter 6; the people are so full of eating, drinking, and wealth – they have forgotten their poor roots. Israelites have lost the communal dimension of their faith.
* **Amos is looking for a change of heart:** Chapter 4:6ff; prophets are like physicians who read the symptoms of the body and forewarn patients on where they’re heading if they don’t take care of themselves. Chapter 5:14-15 – *“See good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”*

***HAPPY ENDING -*** *Chapter 9:14 – “I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them”*

**HOSEA**

*The Book of Hosea stands first in that part of the Latter Prophets called the Book of the Twelve, also known as the Minor Prophets because of the brevity of the books in comparison with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. His ministry is about 750-732 BCE, which overlaps with AMOS. Hosea’s ministry dramatizes his message. Although the book is divided into two uneven parts (chapter 1-3; 4-14) and present serious textual difficulties, it is thoroughly unified by the dominant theme of divine compassion and the love that will not let Israel go. At the heart of Hosea’s preaching is a gospel of redeeming love.* (NRSV – Oxford)

* Hosea 6:6-7 – *“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”* [HESED – loving-kindness]
* God’s rejection of Israel is intense. Hosea 9:15 – *“Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their officials are rebels.”*
* Hosea uses parenting language when describing the relationship between God and Israel. Hosea 11:1 – *“When Israel was a child, I love him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”*
* Hosea 2:16-20 *- “I am your God; you are my people.” After I walk away from them and come back, I will be betrothed to you in mercy, loving-kindness, righteousness, justice, faithfulness and love. It’s an echo of an ancient marriage vow.*

MENTIONED IN CLASS:

zedekah ... mishpat ... emeth ... rachmim ... hesed ... and yadaya.

Basic Hebrew Terminology: <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Glossary/Common_Terms/Common_Terms.html>