



Historical context

- 1150-1025 BCE Period of the judges/Tribal confederation
- 1021-1000 BCE Saul reigns
- 1000-962 BCE David reigns
- 962-922 BCE Solomon reigns; builds first temple
- 922 BCE Rehoboam succeeds Solomon/Jeroboam rebels
- 922-901 BCE Jeroboam rules Israel (northern kingdom)
- 721 BCE Assyria destroys Israel (northern kingdom)
- 586 BCE Babylon destroys Judah (southern kingdom)

What is a prophet? (Heb. נביא, 'nabi)

[Samuel said to Saul] After that you shall come to Gib'eath-elo'him, where there is a garrison of the Philistines; and there, as you come to the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. Then the spirit of the LORD will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man.... When they came to Gib'e-ah, behold, a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them. And when all who knew him before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10.5-6, 10-11)

Illustration: Saul and David by Rembrandt.



Prophets: Early and late

- Moses was thought to be the greatest of the prophets. (“And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land...” (Deut. 34.10-11))
- Elijah, Elisha, and prophets of the period of the judges.
- “Court” prophets, eg, Nathan. (2 Sam. 7.1-3ff)
- The “classic” age of prophets, eg, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Illustration: Moses with the tables of the Law by Rembrandt



The meaning of “prophet” changes. It begins as an ecstatic figure and later becomes more of a literary figure, but there is lots of overlap. Even the later prophets such as Isaiah display ecstatic behavior, eg, Isa. 20.2-4 (Isaiah walked naked)



Prophets and seers/ראה

- Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, “Come, let us go to the seer”; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer. (1 Sam. 9.9)

Illustration: Ezekiel by Raphael.

Key prophetic concepts: Critique of Temple cult

- "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5.21, 23-24)
 - The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.' (Jer. 7.1-4)
-

Illustration: Call of prophet Amos.

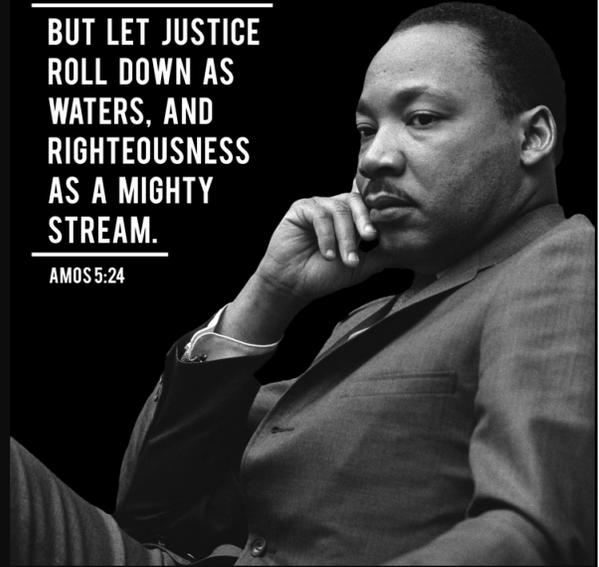


Justice **משפט**/righteousness
צדקה

- I put on RIGHTEOUSNESS, and it clothed me;
my JUSTICE was like a robe and a turban.
I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame.
I was a father to the poor,
and I searched out the cause of
him whom I did not know. (Job 29.14-16)
-

**BUT LET JUSTICE
ROLL DOWN AS
WATERS, AND
RIGHTEOUSNESS
AS A MIGHTY
STREAM.**

AMOS 5:24



We think of righteousness in terms of personal morality, but the prophets did not. And we think of justice in terms of living in a way corresponding to an abstract code of justice, but for the prophets it meant living in a right relationship with the rest of the community.

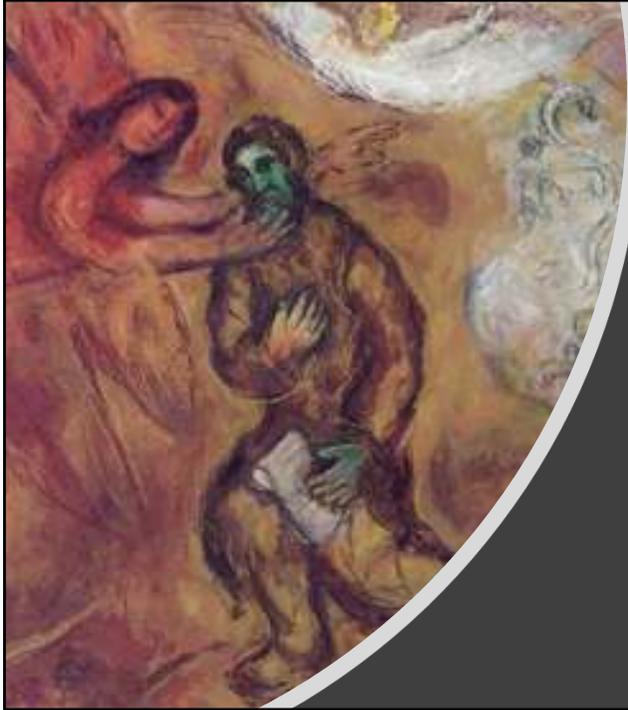


The divine Word/דבר

- Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart (Jer. 15.16)
- If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (Jer. 20.9)

Illustration: Jeremiah by Michelangelo.

God's word is not just a way of communicating information. The divine word is alive. It is both burden and blessing.



The divine word, cont.

- Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jer. 1.9-10)
- I said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." (Isa. 6.5-7)

Illustration: Isaiah and the seraph by Marc Chagall.

Prophetic universalism

- It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
(Isa. 2.2-4)





Universalism, cont.

- “Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. (Zeph. 3.9-10)

Universalism, cont.

- “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.” (Isa. 19.25)

Illustration: Isaiah by Raphael.



The prophets set the religion of Israel apart from all other ancient religions. The gods of all other ancient religions had nothing to do with morality. Religion was entirely transactional. You offered sacrifices either to gain the gods' favor or avert their wrath. But the God of Israel demanded not sacrifice but justice and righteousness. One worshiped YHWH by modeling one's behavior on Adonai's behavior.