

Introduction to the Prophets – Session One



Strasbourg Cathedral Notre Dame Prophets - Gothic

Joshua. Judges. I Samuel

Definition of Prophet: Prophet is a human being who is an intermediary who transmits a divine message of God to a third party. It is just a message – It doesn't have to be about the future.

The Three Major Stories of the Hebrew Bible (plus a fourth)

- Exodus (Passover) Bondage – Liberation
- Exile in Babylon Grief – Longing
- Priestly Story Sin-Guilt-Sacrifice-Forgiveness
- The story of David the King: The pinnacle of Jewish history

The Former Prophets: *Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings*

The Latter Prophets

Major Prophets: *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel*

Minor Prophets: *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum
Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*

Readings from Session One:

- *Genesis* 11: 1 – 9
12: 1 – 4
- *Joshua* 1: 1 -17
4: 1-9
6: 1 – 10
13: 1 – 6
- *Judges* 3:1 - 11
- *I Samuel* 2:1 - 11
3:1 - 21
6:10 - 16

Books of the Old Testament (Jewish Bible / Hebrew Bible)

<i>Torah (Law)</i>	<i>Nevi'im (Prophets)</i>	<i>Kethuvim (Writings)</i>
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
Leviticus	Samuel	Job
Numbers	Kings	Song of Songs
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The Twelve Minor Prophets	Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra-Nehemiah
		Chronicles

Books of the Christian Old Testament (Protestant Church)

<i>Torah</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Wisdom & Poetic</i>	<i>Prophetic</i>
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Ezekiel
Numbers	1 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Lamentations
Deuteronomy	2 Samuel	Song of Solomon	Daniel
	1 Kings		<i>(Minor Prophets)</i>
	2 Kings		Hosea
	1 Chronicles		Joel
	2 Chronicles		Amos
	Ezra		Obadiah
	Nehemiah		Jonah
	Esther		Micah
			Nahum
			Habakkuk
			Zephaniah
			Haggai
			Zechariah
			Malachi

Chronology

2,500 b.c.e.**	<i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i> written (includes the story of Ut-napishtim, a man virtuous enough to be given divine guidance to save his family and a remnant of all living things by building an ark in the primordial time of the universal flood, when the gods decide to destroy the human race.) ***(Utilizing genealogies from the Bible, the time between the flood and the birth of Abram is estimated somewhere between 300 and 1200 years.)
1,800 b.c.e. **	Abram leaves Ur with Sarai to go to the land of Canaan
1,300 b.c.e.	Moses leads Hebrews out of Egypt Joshua leads conquers Canaan
1030 – 1010 b.c.e.	Saul
1010 – 970 b.c.e.	David
970 – 931 b.c.e.	Solomon
722 b.c.e.	Fall of Samaria (Israel – the Northern Kingdom)
700 b.c.e.	Isaiah 1 – 39
600 b.c.e.	Isaiah 40 - 55
588 b.c.e.	Fall of Jerusalem (Judah - The Southern Kingdom) - defeated by Assyria
586 b.c.e.	Exile in Babylon begins (Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon)
538 b.c.e.	Some Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem (Cyrus the Great [Persia] attacked Babylon in 539 and allowed some Jews to leave the following year)
515 b.c.e.	The second temple is built
400 b.c.e.	Isaiah 56 - 60
4 – 1 b.c.e.	Birth of Jesus
30 c.e.	Crucifixion of Jesus
68 c.e.	Destruction of Temple in Jerusalem

“The Walls Came Tumbling Down” – Reading Joshua

Joshua is a difficult book for us to read, for a number of reasons. First, its main theme is the conquest of the land of Israel. Few of us care to read stories of conquest, because war evokes great ambivalence. It isn't pretty. During the recounted battles, Israel practiced *cheirem*, a ban or proscription against conquered places – “exterminate[ing] everything in the city with the sword: man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and ass” (6:21). Furthermore, almost half of the book is comprised of long (boring) lists. To complicate matters, it is extremely unlikely that the *Book of Joshua* represents what really happened. In the words of a recent commentator: “Hardly any of the material it preserves is the sort that can be directly used for historical reconstruction.” Thus, the real question to ask about Joshua is: “Why would anyone have told the early history of Israel in this fashion?”

The present state of the evidence does not enable historians to reconstruct how the people Israel came into being, and how they came to possess their land. This much however is generally conceded:

- A people called Israel existed in the land by the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E.;
- Someone conquered *some* of the cities that the Bible claims Joshua conquered;
- It is difficult to discern who conquered them (we know that the Sea People, including the Philistines, were also settling in the area at this time and taking over population centers);
- One reason that the conquerors' identity is obscure is because Israelite artifacts are practically the same as those of other local groups living at this time;
- Of the cities that according to Joshua were conquered in the period, archeological evidence for many of those sites show no signs of conquest;
- This period meanwhile shows a remarkable upsurge of new settlement in the central hill or highland area of the country; and
- Egypt's longstanding political control over the area of Canaan had waned by this time.

The LORD gave to Israel the whole country which He had sworn to their fathers that He would assign to them; they took possession of it and settled in it. The LORD gave them rest on all sides, according to all He had promised to their fathers on oath. Not one man of all their enemies withstood them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the good things which the LORD had promised to the House of Israel was lacking. Everything was fulfilled. (Joshua 21:41 – 43; in some editions, vv. 43 – 45)

The biblical authors had little interest in the past for its own sake. Typically, they retold or fashioned stories about the past for didactic, theological, or political reasons. Thus, it is significant that Joshua does not end when we reach the summary

in 21:41 – 43 (quoted above). This would have been an ideal ending for the book if it were concerned only with land-tenure and justifying the later Israelite's possession of the land. But Joshua is about more than that. In the book's final form, its last three chapters proceed to make its main point. They focus, in different ways, on obedience to God. These chapters are bursting with Deuteronomistic terminology. Here the premise of land is conditional. In chapter 24 a historical reprise emphasizes God's salvation of Israel from the time of Abraham until entry into the land (24:3 – 13). Immediately following that passage, however, is one in which Joshua gives the nation a choice as to which god they want to follow (vv 14 – 15). And that, in turn, is followed by a warning that if Israel forsakes God, "He will turn and deal harshly with you and make an end of you" (v. 20)

– Marc Zvi Brettler (from *How to Read the Jewish Bible*)

Major Themes in Joshua and Judges

- God's covenant requires commitment
- Israel failed over and over (except Judah)
- Violence and destruction "God of the Old Testament"
- Stories are not chronological in Joshua and Judges
- Perceived need for a king

World view prior to Abraham – *static = I am going to do what my father did – No hope of change, no such thing as a future different than the present.*

Worldview of Hebrews at beginning of Joshua:

- Abraham promised great nation by God - Future
- Law of Moses
- Henotheism – one God per nation (The Ten Commandments tell us "... no other gods before me..." [for the people of Israel]. Implied that other nations may have their own gods.

Session Two Topics: I Samuel (8 – 31), II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings (1 – 14), Amos, Isaiah (1 – 39)

How to Read the Jewish Bible by Marc Zvi Brettler, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2005