

## Responding to God Word: How to Faithfully Interpret the Bible

Men's Bible Study at Park View

A Study of the Old Testament Prophets

May 31, 2005

In this last Bible study before the summer break, we will read several passages of Old Testament prophecy. According to Fee and Stuart, prophets functioned primarily in three ways: 1) as covenant enforcers, 2) they spoke for God, not themselves, and 3) their message was not original. They essentially presented the blessings and curses of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. See for example, Hosea 4:2, which summarizes five of the ten commandments in five words—cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery. A basic pattern in the prophets' message is 1) either an identification of Israel's sin or God's love for her, and 2) a prediction of God's curse or blessing.

The curses of God for breaking the covenant are summarized in ten Ds: death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace (Fee and Stuart). The blessings are found in Deut. 4:32-40; 28:1-14 and Leviticus 26:1-13. The curses are found in Leviticus 26:14-39; Deut. 4:15-28, and Deut. 28:15-32:42.

Fee and Stuart aver that one of the main difficulties in understanding prophets is that in the historical books of the Old Testament (particularly in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles), we read much about the prophet's lives but not much about their oracles; in the prophetic books it is the other way around.

When interpreting the prophetic writings, one must learn to think in *oracles*. These are presented in three common forms: 1) the covenant lawsuit (e.g., Isaiah 3:13-26, Hosea 4:1-19), 2) the woe (e.g., Habakkuk 2:6-8, Micah 2:1-5, Zephaniah 2:5-7), and 3) the promise (Amos 9:11-15, Hosea 2:16-20, Isaiah 45:1-7). Most ancient prophecy was written poetically, since the ancients valued this medium. It was also highly memorable.

The early prophets, (before Amos) prophesied directly to the king. Amos and others went directly to the people.

Read Amos 1:1; 2:6-16

Who was Amos? When did he prophecy? To whom did he prophecy?

Prophets functioned both as foretellers (predicting the future) and as forthtellers (declaring God's word to the present). Which of these two roles is most evident in this oracle?

What is the dominant feeling or mood throughout this oracle?

What response does God seek from us today as we study this ancient oracle?

Read Isaiah 40:1-11

In contrast to Amos, a rural dweller who walked among the people, Isaiah frequented the courts of Israel and addressed kings with his message. He lived shortly after the time of Amos. Yet the last chapters of his book (40-66) address life following the exile predicted in the first 39 chapters. Consequently, many scholars attribute the last part of the book to other writers.

What is the dominant theme of the oracle in chapter 40:1-11?

How is God depicted in this oracle?

What response does God seek from us in response to this prophecy?