

Why study the prophets of Scripture? Seeing in them highly relevant answers to the spiritual, moral and social disintegration of our day.

1. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable.

2. The prophets were men who walked with God, knew God and were known by God. They were spiritually rich men, deeply spiritually taught and exercised men, spiritually powerful men, and observant men, sympathetic and deadly earnest men. They certainly understood human nature and the human predicament. They believed that God was active in history that history was meaningful and that God's purposes were being worked out in it. That God would become incarnate in history in the Person of His Son, and that all salvation rested upon Him. They understood life as a walk with God and a place where vital moral decisions needed to be made. They knew God in daily life and in their innermost souls.

3. Midst the moral confusion of their day they were able to discern and point out what was true and what was sham. They saw through hypocrisy in religion, and man-centred religion. They had the capacity to sift the wheat from the chaff.

4. What we learn about God and true faith through the Prophets is not superseded by the revelation of Christ. Rather it is filled out, illuminated and made more plain by Him.

'The Bible is one book, and we know more about the God of Christian faith than is found in the pages of the New Testament, when like the evangelists and apostles we read the prophetic writings with eyes opened by Jesus Christ. The relationship between the Testaments is not simply one of succession and development, but one of inter-relationship and vital continuity.'

The Relevance of the Prophets, R B Y Scott p206

5. The Prophets made it abundantly plain that true and real faith and ethical behaviour must form a vital unity. *'So let our lives and lips confess the holy gospel we profess.'* Faith without works is dead.

6. Akin to number five is the prophet's emphasis on the fact that religion is not a specialised activity of man's life, but must include the totality of his being and actions. Yes, this involves the specialised activities of prayer, worship, study of Scripture etc, but it must touch the whole attitude, thought and actions of his life.

7. The prophets speak of God as a personal being, the God who can be known. *'Their God is not the remote, dispassionate, abstract deity who becomes a term of intellectual discussion. The God we meet in the pages of Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah can only be described as a vigorous and vivid personality, majestic indeed, and divinely 'other than man', and yet meeting him in the commerce of*

mind with mind and of will with will. His holiness is emphasised not less, but more by the awareness of his towering ethical presence in human affairs, of his commanding and puissant (powerful) purpose, and of the peremptory (admitting no refusal) and inescapable summons of his moral demand on men. His goodness and mercy, his righteousness and his wrath are not dogmas received on authority, nor deductions from one central doctrine. Neither are they inferences from immediate experience. Rather they are elements of the experience itself. God is known as one man knows another, with the indescribable difference that the other is God.'

ibid. p211

8. The prophets speak to us about the true nature of sin.

The deep understanding in prophetic thought of what constitutes sin is another matter of great present significance. Today sin is generally regarded as the transgression of certain arbitrary religious taboos established by religious custom. But particular acts of sin have their origin in the alienation of man's spirit from God, and their consequences in harm done to human personalities and to the common spiritual life of communities. Sin introduces a chaotic element into the divinely intended order of life. Where religion affirms and unites sin denies and divides. Its awful power and dreadful responsibility are measured by its affront to the divine goodness and the divine beauty it mars.

The world is ready once more for the declaration of the awful reality of human evil. The tremendous wars and atrocities of the 20th century have well demonstrated the fact that autonomous man cannot solve the vast problems of economic welfare and political order. The judgments of God are manifest in the world today. The time has come to bring home to men that these are right judgments on human sin and that men bear these consequences inevitably, because they are morally responsible for their actions in denying their responsibility to God and their neighbours.

9. The Prophets speak of the true remedy for sin, the coming Saviour Jesus Christ.

<p>1. HIS FIRST ADVENT. <i>The fact</i>, Gen. 3. 15; Deut. 18. 15; Ps. 89. 20; Isa. 2. 2; 23. 16; 32. 1; 35. 4; 42. 6; 49. 1; 55. 4; Ezek. 34. 24; Dan. 2. 44; Mic. 4. 1; Zech. 3. 8. <i>The time</i>, Gen. 49. 10; Num. 24. 17; Dan. 9. 24; Mal. 3. 1. <i>His Divinity</i>, Ps. 2. 7, 11; 45. 6, 7, 11; 72. 8; 102. 24-27; 89. 26, 27; 110. 1; Isa. 9. 6; 25. 9; 40. 10; Jer. 23. 6; Mic. 5. 2; Mal. 3. 1. <i>Human Generation</i>, Gen. 12. 3; 18. 18; 21. 12; 22. 18; 26. 4; 28. 14; 49. 10; 2 Sam. 7. 14; Ps. 18. 4-6, 50; 22. 22, 23; 89. 4, 29, 36; 132. 11; Isa. 11. 1; Jer. 23. 5; 33. 15.</p> <p>2. HIS FORERUNNER. Isa. 40. 3; Mal. 3. 1; 4. 5.</p>	<p>3. HIS NATIVITY AND EARLY YEARS. <i>The fact</i>, Gen. 3. 15; Isa. 7. 14; Jer. 31. 22. <i>The place</i>, Num. 24. 17, 19; Mic. 5. 2. <i>Adoration by Magi</i>, Ps. 72. 10, 15; Isa. 60. 3, 6. <i>Descent into Egypt</i>, Hos. 11. 1. <i>Massacre of Innocents</i>, Jer. 31. 15.</p> <p>4. HIS MISSION AND OFFICE. <i>Mission</i>, Gen. 12. 3; 49. 10; Num. 24. 19; Deut. 18. 18; Ps. 21. 1; Isa. 59. 20; Jer. 33. 16. <i>Priest like Melchizedek</i>, Ps. 110. 4. <i>Prophet like Moses</i>, Deut. 18. 15. <i>Conversion of Gentiles</i>, Isa. 11. 10; Deut. 32. 43; Ps. 18. 49; 19. 4; 117. 1; Isa. 42. 1; 45. 23; 49. 6; Hos. 1. 10; 2. 23; Joel 2. 32. <i>Galilee, ministry in</i>, Isa. 9. 1, 2.</p>
---	---

<p><i>Miracles</i>, Isa. 35. 5, 6; 42. 7; 53. 4. <i>Spiritual graces</i>, Ps. 45. 7; Isa. 11. 2; 42. 1; 53. 9; 61. 1, 2. <i>Preaching</i>, Ps. 2. 7; 78. 2; Isa. 2. 3; 61. 1; Mic. 4. 2. <i>Purification of Temple</i>, Ps. 69. 9.</p> <p>5. HIS PASSION.</p> <p><i>Rejection by Jews and Gentiles</i>, Ps. 2. 1; 22. 12; 41. 5; 56. 5; 69. 8; 118. 22, 23; Isa. 6. 9, 10; 8. 14; 29. 13; 53. 1; 65. 2. <i>Persecution</i>, Ps. 22. 6; 35. 7, 12; 56. 5; 71. 10; 109. 2; Isa. 49. 7; 53. 3. <i>Triumphal entry into Jerusalem</i>, Ps. 8. 2; 118. 25, 26; Zech. 9. 9. <i>Betrayal by own friend</i>, Ps. 41. 9; 55. 13; Zech. 13. 6. <i>Betrayal for thirty pieces</i>, Zech. 11. 12. <i>Betrayer's death</i>, Ps. 55. 15, 23; 109. 17. <i>Purchase of potter's field</i>, Zech. 11. 13. <i>Desertion by disciples</i>, Zech. 13. 7. <i>False accusation</i>, Ps. 27. 12; 35. 11; 109. 2; Ps. 2. 1, 2. <i>Silence under accusation</i>, Ps. 38. 13; Isa. 53. 7. <i>Mocking</i>, Ps. 22. 7, 8, 16; 109. 25. <i>Insult, buffeting, spitting, scourging</i>, Ps. 35. 15, 21; Isa. 50. 6. <i>Patience under suffering</i>, Isa. 53. 7-9.</p>	<p><i>Crucifixion</i>, Ps. 22. 14, 17. <i>Gall and vinegar, offer of</i>, Ps. 69. 21. <i>Prayer for enemies</i>, Ps. 109. 4. <i>Cries upon the cross</i>, Ps. 22. 1; 31. 5. <i>Death in prime of life</i>, Ps. 89. 45; 102. 24. <i>Death with malefactors</i>, Isa. 53. 9, 12. <i>Death attested by convulsions of nature</i>, Amos 5. 20; Zech. 14. 4, 6. <i>Casting lots for vesture</i>, Ps. 22. 18. <i>Bone not to be broken</i>, Ps. 34. 20. <i>22. 12, 46</i> <i>Piercing</i>, Ps. 22. 16; Zech. 12. 10; 13. 6. <i>Voluntary death</i>, Ps. 40. 6-8. <i>Vicarious suffering</i>, Isa. 53. 4-6, 12; Dan. 9. 26. <i>Burial with the rich</i>, Isa. 53. 9.</p> <p>6. HIS RESURRECTION. Ps. 16. 8-10; 30. 3; 41. 10; 118. 17; Hos. 6. 2.</p> <p>7. HIS ASCENSION. Ps. 16. 11; 24. 7; 68. 18; 110. 1; 118. 19. <i>Dominion universal and everlasting</i>, 1 Chron. 17. 11-14; Ps. 72. 8; Isa. 9. 7. Dan. 7. 14; Ps. 2. 6-8; 8. 6; 110. 1-3; 45. 6, 7.</p> <p>8. HIS SECOND ADVENT. Ps. 50. 3-6; Isa. 9. 6, 7; 66. 18; Dan. 7. 13, 14; Zech. 12. 10; 14. 4-8.</p>
---	---

From 'Helps to the Study of the Bible' (Oxford)

10. The prophets teach us that time/ history is moving onwards towards its climax. "God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year." History has a purpose and a model meaning and is moving towards the final manifestation of justice, righteousness and love of God.

11. The Prophets present a clear call to repentance. They are a cry against materialism and worldliness. Zechariah 4:16 "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord." Literally not by material power or physical force, the twin pillars of the temple of this world. We can take an illustration of this from English church history. There was about England in the late Middle Ages an *odor of despair* preventing the *scent of optimism* accompanying the dawning new age of science and progress. The way out was to be found in Scripture. If there was a strong note of repentance in Cranmer's liturgy, it was there as the springboard to the new life in Christ. (The Church in History J.E. Booty p 56)

The prophets call the people to return to the Lord. **Coupled with the call to repentance of a wrong way of life is the summons to believe and live in God's way, and the assurance of what God has done and will do to make this possible.** This way corresponds to the moral and spiritual reality with which man supremely has to do, in a universe the Creator of which is not Baal or Marduk, Mammon or Mars, but the God of Moses and the prophets, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The social evils denounced by the prophets were seen by them as concrete examples of a dominant spirit in their society, which contradicted the essential nature of man and ignored the commanding presence of God. This spirit and the culture it produced were the fruits of the nature religion, through which men then sought to make the unseen powers the servants of their self interest. The magnitude of the Prophets achievement may be seen in the fact that their religion produced, to replace this, the spiritual culture of Judaism, a coherent and passionately held structure of ideas which became normative for social life and directive in history.

To say that these men are relevant for the cultural crisis of today is thus, in the first place, to recognize their supreme importance in one of humanity's most notable spiritual traditions. It accords also with the growing recognition that a spiritual world view, such as Christianity offers, is indispensable to modern man. For only among a people who share deep ethical and religious convictions can a living and formative culture exist. We speak so often of the achievements of civilization as if these comprised primarily in buildings, machinery and gadgets which men make and use, rather than the developed human quality of those who use them, and their accumulated intellectual, moral and spiritual resources. But it is men themselves who are or are not civilized. Their culture, the non-material possessions of their minds their way of living together according to the best that is in them- these are what really matter. All thoughtful men know that there is a lag here which may well prove fatal. Man has extended his controls over his environment but has not learned to control himself; he has taken into his hands terrific powers before he has attained the spiritual stature which would insure his using them for good ends. As someone has said: *modern life is a whirling around a central emptiness.*

In this area of life the worth and effectiveness of religion in social life is of paramount importance. The basic atheism, materialism, irrationality, moral confusion and social tension of life today in the Western world are more than sufficient to explain our cultural poverty and impotence. Among the vast majority of our people there is little concern for, and less agreement on, the really important issues which should determine social policy: what life is for, and what are its abiding satisfactions; the priority of values; the proper motivating force of economic activity; the moral basis of civil rights and duties; individual liberty; the extent and limitations of state power; essentials in the past and future of democracy. People are concerned with making a living rather than with living well.

Somehow or other the moral and political philosophers, the artists and poets, the writers and preacher's who are the real architects of civilization must find and proclaim a spiritual understanding of life. It must be adequate for the new situation which industrialism, world communications and modern wars have created for human society. The means must be subordinated to the right ends of life. We must recognize the political and economic problems are basically human problems and demand a humane solution. We must see that the fundamental defect of an economic system, which keeps so many in poverty and insecure, is its denial of moral values and of human brotherhood. This denial creates also the international anarchy which makes war from time to time inevitable. The social goal must be clarified; it is the establishment of the rights and duties of all men in the structure of social relationships, appropriate to the fact that they have been made by God to live as brothers. The principal mainspring of economic activity cannot rightly be self interest, if the supreme commandments are that man should love God with his whole being and his neighbour as himself.

What Israel's prophets said long ago as they condemned the manner of this world and pointed men to the city of God, is directly and profoundly relevant for us. They concern themselves with political and economic issues because of their human consequences. They laid bare the moral facts involved, in the light of God's will as the supreme fact with which man in this life has to do. They traced society's troubles to the inverted order of material and spiritual things, to man's self interest and self exaltation even against God, and to the denial of his own nature in denying human kinship.

The prophet's role was more than that of denunciation. The fruit of the religion they affirmed is equally pertinent to our situation. It offered a rock of security for men's spirits, and a coherent meaning and direction for life. It offered a moral motive in the sense of an absolute obligation for God's sake to realize in the community His justice, truth and love; and a creative faith that God's purpose for man's future was good. These things, again, religion can contribute to culture. **Man craves security from want and fear, because without confidence he cannot live at all and retain his sanity. He must have something dependable to rest on, some shield against death. This is why he seeks to wall himself round with safeguards and possessions. But, as Jesus said of the man who thought he had found security in bigger barns, life has no final security at all apart from God. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the Lord is."(Jer 17:7).**- life's foundation, its pivot, its integration. This is what modern man lacks and needs perhaps most of all.

Furthermore, Christianity offers to Western man, by recalling him to his heritage, an interpretation of the worth and meaning of life by which he may find again the bearings he knows he has lost. It can give him, as it gave to his fathers, the supreme motivating power of an absolute obligation to that which is right because God is God. And in the goodness and historic purpose of the God of the prophets and of Jesus Christ, man can again find the faith that goodness is real and is to be realized on earth; and that it alone can overcome the rampant evil of which man is the partly consenting and partly rebellious victim. Only men who believe in God's goodness can discern his purpose and build for an unseen future, creating anew the cultural life of their people.

As a matter of historical record, Christianity has contributed much to the development of the democratic idea and its institutions. Its doctrines of the equality of all men before God, of human brotherhood, of the emancipating power of the Gospel, of the subordination of all earthly authorities to God and his righteousness, and of property as held in trust-have given ever fresh impulses to the democratic movement. **Much of this came into Christianity from the Hebrew prophets, whose spirit Christianity brought to a new fruition and whose words it retained in its sacred Scriptures.** This is the first reason the prophets are relevant for modern democracy - that they belong to its spiritual ancestry, through the intermingling of the Hebrew - Christian and classical traditions.

We may also note. The vivid realization in feeling of the individual's participation in the corporate life is something the prophets helped to revive, though it was their inheritance in Israel. Our excessive individualism has robbed us of this. But it is essential to cultural vitality and to patriotism that citizens of a democracy should be able- to play their part as members of the body politic and so find national unity of spirit.

Again, the essential thing in individual freedom is the responsible moral consciousness of a man or woman as a person. **It was through the experiences of men like Hosea and Jeremiah that there came into our tradition knowledge of the inner freedom of spirit, which creates the demand for civil and religious liberties. It is a matter of record that the struggle for freedom of conscience and**

of worship is part and parcel of the age - long fight for full democratic liberty, and with it stands or falls.

Finally, we may gain from the prophets that depth of moral earnestness which can gird the democratic idea with the conviction of eternal righteousness. God is at work in history to create for Himself a people in whose hearts are His laws. Particular forms of society and government will prosper or perish according as they embodied justice and right, sustained personal dignity and foster true community among men. God is not outside the democratic struggle but within it. Democracy can fulfil its promise and endure, only as it strives to embody ever more fully the ways of the kingdom of God.

Adapted and enlarged from *The Relevance of the Prophets* R.B.Y Scott New York 1954