

Robert Vannoy, Foundation Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 1A

1. Introduction

1A. Course Description

I want to say a few things about each of those handout sheets, and I guess the place to begin is with the single page that says “Course Description.” There’s a paragraph that describes the basic content of the course there at the top of that page. “Foundations of Biblical Prophecy has a two-fold purpose. One, to introduce to the student to the phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel.” What we will look at will be the characteristics of that prophetic phenomenon under that heading. But secondly, “to familiarize the student with the content of the prophetic books of the Old Testament.” Let’s see, four major, twelve minor prophets: what was their message? What was the historical context in which they gave that message?

2A. The Phenomenon of Prophecy

So the first purpose, that is, the phenomenon of prophecy, will be accomplished by classroom discussion, of such questions as: Did all of Israel’s prophets receive a special call to their prophetic task? How is the origin of prophetism in Israel to be explained? Is this a phenomenon that was simply a creation of the genius of these ancient Israelite people? Did they borrow it from some other surrounding nations that were also alleged to have some sort of a prophetic phenomenon in existence? Those are the kinds of questions we will be asking. I will explain the origin of prophetism in Israel. Are there analogies to Israel’s prophetism among other ancient peoples? That’s a question that’s received an awful lot of attention. Of course many people come down and say, “Yes, there are.” How could the ancient Israelite distinguish between a true and a false prophet? When you read through the prophetic books, it becomes particularly clear in Jeremiah, you’ll have Jeremiah saying “Thus saith the Lord.” And then here comes Hananiah another prophet and he claims, “Thus saith the Lord.” Yet, they give two contradictory messages. Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite. Who would you listen to? You’re responsible to obey the word of the Lord coming from the mouth of God’s prophets to his people. What do

you do when two different prophets claim to be God's prophets with two totally contradictory messages? So how could an Israelite distinguish between a true and a false prophet?

3A. Were the Prophets Cultic Functionaries?

Were the prophets cultic functionaries? There's a whole school of thought that says the prophets were very much like the priests in the employ of the temple as personnel, and they were official functionaries of the sanctuary service of the temple. Well, is that the best way to understand who a prophet was? Were the prophets writers? What do we have in these prophetic books? Does this come from the hand of the prophet or is this just a much later record of oral traditions of prophetic proclamations?

4A. Does biblical prophecy have any apologetic value?

Does biblical prophecy have any apologetic value? Can you argue from prophecy and its subsequent fulfillment that because this body of men spoke so long in advance about such remarkable things that happened much later in time historically, this is really an evidence for genuine revelation? That is, these people were speaking from God about what no human person could ever possibly speak and therefore, the Bible is true. Can you make an apologetic argument out of prophecy and fulfillment for the truthfulness of divine revelation? People look two different ways at it; some people say "yes," some people say "no." Those things are all about the phenomenon of prophetism, and we'll spend a fair amount of time in class on those issues because this is foundational for biblical prophecy.

5A. Hermeneutical Principles Important in prophetic writing

Beyond these general features of the prophetic phenomena in the Old Testament, attention will be given to hermeneutical principles that are important for proper interpretation of the Old Testament prophetic writing. Interpretation of the prophetic work has involved some issues that you don't get to in some of the other genres of literature in the Old Testament such as historical narratives or wisdom literature; each have their unique features. So we'll look at some of the hermeneutical principles that are important for interpreting the prophetic writings. Discussions will include such things as the prophetic time perspective, the conditionality of prophetic statements, as well as the

idea of double-sense, double-reference and the prophet speaking with the same words while at the same time having in view two different events, as far as fulfillment is concerned separated by a long distance in time.

6A. Reading Assignments

Now, again, that's still part of this phenomena of prophetism, but to get to that second purpose of content, the student will read each of the major and minor prophetic books along with C. Hasel Bullock's *Introduction to the Old Testament and Prophetic Literature*, where he takes each book and discusses the content of the book, interpretive problems, historical background and its general message, etc. So, as far as content in class, I'm not going to do a whole lot with that. Largely you're going to read the prophetic books and Bullock's *Introduction*. In class I'm going to deal with four of the minor prophets, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, and Amos, and when I start coming to the end of the course I'll teach Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. So, that's the general description of what we will be doing.

2. Course Objective

1A. Prophetic Phenomena

Let's go through the objectives and then on the backside of that page, when we get to methods, I'll talk about assignments. As far as objectives of the course, some of this is a repeat of what I've just said in the preceding paragraph. First, to examine the phenomenon of prophetism in ancient Israel including such things as prophetic call, inspiration of the prophets, relations of true and false prophets, symbolic acts, comparison of prophecy in Israel and prophecy outside, and apologetic value of biblical prophecy. We'll just run through that.

2A. General Content of Each Prophetic Book

Second, to become familiar with the writings of the prophets of Israel including the general content of each book, its purpose, and historical setting. So that's the content piece.

3A. Hermeneutical Principles for the Prophetic Writings

Third, to learn some principles of hermeneutics relative to the prophetic writings, both in theory and application. I'll lecture on that for a session or so, but when we get into the four minor prophets we'll be applying those principles and we'll see the way some of them are relevant to the text.

4A. Critical Theories esp. Isaiah and Daniel

1B. Isaiah: Date and Authorship

Fourth, to become acquainted with critical theories concerning the authorship and character of prophetic books with particular attention given to Isaiah and Daniel. Does the message of Isaiah come from a man called Isaiah the prophet living in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah, or is this material that came from a much later time? That question arises very acutely from Isaiah 40 to the end of the book, so that if you look at the average commentary from mainstream biblical scholars, you will find a commentary on Isaiah the prophet that is chapters 1-39. Then you'll find the second volume on what's called the Deutero-Isaiah, or the second Isaiah, in chapters 40 through the end, which pretty consistently is said to be from someone other than Isaiah the prophet. Why do they say that? That second part of the book of Isaiah assumes that the Babylonian captivity has already taken place, which occurred over 150 years after the historical Isaiah. Of course, it had not taken place in the time of Isaiah, Isaiah was saying it would take place; yet chapters 40-66 seem to assume it has taken place and that now God is going to bring Israel back from captivity. Specifically, they're going to come back from captivity under the reign of Cyrus the Persian, who was mentioned by name. He lived centuries after the time of Isaiah the prophet. So the question is, how could anyone have spoken in advance so clearly and so precisely about the rise of the Persian empire and the ruler Cyrus, and that under Cyrus Israel would return from captivity? In mainstream biblical studies the conclusion is that's impossible. This must have been written by someone much later who was living in the time of Cyrus, and therefore he would have known that Cyrus existed. So, I'm going to look at that whole question with Isaiah because it's with Isaiah and

Daniel that this question is most frequently raised, and the authorship of the book is challenged.

2B. Daniel: Date and Authorship

In Daniel you have very similar issues. In the earlier part of the book you have visions, but in the latter part of the book you have these prophecies, which are detailed descriptions, not only of end times where the anti-christ arises, but of that period of time when the Jewish people were persecuted by a ruler who came out of the division of Alexander the Great's kingdom. For Israel, this was a time when the Seleucids up in Syria and the Ptolemies down in Egypt fought over the Holy Land, struggling over who would control that territory. There are wars between them, that's for the North and the South. In the midst of this there is a description of none other than Antiochus Epiphanes of the Seleucid Dynasty, the descriptions of his persecutions of the Jewish people, and the desecration of the temple—history that quite clearly took place in the second century B.C. How could Daniel, writing back before 500 B.C., have known in advance in such detail what was going to play out 300 years later? So the general conclusion of mainstream biblical studies has been, well, Daniel didn't write this; rather it was somebody who lived around 160 or 164 B.C., in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. We'll look at some of these arguments.

5A. Relevance of the Prophetic Writings

Fifth, we will explore how the message of the prophetic writings has relevance for the church of the twenty-first century. You will do an assignment on that and do some reading outside of Bullock. That's certainly an important issue, this is part of Scripture, for Paul has said, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" that clearly includes the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but how do you find meaning from these books for today?

3. Methods

1A. Readings

So those are the general objectives of the course. If you turn over the backside of that page, “Methods employed toward securing the first objectives:” I’ve already mentioned you will read Bullock’s *Introduction to the Old Testament and the Prophetic Books*. Then in connection with its meaning for today, I want you all to read a chapter by Elizabeth Achtemeier, from a volume called *Preaching from the Old Testament*. Chapter seven of that volume is “Preaching from the prophets,” on pages 109-135 in that volume. In addition to that, I want you to read one of the following two books: Either Elizabeth Achtemeier’s *Preaching from the Minor Prophets* or Donald Leggett’s *Loving God and Disturbing Men: Preaching from the Prophets*. The purpose of each is to discuss how to find meaning for today in preaching from the prophetic books. I’ll come back in a minute to what I want you to do with that once we get to the assignment page. I also want you to read each of the prophetic books in the English Bible.

2A. Lectures and Papers

Lectures will supplement readings, concentrating on various aspects of the phenomena of prophetism, and then, as I mentioned, the books of Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. I want to encourage classroom discussion, I welcome your interruption at any given point with questions or comments or whatever. There will be an exegetical paper on the book of Hosea; I’ll say more about that when we come to the assignments; there will be an exegetical analysis of a passage from Amos, Amos 9:11-13, which becomes a pretty important passage relative to establishing a hermeneutic for interpreting prophetic writings because that text in Amos 9:11-13 is picked up in the book of Acts chapter 15. It is quoted and interpreted in a certain way, but there are a host of issues around exactly how it is being used and what conclusions can be drawn. So I want you to work on that passage a bit and I will do some class discussion of that passage after you’ve already worked on it. In fact, that’ll be the last class of the course. You will need to write a brief discussion of the readings from Achtemeier and Leggett, also. As far as testing, there is

potential for a quiz each week on the assigned readings from Bullock. There's a mid-term and a final, and there is this paper on Hosea that will be a factor in your grade as well.

3A. Assignments

If you go over to this assignment page, and go over to page four down on the bottom you notice there's the schema on grading. One-quarter is quizzes on Bullock, the Amos exegesis and the Achtemeier report are considered the equivalent to a quiz, so all that lumped together cumulatively is a quarter of your grade. The Hosea paper is a quarter of your grade, the mid-term and final are also a quarter of your grade. So there's four factors in the grade. Now, let's go back to the first page of that assignment sheet. I again list the various readings: Bullock, chapter seven of Achtemeier, then either Achtemeier or Leggett, at the top. Those are the things you will read.

4A. Hosea Term Paper Instructions

The term paper. Study is to be made of the book of Hosea, the results of which are to be summarized in a paper of 15-20 pages. Now let me caution you; I don't want 25 pages, keep it 20 pages or under, and that's a challenge, because of what follows here, what I want in this paper to discipline yourself. But 15-20 pages, typewritten double-spaced, with a normal sized font, using correct form for footnotes and bibliography and so forth. I'm not so concerned what form that is, but you ought to be consistent in the form, to follow University of Chicago, MLA, or whatever. The paper is to include discussion of the following matters, and there are three topics. The first thing I want you to include is a discussion of the moral problem of Hosea's wife Gomer. The Lord tells Hosea to go out and marry a harlot. That has bothered a lot of people. How could the Lord do that? Well, is that a problem? What's going on here? I think if you start researching this you will be surprised at the amount of literature there is, out there, on this question, and the enormous variety of ways in which people have dealt with this problem, and come to a conclusion. I've listed two articles which are also on reserve in the library as photocopies. I think they'll probably be helpful to get into this question. The first one is by a man named H. Ebers "The Matrimonial Life of Hosea," published in a volume of

essays out of an Old Testament study group in South Africa. It's a good survey of the questions involved. Then H. H. Rowley's, "The Marriage of Hosea," in a volume called *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy*. If you look at those two articles, you'll get into the issue and from there go wherever you want. What I'm interested in as far as discussion in your written paper is your own conclusion and why you've come to that conclusion. You'll have to show some awareness of what all the issues are in doing that, but I really want you to do some reading and thinking on that, and then put on paper what your own conclusion is, after having gone through that. So that's the first piece of it.

Second, I want you to read through Hosea a number of times; it's not that long a book; it's rather the complex the way it's organized, but read through it, and then select some verse, section, or topic or theme, or you could even do a word study of a significant word. It's all up to you, but select something like a verse, a section, or a topic, other than the topic of Hosea's wife (I don't want you to go back to that question). Take something else in the second section, something you find interesting. Comment on it, utilizing insights derived from Hebrew translation exegesis. In other words I want you to show some evidence that you're working with some interpretive issue in the book of Hosea and using the Hebrew Bible in the process of working with that. So that's the second section.

Then the third section is the prophet's meaning for today. Make some comments on the significance of the book of Hosea for the time in which it was written, and then bridge the historical gap; we live in a totally different time, culture, place, and history of redemption than Hosea did. Comment on its significance for God's people in the twenty-first century. So there are three sections of the paper, I'd say three mini-papers I want you to work through that you turn in as one paper, but with those three sections.

5A. Bulloch Reading Assignment and Dates

Now, any questions on this? I want you to show evidence you've done some research, but I wouldn't put any specific length on it. Let me at this point just skip over to page three. You notice the way this assignment schedule works. The dates are due dates,

so today is the ninth, next Tuesday is January 16th and I want you to read from Bullock his discussion of Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. I'd appreciate it if you'd more than just read it; I want you to take some notes and internalize some of it, work on it. Be ready for a potential quiz on Bullock, for the following week you have Hosea and Micah; that's only 40 pages. I have given a reading assignment from Bullock for January 30th, that's to start working on that Hosea paper, and you can work on that Hosea paper all the way through. The following week Isaiah and Zephaniah, then the week after that back to the Hosea paper research, and then you come to a mid-term. Then you're back to Bullock with Habakkuk to Jeremiah and Nahum, and then Bullock on Daniel. But, March the 6th the Hosea paper is due. In other words, you have two open assignment dates to work on it, plus whatever other time you'll be doing along the way. But by Tuesday, March 6, I want you to turn that in.

Now there is an asterisk there, which over in the middle of page four you see a one week extension will be granted without penalty. But beyond one week late, I will deduct 5/10 of a grade point per week subsequently. I'm not leaving this paper till the end of the course; I want you to have done it, 2/3 of the way through the course, so it's not piling up at the end. March 13th you're back in Bullock; March 20th, Amos exegesis. I will give you a worksheet with some questions on it that I want you to respond to in written form for that assignment. I'll give it to you in a few more weeks. Then I will discuss that Amos 9 passage as I mentioned for Tuesday, March 27, which is our last lecture time. Tuesday, April 3rd's the final exam, I want you to turn in a two-page written summarization of the five most significant things you have learned from reading either the two assigned readings from Achtemeier chapter seven or the book by Leggett. In other words, that's the material on preaching from the prophets, and I want you to do that reading listed there again, and then draw up the five most significant things you've learned from that reading. Then April 3rd is the final exam. Any question on assignments?

6A. Extra Credit

As far as extra credit is concerned, if you want to do some extra credit work, you

can do that by reading chapters one, two, six and seven in the book called *Continuity and Discontinuity, Perspectives on the Relationships Between the Testaments*, edited by John Feinberg, published by Crossway Books in 1988. This is a collection of essays by people who represent two different viewpoints; some see a very strong continuity between the Testaments and really between Israel and the Church, and others see more distant continuity between the Testaments and between Israel and the Church. When you get into what you might call the “kingdom prophecies” of the Old Testament, a lot of them talk about the future for Israel. What’s it talking about? Is it a future for national or ethnic Israel in some sense, or do you spiritualize those and say it’s really talking about the Church, and the Church has succeeded, you might say, Israel as the people of God; there is no future for Israel, and those prophecies then have to be understood as references to the Church. That, in very broad lines, is where the point of difference lies between the continuity people and the discontinuity people. This book was out of print for a time, but I think last year it came back in print. So if you want to purchase it you can, but if you don’t want to purchase it photocopies of those four chapters: one, two, six and seven, are on reserve in the library. The articles in this book as the title suggests raise the important issue of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments which is particularly important especially when one attempts to interpret the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament prophetic books. Do these prophecies speak in figurative language about the New Testament Church? Or, do they have reference to a future that somehow involves some sort of a reconstitution of the nation of Israel? We’re going to hit this when you go to Obadiah, the first book you’re going to read about, because at the end of Obadiah it talks about a future. Is it talking about a future for Israel, or is it talking about the Church? This issue is found in almost every one of the prophetic books.

7A. Comments on Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos

If you turn back to page three, you notice your first reading is Obadiah , Joel, Jonah and Amos. And you notice the page numbers are toward the end of Bullock’s book. Obadiah’s page 254, Joel is 324, and then Jonah’s back towards the beginning. The

reason I've assigned Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos is I think that's the order in which these books were written. I think Obadiah was the earliest of the Old Testament prophets, but that gets into the questions of authorship and date of Obadiah and date of Joel, which some people give late dates. We're going to look at that when we discuss it. I think they're best dated earlier. That's not an issue that's necessarily between conservative interpreters and more liberal interpreters; it's not that kind of an issue. It's an issue where there's plenty of room for disagreement, and it's not altogether clear; that's why there's discussion. But I prefer the view putting Obadiah early and Joel early, which I will discuss later. So you're going to read the sections of Bullock in the order that I think is the chronological order of the appearance of the prophetic books.

8A. Extra Credit: Israel and the Church Paper

Returning to page 5: Do these prophecies speak in figurative language about the New Testament Church or do they have reference to a future involving some sort of a reconstituted nation of Israel? Does the Bible see a future for Israel, or is Israel superseded by the Church? There's a word for that, "super-cessionism" which says the Church has simply replaced Israel, there is no future for Israel. You should read the above chapters, then reflect on the issues that they raise and write an 8-10 page paper describing your own conclusions on these issues. This does not necessarily mean that you have to agree with the expression of either side of the issue as represented in the essays you have read. There may well be other alternatives. This of course, is a very large subject, and one that is very complex as well. It's possible that you may not be able to come to any firm conclusions in the short time that you'll have to work on this. I'm aware that most of you are probably in the early stages of your own theological reflections and that issues like this need to be worked out over a longer, rather than a shorter, period of time, wrestling with the issues; and I might say, this is not a simple question.

9A. Extra Credit: Directions for the Millennial Positions Paper

Of course, you get into eschatological positions, the a-millennial school generally holds that there is no future for Israel; that millennial period is now; there is no

millennium; these prophecies are all fulfilled in a spiritual sense. The pre-millennial, or even the post-millennial view, would see these prophecies as relating to some future for Israel, in some way. Those eschatological positions have been around for a long time, and are debated constantly. But I would hope that this project would encourage you to at least make some tentative steps toward finding your own way in these questions and then enable you to identify some of the outstanding issues that are as yet unresolved in your mind. In other words it's a goal to familiarize yourself with the debate, trying to work through it, seeing initially what tentative conclusions you may come to. These unresolved issues could also be part of the discussion for your paper. The due date is March 27th, that is the last class before the final exam; notice that it says "there is no extension." If you do the paper, an A will increase your final grade .75, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a grade. And in the grade point scale, you know, an "A" is 4, a "B" is 3, "C" is 2; so if you have an average 3 for all the other components of the course, when you get this, if you get an "A" on it you have a 3.75 instead of 3. Any question on the extra credit?

4. Other Resources

These other handouts are for use as we go forward. There's a class lecture outline that I will follow in our class lectures; there's a bibliography key to that class lecture outline, and then there's that set of citations which is also key to the class lecture outline but includes actual paragraphs taken out some of the entries in the bibliography. Then there's a set of PowerPoint slides; I don't have a lot of slides for this course, but there are a few.

1A. Bibliography Comments

I might comment on the bibliography, you notice the first heading: "General Reference Volumes on the Prophetic Books." Here I've listed some other books that are similar to Bullock that survey the prophetic materials. Bullock is the first one listed there, but there are two surveys of the prophets that have come out in the last couple years that are really quite good, they're quite different, but they're both quite good. Robert Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, Baker 2002; Chisholm is at Dallas Seminary. And

the last entry, O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, Presbyterian Reformed, 2004. If you want to look at two other kinds of surveys of the prophetic books, those two are both quite different. Robertson's is more theological, but both are good.

J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* is a complete guide to scriptural predictions and their fulfillment. This was written some years ago in 1973, but I think it's still available. It's a very interesting volume because what Payne does is go through all of Scripture and isolate every statement of Scripture that he considers to be a prophetic statement, referring to something in the future. Then he interprets every single one of them, and he has categories of time as far as fulfillment: fulfillment in the Old Testament, fulfillment in the inter-testamental period, fulfillment in the New Testament period, fulfillment sometime in the Age of Church, fulfillment of millennial period, and fulfillment in the eternal state. He gives numbers for all these things and charts them out. So what you find in this encyclopedia is a reference source; if you're dealing with some verse or prediction you can look at it see at least Payne's interpretation of it and where he thinks you would find fulfillment; you don't always have to agree with him. But it's useful as a reference at least to get you going on some of that. The first part of that book is a long introduction to the prophetic phenomenon, and it's sort of like what you're doing in the introduction to this course; discussing some of the phenomena of prophetism in Israel.

The other collection, *Israel's Prophets*, edited by Robert Gordon, is a collection of very academic essays, mostly by mainstream biblical scholars, published in 1995. Then more recently Gordon McConville wrote, *The Prophets: Exploring the Old Testament*, Volume Four, Intervarsity, 2002. It's much like Bullock, Chisholm, Robertson, a survey of the prophetic books. Gordon McConville certainly would be considered an evangelical, but he's much more open to Deutero-Isaiah, a late date of Daniel, some of those kinds of things, than a more middle-of-the-road conservative or evangelical. There's some good stuff in there, but I'd give you caution using it; nevertheless, I'd pay attention to it.

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