

The Prophets - Modern Writers?

Pastor Duke Jeffries

Can 21st Century American Christians learn any valuable lessons from the divinely-inspired rantings and ravings of three Hebrew prophets who lived more than 2700 years ago? Can they teach us anything “new” about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Can they have anything even remotely relevant to say to us?

These are fair questions. Like most Christians, my knowledge of Old Testament prophecies was limited to those regarded by Bible scholars as either *eschatological* or *messianic*. But one of my favourite authors, Phillip Yancey, helped to change all that. In his excellent book, The Bible Jesus Read, his answer to the question “Why Should We Bother With The Prophets” piqued my interest.

“Far from my prior stereotype of fusty finger-waggers, I found the prophets to be the most *modern* writers imaginable. In chapter after chapter they deal with the same issues that hang like a cloud over our own century: the silence of God, economic disparity, injustice, war, the seeming sovereignty of evil, the unrelieved suffering that afflict our world. These, the same themes that surface periodically in *Job*, *Psalms*, *Ecclesiastes*, and even *Deuteronomy*, the prophets bring into sharp focus, as if examining them under a microscope. Prototypical books of Old Testament realism, the prophets eloquently express the doubts, pains, and complexities that we all feel.”

- Phillip Yancey: The Bible Jesus Read

The prophets, I have learned, behave most like I do when I’m at my wit’s end, struggling to come to logical terms with what I perceive to be God’s refusal to take immediate care of my business. Where I may *think* the question, the prophets are so bold as to shout it out loud: “Where ARE You, God?” They demand to know how long His latest silence might last. They fuss and they whine. They cry out in anguish. They mourn and they wail and they rage – *coram Deo* – “to God’s Face”, as it were. As Yancey writes, they “treat God with shocking familiarity”.

Perhaps the most fascinating feature of the prophetic books is the glimpse they provide into elements of God’s character which surprise (or even frighten) us. When the prophets complain to God about His seeming indifference or tardiness, He speaks right up and gives them answers –but not always the ones they want to hear. Sometimes God seems to lose His divine cool, like when He gets fed up with His chosen people and threatens them with curses for their cussedness, or when He uses His “*Yahweh* voice” to pronounce an oracle of unspeakably grim judgment on one of their enemies. At other times we find God vacillating between irritation, anger, and wistful sadness toward His own people as He muses on their long history of stubbornness, disobedience, rebellion, and wickedness. In many ways they were, you know, just like *us*!

How can you NOT be intrigued? ☺

SO...for the sixth consecutive year, *D.v.*, we shall in our *Summer Church* teaching sessions dive headlong into the Old Testament, focusing particularly this summer on the writings of three of the so-called “Minor Prophets” -- **Jonah**, **Hosea**, and **Amos** –who ministered in the *Northern Kingdom* after Israel was divided by a civil war. Best way to get ready? Read these three short books during the next few weeks. Try reading them in several English translations. You might be surprised. The first

Sunday of *SummerChurch at COS* is **July 3rd**. We'll get started at **9 AM** with a hearty breakfast. Soon after, we'll feast on the Word. Let us break bread together in the Fellowship Hall. *Bon appétit!*