

Robert Vannoy: Foundations of Prophecy, Lecture 7

Last week we were under the Roman numeral IV., “The ways and means of God’s revelation to the prophets,” at point C., “In what sense may we speak of ecstasy among Israel’s prophets?” In a lot of the main stream biblical studies there’s a great deal made of this ecstatic phenomena that existed in the ancient world in nations around Israel. The theory has been given that ecstatic phenomena were the source of prophetism in Israel, and that Israel was exposed to that and that you can find similar phenomena among Israel’s prophets. In C. we were down to point 3., “Certainly not everything labeled as ecstatic behavior on the part of canonical prophets can be considered such.” Those that are looking for evidence of ecstatic phenomena among Israel’s prophets have pointed to various things in the prophetic books that were not necessarily in the prophetic books, but in historical books where prophetic phenomena occurred or were mentioned. I mentioned last time that you have to be careful of exaggeration in speaking of ecstasy among Israel’s prophets, and often the evidence that is utilized is not really convincing—such things as symbolic acts, strong emotional expressions, as we saw in Isaiah 21:3 and Jeremiah 23:9. Then the ‘I,’ or first-person style of speech where the prophets speak as if they were God themselves, speaking in the first person. I mentioned there it’s simply a style by which it’s made clear that the messenger is not really giving his own word but the word of someone who has sent him. We looked at 2 Kings 18:29 where a messenger brings the word of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, to Hezekiah—and he speaks in the first person for Sennacherib. So, again, that messenger certainly wasn’t an ecstatic, and the first person speech doesn’t give any basis for concluding that a prophet who uses it must have been in an ecstatic state.

The last point which I didn’t get to under that heading in number 3. is, “The labeling of prophets as being mad.” 2 Kings 9:11 is sometimes referred to in that connection. There you have a member of the companies of prophets, “When Jehu went out to his fellow officers, one of them asked him, ‘Is everything all right? Why did this madman come to you?’” Now that was the messenger that Elisha had sent to anoint Jehu

as king, and one of Jehu's officers then speaks of this individual and labels him a "madman." Some see in that evidence that these prophets were looked upon as madmen and the reason for that is that they were characterized by ecstatic behavior. The ecstatic part of that is certainly not clear there. It's a remark made by someone making fun of this individual who came to Jehu.

If you look at Jeremiah 29:26 you have a similar reference. In Jeremiah 29:25 you have the words of a false prophet in Babylon. Jeremiah writes, "Tell Shemaiah, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You've sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the other priests. You said to Zephaniah, 'The Lord has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the Lord; you should put any madman who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons. So why have you not reprimanded Jeremiah from Anathoth, who poses as a prophet among you.'" Now the "madman" there is a reference to Jeremiah as a madman, but he's characterized as a madman by a false prophet. I don't think that says anything about being ecstatic. It's just someone who wants to discredit Jeremiah because of his message. So he's called a madman.

It's interesting if you go to the New Testament, in John 10:20, "At these words [of Jesus] the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to Him?'" Why was Jesus called a madman? Not because he was an ecstatic, it's because of his message. You get the same in Jeremiah with this false prophet. It has nothing to do with ecstasy, but it has everything to do with the message. There's another text in the New Testament in Acts 26:24 where Paul is before Agrippa and Festus and testifying to his faith. You read, "At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. 'You are out of your mind, Paul!' he shouted. 'Your great learning is driving you insane. But to this Paul replied, 'I'm not insane Festus. What I'm saying is true and reasonable.'" What had he said? Well if you go back to verse 22, "I have had God's help through this very day and so I stand here and testify. I am not saying anything beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen, that the Christ would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead would proclaim life for his own people and to the Gentiles."

Festus says, “You’re out of your mind.” That has nothing to do with being in an ecstatic condition. So, labeling the prophets as being “madmen” has been used by some as an argument for considering them to be ecstatic, but is not a strong argument.

Let’s go on to 4. under C., which is, “The form of ecstatic behavior most frequently displayed among Israel’s prophets is that of the visionary experience, not wild abnormal behavior.” If you are going say there is anything in the biblical text that points in the direction of ecstatic phenomena among Israel’s prophets, what you are going to find is the visionary situation, not wild, abnormal, or erratic behavior. The vision was a means of divine revelation that came to the prophets rather frequently. It seems to play a greater role with some prophets than with others. You find it quite often with Ezekiel for example. The whole second part of his book is this vision of a future temple and many things connected with that. You find it very little in Jeremiah. You find in Isaiah a scattering of visionary situations. So it differs from prophet to prophet. But the visionary means of communicating God’s word through the prophet to his people is something that is very common. Now, that whole visionary thing receives a fair amount of attention if you look at mainstream literature. Some say it is simply a literary device and there is no real historical reality to it; this is just the way the writer has characterized the perception of divine revelation. Others go in a psychological direction and say these are really hallucinations that come out of the psyche of the prophets themselves. If you go either of those directions then you are denying divine revelation by visionary means. It seems what the biblical text is telling us is that God did use the vision in order to communicate his message to the prophets.

Well, what’s a vision? It’s a hard thing to describe, I don’t know if any of you have had a vision. I never have. Some say a vision is to someone in an awakened condition, what a dream is when we are sleeping. We’re familiar with dreaming. Dreams can be very real—sometimes too real. But a vision is someone in an awakened condition where he’s transposed into another reality. He sees things, he hears things. It’s exactly as if he was there. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah sees that vision of God high and lifted up in the temple with the seraphim, and the seraphim takes the bowl from the altar. Isaiah hasn’t

lost consciousness because there is communication back and forth. He has not lost normal consciousness but sees another reality. Augustine said we do not have a loss of consciousness, but a making of the consciousness loose from the bodily senses, so that what “God wanted shown could be shown. The prophets feel themselves in another spiritual world, in which they hear voices and see images.” That seems to be a pretty good description of what we find from that day. If you had been standing next to one of these prophets you wouldn’t have seen or heard a thing—at least that’s the way I would perceive it. But *they* did and God communicated to them in that way.

Now to get back to that thing of ecstasy with Israel’s prophets, I think it is permissible to term this visionary form of divine revelation as “ecstasy.” There is some biblical basis for that. For instance, Acts 10:10, where you have this description of Peter seeing this vision of a sheet descending down from heaven on which are clean and unclean animals. You read, “He became hungry and wanted something to eat and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.” If you look at the Greek text there, “trance” is the English translation of the word *ecstasis* in the Greek. So he was in *ecstasis*. “He saw heaven open, something like a large sheet was being let down to earth, lowered by its four corners to the ground.” That visionary experience of Peter is described by the word *ecstasis*.

In Acts 22:17, we have the same thing with Paul where he sees a vision. And we read, “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance.” That’s *ecstasis* again. “And I saw,” notice the language there it’s just like the prophet, “I saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick,’ he said to me, ‘leave Jerusalem immediately because they will not accept your testimony about me.’” That seems very similar to what we find in the Old Testament visionary experience. So it seems to me that we may call this visionary means of reception of divine revelation as “visionary ecstasy.” If there’s anything in the Old Testament that speaks through ecstatic phenomena among the Jewish prophets it seems to me it’s like a visionary experience, not wild, or erratic behavior.

Let’s go on to Roman numeral V. then, which is, “The preaching of the prophets.” I just want to make some pretty general remarks about this. We’ll look at some formal

characteristics and then some characteristics of the content but all of it is pretty general. Under A., “General remarks,” 1., “The prophets were first and foremost proclaimers of God’s Word.” The prophets received divine revelation, yes, but they did not receive divine revelation to keep it to themselves. They received it in order to proclaim it to other people. They did that primarily by preaching. So the prophets to a large extent were preachers. Now some of the material may have been written down and represented in written form but for the most part you’ll find the prophets going out in public forums and preaching and giving the message of God to their contemporaries, whether that’s to a king or to the people at large. The prophetic books to a large extent are a written record of their oral proclamation. We’re going to come back to that under Roman numeral VIII., “The composition of prophetic books—were the prophetic writers?” We’ll talk about that question a bit further. But the canonical books are to a large degree a written record of their oral proclamation. The idea that they delivered their messages in some sort of an ecstatic condition is lacking evidence. They gave their message in understandable language and from the indication of the text they did say it in a very sober and normal manner of speaking or preaching. The fact that they were regarded as strange by others, sometimes because of their symbolic acts, sometimes because of their emotional expressions or whatever, isn’t sufficient evidence for saying they were ecstatics. But they were proclaimers of God’s Word first and foremost.

2. “The message of the prophets was a faithful proclamation of God’s revelation.” But, and here is a qualification, not to the exclusion of a personal element in the form of its presentation. So what is the relationship between the revelation and the proclamation? When you ask that question, it’s very important not to place a tension or division between the revelation and the proclamation. In other words, the preaching of the prophets was a faithful representation of what God revealed to them.

However, and this is where that qualification on point 2 of your handout arises, the personal element of the individual prophet is employed in the representation of the message. In other words, if you look at the messages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel and compare the form of the proclamation you will find that there are differences in

language, style, choice of words, personality traits, personal background, agricultural versus the priesthood. It's clear from the message, say of Jeremiah, that he was a very different person than Amos was. Jeremiah is obviously a very sensitive man, and that comes through in the messages that he gives. In Isaiah you see little or nothing of Isaiah's inner personality. So you see differences in the language and style of the messages of the various prophets that are related to the personalities of the prophets.

Now when you see that, there is, I think a mystery here and that is the mystery of how God takes up and employs the personal characteristics, traits, background and the different ways of affecting an individual, and uses that in the proclamation of his word. You get this intertwining of the divine and the human in the proclamation of God's word. So it's man's word but at the same time it is God's word. Wherever you get that kind of intersecting of the divine and human you come to a mystery. We can't fully explain how that functions or how it works. You have that in the inspiration of Scripture which is really the same thing as the inspiration of the prophets because the Scripture is God's word, the writer of Scripture is proclaiming God's word, yet his own personality comes through in the writing. I think Vos discusses this point well. Page seven of your citations from an essay he wrote called, "The Idea of Biblical Theology and Sciences as a Theological Discipline." Notice what he says, page seven. He says "For, God having chosen to reveal the truth through human instruments, it follows that these instruments must be both numerous and of varied adaptations to the common end. Individual coloring, therefore, and a peculiar manner of representation are not only not detrimental to a full statement of the truth, but directly subservient to it. God's method of revelation includes the very shaping and chiseling of individualities for his own objective ends. To put it concretely: we must not conceive of it as if God found Paul, 'ready-made,' as it were, and using Paul as an organ of revelation, had to put up with the fact that the dialectic mind of Paul reflected the truth in a dialectic, dogmatic form to the detriment of the truth. The facts are these: the truth, having inherently, besides other aspects, a dialectic and dogmatic side, and God intending to give this side full expression, chose Paul from the womb, molded his character, and gave him such a training that the truth

revealed through him necessarily bore the dogmatic and dialectic impress of his mind.” And then there is the next section, “The divine objectivity and the human individuality here do not collide nor exclude each other, because the man Paul, with his whole character, his gifts, and his training, is subsumed under the divine plan.” In other words, God prepared in advance precisely the kind of person and mind that he wanted in order to convey some particular message through him. And in the case of Paul, his dialectical and logical mind may produce logical sentences in some of his writings. Well, it is God’s purpose to have his word put in that kind of form that he had prepared the individual to do. “The human is but the glass through which the divine light is reflected, and all the sides and angles into which this glass has been cut serve no other purpose than to distribute to us the truth in all the riches of its prismatic colors.” Now that’s often called “the organic view of inspiration,” where this human person is taken up into this process and utilized or employed by God in the formulation of the message.

Some of you are probably familiar with the theologian from the Netherlands, G. C. Berkouwer. He wrote the theories and volumes called, *Studies of Dogmatics*, which he was writing at the time I studied in the Netherlands in the 1960s. He’s a very good scholar. He says some interesting things about this question and how his view of Scripture changed over time. Some have spoken of an early Berkouwer and a later Berkouwer but the early Berkouwer spoke of this question in this way. He said, “Where do you put the mystery?” And if you ask the early Berkouwer the question, “How can a word be both God’s word and man’s word?” Berkouwer says that the mystery is in the nature of the working between God’s spirit and the human consciousness, the intersection of the divine and human so that the human personality is taken up into the proclamation of God’s word. There is the mystery. How does that actually work? I think that’s where the mystery should be placed and leave it there. If you look at all the specifics of Scripture, “I will put my words in your mouth,” make it seem that the proclamation is in the human personality. The result is Scripture remains the inerrant word of God in spite of its human mediation. Because it is the word of God and it remains the inerrant word of God.

The later Berkouwer answers that question again—“How can the human word be at the same time the word of God?”—but places the mystery in a different point. In the later Berkouwer, the question is, how can the human word—which, because it is human is of necessity errant—how can a human word and therefore an errant word, be at the same time the word of God? In the later Berkouwer, the mystery is, how is it possible for a fallible human word to be at the same time God’s word, and to convey divine truth. Now it may sound like I’m quibbling. But the later Berkouwer would say, Scripture is not inerrant but it is God’s word. To be that raises a host of problems. We start trying to sort out which word is better by saying which one is reliable and which one isn’t. So it’s an important question but it seems quite clear when you look at the prophetic writings there are personalities that are different. The way in which the message is formulated reflects that, but it remains God’s word.

Let’s go to B., “Some formal characteristics of the prophetic proclamation.” And 1. is, “The messages are direct and living—not abstract and dry.” When you read through the prophetic books, you find that prophets came and they spoke in a vivid, forceful and powerful way to their audiences. They are not abstract, dry, theoretical, formal lectures. Let me give you just a couple illustrations: Jeremiah 7 is a good chapter to illustrate this. This is often called *Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon*. You look at the context from Jeremiah 7 in the first verse, “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Stand at the gate of the Lord’s house and there proclaim this message.’” The Lord tells Jeremiah to go out and look for him at the gate of the temple and give this message, “‘Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!’ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers forever and ever. But look, you are trusting

in deceptive words that are worthless. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe—safe to do all these detestable things?’ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!’ declares the Lord. Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.” This is what happened to the town of Samuel and they destroyed his tabernacle. “While you were doing all these things, declares the Lord, I spoke to you again and again but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore what I did to Shiloh, I will now do to the house that bears my name, the temple you trusted, the place I gave to you and your ancestors, I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did to all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.” So here he is standing at the gates of the temple saying, “This temple’s going to be destroyed.” The temple is what Israelites gloried in. This was God’s dwelling in their midst. They went through all these rituals, but their lives were telling a different story. They were, as it says, burning incense to Baal, following other gods. Now that’s a powerful message, and it’s characteristic of the prophets to give messages in a forceful way like that—not abstract and dry lectures.

We could look at a number of other examples, but I’m not going to take time to do that. This is the language of Joel 2 where there is a description of a locust plague. It is really descriptive and a very beautiful passage. But it’s a passage of coming judgment. The locusts were symbols of the coming judgment of the world. Look at Nahum with the description of judgment coming on Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. So the messages are direct and not abstract and dry.

2. is, “The prophets often utilized a play on words to get a point across.” There’s a lot more of this in the prophetic books than you probably would be aware of if you only looked at the English texts because plays on words are one of the most difficult things you can deal with if you’re trying to translate from one language to another. And to carry over the play on words into the receptor language is very often it is impossible.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations. This is Isaiah 5:7, which if you look at the Hebrew there, you have, “And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed.” You see the play on words with *mishpat* and *mispok*, are almost identical in sound, but how do you carry that across into a translation? But then the second phrase there, he looked for righteousness, *lesedeqah*, but behold a cry a cry of distress, *sadaq*. You get two of them in that verse. A play on words like that is a very effective manner of calling attention to the point that is being made. So it heightens the force and effectiveness of the statement, but it is difficult to capture that in translation.

Look at Isaiah 7:9 in the NIV, “If you do not stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all.” There they have captured something of the play on words that we heard there. ‘*amen*’ means “confirm” or “support” as far as its basic meaning. In the Hiphil stem it means “trust” or “belief.” In the Niphal stem it means “confirm” or “establish.” So you get a difference between the Hiphil and the Niphal and you get the idea of believing established. But you don’t get the similarity in sound that you do when you read it in Hebrew.

I’ll give you another example. This is a textual problem that is a combination of play on words along with a textual issue. If you look at Jeremiah 23:33—following really the Septuagint and Vulgate, which I think are preferable here—from the Masoretic Text. I’ll come back to the Septuagint text in a minute. But the translation if you follow the Masoretic Text would be, “When one of these people or a prophet or a priest asks you, ‘What is the Lord’s burden?’ Then you shall say to them, ‘You are the burden.’ ‘And I will cast you off,’ says the ruler.” Now there is a play on words there and the play on words is with the word *massa* you see the last word on the Hebrew line. If you look there at the beginning there is the word *massa*. What is the Lord’s burden? *Massa* is a word that has a double meaning. It can mean “burden” or it can mean “oracle.” So, when one of the people, prophets or priests says to you, what is the Lord’s burden? What is the Lord’s oracle or message? Then you shall say onto them, you are the Lord’s burden.” Not in the sense of a message but in the sense of a weight on his back. You see, there is a play on that double meaning of the word *massa*. I think that is the way the text is to be

read. That's the Hebrew text presupposed by the Septuagint. What is the Lord's burden? You are the burden. If you looked at the NIV and the King James, "What is the burden of the Lord? Thou shalt say under them, what burden?" That's the way the Masoretic Text reads. "What is the Lord's burden? We shall say unto them. What burden?" Now you see what has happened here? The question is where do you divide between the words? Do you divide after the *taw* and put the *mem* with the *he* interrogative or do you divide it after the *he*? Seems to me the Septuagint has kept the play on words much better. To say that "what burden" doesn't fit nearly as well as "you are the burden."

Let me give you one other example of this play-on-words. Jeremiah 1:11 says, "The word of the Lord came to me: 'What do you see Jeremiah?' 'I see the branch of an almond tree,' I replied." The Almond tree is *shaqed*. "I see the branch of the **almond tree**. The Lord said to me, 'You have seen correctly for I am **watching** to see that my word is fulfilled.'" Watching is *shoqed*.

So we have *shaqed* and *shoqed*. We can't catch that in the translation but it's a play on words. *Shoqed* is a verb that means "to watch" or "to wait" and *shaqed* [almond tree] is derived from that root. It's called that because of its early waking out of winter sleep, it's an early blooming tree. But as far as etymology you get the *shaqed/shoqed* play on words and that is something that's fairly common in the prophetic discourse.

Thirdly, it's simply a literary technique, a manner or means of making the point you're making in a more effective, forceful manner. I'm not good at that kind of thing; there are writers and there are speechmakers who have the clever ability in order to do that. It's a forceful way of speaking if you can do it right. That's my next point, a lot of the prophets wrote in poetic form and poetic language often tends to play on a word. There was a philosopher at the Free University at Amsterdam where I took my doctorate who spoke in plays on words all the time to make philosophical points. He did that as a matter of course.

3. is, "The prophets often utilize poetic expression." Great sections of the prophetic books are in Hebrew poetry. You can see that simply by opening to Isaiah, or if I open on this page you can see the typeset indicates when it is prose. But when you read

through Isaiah you see that most of the book is in poetic form. In some of the older translations that did not show up in the typeset, you wouldn't know from reading those translations whether you were reading poetry or prose. The newer translations indicate that by the way it is typeset line by line rather than in paragraphs as prose is.

Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelisms. These parallel lines can be synonymous parallelism, antithetical parallelism or synthetic parallelism. These are the three main types. In synonymous you get two lines that say pretty much the same thing with different words. In antithetic, you get two lines where the first says one thing and the second says the opposite. In synthetic, there is sometimes a building together between the two. The lines between them are sometimes difficult to draw but it's clear that Hebrew poetry is built on parallel lines.

Look at Isaiah 2:2, "In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established," and then the parallel phrase, which really builds on it, "as chief among the mountains." And then the next phrase, "It will be raised above the hills," and the parallel, "all the nations will stream to it." "Many peoples will come and say, come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." And the parallel phrase, "to the house of the God of Jacob." "He will teach us his ways," parallel phrase, "that we may walk in his paths." "The law will go out from Zion," parallel phrase, "the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." See it goes on like that. That is characteristic of much of the prophetic discourse.

Fourthly, the prophets all tend to use imagery or figurative language. Now as it has already been pointed out, imagery, figurative language is often characteristic of poetic expression. Look at Isaiah 28. In the first four verses, Isaiah says, "Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley—to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine! See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground. That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, will be like a fig ripe before harvest—as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it." Now what's

that talking about? What is this wreath that is the pride of Ephraim's drunkards that is going to be cast to the ground through this hailstorm of destruction? That's figurative language, describing Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom. Samaria is the wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards; "Set on the head of a fertile valley, to the city, the pride of those laid low by wine. See the Lord is one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour" – that's Assyria that's going to come in and destroy Samaria. Assyria is that hailstorm of destruction. Samaria will be trampled underfoot. Now the figurative language there is fairly clear, sometimes it's more difficult to understand exactly what the figure represents. Sometimes it's difficult to know whether a passage is intended to be taken figuratively or literally. We have to sort it out and look at reasons why maybe you read it literally and maybe you read it figuratively. That can be very complex.

Another clear example of figure is Isaiah 5, "The Song of the Vineyard," where you read, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." And then you get an explanation. What is this figure all about? It's an extended figure, almost an allegory. Yes, in verse 7, "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight." And then you get that verse we looked at earlier, it has that play on words, "And he looked for **justice** [Mishpat], but saw **bloodshed** [Mishpoh]; for **righteousness** [sadaqah], but heard cries of **distress** [sa'aqah]." So, there's a lot of imagery and figurative language in the prophetic discourse.

Let me give you one other extended one, and that's Ezekiel 27, where you have a description of the city of Tyre, which was a trade city. It's pictured in Ezekiel 27 as a merchant ship at sea. So you read in the first verse, "The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, take up a lament concerning Tyre. Say to Tyre, situated at the gateway to the sea, merchant of peoples on many coasts, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: You say, O Tyre, I am perfect in beauty. Your domain was on the high seas; your builders brought your beauty to perfection. They made all your timbers of pine trees from Senir; they took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.'"" So here's this picture of this city in the form of a ship. "Of oaks from Bashan they made your oars; of cypress wood from the coasts of Cyprus they made your deck, inlaid with ivory. Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail and served as your banner; your awnings were of blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah." Now I'm going to skip way down to verse 26. "Your oarsmen take you out to the high seas. But the east wind will break you to pieces in the heart of the sea. Your wealth, merchandise and wares, your mariners, seamen and shipwrights, your merchants and all your soldiers, and everyone else on board will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of your shipwreck. The shorelands will quake when your seamen cry out. All who handle the oars will abandon their ships; the mariners and all the seamen will stand on the shore. They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you; they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in ashes." Verse 32 continues, "As they wail and mourn over you, they will take up a lament concerning you: "Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea?" When your merchandise went out on the seas, you satisfied many nations; with your great wealth. Now you are shattered by the sea in the depths of the waters." So, judgment is going to come on the city of Tyre. It's pictures; this imagery is both poetic and figurative of a merchant ship. Those are some formal characteristics of poetic writing.

Let's go to C., "Some characteristics of the content of Prophetic writings" I have two sub-points here. One, "The prophets do not bring a new religion or morality." So first, something that I think is important—particularly in the viewpoints that have been advocated by many that the prophets are the great religious innovators in Israel—

you have to understand from the outset; the prophets did not initiate a new religion or perform it. The prophetic message is not distinguished by new religious concepts. The primary emphasis of the prophets is to call God's people back to salvation, and back to what God has previously revealed. They called Israel back to their obligations as the covenant people of God, the covenant that was established on Mount Sinai under the leadership of Moses. That covenant was foundational to what Israel was to be as a people. So you'll find that the prophets, to a great extent, are calling Israel to be faithful to that covenant. That's not innovation, it's more reformation. Yet you do get some deepening and further development of previously revealed theological concepts, certainly the progress of redemptive history is made clearer as the prophets begin to speak God's word in the future of where and when God intends to go with His redemptive purposes. You can speak of progress of revelation but not of essential change. So the prophets were not the great religious innovators in Israel who, as many have alleged, established the idea of ethical monotheism.

Wellhausen reversed the role of the law and the prophets putting the prophets first and the law second. He thought the prophets were the religious innovators who created this idea of ethical monotheism. However, the Bible itself is exactly the reverse. Moses laid the foundation for the clarification of the covenant on Mount Sinai, and it was the prophets who called the people back to that notion.

Secondly, "The message of the prophets is centered in four areas," and I just listed four broad categories of material in a, b, c, and d: a. is religious or theological, b. is morality or social relationships, c. is political issues, and d. is eschatology and Messianic expectation. All those things are interconnected, but I think much of what the prophets had to say could be placed under one of those as far as the primary emphasis or focus of what they were saying. So let me make just a couple comments about each of them.

"Religious or theological," would include teaching about God and God's relationship to his people. It would include warnings against idolatry and false worship, as well as warnings against religious formalism, going through the ritual but not living the life. There was a lot of that going on in Israel; that was a major focus of the prophets.

As far as general teaching about God, there's stress on monotheism—there is only one God. Look at Isaiah 45:4-5, where Isaiah says, “For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name” and this is speaking of Cyrus the Persian ruler, “and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me, I am Yahweh, and there is no other. Apart from me there is no God.” This is a straightforward statement of monotheism.

If you go down to Isaiah 18:45 you read, “For this is what Yahweh says, he who created the heavens, he is God. He who fashioned and made the earth and founded it, he did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited.” He says, “I Am Yahweh and there is no other.” So there is one God, and that is emphasized.

There is a great deal of emphasis on God's power and sovereignty. One of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible on God's power, his creative work and sovereignty, is Isaiah 40. See verse 18, “To whom will you compare God? To what image will you compare Him?” And then he ridicules idolatry, “As an idol, a craftsman casts gold, or a goldsmith overlays it with gold and the silversmith casts silver chains. Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? He that is God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to nothing, he reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.” He is sovereign over both nature and history, he is the Creator. Verse 26, “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out the starry host by number, he calls them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and the strength of his power, not one is missing.” Here's the powerful God who controls nature and history. Verse 27, “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: “My way is hidden from the Lord and my just claim is passed over by my God?” Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” So emphasis is on divine power and sovereignty. He is

the Creator of the whole earth.

There is at the same time emphasis on God's holiness and justice. God of Israel is a God that judges sin. But there is a name for God that is characteristic of Isaiah, that is the "Holy One of Israel." That's the way God is often referred to. There's a great deal of emphasis on his holiness and his justice. But at the same time there's emphasis on his mercy. He seeks out his people. He pulls them back to himself, even in judgment there's mercy. He desires his people to repent, and when they refused to do that, and ultimately even are driven out of the land, a remnant is brought back. So there's emphasis on love and mercy. So those are just broad, general comments about teachings about God.

As far as teaching about God's relationship to His people, the focus there is on the covenant relationship. But having said that, the interesting thing is you do not find the word *berit*, covenant, used extensively by the prophets. If you go through all the prophetic books, Major and Minor Prophets, there are 65 occurrences of the word "covenant." In a number of the prophets, there's no reference to the word at all. It doesn't even appear. It's not used in Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, or Habakkuk. There was a time when people would look at the prophetic books and say, "Oh, the word 'covenant' doesn't appear, so these prophets didn't know anything about the covenant." Look at your citations, page 7, the bottom of the page, Walter Eichrodt in *Theology of the Old Testament*, points out, "The crucial point is not – as an all too naive criticism sometimes seems to think – the occurrence or absence of the Hebrew word *b'rit*, but the fact that all crucial statements of faith in the Old Testament rest on the assumption, explicit or not, that a free act of God in history raised Israel to the unique dignity of the people of God, in whom his nature and purpose were to be made manifest. The actual term 'covenant' is, therefore, so to speak, only the code-word for a much more far-reaching certainty, which formed the very deepest layer of the foundations of Israel's faith, and without which indeed Israel would not have been Israel at all." In other words, the whole message of the prophets rests on the assumption that there was such a covenant relationship between God and his people. Whether or not they use the word "covenant" really has nothing to do with it. I think one of the clearest illustrations of that, is found

into this later in the book of Amos. The word *berit* does not occur at all in the book of Amos. But the messages of Amos are using covenant language, terminology and covenant concepts constantly. So we don't determine whether or not the word and whether or not the idea of covenant was present in the message of the prophets by looking and seeing whether or not they use the word *berit*.

But the teaching in the prophetic books about God's relationship to his people is based on the covenant relationship, and because of that, the prophets come with these messages of warning and judgment. The covenant included blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, and the warnings about judgment to come are rooted in the covenant curses. The prophets come and call God's people to obedience and to worship of the Lord. Where does that come from? It comes from the covenant. They were obligated to obey the stipulations of the covenant, and to love the Lord their God with their whole heart, mind and soul. So the fundamental assumption with respect to God's relationship with his people is the covenant relationship.

Let's go on to b.: "Morality and social relationships." There's a fair amount of attention given to questions of morality and social relationships. I think the reason for that is the prophets see a very close connection between a person's morality and true religion. In other words, the Mosaic law had a lot to say about love for one's neighbor and what that implies or entails in one's daily life. True religion involves concern for and a practice of social justice. So the prophets view the social evils that existed in Israel in their days as apostasy from the Lord, turning away from their covenant obligations. So they speak out against such things. Look at Jeremiah 22:13, for example. Jeremiah says of Jehoiakim, "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness. His upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it and panels it with cedar, and decorates it in red. Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food or drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him." What is doing what is right and just? That's walking in the way of the covenant, doing what is right and just. So all went well

with him. ““He defended the cause of the poor and needy, so all went well.”” And then there’s a very interesting next line, ““Is that not what it means to know me?’ declares the Lord.” What does it mean to know the Lord? That’s covenantal language as well. That’s to recognize Yahweh as sovereign and to recognize his stipulations as binding. That’s what it means to know the Lord. Your father did that but you, Jehoiakim, are not. Verse 17, ““You set your eyes and your heart on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood, and on oppression, and on extortion.’ Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, ‘They will not mourn for him, saying, “Alas my brother! Alas my sister!” They will not mourn for him, saying, “Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!” He will have the burial of a donkey— dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem.”” Down to verse 9, “because you have turned away from the Lord.”

Look at Amos 8:4-12, “Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?— skimping the measure, boosting the price, and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.”

The world hasn’t changed much. Some years ago somebody did a survey around Thanksgiving time, on turkeys in the supermarket. You pick up a turkey and it is marked “13 ½ lbs.” They weighed all these things and found they were consistently less weight than what was marked on the thing. Cheating with dishonest scales, not much has changed. “Selling the sweepings with the wheat.” But the prophets speak out against those kinds of things.

Then there’s corruption in the courts. Look at Micah 3:9-11, “Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, ‘Is not the Lord among us?’” That’s an abomination.

Look at the materialism of Isaiah 3:16-26. It's a very descriptive passage. "The Lord says," and here we get a description of the women of Jerusalem, the women of Zion. "The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald.' In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery." Here you get a description of the finery of these women of Zion. "The bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and the mirrors, and the linen garments and the tiaras and shawls." So that's a picture of the women of that time yet it sounds similar to today in many ways.

But then Isaiah says, "Instead of fragrance there will be a stench, instead of sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding. Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground." Judgment's coming. So there is a fair amount in the prophets about moral and social relationships.

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