

Biblical Prophecy is the progressive revelation of God’s redemptive plan throughout history. “Surely the Lord does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the Prophets.” Amos 3:7

A) PROPHETIC VISION – this is without question one of the greatest needs in the Church today. Vision is thought of in terms of projecting an objective or conceptual development from a corporate perspective. In the context of prophecy, Vision a Spiritual gift that is developed as we allow our imagination to integrate Biblical Literacy [IQ or knowledge of God’s Word] and Spiritual Formation [EQ or relational experience with God] into wisdom, discernment, and insight... it is in essence thinking God’s thoughts in our context and place. The cultivation of the intellect [IQ] without the cultivation of the relational heart [EQ] has distorted Biblical Discipleship. Jesus made this truth clear in His teaching on the Greatest Commandment Matthew 22:37-40 – Love the Lord your God with all your heart [EQ] and with all your soul [morals & ethics, values & priorities] and with all your mind [IQ]. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. **The consistent message of the prophets is that God’s people and their leaders have failed to live in accordance to the Greatest Commandment [AKA the “Shema” – Deuteronomy 6:4-5].**

1. **The Death of the Imagination in the Modern Evangelical World – Dr David Eckman of Western Seminary has observed that: “The only thing that Evangelicals use the imagination for is not to have dirty thoughts. Yet the role of the imagination is crucial in reforming our emotions and our view of who we are – giving us radical permission to have a transparent relationship with God. This gives us the basis for controlling our moods, desires, and appetites – that is managing our emotions. If we allow God to place healthy Scriptural pictures within our minds... this leads in turn to healthy perspectives, healthy relationships, and healthy emotions.”**
 - a. **This progression can be seen in an integrated self-image as follows:**
Vision <=> Wisdom <=> Imagination <=> Knowledge & Experiences <=> Perspective <=> Relationships <=> Emotions <=> Desires <=> Sexuality
 - b. **God never intended human life to be anything but a healthy integrated self-image flowing out of our identity in relation to God and one another, where our interior life [who we are] gives guidance to our exterior life [what we do].**
2. **The Kingdom of God and Prophetic Vision are Revealed in Scripture in Redemptive History – note the relational connections in these three progressive movements:**
 - a. **First – Israel in Exile – 586 to 516 BC => Prophetic Vision revolved around:**
 - i. **The end of Israel’s exile.**
 - ii. **Israel being forgiven for her betrayal and failure of seeking out and following God.**
 - iii. **A new ‘seed’ would emerge – a new people of God => the remnant.**
 - iv. **A new and restored homeland.**
 - v. **A new covenant – written on the heart, not on tablets of stone.**
 - vi. **A new Temple established.**
 - vii. **Israel vindicated over her enemies.**

- viii. The net result => a new global identity where all nations would come together in a new Zion [the place of the Lord]... leading to new spiritual identity... a cosmic new creation.
- b. Second – Israel in Waiting – 516 BC to 29 AD => the inter-testament period... 400 years of prophetic silence between the last Old Testament writing and the first New Testament writing; where Prophetic Vision revolved around:
 - i. A remnant that returns to Jerusalem, but there is a sense that the people really haven't returned to God... something is wrong.
 - ii. Reconstruction of the walls and Temple is the focus of the return to Jerusalem – The dates of Zechariah's recorded messages are best correlated with those of Haggai and with other historical events. All dates are BC:
 1. Haggai's first message (Ezra 5:1; Hag 1:1-11) – Aug. 29, 520
 2. Resumption of the building of the temple (Ezra 5:2; Hag 1:12-15). The rebuilding seems to have been hindered from 536 to c. 530 (Ezra 4:1-5), and the work ceased altogether from c. 530 to 520 (Ezra 4:24) – Sept. 21, 520
 3. Haggai's second message (Hag 2:1-9) – Oct. 17, 520
 4. Beginning of Zechariah's preaching (Hag 1:1-6) – Oct./Nov., 520
 5. Haggai's third message (Hag 2:10-19) – Dec 18, 520
 6. Haggai's fourth message (Hag 2:20-23) – Dec 18, 520
 7. Tattenai's letter to Darius concerning the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 5:3-6:14). There must have been a lapse of time between the resumption of the building and Tattenai's appearance – 519-518
 8. Zechariah's eight night visions (Zec 1:7-6:8) – Feb. 15, 519
 9. Joshua crowned (Zec 6:9-15) – Feb. 16, 519
 10. Repentance urged, blessings promised (Zec 7-8) – Dec. 7, 518
 11. Dedication of the temple (Ezra 6:15-18) – Mar. 12, 516
 12. Zechariah's final prophecies (Zec 9-14) – After 480(?)
 - iii. The Temple is cleansed and rededicated, but the priesthood is still corrupt and Jewish leaders are still influenced by the Pagan culture and Israel is still oppressed... something is still wrong.
 - iv. However, this period served to intensify the longings of God's faithful remnant.
- c. Third – Israel's exile is over – 29 AD => a new transcendent reality is introduced... Messiah has come! Prophetic Vision revolved around:
 - i. The exile is over – Mark 1:5.
 - ii. Israel is forgiven – Mark 1:4.
 - iii. The people of God have been reconstituted as a new 'seed' – Rom 2:28-29; Eph 2:11-19. The old has passed away, the new has come – the vision revealed in new wine skins – Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38.

- iv. A new homeland is established – Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5; 28:18-20.
 - v. A new covenant is given to God’s people – 2 Cor 3-6.
 - vi. A new Temple is built... instead of stone it is one of Spirit and flesh – 1 Pet 2:4-10.
 - vii. God’s people are vindicated over their real Spiritual enemy – Col 2:15.
 - viii. The nations have come to Zion – Acts 15:7... in a new creation 2 Cor 5:17.
3. Prophetic Vision revealed in Hermeneutic Development – where broken hearts longing for God in the darkness are transformed into Burning Hearts who walk with God in the light – Luke 24:13-35.
- a. Vs 17 – Observation... the disciples looked sad.
 - b. Vs 21 – Expectation... that Jesus would redeem Israel. The story of the Gadarenes demoniacs in Matthew 8:28-34 – “pigs” is what the Jews called the Pagan Romans, the destruction of the herd of pigs is a vision of what the Jews expected the Messiah to do to the Romans. The deliverance that Jesus provided is what humanity needed, but it wasn’t what the Jews wanted or expected. The Jews’ idea of the Messianic era was Israel ruling the earth as God’s regent with the nations destroyed or in complete subjugation, not the integrated humanity God intended and Jesus provided.
 - c. Vs 27 – Explanation... Jesus revealed the prophetic roots and how He as the Messiah fulfilled Scripture.
 - d. Vs 32 – Consummation... their hearts were aflame because of Jesus’ teachings. Jesus’ passionate revelation had them totally transfixed and provided them with a ‘new vision’ for the future of God’s people.
4. Phillip the Disciple displaying Prophetic Vision – Acts 8:26-39.
- a. Vs 26-29 – Phillip is attentive and responsive to the Spirit’s encouragement. Looking for where the Spirit already working is a big part of employing our imagination in developing Prophetic Vision. Too often we pray for what we want God to do for us, rather than trying to catch up with what the Spirit is actively doing in us, through us, and around us. THIS IS HUGE!
 - b. Isaiah 53 is the story of Jesus... He the suffering servant. Jesus is the True leader the people of God always needed... the perfect King/Priest/Prophet who came to live and die for His people. The vision of the false leaders is aptly displayed in Ezekiel 34.
 - c. Isaiah 54-56 is the Gospel going out into the world – it is a foretelling of the Book of Acts.
 - d. Isaiah 56:3-4 speaks that the foreigner [non-Jew] and eunuch [broken humanity] who would be offered Grace, mercy, and healing. Phillip was the evangelist who brought the Ethiopian Official the message of the Gospel... and then he completed his work of baptizing him, and then was swept up by the Spirit and moved on to his next opportunity. This is what evangelism looks like... paying attention to what God is doing and coming alongside it. It is not for us to “win souls” but to be Jesus’ witness and ambassadors for the Kingdom of God.
 - e. Isaiah 56:5-7 speaks to the intent God always had for all of humanity being invited to come to His holy mountain where His Temple would be a house of prayer for the nations [all of humanity].

- f. **Acts is the working out of Isaiah’s prophecy in redemptive history. Thinking in terms of redemptive history is thinking “Diachronically” – where we are aligning ourselves with God’s chronological developmental plan.**
5. **Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church reflects his Prophetic Vision – Eph 1:16-23...** I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.
6. **Prophetic Vision necessarily plays out of and is defined by all of Biblical Revelation throughout redemptive history. There is a tendency in our era of redemptive history to “cherry-pick” specific verses out of context and build a theological position around it. This is called “Proof-Texting” and is a fundamental hermeneutic error! And it often has disastrous results! Our hermeneutic and our vision need to flow out of the entirety of Biblical Revelation and out of our personal holistic theology that results from having developed Biblical Literacy in forming the mind of Christ; our Spiritual Formation in forming the Heart of Christ; and Leadership Development in forming the Mission of Christ. This integrated holistic approach is Authentic Discipleship.**

B) THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF A PROPHET:

1. **Prophetic Biblical Definitions:**
 - a. **Seer [roeh] – is from the verb meaning “to see” relating more specifically to “Spiritually see” that which is “physically unobservable” with conventional sight – 1 Samuel 9:9.**
 - b. **Observer [hazah] – means to “see, perceive, observe” and includes receiving supernatural revelations and visions – Exodus 4:15-16; 7:1. This term has been used almost interchangeably with Seer.**
 - c. **Prophet [nabi] – means “a called one” meaning someone who has been entrusted with a message from God, and speaks with His authority. “Thus says the Lord” was a common declaration of Jewish prophets, whose pronouncements we’re usually accompanied by dire warnings of what would happen if the recipients failed to obey. Because of the importance of this position, those who uttered these “prophetic pronouncements” with attendant warnings that failed to come true were called “false prophets” and were sought out and executed.**
 - d. **Man of God – referred to a humble man of noble character who loved God and served Him –**

Deut 33:1; 1 Sam 9:6; 2 Kings 8:11.

- e. Watchman – Kingdom of God minded person who had the insightful responsibility to warn the nation of impending doom – Isa 21:11-12.
 - f. Messenger of God – represented the Lord and was sent with God’s authority – Mal 3:1.
 - g. Servant of God – served the interests of God rather than his own interests – Amos 3:7.
2. **Biblical Leadership Definitions** – prior to the Monarchy, God ruled directly over the “Jewish Theocracy” as the “Great King” over his people. God chose specific men and women to act as “Judges” to lead and administrate over His people in times of need. The last person who occupied the role of Judge also had the first role as Prophet in the Monarchy... this was Samuel. With the institution of the Monarchy, the role of the Jewish King reflected that of a “vassal king” to the “Great King or Sovereign Lord.” The intent was for the vassal king to do God’s will, not serve his own. The institution of the monarchy had three leadership roles:
- a. Priest – mediated the Law of Moses and Sinai Covenant sacrificial system. The Priests through blood sacrifice mediation helped keep the people properly aligned spiritually and related to God ceremonially.
 - b. Prophet – revealed God’s will for His people. They were responsible to identify and install the King, and also served to keep the appointed Leadership properly attuned to God. When the king or priest got off tract, it fell to the prophet to express God’s displeasure and encourage their realignment to God’s will... usually with a stipulation of impending disaster should they fail to comply. Obviously, this news was not always welcome. The Jewish Kings and Priests were to be subordinated to the Prophet who alone spoke for God.
 - c. The King – was the political head of state and was responsible to take care of people and protect the nation from outside threats, and to rule the people justly helping solve conflicts among the tribes and the people. The king mediated treaties and business with the nations of the Middle East. The Jewish Kings were seen vassal kings under the Great King... primarily meaning God, but also meaning the greater king overlords of the major empire-cultures of the time (IE – the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, etc.). Interestingly, the Assyrian and Babylonian empires invaded as a result of the vassal breaking the covenant with the sovereign. What these vassal kings did first with God they did later with the empires.
3. **Covenant Context in the Middle East** – Israel was initially a collection of cooperative tribal city-states through the period of the Judges. Then under Saul, David and Solomon – Israel grew into a substantial regional power that ultimately controlled the crossroads between the Middle East super-powers of Egypt to the South, the Hittites and Mitanni to the North, and the Assyrian and Babylonians to the East. Israel’s role was to safeguard travel and trade among these super-powers from which they all benefitted financially and culturally. Rules of engagement were defined in covenant form which stipulated benefits and responsibilities between the parties. Suzerain Covenants were between the Super-power and the local-Vassal-power.

a. Jewish Covenant History:

- i. **The Adamic Covenant** – God assigned the right to rule over earth to Adam. Adam was to remain obedient to God... the only stipulation was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve’s disobedience known as the Fall, allowed a mean spirited rebel [Satan] to usurp humanity’s rightful rule over earth. The first prophecy appears in God’s judgment of Satan (Gen 3:15), that the heir of humanity [Messiah] would be wounded but would destroy Satan.
 - ii. **The Abrahamic Covenant** – following the Fall humanity continues its meteoric decline into decadence and debauchery. Just when you think humanity can sink no lower or things get no worse, it does. But then God places an invitation before Abraham, and Abraham accepts it by faith – Gen 15:1-21. This is the start of a new work in redemptive history, and things start to change as Godly character emerges in this humble faithful man. The person of faithful devotion and obedience becomes the new standard for Humanity, Godly men and women whose character and nature are submitted to and reflective of God. The majority of humanity did not reflect such character... giving rise to the notion of a “remnant” being a special cadre of people who were God’s people.
 - iii. **The Mosaic/Sinai Covenant:**
 1. It involved God and Israel only, no other party was bound by it.
 2. It was Bilateral and conditional – there were responsibilities and conditions that affected the relationship.
 3. It involved material-temporal elements, it was not spiritual-eternal. The locus of the benefit was the blessing and inheritance in and of the Land.
 4. It was a works based system, and not a faith based system.
 5. It was temporary not eternal.
 6. It was built upon the foundation of the Adamic and Abrahamic covenants, and became the foundation for the entire Old Testament.
 7. It would be replaced by a newer and better Covenant... as Law ultimately gave way to Grace in Messiah Jesus.
 - iv. **The Messianic Covenant:**
 1. The OT bilateral/conditional rule of Law/works is replaced by the NT unilateral/unconditional rule of Grace/faith.
 2. The OT temporal/material-outerman/flesh blessing is replaced by the NT eternal/spiritual-innerman/Spirit blessing.
 3. The OT curse of death is replaced by the NT blessing of Life.
- b. Due to the conditions set out in the Old Covenant, God appoints Prophets to become His standard bearers and act as His prosecutors when leaders fall short. The prophets challenge, correct, and condemn the faithless leaders – Ezekiel 34 is a great example.

- c. In the New Covenant, the prophetic “office” or role of the prophet gives way to “prophetic ministry” of Godly Biblical leadership where “Word Ministry” takes precedence. NT prophetic ministry teaches the truth of the Word, and seeks to keep God’s people properly aligned with it... “Making straight the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3; Matt 3:3). In a reversal of the Old Covenant approach, in Christ there is no condemnation – Romans 8:1-14; and in Christ there is no curse... only Blessing – Matthew 5:3-12.

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROPHET:

1. Prophets have a great sensitivity to Evil:
 - a. The prophets see the world through God’s eyes... the magnificence of what it was designed to be and how it’s been corrupted by evil – Amos 8:4-6.
 - b. The prophets see the injustice imposed by the strong upon the weak, and feel God’s revulsion toward it – Jer 2:12-13.
2. Prophets “Feel fiercely:”
 - a. They are men and women of passion and purpose, who identify with God and in advancing the things that are important to God... His goodness, mercy, and justice, and they are appalled by humanity’s continued degradation and love for evil – Micah 6:1-8.
 - b. The prophets know God’s heart and realize that He will not tolerate evil forever – Jer 4:23-26.
3. Prophets as a result of their passion for God are often alone and rejected by humanity:
 - a. They reject the fallen norms the establishment presumes God desires from them – Jer 6:20.
 - b. They tend to be alienated from the worldly culture and its pleasures – Jer 20:14, 17-18.
4. The prophet is a complicated person:
 - a. They are a watchman – Hos 9:8.
 - b. They are a servant – Amos 3:7; Jer 25:4; 26:5.
 - c. They are a witness and a messenger who stands for God – Jer 23:18; Ezek 3:17.
5. The prophet is not merely a mouthpiece, but a fully formed person:
 - a. They are not merely an instrument, but rather an active partner and willing associate with God.
 - b. The task of the prophet is to convey God’s message to humanity... His Word. Yet the Word is often shrouded with pain and pathos... because the prophet wants humanity to hear and respond, but they are continually frustrated because humanity refuses to do so.
 - c. The prophet knows their own desperate need and personal depravity... they know who they are apart from God – Isaiah 6:5. But their vision of God’s love and goodness compels them to loving obedience – Jer 20:8-9.

D. DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY – CONTEXT OF THE PROPHETS IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY:

1. In the Biblical Literacy article of Authentic Discipleship on Hermeneutics-Part 2, on page 12 there is information as to what constitutes “Meaning” developed in the “Method of Interpretation” in

segment 5 of the article. Segment 5.3.6 on page 25 speaks to the general nature of the genre of Biblical prophecy. While hermeneutics is a basic necessity of understanding all Scripture, it is extremely helpful to have a brief refresher as you dive into the difficult areas of prophecy. The link is <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Interpreting%20Scripture%20-%20Part%202.pdf>

2. There are three distinct historical segments within the Genre of Biblical Prophecy. Each of these prophets were historically real, and each had distinct characteristics in the development of Redemptive History:
 - a. The Pre-Monarchial Prophets – from the earliest days up until Samuel: Moses is usually considered to be the first prophet of Israel... this period was characterized by new beginnings.
 - i. Moses enjoyed a special intimacy with God, the text states that “the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” – Exod 33:11.
 - ii. Moses was revered as the “Law Giver” – being God’s mediator with humanity in the establishment of Israel as God’s “Covenant people.”
 - iii. Moses left the people with the promise that another would come in due time to lead the people – Deut 34:10-12.
 - iv. The most basic components of the “OT Law” being the Ten Commandments, which were written on stone. In comparison the “NT Gospel of Grace” had God’s Law written on the hearts of men. The most basic truth of Scripture particularly in the development from Law to Grace is that we’re all destined to die. The question becomes what are you living for? And what will you invest your life in? We all live once and then face God in eternity... those who rely on the Law are condemned by the Law. Those who rely on the Gospel Grace of Jesus pass beyond condemnation – Romans 8:1.
 - b. The Former Prophets – from Samuel to Elisha: this period was characterized by the nation being in crisis.
 - i. What began in such a hopeful glorious environment under Moses and Joshua, quickly descended into confusion, immorality, and idolatry. The discipline necessary to maintain covenant health proved unsustainable.
 - ii. Things got so bad, that in an example of early judgment God allowed the Ark of the Covenant to be captured by the Philistines... this was certainly intended as a wakeup call to anyone paying attention... which unfortunately they weren’t.
 - iii. Samuel was a servant of God chosen from birth, not unlike Moses and John the Baptist.
 - iv. Samuel also served in a number of offices to meet the people’s needs in that era of redemptive history... he was judge, priest, and prophet.
 - v. He also ushered in the Monarchy establishing the three roles of leadership – prophet, king, and priest. As prophet Samuel was counselor to the kings and the guardian of

- the king's conscience.
- vi. Elijah was prophet during the evil reign of King Ahab and his pagan wife Jezebel who introduced Ba-al worship to Israel, with the people becoming mostly divided and often confused between Ba-al and Yahweh worship. Elijah was a faithful servant of God whose power worked supernaturally through him. Rather than being swayed by his miraculous signs, Ahab wanted Elijah killed to silence him... not unlike Jesus in His era of redemptive history.
 - vii. Elisha followed in the tradition of Elijah.
- c. The Latter Prophets – often considered being the “classical prophets” of Isaiah through Malachi: This period was characterized with prophetic pronouncements being given both to the failed Jewish leadership as well as to the unfaithful people themselves.
- i. The unified kingdom of Israel following Solomon was divided into North and South, with their political loyalties mirroring their divided spiritual loyalties. The nation as a whole had been judged for their sin and the fulfillment of God's pronouncement of destruction was immanent... it began first in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, then soon after the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
 - ii. The Northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. The Assyrians were known for their ruthlessness and heavy handed treatment of their foes. The Northern kingdom was repopulated with intermixed tribes and later became known as Samaria.
 - iii. The Southern kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Most of the population was killed with all the best and brightest sent to work in exile. When the Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Persian Empire, those who wanted to return to the southern kingdom of Judah were permitted to go back. In 538 BC, the first group returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the second group in 458 BC under Ezra, and the third group in 432 BC under Nehemiah. The Persian king actually funded the reconstruction of the walls and Temple in Jerusalem.
 - iv. The Latter Prophetic period was divided into three time frames: noted below are the prophet, their time frame, the Biblical-historical chronicle of their ministry, and to whom their prophecy was directed:
 - 1. The “Pre-exilic” Period – before the destruction of each kingdom:
 - a. Israel – the Northern kingdom:
 - i. Amos – 793-740 BC; 2 Kings 14:21-15:7; Israel
 - ii. Jonah – 786-746 BC; 2 Kings 14:23-29; Assyria
 - iii. Hosea – 753-722 BC; 2 Kings 15-18; Israel
 - b. Judah – the Southern kingdom:
 - i. Joel – 835 BC; Judah
 - ii. Micah – 742-686 BC; 2 Kings 14:23-20:21; Israel & Judah

- iii. Isaiah – 740-686 BC; 2 Kings 15:1-20:21; Israel & Judah
 - iv. Nahum – 663-627 BC; 2 Kings 21:1-23:27; Assyria
 - v. Zephaniah – 640-609 BC; 2 Kings 22:1-23:35; Judah
 - vi. Jeremiah – 626-586 BC; 2 Kings 22-25; Judah
 - vii. Habakkuk – 605 BC; 2 Kings 23:36-25:21; Judah
 - viii. Obadiah – 585 BC; cf Jer 49:7-22; Edom
2. The Exilic Period – the people were in exile and longing for their homeland:
 - a. Daniel – 605-535 BC
 - b. Ezekiel – 592 – 572 BC; 2 Kings 24-25; Judah
 3. Post-Exilic Period – the people were now returning to the land, and another opportunity of promise beginning:
 - a. Haggai – 520 BC; Ezra 5-6; Judea
 - b. Zechariah – 520 BC; Ezra 5-6; Judea
 - c. Malachi – 458-433 BC; cf Nehemiah 13; Judea
 4. Cessation of Prophecy – The Prophet Malachi closed out this prophetic period with the final promise that God would again send His messenger (Elijah) to prepare the way for the future coming of God to His people – Mal 3:1; 4:5.
 - a. Both the author of Maccabees and the Jewish historian Josephus (90 AD) indicate that the succession of prophets had ceased after Malachi.
 - b. The final prophet in the line of the OT prophets was John the Baptist identified as coming in the name of “Elijah” (Matt 11:14). John fulfilled his prophetic role by denouncing the false leadership of Israel, and identifying Jesus as the “Coming One” of the New Covenant – the King/Priest/Prophet/Messiah foretold in the Scriptures.

D. INTERPRETATION OF THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE – IMPORTANT REALIZATIONS:

1. Realize that as with all of Scripture, we must allow the writings of the Prophets to speak on their own terms – each prophet spoke words of warning, consolation, and judgment as God prompted them to a specific people in a unique historical setting. We must resist the tendency to read into the text [eisegesis] what we now know looking back at it. Interpretation must always begin from the author’s intended message and drawing out that meaning clearly [exegesis], and then finding appropriate application to our environment and context.
2. Realize the message that the prophets presented is Indirect – God chose real people to deliver His message to His chosen people. These prophets were in many ways God’s ambassadors to His people representing the Kingdom of God and realigning Jewish leadership and the general public alike. The vehicle God employed in His Self-Revelation is Scripture – the Word of God directed by the Holy Spirit spoken into the mind of the prophet and employing the common language of the day. Moses and the prophets as well as other Godly individuals selected for the task of receiving and passing

along God’s revelation, were empowered by the Spirit to receive and present God’s message. The quality of the Revelation and the strength of Faith to receive it is no different today than it was from the people who heard directly from God. We hear and respond in faith; but the quality of hearing and the power of our response has much to do with how clearly and completely we understand and surrender to God and His Word.

3. Realize that we come to Scripture not to impose our sense of relevance or propriety upon it, but to draw out the message God intended us to receive. In other words, we don’t come to Scripture for us to impose our sensibilities upon it, but rather to understand how God wants to employ it to reframe our sensibilities through it.
4. Realize that the primary medium of prophecy is poetry, and that it is a developed form of figurative language. There has been a running theological debate as to whether Scripture is literal or figurative... the answer is that it is both. The main problem that we have in interpreting Scripture, has to do with understanding the nature of the “message format” [Genre] employed in delivering God’s message. Please refer to the “Hermeneutics – Part 1-3” articles under Biblical Literacy to more fully understand the proper methods of interpreting Scripture. Wikipedia defines poetry as:
 - a. A form of literature that uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language—such as phonaesthetics, sound symbolism, and metre—to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, the prosaic ostensible meaning.
 - b. Poetry has a long history, dating back to the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. Early poems evolved from folk songs such as the Chinese Shijing, or from a need to retell oral epics, as with the Sanskrit Vedas, Zoroastrian Gathas, and the Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. Ancient attempts to define poetry, such as Aristotle's Poetics, focused on the uses of speech in rhetoric, drama, song and comedy. Later attempts concentrated on features such as repetition, verse form and rhyme, and emphasized the aesthetics which distinguish poetry from more objectively-informative, prosaic forms of writing. From the mid-20th century, poetry has sometimes been more generally regarded as a fundamental creative act employing language.
 - c. Poetry uses forms and conventions to suggest differential interpretation to words, or to evoke emotive responses. Devices such as assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhythm are sometimes used to achieve musical or incantatory effects. The use of ambiguity, symbolism, irony and other stylistic elements of poetic diction often leaves a poem open to multiple interpretations. Similarly figures of speech such as metaphor, simile and metonymy create a resonance between otherwise disparate images—a layering of meanings, forming connections previously not perceived. Kindred forms of resonance may exist, between individual verses, in their patterns of rhyme or rhythm.
 - d. Some poetry types are specific to particular cultures and genres and respond to characteristics of the language in which the poet writes. Readers accustomed to identifying poetry with Dante, Goethe, Mickiewicz and Rumi may think of it as written in lines based on rhyme and regular meter; there are, however, traditions, *such as Biblical poetry*, that use other means to create

rhythm and euphony. Much modern poetry reflects a critique of poetic tradition, playing with and testing, among other things, the principle of euphony itself, sometimes altogether forgoing rhyme or set rhythm. In today's increasingly globalized world, poets often adapt forms, styles and techniques from diverse cultures and languages.

- e. **Poetry is by its nature figurative language – as a Genre it communicates through imagery and emotions. It invites the reader to “see” and “feel” what the prophet was experiencing, rather than merely thinking his thoughts.**
 - f. **Prophetic messages are usually delivered in the medium of “Inspired Poetry”... and Hebrew Poetry in particular is quite different from other forms of poetry.**
 - g. **Unlike prose-narrative it should not be assumed that prophetic “speeches” should be taken completely at face value. Poetry unlike narrative is a “Terse” form of communication... meaning it is a medium where through few well-chosen words a message is expressed in grammatical and semantic parallels in a heightened style of speech.**
5. **God’s Message is Prophetic – all revelation is prophetic in nature. “Prophetic Revelation” is intent on keeping God’s people walking correctly with Him.**
- a. **The books of the Bible are not just history, but a ‘prophetic message’ for God’s people.**
 - b. **Prophetic writings [such as Jonah] were to and through a historical person who served as God’s literary agent with whom his original audience could identify and relate.**
 - c. **We can discover truths about the world through our reasoning and through our senses, but not Truth about God. Truth about God only comes through revelation... it is His Self-disclosure to us.**
 - d. **God did not intend to give us information that could be discovered solely through our own thinking or through our senses; revelation is the impartation of a higher level of experiential knowledge and wisdom.**
 - e. **OT prophetic ministry – the prophet identified and anointed the king, and helped keep him properly directed to care for God’s people... in conjunction with the king and priest.**
 - f. **NT prophetic ministry – is “Word Ministry” that keeps God’s people properly aligned with Him by illuminating eternal truth of God’s self-revelation that impacts and transforms our inner-life today.**
6. **God’s Message is Symbolic – dreams and visions are employed to the prophet who then transposes their experience into words to express what would otherwise be the inexpressible. Some common occurrences and definitions include:**
- a. **“High places” such as mountains were thought to be closer to the heavenly realm where God existed... it was a way for people to get closer to God. “Mount Zion” refers to Jerusalem and specifically to the Temple where humanity could approach God... where Heaven and earth intersected.**
 - b. **“Flowing Water” were seen as Streams of Spiritual and physical Life – the places of refreshment both physical and Spiritual.**

- c. **“Blood”** was symbolic of the life from which the blood had issued – there was no distinction between life and blood. A body without life was a carcass... a body without blood was a carcass.
 - d. **“Hyperbole”** – according to Wikipedia... Is the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. It may be used to evoke strong feelings or to create a strong impression, but is not meant to be taken literally. Hyperboles are exaggerations to create emphasis or effect. As a literary device, hyperbole is often used in poetry, and is frequently encountered in casual speech. An example of hyperbole is: "The bag weighed a ton." Hyperbole makes the point that the bag was very heavy, though it probably does not weigh a ton.
 - e. **“Simile and Metaphor”** – according to Wikipedia... a simile is a rhetorical figure expressing a comparison or likeness that directly compares two objects through some connective word such as ‘like’, ‘as’, ‘so’, ‘than’. Similes employ a known item or experience to help explain an unknown item or experience. Although similes and metaphors are generally seen as nearly interchangeable, similes tacitly acknowledge the imperfections and limitations of the comparative relationship to a greater extent than metaphors. Similes also help protect the author against an outrageous, incomplete, or unfair comparison. Generally, metaphor is the stronger and more declarative or encompassing of the two forms of rhetorical analogies.
7. **God’s Message is Necessarily Transformational – God’s Truth is transformational – it has the unique quality of making us something other than we were apart from God. We should always expect there to be this transformational quality. If no transformation occurs, it is questionable if it has been properly delivered, interpreted or understood.**
- a. **Preaching and teaching needs to be intent upon imparting ‘transformational truth’ – based upon the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. Anything else is ‘sub-Christian’ and as Paul wrote is ‘an offense to the cross’.**
 - b. **The message of the cross is offensive to the world**
 - i. **It serves notice that man is not his own ruler; that God exists and must be dealt with on His terms.**
 - ii. **The message is not just lifestyle or dogmatic truths that can be followed apart from a genuine surrender to and love for God – this is the heart of relational intimacy.**
 - iii. **The ‘head’ won’t save you, but the ‘heart’ will – and the head and heart in balance is the greatest declaration of discipleship.**
8. **God’s Message is always “Theo-Centric” – true hermeneutics must reveal who God is to humanity.**
- a. **The OT is obviously God Centered or “Yahweh-Centric” just as the NT is God-Centered or “Christocentric” – It is definitely not man centered or “anthropomorphic.” God’s revelation is to transform our life, not merely make it better. Our worship needs to follow this same path.**
 - b. **Too many preacher/teachers “tickle people’s ears” – they provide provocative thought that doesn’t draw people into intimacy and dependency upon God. This is not word ministry. As the bronze snake was lifted up by Moses and all who saw it were saved from the venom of**

snakebites, only Jesus blood can save us from the venom of sin. We must look up to Jesus as Moses followers looked up to the bronze serpent... this is the prophetic message of the OT occurrence into a NT context.

- c. Everything listed in scripture is to show us ‘the big picture’- we may not relate to everything, but it is all-cumulative into a larger picture that we will never completely master this side of heaven.
9. God’s Message in His Word is not just about what the text says, but also how it says it. All prayer and most prophecy and apocalyptic genre in general are written primarily in poetry. Poetry is a literary medium that communicates through images and emotions, because of this the imagination is crucial to “seeing” and “feeling” what the writer wants to convey. Poetry is not a literal medium... it is a heightened and stylized medium that employs allegory, simile, and hyperbole along with rhythm and tempo. Example of Isaiah 1:2-3 demonstrates the power of poetry:
- a. Observe the poetic message of Isaiah 1:2-3:
 - Vs 2 Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken:
[complaint] I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.
 - Vs 3 The ox knows his master, the donkey [knows] his owner’s manger,
but Israel does not know [his master],
[verdict] my people do not understand.
 - i. In verse 2, God is speaking to the court-room of creation [heaven and earth] to press His prosecution against humanity. The rebellious child is the worst possible affront to an Ancient Near-East father. This is one of the insights that made the story of the Prodigal Son so powerful to the Jews. Beyond our cultural norms, rebellion is obviously not what you would do to God; this is reminiscent of what Satan did in the Garden in returning evil for the good he had received from God... the worst sort of betrayal.
 - ii. In verse 3, God shows that an ox and a donkey are more wise and observant than God’s people. The text added in the [] inclusion parenthesis above adds what is left unsaid by the author. This is an invitation to “fill in the blanks” and is typical of poetry.
 1. The unsaid insight – the ox is known as a more noble animal than a donkey... the ox knows who their master is and will not only submit to him but will return to him on their own; while the donkey may know its owner, but it will submit to no master and cares for nothing but its next meal and it will return to the wild if given the chance.
 2. The juxtaposition of “knows” with “does not know” is the crux of the argument God is presenting... the unstated inference is that they should have known. The result is a strong rebuke of God’s people observing that the beasts of

burden are more loyal, intelligent, and responsive than God's people. The animals at least *know* their place.

- iii. The power of this argument as presented demonstrates that God is justified in treating faithless humanity harshly... which He is about to do. But even here Grace is in action... the threat is real, but you get the impression that mercy is yet available. God is holding out the opportunity for escape, but humanity is too obstinate and unreasonable (like the donkey) to accept what is best for them on God's terms.
 - iv. Remember the precursor... the Sinai covenant is "bi-lateral" – meaning God will bless His people if His people will accept His guidance and discipline and remain steadfast and true in their response of love and worship. The people want the blessing, but refuse to be disciplined in obedience and love. The people have broken the covenant and will have to pay the price for their covenant failure.
 - v. There is definitely a sense of pathos herein that has been building to a crescendo over a long period of time. God has been wooing and pursuing His people, who fail to respond as a loving bride should.
- b. Observe the poetic message of Proverbs 6:16-19:
- There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:
- (1) haughty eyes, (2) a lying tongue, (3) hands that shed innocent blood,
 - (4) a heart that devises wicked schemes, (5) feet that are quick to rush into evil,
 - (6) a false witness who pours out lies, and (7) a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.
- i. In the first line numerology is employed in the poetry – six is an incomplete or imperfect number, 7 is perfect. Why would the author employ such a device? Its intention is to call attention to the importance of the 7th thing.
 - ii. The first 6 refer to human behavior that is destructive to the social order in the community of faith. These 6 behaviors are hated because they present the opposite relational approach that humility in love should produce.
 - iii. The 7th behavior is particularly heinous because it destroys the relational intimacy inherent within the family structure. While all of these behaviors are bad, this 7th behavior is a much higher order of sin than the 6, because the family structure is at the heart... it is the strength of the social order. Destroy familial relational trust and dependence, and the family unravels.
- c. Observe the poetic message of Micah 5:2-8a – the 5 stanzas are my own distinction for clarity:
- 1) But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

- 2) Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.
- 3) He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be their peace.
- 4) When the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, we will raise against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men.
They will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword.
He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he invades our land and marches into our borders.
- 5) The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for man or linger for mankind.
The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples.

i. Notice the alternating nature of the message in these 5 stanzas:

1. **#1 is positive – the foretold Messiah will come from Bethlehem. Notice also the reference to Messiah’s origin from “ancient times” – i.e. the line of David.**
2. **#2 is negative – Israel will be abandoned for a protracted period of time.**
3. **#3 is positive – Messiah will be the shepherd Israel desperately needs and wants... he will be great!**
4. **#4 is mixed negative and positive – the Assyrians are going to destroy Israel; but Assyria will pay for their crimes against Israel and will be destroyed themselves when a deliverer will come.**
5. **#5 is positive and crucial – the value is not all the people, instead it is the remnant... the true people of God who will enjoy His kingdom life.**

ii. When people are facing the certainty of destruction, God consoles them – essentially God says you are getting what you deserve and it’s going to be really bad, but I will bring blessing out of the matter. The reference to birth in stanza 2, rings with what Paul said – Romans 8:22; Galatians 4:19. The pain associated with childbirth is forgotten in the joy of holding the child.

iii. Note this prophetic message spoke to the people in Israel who were going to suffer through this travail, and it also spoke to the future time when Messiah would come.

iv. The nature of prophecy also is in the duality:

1. **Of the “Now” and the “Later.”**

2. Of the material and the Spiritual.

- d. In summary, these poetic images and the emotional alliteration they evoke are invitations into another level of literary experience. The result of the poetic message is too large for a “plodding proposition” of narrative to convey. Trying to land these thoughts literally in narrative doesn’t work. The poetic metaphor takes it to another level. The source of the “demonic nation” for the prophet was Assyria... their brutality and the horror they evoked was well known, but along with the coming terror there would be a future consolation. Hope would be realized in due time.

10. A final observation relative to this introduction of prophecy has to do with the fundamental nature and difference between Old Covenant/Old Testament prophecy and New Covenant/New Testament prophecy :

- a. Old Covenant prophecy is eschatology anticipated – it is looking to the future when the revelation is more complete and the arrival of the Kingdom of God is more immanent... the Kingdom of God is Coming! This is good news!
- b. New Covenant prophecy is eschatology realized – we now have a more complete revelation and the arrival of the Kingdom of God is at hand... we are living now in the Kingdom of God through the indwelling Spirit in each believer awaiting the Parousia [2nd Coming] of Messiah Jesus. This is Great news!