

Lecture One. Overview: the Prophetic Writings and their Christian Understanding.

1. The distinction between *Torah* (the Law), *Nviim* (the Prophets), and *Ktuvim* (the Writings). The prophetic mission: appointed by God to receive revelation, to announce His word, and to give witness to the Torah and encouraging its observance.

2. The four senses of Scripture – see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §100-§130.

– the *literal* sense: what the human author under divine inspiration intends

– the spiritual senses: what the Holy Spirit intends when inspiring the human author

– the *allegorical (typological)*: Christ recapitulates the life of His People (correcting what was wrong, completing what was incomplete, sanctifying what was sinful).

– the *tropological (moral)*: not only commandments but accounts of virtue and vice, including stories that bring out moral lessons

– the *anagogical (sacramental, eschatological)*: indications of the four last things (death, judgment, heaven, hell) and the means by which God has given to return to Him

3. The history of prophecy. Prophets and oracles were quite common throughout the ancient near east, but they are distinctively different in Israel, for the authority of the prophets is superior to that of king and people in a way that is otherwise unparalleled. Abraham, Aaron, Miriam are called prophets: Gen 20:7, Numbers 12:2-8, Ex 7:1, Ex 15: 20. Moses is called a prophet: Deut. 18:13-18, 34:10-11. Deborah (Judges 4:4). From Samuel's time (c. 1040 BC) the office of prophet is tied to the office of kingship.

(A) The formative period (1100-750 BC) prior to the first written collection of oracles. First, the *roaming prophets* who fell into ecstasy and delivered oracles, to the accompaniment of music and dance (1 Sam 10:5-13, 19:18-24). Samiel is a *prophetic priest* who designates, first, Saul (1 Sam 9:11–10:16) and then David (1 Sam 16:1-13) as king over Israel. Nathan is a *court prophet* at Jerusalem who can freely advise (2 Sam 7:1-17) and admonish (2 Sam 12:1-15) King David. There are *sanctuary prophets* such as Abijah at Shiloh who prophesied the success of Jereboam's rebellion (1 Kings 11:27-39) and Jereboam's removal by the Lord (1 Kings 14:1-2). There were also such prophets at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 23:11; 35:4). Some of these prophets rebuked their kings, such as Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:22-24), Jehu ben Hanani (1 Kings 16:1-3), and Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kings 22:5-8), who exhibits a priority of reason over ecstasy by contradicting the advice of the ecstatic prophets to King Jehoshaphat (870-848 BC) and is vindicated by the results of battle (1 Kings 22:5-38). Likewise, Elijah's steadfast devotion contrasts with the ecstatic prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40).

(B) The pre-exilic and early exilic era (750-587 BC): concerned with (1) calling Israel and Judah to repentance for neglecting to live up to the covenant; (2) God's coming judgment in the form of invasion by such powers as Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon, (3) the preservation of a faithful remnant (Amos 9:8; Isaiah 4:3, 8:16-20, 10:20-23, and 37:32; Micah 2:12 and 4:7; Zephaniah 2:7 and 3:12-13; and Jeremiah 23:3), and (4) the coming of a divine Messiah (Isaiah 9:1-6, 11:1-9; Micah 5:1-3; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23-31 and 37:24-28. Amos, the first prophet whose oracles are preserved in written form, dissociates himself from the ecstatic prophets (Amos 7:14). Amos and Hosea (760-700 BC) are prophets of the northern tribes (Israel); all the others come from Judah, beginning with Isaiah and Micah, and later (635-587) Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Ezekiel. There appear to have been no writing prophets during the repressive era of Manasseh (687-642), and some prophets were martyred in this period (2 Kings 21:16). The names of some other prophets are known, including Huldah – a prophetess who supported the reforms of Josiah (2 Kings 22:14-20) – and Uriah – a prophet who died a martyr under Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26: 20-23). False prophets deserved to be chastised (Micah 3:5-6; Zephaniah 3:4; Jeremiah 5:13 and 23:9-40; Ezekiel 13:1-23; Amos 2:11-12; Isaiah 9:14-15).

(C) The late exilic era (587-538 BC): prophets who received their call outside the Promised Land: Ezekiel (Ez 1:1–3:21), who prophesied the coming exile of Judah and raising up of the people from death to new life (Ezekiel 36:24-42; 37:1-14); Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40:1-11), who prophesied the end of the Babylonian exile and the new covenant (Isaiah 48:6-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34). The early prophesies envision a restoration of the Davidic line (Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 37:24-28), but Second Isaiah calls the pagan King Cyrus the servant and messiah who will end the exile (Isaiah 45:1-7) and envisions the restoration of Zion as the result of divine grace (Isaiah 42:1-12 and 54:1-17).

(D) The post-exilic era (538-250 BC): male and female prophets working near the Temple (Zechariah 7:3, Nehemiah 6:14) and focusing on the priesthood, the Law, and the liturgy (Haggai 1:1–2:9; Zechariah 3:1-10; Malachi 1:6–2:9). A vision of God protecting Judah while overthrowing the gentiles (Joel 3:1–4:21; Zechariah 12:1–14:21, Obediah 1-21); at the same time a vision of God’s redemption as including the gentiles (Isaiah 56:1-7, 66:18-23; Zechariah 14:16-19). The book of Jonah shows God’s mercy to the gentiles and the Jews (Jonah 3:1-10). Some of these writings exhibit God’s universal judgment at the end of history (Obediah 1-21 Joel 3:1–4:21, and Zechariah 12:1–14:21).

5. Covenant(s) – in a sense many, in another sense two, and in yet another sense only one.

- with Adam and Eve (Gen. Chs. 2-3)
- with Noah (Gen. Chs. 8-9)
- with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (e.g., Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18; Lev. 26:42, 45; see Ps. 105:8, 106:45, 111:5)
- with Moses (e.g., Ex 6:5-7, 29:45)
- with David (e.g., 2 Sam.7)
- the promise of the New Covenant (Jer.31:31-34)
- the new Covenant in Christ

(A) Covenant as one of *the* main theological idea of the Scriptures.

- the phrases “Old Testament” and “New Testament”
- the frequency of this idea in describing the relation of God to the Chosen People, of Christ to the Church, of Christian spouses to one another
- the significance of questions about whether any covenant that God has ever established with His people might become obsolete or be superceded?
- the alternatives include a notion that God might have plural independent covenants, running on parallel tracks until the end of history
- neither of these notions is correct: no supercession, no independent parallel tracks
- rather, what is needed is a distinction: in one sense, *one*; in another sense, *two*; in another, *many*.

(B) The case of Exodus and Deuteronomy and the use of sovereignty treaties from the ancient Near East:

- a multi-part treaty: introduction of the parties and a history of their relations (lord and vassal); stipulations (commandments); blessings and curses; the swearing of an oath.
- the recapitulation of this structure in many of the speeches of “Moses” in Deuteronomy

(C) The series of covenants in the course of the Old Testament:

- Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah
- the frequent misunderstandings of evil and suffering because of the failure to grasp what changed between Adam and Noah
- the persistence of the covenantal relation throughout the breakage and renewal of the covenant

(D) The coming of Christ and the events of the Passover

- a new Covenant in his blood
- the liturgical reminders of this at every Mass

(E) St. Paul on the relation of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant in Romans 11

- grafting the vine back into the stock.