

HUMA 1850 The Bible and Modern Contexts

Oct. 21: The Prophets (Tony B)

Read for today: *IB* Ch. 4 Narrative and Prophecy amidst the Rise and Fall of the Northern Kingdom (pp. 85–117) and indicated readings from Kings, Amos, Hosea, etc.

1. The Kingdom of Israel Divided

- Solomon dies 922 BCE; son Rehoboam coronated in Jerusalem but seeks further approval in the northern city of Shechem
- the northerners ask Jeroboam to lighten their yoke, but he refuses, leading to the northern tribes' independence
- God, via the prophet Ahijah, selects Jeroboam as the northern king
- the north is thereafter called Israel (aka Ephraim) and the south is called Judah
- Jeroboam (r. 922-901 BCE) gets better part of the kingdom; north also tends to be more accommodating to Canaanite culture
- the “sins” of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:25-33)
 - makes two shrines/temples (Dan and Bethel) and uses golden calves
 - builds houses on high places and employs priests from the people (not Levites)
 - creates new version of the festival of Tabernacles
- note: Elohistic version of the Israelite epic may have been written in Jeroboam's time
- after Jeroboam the stories of the kings take on a stereotyped form

<i>Judah</i>	<i>Israel</i>
1. In the _____ year of so-and-so, king of Israel, so-and-so, king of Judah, began to reign.	1. In the _____ year of so-and-so, king of Judah, so-and-so, king of Israel, began to reign.
2. Facts about his age, duration of reign, name, and queen mother.	2. Facts about the length of his reign and the place of his capital.
3. Evaluation of his standing in comparison to “David his father.”	3. Censure for the fact that “he did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in the way of Jeroboam and his sin which he made Israel to sin.”
4. “Now the rest of the acts of so-and-so...are they not written in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?”	4. “Now the rest of the acts of so-and-so...are they not written in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?”
5. Concluding statement that he slept with his ancestors, and so-and-so reigned in his stead.	5. Concluding statement that he slept with his ancestors, and so-and-so reigned in his stead.

- dynasty of Omri the most stable (r. 876-869); terminates with Ahab (869-850 BCE)

- 1 Kgs very brief on Omri (16:24-28): mentions only his construction of the new capital in Samaria; but Omri was regarded as an able and important king by other observers of Israel in this period (the Moabite Stone)
- the “sins” of Ahab (r. 869-850): takes Jezebel (daughter of King of Sidon) as his wife, built a temple of Baal (Baal-Melkart of Tyre) for Jezebel, Jezebel tried to obliterate Yahwism

2. Prophecy in the Ancient Near East

- virtually every culture in antiquity had individuals who were seen as a means of communication with the divine
- Letters of Mari (ca. 18th c. BCE) contain many references to prophets, using a variety of titles, including “answerer” (implying that the person provides answers to inquiries), “cult functionary,” “ecstatic” (the most common title) and “diviner”
- Mari prophets: connected with royal court, prophecy typically involved entering into trancelike (in effect, being “possessed” by the deity), employed divination
- Hebrew word *nabi* means “one who announces” or “one who is called”; speakers who carried messages from the divine realm to the earthly realm
- concerned with present, not future, task to communicate God’s message for now, and to summon the people to respond today
- various types: cultic prophets (associated with shrines and temples), royal prophets (members of the court), “sons of the prophets” (belonging to guilds or bands), amateurs (not professionals but felt a calling by Yahweh)
- The Former Prophets=the Deuteronomic History (Joshua-Judges-Samuel-Kings)

3. Elijah and Elisha

- Elijah the Tishbite (Yahweh is my God); stories in 1 Kgs 17-19 and 21
- Elijah’s stories are battles between prophets, between religious systems (Canaanite and Israelite)
 - First battle (1 Kgs 17); Elijah is in a Phoenician town (Zarephath); he provides an endless supply of meal and oil for the widow; he raises her son from death
 - Second battle (1 Kgs 18): contest at Mt. Carmel with Jezebel’s Canaanite prophets; wants an unequivocal answer from the people (Yahweh or Baal, not both)
 - Third battle (1 Kgs 21): Elijah rebukes Ahab for the killing of Naboth, the Jezreelite
- Elisha succeeds Elijah in 2 Kings 2
- Elijah the model for the “eschatological prophet”: when times are bad a prophet like him is expected to come

4. Literary Prophets

- The Latter Prophets=Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and the “Book of the Twelve” (aka The Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)
- respond to three major crises: the Assyrian crisis (8th c.), the Babylonian crisis (late 7th and early 6th c.) and the crisis of Restoration (late 6th and early 5th c.)

- addressed their oracles to the people not just rulers; why? policies of Assyria led to punishment of the people as a whole rather than just rulers
- each text is an often unruly collection of poetry and prose assembled by later followers of the prophet; do not expect coherency in argument

5. Amos, Hosea, and Micah

5.1 Amos

- Amos is the earliest written prophetic text; an indictment of activities in the north (Israel) from someone in the south
- set after Jeroboam II's (786-746 BCE) wars of conquest
- four basic points of Amos' message:
 1. The socioeconomic lifestyle of the Israelites is opposed to traditional Yahwhistic values
 2. Socioeconomic reorganization without compassion is unacceptable
 3. The resulting oppression of the poor cannot be tolerated
 4. Participation in the cult supplies a false sense of confidence
- who was Amos? See 1:1 and 7:10-14
- three sections:
 - 1:1–2:16 ~ Introduction and Oracles against the Nations
 - 3:1–9:8a ~ Elaboration of judgment: the Inversion of Israel's Election (7:1-9:8a ~ Visions)
 - 9:8b–15 ~ Final qualification: future for "Israel" in a revived Davidic kingdom

5.2 Hosea

- northern prophet concerned with syncretism/accommodation
- context: Assyrian King Tiglath Pileser III began extending his reach westward in second half of 8th century; Israel begins paying tribute around 738 BCE under Menahem; after his death Pekah joins Syria and other nations in rebelling and stopping payment; leads to Syro-Ephremite War (736–732 BCE); Israel destroyed by Assyrians in 722 BCE
- two sections:
 - 1–3 ~ material about Hosea's marriage and delivered under last years of Jeroboam II; 2
 - 4–14 ~ prophetic speeches over the years of the Assyrian crisis

5.3 Micah

- southern prophet writing after the destruction of Israel; thinks the same will come to Judah
- three sections:
 - chs. 1-3 ~ judgments against Israel and Judah
 - chs. 4–5 ~ images of a restored and glorious Zion with an ideal king (5:2-5)
 - chs. 6–7 ~ blend of doom and hope perhaps reflecting pre-Exilic and exilic perspectives

6. Isaiah

- Syro-Ephraimite war: Israel and Syria ask Judah to unite with them in war against Assyria; King Ahaz (r. 735–715) makes deal with Assyria instead
- Ahaz burns his son in the Valley of Hinnon (Ge Hinnon) just outside the city (2 Kgs. 16:3) hoping to prevent attack on Judah by Syria and Israel
- Isaiah: court prophet under King Ahaz of Judah
- evidence of multiple stages of authorship:
 - 1st Isaiah: chs 1–12; 20; 22; 28–33, 36–39 (comp. 740–700 BCE)
 - 2nd Isaiah: chs. 35, 40–55 (comp. ca. 538 BCE)
 - 3rd Isaiah: chs. 34, 56–66 (post-Exilic)
- chs. 7–8 features Isaiah’s response to the Syro-Ephremite war; Ahaz ignores Isaiah’s advice and allows Judah to become a vassal of Assyria
- children of Isaiah: Shear-jashub (7:3) which means “a remnant shall return”, Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1, 3) which means “the spoil speeds, the prey hastens” (8:1, 3)
- Isaiah withdraws but comes back under Hezekiah and aids Hezekiah during the assault by Assyrian king Sennacherib (705–701 BCE)
- Hezekiah (r. 715–687):
 - “He trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him” (2 Kgs. 18:5)
 - purges Canaanite and Assyrian influences from the Jerusalem temple
 - against Isaiah’s counsel Hezekiah joins with Egypt in a rebellion against Assyrian king Sennacherib (r. 704–681)
 - 701 BCE Sennacherib attacks and lays siege to Jerusalem; Hezekiah pays large bribe and Sennacherib withdraws because of rumour of revolt in Babylon
- Manasseh (r. 687–642):
 - reversed reforms of Hezekiah; held responsible by the Deuteronomic Historian for provoking Yahweh into bringing judgement on the nation
 - Assyria under Esarhaddon (r. 680–669) marches into Egypt; Manasseh allowed Egypt to move up and down through Judah
- Josiah (r. 640–609): next week