

The Bible as Revelatory Word

The Bible as Revelatory Word:

*1 Scripture as Oracular Text
(The Prophetic and Wisdom
Traditions)*

By

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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(The Prophetic and Wisdom Traditions)

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Fig.1 Frontispiece: Isaiah (Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, 1508-12)

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." (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to sceptres and thrones... For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the workings of God, and an image of his goodness. (Wisdom 7:7-8a, 26)

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LIST OF BIBLICAL ABBREVIATIONS

The Old Testament

Am	Amos
1 Chron	1 Chronicles
2 Chron	2 Chronicles
Dan	Daniel
Deut	Deuteronomy
Eccles	Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
Est	Esther
Ex	Exodus
Ezk	Ezekiel
Ezr	Ezra
Gen	Genesis
Hab	Habakkuk
Hag	Haggai
Hos	Hosea
Is	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Job	Job
Joel	Joel
Jon	Jonah
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
1 Kgs	1 Kings
2 Kgs	2 Kings
Lam	Lamentations
Lev	Leviticus
Mal	Malachi
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Neh	Nehemiah
Num	Numbers
Obad	Obadiah
Prov	Proverbs
Ps (pl. Pss)	Psalms

Ruth	Ruth
1 Sam	1 Samuel
2 Sam	2 Samuel
Song	Song of Songs
Zech	Zechariah
Zeph	Zephaniah

The Deutero-Canonical Books

Bar	Baruch
Ecclus/Sir	Ecclesiasticus (= Sirach)
Jud	Judith
1 Macc	1 Maccabees
2 Macc	2 Maccabees
Sir	Sirach (= Ecclesiasticus)
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom (= Wisdom of Solomon)

Apocrypha

1 Esd	1 Esdras
2 Esd	2 Esdras

The New Testament

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Apoc	Apocalypse (= Revelation)
Col	Colossians
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Eph	Ephesians
Gal	Galatians
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
Jn	John (Gospel)
1 Jn	1 John (Epistle)
2 Jn	2 John (Epistle)
3 Jn	3 John (Epistle)
Jude	Jude
Lk	Luke
Mk	Mark

Mt	Matthew
1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Pet	2 Peter
Philm	Philemon
Phil	Philippians
Rev	Revelation (=Apocalypse)
Rom	Romans
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy
Tit	Titus

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INTRODUCTION

This book provides an opportunity for studying the special areas of Scripture known as the Prophets and the Wisdom Books, building on a fundamental understanding of the Old Testament. Both groups constitute a great proportion of the Bible, and approaching these long and complex texts can seem like a considerable, even an intractable, challenge. This book enables a thematic overview of the subject, a way into some of the critical issues endemic to the study of both traditions, and by implication, to some of the fundamental approaches used in biblical scholarship.

This work is designed to enable readers and students to consider these special themes, with selected passages from the Bible, in a way that sharpens reactions, and facilitates the possible construction of the biblical horizon, from ancient Scripture to situations and issues in the contemporary world. The process, aware of both diachronic (historical-critical) and synchronic (literary) challenges in the sacred texts, puts emphasis on exegetical and hermeneutical issues, and the theological application of interpretive findings.

This work hopes to encourage reading the texts themselves, and developing a perception of language, imagery, genre and style. All these aspects are essential for distinguishing elements in Prophetic Writing, and differentiating it from the very different approaches of the Wisdom Books. The aim is to provide an overall picture of the genres employed, to locate the books in a chronological and thematic context, to explore the texts themselves through the specific passages provided, and then to read the books themselves as a whole.

The Prophetic Phenomenon

This first part provides a consideration of the prophets by reference to the messianic tradition. It surveys the **prophetic phenomenon** in the context of the political history of Israel and Judah: the monarchy and its failure, the disaster of political independence, the tragedy of confrontation with Assyria and Babylon, the **Exile** and its meaning for the Jews. The prophetic phenomenon is seen as the voice of justice, as beacon of hope, as custodian of the spiritual values of the nation, as mystical call to fullness of life now and in the future. The figure of the **Suffering Servant**

is a dominant theme, as is the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation in time and space.

Oral Hebrew Prophecy

This phenomenon was rooted in the prophetic activities of various individuals and groups from the peoples of the Ancient Near East. Even though prophecy among the Ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians and Canaanites was generally connected with predicting the future, the Hebrew view of prophecy centred on proclaiming the truth, though it also included a predicative aspect. The sentence "*Thus says the Lord*" is repeated constantly to emphasize this proclamatory aspect. The Hebrew prophets were very conscious of the absolute holiness (or separateness) of God, and his plans for his chosen people Israel. Because of this consciousness, they developed an acute awareness of sin and its effects on the individual and society. The consequence of this awareness was a radical ethical outlook that applied to person and community.

The Hebrew term for prophet (**navi**?) is related to the Akkadian **nabu** ("to call", "to name"), and the prophet may therefore be viewed as 'caller' or 'spokesman' for God. The distinctive element of Hebrew prophecy is the relationship of the prophet to God, the Lord of the Covenant, and to Israel, the people of the covenant. The prophet spoke for the Lord to recall, cajole, castigate, reprove, comfort and give hope to the people of the covenant, constantly reminding them that they were chosen to witness to the nations the love, mercy and goodness of God. Some of the Hebrew prophets from the 11th to the 8th centuries BC belonged to bands or guilds of ecstatic prophets. Their uncontrollable actions and words caused them to be feared. Other prophets, like Nathan (2 Sam 7) and Elijah (1 Kgs 17), were more independent, and worked alone, but were also regarded as uncontrollable and dangerous by the political authorities. These early non-writing prophets spoke out against the oppression of the weak by the strong, a theme that was constantly to be expressed in Judaism throughout the centuries.

The prophetic tradition became an integral part of Hebrew religious culture, permeating the very consciousness of the people, and a feature of their spiritual and social self-expression, right into New Testament times. The following table lists those identified in the Bible as prophets, or at least as sharing in the special charism of that calling or vocation. Some of these are passing names, remembered for some court function, for some brief intervention, or glorious insight; some became giants of the ancient

testimony of the Jewish People, leaving a precious written inheritance. Still others were identified and shamed as false prophets.

Primary List

Aaron (Exodus 7:1)
Abel (Luke 11:50-51)
Abraham (Genesis 20:7)
Agabus (Acts 21:10)
Agur (Book of Proverbs 30:1)
Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29)
Amos (Amos 7:14-15)
Anna (Luke 2:36)
Asaph (2 Chronicles 29:30)
Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:8)

Barnabas (Acts 13:1)

Daniel (Matthew 24:15)
David (Hebrews 11:32)
Deborah (Judges 4:4)

Elijah (1 Kings 18:36)
Elisha (2 Kings 9:1)
Enoch (Jude 1:14)
Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:3)

Gad (2 Samuel 22:5)

Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:1)
Haggai (Haggai 1:1)
Hosea (Matthew 2:15)
Huldah (2 Kings 22:14)

Iddo (2 Chronicles 13:22)
Isaiah (2 Kings 19:2)

Jacob (Genesis 28:11-16)
Jehu (1 Kings 16:7)
Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:2)
Jesus (God the Son and/or the Son of God) (Luke 24:19)

Joel (Acts 2:16)
John the Baptist (Luke 7:28)
John of Patmos (Revelation 1:1)
Jonah (2 Kings 14:25)
Joshua (Joshua 1:1)
Judas Barsabbas (Acts 15:32)

Lucius of Cyrene (Acts 13:1)
Malachi (Malachi 1:1)
Manahen (Acts 13:1)
Micah (Micah 1:1)
Micaiah (1 Kings 22:8)
Miriam (Exodus 15:20)
Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10)

Nahum (Nahum 1:1)
Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2)
Noah (Genesis 7:1)

Obadiah (Obadiah 1:1)
Oded (2 Chronicles 28:9)

Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:26)
Note: his four daughters also prophesied (Acts 21:8, 9)
Paul the Apostle (Acts of the Apostles 9:20)

Samuel (1 Samuel 3:20)
Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:22)
Silas (Acts 15:32)
Simeon Niger (Acts 13:1)

Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:3)

Urijah (Jeremiah 26:20)

Zechariah, Son of Berechiah (Zechariah 1:1)
Zechariah, Son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20)
Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1)

Secondary List

Eldad (Numbers 11:26)
 Eliezer (2 Chronicles 20:37)
 Elizabeth, Mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:41)
 Jahaziel (2 Chronicles 20:14)
 Joseph (Genesis 37:5-11)
 Joseph, Fosterfather of Jesus (Matthew 1:20)
 Mary, Mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-28)
 Medad (Numbers 11:26)
 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 2:1)
 King Saul (1 Samuel 10:10)
 Simeon of Jerusalem (Luke 2:25, 26)
 King Solomon (1 Kings 3:5)
 The Seventy Elders of Israel (Numbers 11:25)
 Zechariah, Father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:67)

False Prophets

Ahab (Jeremiah 29:21)
 Antichrist (1 John 2:18-19)
 Azur (Jeremiah 28:1)
 Elymas (a.k.a. Bar-Jesus) (Acts 13:6-12)
 Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:5)
 Jezebel (Revelation 2:20) (not to be confused with Queen Jezebel of the
 Old Testament, 1 Kings 16)
 The False Prophet of the Book of Revelation (16:13, 19:20, 20:10)
 Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24)
 Zedekiah (Jeremiah 29:21)

The Non-Writing Prophets

The activities of the early prophets, including Elisha in the 9th- century BC, are described in those history books called the Former Prophets by the Jews. The first sustained contact with the phenomenon of prophecy comes in the person of Samuel. His early life and vocation are described in detail in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel (1—3). The situations and themes presented here are of crucial importance for the whole notion of prophecy. Samuel's birth is the result of a miracle of grace. After years of disappointment, his mother Hannah is granted a child who would be special to the Lord. The situation with Elkanah and Hannah is analogous

with that of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18), and Samuel's birth and consecration to the Lord is a parallel with Isaac (Gen 22). It also looks forward to the story of John the Baptist's birth and consecration (Lk 1). Hannah's faithfulness, obedience and loving dedication of her son make her a perfect example of total cooperation with the God of Israel. In her lowliness, pain and patient attendance on the Lord, she becomes a type of the Daughter of Zion (Zeph 3:14). The analogies are now with Mary and the Angel Gabriel (Lk 1:26-38).

1 Sam 1:17-18

Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him. And she said, "Let your maidservant find favour in your eyes."

When Samuel is born, his father significantly says, "*Only, may the Lord establish his word*" (1 Sam 1: 23b). Hannah's song of thanksgiving looks back to Moses' canticle of praise after the deliverance of the Children of Israel from Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Ex 15:1-18). Hannah sees Samuel's birth as a sign of God's saving plan (1 Sam 2:11-11). Here is the indication of God's salvific love, especially for the poor, downtrodden and forgotten. The canticle becomes the manifesto of the **'anawim**, the poor ones of the Lord who are special in God's sight, and who because of their faithfulness, will eventually know the power of his love. The analogies are again with Mary and her song of praise (Lk 1:46-55, the Magnificat) and Zechariah and his song of thanksgiving (Lk 1: 67-79, the Benedictus).

1 Sam 2:5

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

6 The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.

While the boy Samuel lived in the Temple with the old priest Eli, he "*continued to grow both in stature and favour with the Lord and with men*" (1 Sam 2:26). This looks back to Isaac (Gen 26:23-25) and Samson (Judg 13: 24-25), and forward to John the Baptist (Lk 1:80) and Jesus (Lk 2:52).

The story of God's voice calling to Samuel out of the night as he lay sleeping near the Ark of the Covenant is a key passage in the history of prophecy (1 Sam 3). Like Moses in Sinai keeping watch over his father-in-law's sheep, the call of the Lord comes quietly, mysteriously, and irresistibly (Ex 3).

1 Sam 3:9

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears'." So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Samuel is told to communicate the advent of God's judgement on Eli's wayward sons, and even though he does not wish to do so, the priest obliges Samuel to be faithful in relaying God's word, no matter how personally unpalatable or devastating the message might be (1 Sam 3:15-21). From then on, Samuel becomes the special recipient of God's revelation, the Lord's spokesman to the people of Israel

1 Sam 3:19; 4:1

And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.

21 And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

4:1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

It is Samuel who comes to help and lead the people in the national crisis when the Israelites are defeated by the Philistines, the Ark of the Covenant is captured, and Eli and his sons die. Samuel leads the people to victory against the Philistines at Mizpah, having confirmed them in their faith in the one true God and rededicated them to pure and faithful monotheism (1 Sam 4—7).

1 Sam 7:3

Then Samuel said to all the House of Israel, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the ashtaroth from among you, and direct your heart to the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

4 So Israel put away the baals and the ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only.

5 Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you."

6 So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." and Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

It also fell to Samuel to initiate the next vital phase in the history of Israel, the establishment of the monarchy. The moral turpitude of Samuel's sons who become judges in his place ("*They took bribes and perverted justice*", 1 Sam 8:3b) was reflected in the collapse of moral standards all over Israel, and the national desire to have a king, as a means of national unity and revival. The terrible story of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19—22 was written as a warning and a plea for this perceived solution to the people's crisis ("*In those days there was no king in Israel*", Judg 19:1). The monarchy was to bring Israel to a brief moment of glory, but on the whole was to prove a social, political and national disaster. It is bound up with the call, covenant and faithfulness of the people, with the purity of their trust and dedication to the Lord. Samuel's prophetic message had them warned them in advance.

1 Sam 8:4

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah,

5 and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations."

6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." and Samuel prayed to the Lord.

7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

8 according to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.

9 Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So Samuel anointed Saul to be king (1 Sam 10:1), and after the growing failure of Saul's leadership and disobedience, Samuel was sent to choose David, the youngest and overlooked son of Jesse of Bethlehem (1 Sam 16:13) who would eventually become Israel's greatest king. Such was the moral power of Samuel's leadership, that even after the prophet's death, in

the nadir of Saul's failure, he tried to seek out Samuel through the mediation of the Witch of Endor (1 Sam 28).

To Samuel's successor, Nathan, fell the task of reproving David for his adultery with Bathsheba, and for engineering the death of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 12). Conversely, Nathan was also the mouthpiece of the great renewal of the covenant that was vouchsafed to David, whose royal dynasty was to become the symbol of God's kingly power and plan of salvation for the future. The Messianic Covenant became one of the key statements in all the Bible, of immense consequence for understanding the whole prophetic movement, and finally for the nature and purpose of Jesus' ministry in his lifetime ("*Rabbi, you are the son of God! You are the king of Israel*", says Nathanael Jn 1:49) and beyond all time as the King of Kings ("*King of all the ages*", Rev 15:3b).

2 Sam 7:10-17

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly,

11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men;

15 but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

For all the glory of Solomon's reign, the new king initiated moral compromises and tolerance of syncretism, and launched the moral decline of the nation. The division of the polity into the two separate kingdoms of Judah and Israel was a fatal development, and the beginning of the end of the nation's unity and political independence (1 Kgs 12:16-24). Even more darkly, it resulted in a second centre of worship in the north (at Shechem

and Bethel) which would be a focus of recurrent apostasy and betrayal of monotheism (1 Kgs 12:25-33). The very institution of prophecy was now open to abuse (1 Kgs 13).

1 Kgs 13:26

And when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God, who disobeyed the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord has given him to the lion, which has torn him and slain him, according to the word which the Lord spoke to him."

The nub of this new situation of political complexity, dynastic plotting and moral/religious turpitude, was identified decisively in the second great prophet of the moral tradition, Elijah.

The Elijah-Elisha Cycle (1 Kings 12—2 Kings 13)

This is the story of Elijah's confrontation with the weak king Ahab of Israel and his scheming Phoenician wife Jezebel, who had introduced Baalism to the kingdom and murdered the prophets of the Lord (1 Kgs 18:4). Elijah's contest with the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18) is one of the greatest events in the Bible, and a testimony to the truth of the omnipotent Lord revealed to Ancient Israel. Elijah's exile in the wilderness of Horeb, his encounter with the Lord in the cave of his refuge, and the vitalization of his prophetic vocation (1 Kgs 19), as well as the passing on of the cloak of his succession to his disciple Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16; 2 Kgs 2:13), are powerful themes and events that have had enduring consequence for sacramental theology and the traditions of spirituality [Fig.2]. The prophet's confrontation with the king over the misappropriation of Naboth's vineyard, his coruscating words of reproof, warning and chastisement, and Ahab's obedient repentance, are also of enduring moral power and witness through the ages (1 Kgs 21). Elijah's ministry of testimony and integrity, his powerful words and actions, his life of prayer and inspiration, his retreat into desert and mountain, the dynamism of his public actions on Carmel and in Jezreel, made him the very epitome of prophetic vocation and divine witness. Elijah came to symbolize God's action through his prophets, and to represent in himself the charism of this calling. His name became a metonym for the prophetic witness (as when people thought that John the Baptist was Elijah came back to life, Mk 6:15). Elijah's name summed up the whole prophetic tradition and the might of the Word of God (as when he appeared with

Moses on the mountain top, speaking with Jesus at the Transfiguration, Mt 17:3; Mk 9:4; Lk 9:30) [**Fig.3**].

Elijah's ministry was carried on by Elisha (2 Kgs 1—12). Elisha stands as an example of humility, mercy, and faithfulness. Though a wealthy man brought up with privilege, when God called him into the position of prophet, he faithfully served this calling until the Lord took him. Elisha's main purpose was to finish the work of Elijah and help during a very dark time to restore Israel back to the God of Israel. With a double portion of anointing on him, Elisha not only became a widely recognized prophet in Israel but also a miracle worker for Israelites and foreigners alike. The prophet made himself available to others, educating them about living a life of faith. He travelled widely, advised kings, and befriended the common people. Throughout his ministry from 892–832 BC, God used Elisha to touch people in the midst of sickness, death and want, in order to lead them into the divine restorative mercy and grace. Early in his ministry, Elisha distinguished himself as a compassionate, merciful, miracle-working prophet. Some of those miracles reflected the past and others foreshadowed those of Jesus. As Moses sweetened the bitter waters of Marah so the nation could survive (Ex 15:25), Elisha's second miracle healed the spring near Jericho (2 Kgs 2:19-22) so the people of the city could have a clean source of water.

Not only did Elisha receive the apostolic succession from Elijah, he witnessed his master's fiery assumption into heaven (2 Kgs 1:11-12); he parted the River Jordan like Joshua and Elijah before him (1:13-14); and it was known that "the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha" (1:15). Among his many miracles were: providing water (3:16); oil (4:4); healing the Shunammite Woman's son (4:32); feeding a hundred men with twenty loaves (4:44); curing Naaman the Syrian's leprosy (5:14); exerting power over the forces of nature by causing an axe-head to float (6:5); striking hostile Syrians blind and then healing them (6:18-20); and even when buried, bringing life to the dead who touched his bones (13:20-21). In his ministry Elisha prophesied in Samaria when the city was besieged (7:1), and sent a disciple to anoint Jehu as king (9:1).

Like Elisha, Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick, multiplied food, and defied gravity in walking on water. The Evangelist Luke uses firstly Isaiah, then the prophets Elijah and Elisha to stress the continuity and fulfilment of Jesus' ministry with the Old Testament (Lk 4:24-27). Indeed, both John the Baptist and Jesus were associated with the ministries of Elijah and Elisha (cf. Mt 3:1-6; 11:14; 16:13-16; Lk 1:17; 9:8, 19; Jn 1:21), and these prophetic narratives have been seen as a literary model underpinning the Gospel story (see Thomas Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge*,

1999). Jesus' words in the Synagogue of Nazareth, citing the Isaiah, capture the nature of the election, the ministry of sorrow, and the healing/illuminating mission of the prophet.

Lk 2:14-30

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country.

15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read;

17 and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

20 And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

21 And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

22 And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

23 And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here also in your own country.'"

24 And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country.

25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Eli'jah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land;

26 and Eli'jah was sent to none of them but only to Zar'ephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Eli'sha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Na'aman the Syrian."

28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

29 And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong.

30 But passing through the midst of them he went away.

Luke's theology reflects his concerns with the history of salvation and the continuity between the Old and the New Covenants, and with the importance of Jerusalem as the place from which salvation will spread to the whole world

Elisha's death signalled an even more depressing betrayal of the pure religion of Ancient Israel. Only the reigns of good kings like Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18—20) and Josiah (2 Kgs 21—23) saw religious orthodoxy restored, and the emergence of a new type of prophetic witness. The prophet Isaiah, who ministered to Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20), was to write down what was revealed to him by God. By the 8th century BC, the writing prophets (i.e. Latter Prophets) began their activities. In the books that bear their names, the editors or disciples of the prophets preserved as far as possible the words, activities and idiosyncratic themes of the prophetic personalities. Some of them were associated with the priestly class (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), but most were free of priestly connections.

The messages of the prophets were primarily moral and spiritual in their purpose. Israel's prophets were rugged reformers, divinely raised up to call the nation from sin and idolatry in its periods of decline. They pronounced warnings of impending doom in centuries preceding the fall of Israel in 722 BC and the fall of Judah in 586 BC. Their weighty oracles of woe, however, were frequently the vehicle for far-reaching messianic prophecies. Ezekiel and Daniel ministered hope and comfort to the exiles. Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the weak remnant that returned to Palestine. Malachi sounded a sombre note of warning and repentance illuminated by brilliant messianic flashes. So an overview of the prophetic mission and their directive theology of repentance can be proposed.

To Israel before the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC) the prophets announced:

Amos—divine punishment follows persistent (social) sin;

Hosea—God's love for Israel in spite of her apostasy;

Jonah—Nineveh, repent! God's concern for the Gentiles.

To Judah during the declining years (726-597 BC):

Joel—the Day of the Lord and judgement of nations;

Obadiah—doom upon Edom;

Isaiah—the coming saviour and Israel's king;

Micah—Bethlehem is for the king and his kingdom.