



The Prophets

Abraham Joshua Heschel , Susannah Heschel (Introduction)

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Abraham Heschel is a seminal name in religious studies and the author of *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man*. When *The Prophets* was first published in 1962, it was immediately recognized as a masterpiece of biblical scholarship.

The Prophets provides a unique opportunity for readers of the Old Testament, both Christian and Jewish, to gain fresh and deep knowledge of Israel's prophetic movement. The author's profound understanding of the prophets also opens the door to new insight into the philosophy of religion.

The Prophets Details

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Michael says

Less a work of historical criticism than a philosophical tract (though certainly thoroughly researched and highly critical), Heschel holds up the prophets of the Tanakh as exemplars of not just divine revelation, but also of : "divine pathos" and "prophetic sympathy," men attuned to God's concern for humankind and brave enough to speak His word to those who've forgotten it. The key here is reciprocity between the divine and the human, a concept to which I fully subscribe.

Brian Wilcox says

A classic !

Brett says

Absolutely awesome. He had me in tears in the Introduction. That's pretty good. It is a study of the prophets from the standpoint of divine pathos. A tremendous reflection upon the emotional concern of God for man. There are some dangers I suppose if you took this too far, but if you or anyone needs a cure for a view of God - a dispassionate stoic - this is it. This one goes right up toward the top of my list!

Doug says

At one point, the author summarizes: "We and the prophets have no language in common. To us the moral state of society, for all its stains and spots, seems fair and trim; to the prophet it is dreadful. So many deeds of charity are done, so much decency radiates day and night; yet to the prophet the satiety of conscience is prudery and flight from responsibility. Our standards are modest; our sense of injustice tolerable, timid; our moral indignation impermanent; yet human violence is interminable, unbearable, permanent. To us life is often serene, in the prophet's eye the world reels in confusion" (10).

This near-classic treatment of the prophets, written by Jewish theologian, Abraham Heschel, is full of helpful insights and reorientations of perspective. I only read the first half of the book, since the latter discussion of the psychology of ecstasy and such didn't interest me.

But the main section on OT prophets reinforced my sense that the biblical prophets saw the message or gospel of God as clearly focused on communal justice and even perhaps foreign policy, not on our post-Reformation obsession with individual salvation.

The book also highlighted how idolatry, too, was not some individual doctrinal error (the way we assume) but itself an alien politics and economics. To worship Assyrian or Egyptian gods was not just to worship a god of a different personal trait. It was to embrace an opposing politics, an opposing way of life.

The book also highlighted the prophets' continual denunciations of violence and war (I hadn't realized how many). At the same time, their general opposition to violence and military might set them not only at odds with the conservatism of their day but also with the violent pagan systems surrounding them.

"Others have considered history from the point of view of power, judging its course in terms of victory and defeat, wealth and success; the prophets look at history from the point of view of justice, judging its course in terms of righteousness and corruption, of compassion and violence" (219).

Still, the more one reads the communal perspective of the prophets, the more strange become the deep individualism and pietism of much of Christian faith, whether Roman, Protestant, or Eastern. All our traditions show a deep divide with the concerns of the prophets, and then we force our individualism on Jesus, though His teaching directly repeats their perspective.

At the same time, every Christian tradition has sub-traditions that follow Jesus and the prophets. Still, how to explain the divide between the concerns of Jesus/the prophets and a precisionist concern about where our soul would go if we died tonight. That is our evangelism, but it doesn't dominate the horizon of Jesus and the prophets (and I'd add, not Paul's or the other apostles' either).

I suspect there's a political/social answer for our deep pietism (even in those traditions, such as the Reformed, which pretend to denounce pietism). Historically, individualism and pietism and a general overemphasis on the inward tends to accompany those who have been compromised by systems of Mammon. This clearly happened to the Pharisees, once dangerously social but then tamed by Rome. And perhaps the same thing happened to Protestants when we sided primarily with German nobles and Elizabeth's quests for gold and American nuclear domination. In other words, once we surrender to Mammon, we're allowed only nonthreatening, private religion, nothing that would provoke persecution.

Apart from being provocative on a few points, the book overall didn't knock me over. Much of it was common knowledge but still good.

Neat opening line: 'This book is about some of the most disturbing people who ever lived.'

Matthew says

Feb 2012: Recently completed Book II -- also excellent, a bit less of direct argument and more historical contextualising against other faiths.

Oct 2011: This review is for Book I -- am taking a break before digging into Book II. I generally enjoyed Book I and really like how as a Jewish author he argues solely from the Old Testament and yet the message resonates very strongly with the message of the New Testament. The structure of the text is a reading of individual books, then a few thematic summaries: chiefly on God's role in history. The final chapter is on justice which I used as basis for a short public prayer, with the key points below.

1. Justice and morality are more important to God than sacrifice and even prayer

2. Justice is not — like in the Greco-Roman conception — an objective reality or set of unalterable laws that exists apart from God. Rather justice is an expression of God's will and being. Justice in the Hebrew mind (or mishpat) is a mode of action, which stems from tsedakah, or righteousness — the former implies giving each his due, the latter implies a burning compassion, an emotive sense.

Sub-point: justice implies one party has a right, and this implies the counter-party has an obligation or responsibility. Justice is thus an inter-personal relationship, and exists only in context of community.

Implication: Justice doesn't exist apart from God. Wherefore humanism then?

3. Why justice doesn't exist apart from God — reason 1:

“Justice represented as a blindfolded virgin, while conveying the essential thought of the rightful caution of the mind against illusions and partiality of the heart, conceives the process of justice as a mechanical process, as if the life of man were devoid of individuality and uniqueness and could be adequately understood in terms of inexorable generalisations. There is a point at which strict justice is unjust.

“Immutable justice — the principle of fiat justitia, pereat mundus — raises justice to a position of supremacy, denying to any other principle the power to temper it, regarding it as an absolute; the world exists for the sake of maintaining justice rather than justice for the sake of maintaining the world...

“God's concern for justice grows out of His compassion for man. The prophets do not speak of a divine relationship to an absolute principle or idea called justice. They are intoxicated with the awareness of God's relationship to His people and to all men.... Justice, as stated above is not an abstraction or value. It exists in relation to a person and is something done by a person. An act of injustice is condemned, not because the law is broken, but because a person has been hurt.

“When Cain murdered his brother Abel, the words denouncing his crime did not proclaim: You have broken the law. Instead we read: And the Lord said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the Ground.”

4. Why justice doesn't exist apart from God — reason 2:

The personalisation of the moral idea is the indispensable assumption of prophetic theology. Mercy, grace, repentance, forgiveness, all would be impossible if the moral principle were held to be superior to God. “If thou, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?” Psalm 312:3.

5. Human justice progresses to mercy, which progresses to humility before God

What does God require of you O man, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 8:6.

To do justly — righteousness; To love mercy — reflecting that mercy is part of the justice born of righteousness (in the sense of compassion), rather than the justice born of ideology; To walk humbly — to recognise that we ourselves are in need of mercy.

Also consider: humanism's justice aims for the first, and to a certain extent the second. But the impossibility of universalising legal justice is why humanism fails. To some extent our judicial systems try to adjust for that by giving the judge some leeway in interpretation and administration of the law. But only to some

extent, and certainly there is no forgiveness clause. Humanistic justice makes no attempt at the third — addressing the pride of a civilisation and aiming for humility.

Harking back to Amos 4:6-13: after a slew of punishments... “yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. Therefore thus I will do to you O Israel... Prepare to meet your God!” — usually interpreted to mean prepare to meet extreme disaster worse than any punishment so far — but the word ‘prepare’ in Hebrew usage means to prepare to meet someone favorably, or for a constructive achievement. So Heschel reads it here to mean: God will come to meet you, to forgive you — since the ‘justice’ approach hasn’t worked, let’s do the ‘mercy’ approach.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

Wow! This is the best book I have read in years! When I read books, I try to take notes, but books like that almost make me feel like I have copy large portions and portions of the book in my notebook for later reference. A while back I read F. B. Meyer on some of the characters of the Old Testament. I was turned off. Christian Fundamentalists don't help the situation either for me. They keep talking about judgement and anger and all these words that remind me of the god of Islam called Allah. But as I have come to read Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, I have come to rejoice in the God of the Old Testament and his judgement and be at peace when I hear about his anger. If I was still a Muslim and heard Rabbi Heschel and what he had to say about the Lord in the Hebrew Bible, I would have converted to Judaism right away. He reads the legacy of his Jewish mindset and not like those who read fragmented, mutilated passages here and there in order to justify their self-righteous "fire and brimstone" version of faith. On p. 21 Rabbi Heschel introduces us to the prophet. In my mind as a Muslim, the prophet was just a messenger. And in the Baptist seminary they taught us that the prophet is just "telling forth" what he hears from God. To me this sounds more like a mouthpiece, not too far from the Muslim concept of a prophet. In the Hebrew Bible the prophet claims to be far more than a messenger. He is a person who stands in the presence of God (Jer. 15: 19), who stands "in the council of the Lord" (Jer. 23: 18), who is a participant, as it were, in the council of God, not a bearer of dispatches whose function is being limited to sent on errands. He is a counselor as well as a messenger. In Amos 3: 7, we read "Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets". In Islam, the prophet is nothing more than a mouthpiece who conveys what is told to him verbatim, mechanical dictation. Never is it so in the Hebrew Bible. That is why people make huge mistakes when they say that the God of Islam is the same as the God of the Old Testament or that Mohammad functioned like any prophet in the Hebrew Bible. Not really. They can just wish all they want. This secret of the Lord that the Lord is dying to reveal to His servants to the prophets, as Amos has already told us, is one of awe. Yet the prophet does not hesitate to challenge the intention of the Lord, something that never happens in Islam. Yet here the prophet says to the Lord, "Oh Lord God, forgive I beseech Thee! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!". When the lives of others are at stake, the prophet does not say "Thy will be done" but rather "Thy will be changed". in Amos 7: 3, the prophets reports that he had a way with God and "The Lord repented concerning this; It shall not be, said the Lord". Rabbi Heschel assures us the that the prophet does not prove anything. He is not in the business of arguing his message. He is merely a witness. As a witness, the the prophet is more than a messenger... and as a messenger he bears witness that the Lord is divine. Mohammad used to argue and curse those who will not agree with his message of Islam and made it a divine mandate to curse those who will not be subjugated to his religion. This is called mubahah in Islam. Read Family of Imran verse 61. Essentially it is, if we don't reach an agreement and you don't convert to a Muslim as a result of the debate, let us raise our hands to the sky and vehemently curse those who refuse to convert to Islam. On the other hand, the prophet in Hebrew Bible is not interest in the least to argue or prove anything to you. He is just a witness. He bears witness to the message he received from his Lord. The thought he has to convey is more than the

language can contain. Divine power bursts in the words. The authority of the prophet is in the Presence His words reveal. You just have to hear his words and sense the power coming from the Presence behind them and they are to cut to the core of our hearts. This prophet didn't have to worry about Richard Dawkins or worry himself about giving proofs for anything. The prophet had the right concept: there are no proofs for the existence of the God of Abraham. There are only witnesses. The greatness of the prophet lies not in the ideas expressed, but also in the moments he experienced. As a witness, he experienced his moments with the Lord he has been with, and his words are a testimony to that- to God's power and judgement, to His justice and mercy. If we look for prophetic coherence, it won't be in what the prophet says but of WHOM he speaks. Indeed, not even the word of God is the ultimate object and the theme of his consciousness. The ultimate object and theme of his consciousness is God, of Whom the prophet knows that above his judgement and above his anger stands His mercy. On p. 24 Rabbi Heschel states that the attitude that the prophet takes to the tension that obtains between God and the people is characterized by dichotomy. In the presence of God he takes the part of the people. In the presence of the people he takes the part of God. On p. 25, he says that the conception of the prophet as nothing but mouthpieces, the assumption that their hearts remain unaffected, would almost compel us to apply to them the words that Jeremiah used of the people in chapter 12 verse 2, "Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their heart". The prophet is not a mouthpiece, but a person; not an instrument, but a partner, an associate of God.

In chapter 2, Rabbi Heschel deals with concept that we all know, Israel being the chosen people of God. He explains that from the beginnings of the Israelite religion the belief that God had chosen this particular people to carry out his mission has been both a cornerstone of Hebrew faith and a refuge in moments of distress. What Rabbi Heschel is so important for Muslims to hear, especially Palestinian Muslims who chose Atheism as they accuse the God of the Old Testament of being a racist god. Rabbi Heschel says, the prophet had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgement and chastisement. In Amos 3: 1-2, he says,

1 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt: 2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

Does chosenness mean that God is exclusively concerned with Israel? Does the Exodus from Egypt imply that God is involved only in the history of Israel and is oblivious of the fate of other nations? Amos 9: 7 has the answer:

"Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" says the LORD. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? 8 Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," says the LORD. 9 "For lo, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall upon the earth. 10 All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, 'Evil shall not overtake or meet us.'

The nations chosen for this comparison were not distinguished for might and prestige- countries such as Egypt and Assyria- but rather, nations which were despised and disliked. The color of the Ethiopian is black and in those days many of them were sold on the slave markets. The Philistines were the arch enemies of Israel, and the Syrians continued to be a menace to the Northern Kingdom. The God of Israel is the God of all nations, and all men's history is His concern.

On p. 46 Rabbi Heschel discloses : He is a God of pathos. No matter how angry he is, he is always on the side of his people and is seeking every means to show his redemption to them and restore them to Himself.

His anger simply means he responds to how we act and his not without emotion or passive or uncaring. But as we speak about his anger we have to instantly mention his compassion. The two go hand in hand inseparably. All prophets felt the pathos of God even in the midst of his anger. That anger of the Lord did not express all that God felt about the people. Intense is His anger, but profound is his compassion. It is as if there were a dramatic tension in God. Rabbi Heschel puts it so beautifully when he says, God is conceived, not as the self-detached Ruler, but as the sensitive Consort to Whom deception comes and Who nevertheless goes on pleading for loyalty, uttering a longing for reunion, a passionate desire for reconciliation. Of all prophets, only Jeremiah has sensed a wider scale of personal relations, a more intense subjectivity. Hosea has given us a supreme expression of the vision of the subjective God so typical for prophetic awareness (please read Hosea chapter 11: 8-9). On p. 83, Rabbi Heschel presents with a beautiful concept that didn't cross my mind before. The prophets were moved by sympathy for God. Isaiah is animated by a sense of dread and the awareness of the transcendent mystery and exclusiveness of God and only secondarily by a sense of intimacy, sympathy, and involvement in the divine situation. Isaiah's sympathy for God comes to expression in a parable describing the crisis in the relationship between God and Israel(Isaiah 5: 1- 7):

Let me sing for my beloved
a love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

Here Isaiah knows how his beloved feels. He sings about it. He feels the pain of his beloved. He is fully sympathetic. He is telling the people, Look at how the Lord feels, see where He is, see what you did and how that is making him feel. Feel for him. What intimacy!

Circle of Hope Pastors says

"Heschel does a wonderful job in this classic text deconstructing Greek influences on our conception of God and the prophets. He brilliantly states that the job of the prophet is to empathize with the pathos of God. It's the same kind of thing we do. Heschel marched with King and is a radical thinker, right up our alley. I don't think he ever became a Christian. But in his polemic against other faiths, he seems to protect Jesus and Paul, in particular (never hurling a critique of them). But he does have good things to say about the over-emphasized patriarchs of our faith." -- Jonny

Drew says

Volume Two is more scholastic than Volume One and a slower more difficult read. As I read it, I had the sweet feeling of being in the presence of a master. What a beautiful mind! What a beautiful soul!

Jonathan says

This is not lightly to be entertained. The mode of reflection would be strange to someone unaccustomed to theology (a/o religion), but that is not a critique. It's thoughtful and a sensible attempt to explore the human dimension and individual qualities of prophets without attempting to rationalize them or reduce them to that

dimension and those qualities. Requires simultaneous meditative and reflective effort.

Carl Williams says

A tome, indeed.

I first became aware of Abraham Joshua Heschel by his presence—when he walked across the Pettus Bridge, linked arms with Martin Luther King. And that is certainly an important way to remember him, as a man who put his faith on the street. He was, of course, also a traditional scholar, carrying understanding of Torah and the other Hebrew Testaments from the past and translating them for new generations and new understandings.

“Revelation is not a voice crying in the wilderness, but an act of received communication. It is not simply an act of disclosing, but is an act of disclosing to someone, the bestowal of a content, God addressing the prophet.” (page 217)

The two volumes of the Prophets bound into one book is one of those scholarly works—rich, and thick (and I’m not referring to the number of pages) but the kind of thing that, though I sometimes struggle through, broadens and enhances my understanding of the biblical prophets.

“But the prophet casts a light by which the heart is led into the thinking of the Lord’s mind. God does not delight in unleashing anger. In what, then, does God delight? ‘I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight, says the Lord.’ (Jeremiah 9:24. Hosea 9:25)” (page 67)

The volumes contain both a deep discussion of each prophet and a comparison of the biblical prophets, their prophecies and other worldviews—the Greeks, Buddhist, and others.

Good stuff, and not just because it gave me an opportunity to brush up on my academic reading skills—no skimming allowed. Good stuff but not for the faint of heart.

Chad says

I originally found Heschel's *The Prophets* in the references on the Wikipedia site for the prophet Jeremiah. I had been reading the book of Jeremiah for my scripture study, and had found some of the particulars difficult to understand. I knew Jeremiah was a bit of a downer, but his constant calls of destruction, his apparent self-hatred were a bit confusing (at one point, he cries, "cursed be the day my mother bore me.") I didn't want a verse-by-verse explanation, but a little context was appreciated.

I got more than I bargained for in *The Prophets*! But Heschel writes with amazing clarity. There is indeed a chapter dedicated to Jeremiah. But the book is a treatise on prophets and prophecy in the Old Testament. It includes more than just an explanation and backstory of the prophets; it gives a theory and theology of prophecy and how it fits into God's plan.

As a Mormon, I came at the book with a theory of prophecy and prophets of my own. With the prophetic succession of President Russell M. Nelson happening this past month, it is at the forefront of my people's mind. I taught about the centrality of prophets on my mission. Prophets are called to preach God's word to the people, and hold the necessary authority to perform sacred ordinances to return to live in God's presence. When people reject the prophets, that authority is lost, and man loses his connection to God. After a long period of apostasy, God has again called a prophet in this dispensation with all the keys necessary to salvation.

The two central principles to Heschel's theory of prophecy are twofold: divine pathos and divine sympathy. Divine pathos is defined as God's concern for man. Central to God's being is not his omniscience, omnipresence, or omnipotence; it is his pathos, his concern for man. God is not indifferent to man's plight. His love and compassion as well as his anger and wrath are elements of that pathos. The central defining attribute of a prophet is divine sympathy, or identification with the will of God. Thus, prophets experience the divine pathos, and carry the message of God's concern to man.

I would divide the book into three sections: (1) an in-depth look at the literary prophets of the Old Testament e.g. Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah (2) a development of the theology of prophecy, and (3) a compare/contrast with different ideas of prophecy in different times and cultures. Part one is particularly informative. I have read some of these books in the Old Testament with no idea for context. You get an idea of when the prophets were prophesying, to whom they were addressing, and the problems of their day and age. Very helpful to someone who gets lost in the Old Testament.

The second portion develops the theology of pathos and sympathy, going in depth into side concepts such as justice and wrath. This is a very interesting discussion, because it changes your view of the role of prophets as well as the God of the Old Testament. For instance, I never thought of the prophets as "social justice warriors." But their concern for justice was paramount:

Justice is not important for its own sake; the validity of justice and the motivation for its exercise lies in the blessings it brings to man. For justice, as stated above, is not an abstraction, a value. Justice exists in relation to a person, and is something done by a person. An act of injustice is condemned, not because the law is broken, but because a person has been hurt. What is the image of a person? A person is a being whose anguish may reach the heart of God. "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to Me, I will surely hear their cry... if he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."

You also begin to get an idea of the importance of divine wrath, and how we often misconceive it due to the prejudice's of modern society:

To our mind the terrible threats of castigation bespeak a lack of moderation. Is it not because we are only dimly aware of the full gravity of human failure, of the sufferings inflicted by those who revile God's demand for justice? There is a cruelty which pardons, just as there is a pity which punishes. Severity must tame whom love cannot win.

Finally, the compare/contrast section gets into some technical definitions of things similar to biblical prophecy, but are actually radically different including ecstasy (the separation of body and spirit), possession or enthusiasm, divination, etc. Heschel highlights the uniqueness of the Hebrew understanding of prophecy. Prophecy is a dialogue. Prophecy isn't an end in itself. And the prophet maintains his wits about him during the experience.

There was a particular portion where he compares prophecy with some aspects found in Christianity without

explicitly mentioning Christianity (e.g. prophecy is not passion, like the passion of Christ. Prophecy is also not imitatio, or the imitating of Christ). I found the discussion interesting, and I appreciated the clear distinctions in definitions Heschel provided.

Also of particular interest to me coming from my faith tradition was his contrast of the prophet and the priest. The prophetic role is to receive and declare revelation from God, while the role of the priest is worship and sacred ritual. In Mormonism, these two roles are fused into one. Can this effectively happen? Or is the role of prophet downplayed when constrained to a hierarchical structure?

Just as the prophet is the supreme example of anthropotropism (turning to man), so is the priest the outstanding exponent of theotropism (turning to God). The difference between them must be understood in terms of the different experiences they represent. The prophet, speaking for God to the people must disclose; the priest, acting for people before God, must carry out the will of God. The prophet speaks and acts by virtue of divine inspiration, the priest performs the ritual by virtue of his official status.

There is a warning when the role of the priest becomes dominant:

Whereas theotropic moments determine the ultimate image of existence, directedness of the mind upon the divine may become, in extreme cases, the exclusive standard and principle of judgment. Focused upon the Beyond, the mind begins to disregard the demands and values of here and now; sliding into resignation and withdrawal from action, moral indifferentism, and world denial.

A fascinating read. It will enrich your reading of the Old Testament, and give you a greater appreciation and understanding of the Jewish tradition. Sometimes I think we cheapen the faith and experience of the Jews. Historically, Christians have scorned the harsh God of the Old Testament in contrast to the loving God of the new, without realizing that the Jews very much believed in a God of love as well. We just have a very superficial idea of love.

Simcha Wood says

Abraham Heschel's *The Prophets* offers a thorough and insightful analysis of the phenomenon of the prophet in the Hebrew Bible.

The first part of the book begins, modestly enough, as something of a commentary on the texts of the prophets. This begins with a general discussion of the sort of man that the prophet was, before going into individual readings of the prophets and discussion of the historical contexts in which they operated.

The book then moves into a theological and philosophical discussion of the phenomenon of Biblical prophecy, and then on to a discussion of the explanations for prophetic inspiration. As is to be expected of Heschel, these sections are intellectually substantial, but are written in a dense, but surprisingly lucid manner.

This book shows its age a bit in those parts engaging with psychoanalytical and anthropological approaches to the phenomenon of prophecy. But such arguments at least provide the contemporary reader with some insight as to how Heschel might extrapolate his arguments to counter more contemporary non-Biblical approaches to prophecy.

The book really hits its stride with a comparative study of prophets throughout the surrounding Biblical world. In this section, Heschel does a thorough job of cataloging the many distinctions that separate the particular character of Biblical prophecy from the superficially similar phenomena also found in that part of the ancient world.

The Prophets is a rewarding read. It should appeal to anyone with an interest in better understanding the prophets' words as well as their particular place within ancient Israel and Judah, and their unique relationship to the priesthood and the kings.

Kathryn says

I have read the vast majority of this book for a graduate level Prophets course. It's commentary is extraordinarily helpful in understanding both the major and minor prophets of the Hebrew Bible. In particular I appreciated how Heschel embeds the word into his commentary. Through his work, Heschel helps develop what the prophet Hosea calls *daath elohim* - an intimate sensitivity for who God is and God hopes and desires for relationship with humanity and all creation.

Steve Bender says

Thorough exAMINATION OF THE PROPHETI MOOD IN iSRAAEL.

Trey Benfield says

I read this book after reading "The Prophetic Imagination" by Brueggemann who often mentions "The Prophets" as a major influence. After reading "The Prophetic Imagination," I concluded "The Prophets" was probably the most important work of scholarship of the Hebrew scriptures in the last 50 years. After reading, "The Prophets," I have concluded it is the most important work of scholarship of the Hebrew scriptures in the last 100 years.

Wonderfully researched and clearly written, Heschel builds up his thesis in layers, arguing for his approach and drawing out the ramifications of his approach. His central point is that rather than viewing the prophets as predictors of the future, that the prophets are messengers of the pathos of God. This approach can revolutionize prophetic interpretation leading to a relational God who, though retaining His transcendence, is present and immanent in His creation. The pathos of God reveals God as a person, who suffers and feels and is moved and effected by humanity. "The Prophets" should be required reading for every rabbi and pastor.

Israel Drazin says

Is God involved in prophecy?

The late Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) was one of the great Orthodox Jewish scholars, theologians, and philosophers of his generation. His books made a striking impression on many people, including me. His

many insights are eye opening. His book "The Prophets" is one of his classics.

He tells us that he will not address the well-known question about prophets: Did God really speak to them? Did they actually communicate with God? Yet, I think it is clear that he did not believe that God spoke to the prophets. I say this because his book is devoted to telling us about the passions that the prophets felt that encouraged, even compelled, them to speak.

Heschel's view of prophecy is radically different than that of Maimonides (1138-1204). The two seem to agree that prophecy is not a supernatural event, it is part of human nature. But they differ in whether the prophet is prompted to act by his emotions or his intellect. Heschel mentions Maimonides in his book ten times, but only to disagree with him.

Heschel stressed the anguish of the sensitive prophets over what they saw. He considered this emotion a good thing, and contended that their emotional reactions to what they saw around them prompted them to speak. While it seems to me that Heschel was influenced by hasidic mystical thinking, for he was raised as a hasid, Maimonides took the rational Aristotelian view that what is important is intellect, thinking, not emotions. Maimonides stressed that emotions must be controlled by the intellect, and unless emotions are controlled by the intellect, they can be evil. Maimonides contended that it was not emotions that prompted prophets to speak but the higher level of understanding that the prophets had; his or her understanding that what was being done was wrong. They saw and understood what the general population did not understand. Heschel not only contends that emotions are good and that it is an emotional reaction that compels prophets to speak, he also takes the biblical stories about God's reactions to the Israelite behavior literally and states that God also has emotional reactions. God, he writes, is "moved and affected by what happens in the world, and acts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath...man's deeds may move Him, affect Him, grieve Him or, on the other hand, gladden and please Him." He writes that "the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos (emphasis by Heschel)." God, according to Heschel, has these feelings because "His thoughts are about the world. He is involved in human history and is affected by human acts."

Maimonides rejected the idea that God could be affected by human behavior. He taught that God has no body and no emotions and all of the biblical descriptions of God having an emotional reaction refers not to God, but to the way the people perceive their own behavior. When the Bible states that God is angry, it does not mean that God suddenly changed and reacted with anger. It means that the people realized that the behavior was wrong and not what God wanted. A side effect of portraying God having an emotional reaction is that it tends to frighten the masses who think that God actually is angry at them, and they become frightened and some even change their evil deeds.

Thus, for example, Heschel, as well as Rashi and the Targum, understood that the prophet Hosea actually married a harlot and suffered extreme agony as a result of her behavior, her adulteries, and these emotions caused him to understand how the wavering of the Israelites, their abandonment of God, affected God. In contrast, rationalists such as Maimonides, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Kimchi interpreted the tale of Hosea's marriage to a prostitute as a parable that Hosea invented and used to dramatize his message, a message he developed intellectually.

Christa says

Great book, but start with God in Search of Man

Julie Davis says

As much as I love Abraham Heschel's writing I probably wouldn't have picked this up if my Catholic women's book club hadn't selected it. We read book 1 (the first half) and it was simply superb.

It is common to characterize the prophet as a messenger of God, thus to differentiate him from the tellers of fortune, givers of oracles, seers, and ecstasies. Such a characterization expresses only one aspect of his consciousness. The prophet claims to be far more than a messenger. He is a person who stands in the presence of God (Jer. 15:19), who stands "in the council of the Lord" (Jer. 23:18), who is a participant, as it were, in the council of God, not a bearer of dispatches whose function is limited to being sent on errands. He is a counselor as well as a messenger. ...

The words the prophet utters are not offered as souvenirs. His speech to the people is not a reminiscence, a report, hearsay. The prophet not only conveys; he reveals. He almost does unto others what God does unto him. In speaking, the prophet reveals God. This is the marvel of a prophet's work: in his words, *the invisible God becomes audible*. He does not prove or argue. The thought he has to convey is more than language can contain. Divine power bursts in the words. The authority of the prophet is in the Presence his words reveal.

Heschel digs deep into selected prophets and shows how they were not just God's messengers but God's witnesses, interpreters, and friends. As well as being on the people's side also. It ain't easy being a prophet. It was inspirational and thought provoking.

I especially appreciated the inclusion of scriptural excerpts because I'd never have gone to look up referenced quotes. And I liked that he took the time to set each prophet firmly in his own historical context. Every single prophet isn't covered but there are various lesser prophets like Amos, Habakkuk, and Hosea to go along with the expected biggies (Isaiah and Jeremiah).

Heschel also takes side trips to discuss bigger issues like history, chastisement, and justice so that we get an overview from the prophets' point of view.

The second book goes into more depth on such topics as inspiration, wrath, and comparisons to prophets in other faiths. I will be reading that part in the future. Heschel is too good not to get the whole story from.

Migl? says

Perskai?iau jau antr? A. J. Heschel knyg? ir reikia pasteb?ti, kad jis yra: a) nuoširdžiai religingas žmogus (to ir neslepia, knygos ?vade atvirai pasako, kad komentuos pranaš? gyvenimus ir j? tekstus nebandydamas išlaikyti neutralumo ar pan.), ir b) man atrodo, kad jis yra geras žmogus, taigi dauguma dalyk? interpretuojama palankiausiai b?du. Aš pasi?miau ši? knyg? tik?damasi daugiau teorin?s distancijos, bet tai turb?t ne knygos problema ir manau, kad nuoširdžiai religingi žmon?s gali joje atrasti daugiau ir ?vertinti j? geriau negu aš.

Nepaisant to, pranašai ir j? tekstai, kaip jau min?jau, n?ra optimistiškas skaitinys. Tikrai duoda „sense of impending doom“ ir ver?ia galvoti, kokie mes visi esam nemoral?s (kas šiaip turb?t tiesa). Knygoje yra ir daugiau pasteb?jim?, kurie padeda geriau suprasti religin? mint? ir pranašo fig?r? apskritai: „Others may

suffer from the terror of cosmic aloneness, the prophet is overwhelmed by the grandeur of divine presence. He is incapable of isolating the world. There is an interaction between man and God which to disregard is an act of insolence. Isolation is a fairy tale.“

Šioje knygoje (skaičiuoju tik I dalį), šalia konteksto, yra papasakota apie šešis pranašus (Izajo pranašystų išskirtos 2 dvi dalys). Labai nenoriu žveisti niekieno religiniu jausmu, bet noriu papasakoti apie pranašus atskirai, kaip jie man pasirodė, ir pastebėjau, kad kai bandau kažką daryti „pagarbiai“, išeina kažkokios nesąmonės, tai gal papasakosiu kaip išeina, dar sykį atsiprašydama, jei kažką tai žėis. Jei bus nepagarbumo, tai galbūt jis kyla iš mano nežinojimo ir nereliginumo.

1. Amosas. Jisai pranašavo tuo metu (apie VIII a. pr. Kr.), kai ir Izraelio, ir Judėjos karalystės sekėsi visai gerai. Ko tada nerimauti? Ogi to, sako Amosas, kad tamstų religingumas nieko nereiškia Dievui, jeigu jūs elgiatės šėdinai. Daug apie Dievo šauksmą ir „riaumojimą“, kurio visi negirdi, o Amosas tik tai ir girdi, turėtų būti nemalonu. Beje, Amosas nebuvo pranašų gildijos narys, kas apskritai įdomu dėl to, kad egzistavo pranašų gildijos! Jisai smerkė turtuolius ir nugalėtojus, kad blogai elgiasi su vargšais ir nugalėtais, dėl to man Amosas patiko.

2. Hosėjas. Pranašavo panašiu metu, kaip Amosas, kai Asirijos grėsmė jau buvo akivaizdi Izraelio karalystei. Izraelis daug lygina su neištikima žmona, kuri vyras (Dievas) nubaus, bet paskui priims atgal. Pats Hosėjas turėjo neištikimą žmoną, kuri paskui priėmė atgal, taigi kaip ir žinojo, apie ką kalba.

3. Izajas. Nežinau, kodėl, bet man tiesiog nelabai patiko Izajas. Judėjos karalystė tuo metu buvo tarp Egipto, Asirijos ir kitų politinių sąjungų, šalia nuolatinių užkariavimo grėsmių. Karalius tiesiog nežinojo, kuri įia sąjunga būtų naudingesnė, o Izajas vis sakydavo, kad karalius pasirinko ne taip, kaip Dievas nori. Kita vertus, paskui pagalvojau, kad jei išėjimas iš Egipto judaizme yra kertinis įvykis, tai paskui politinės sąjungos sudarymas su Egiptu skamba kaip truputį lipimas ant to paties grėbio, ar ne? Izajas sako, kad Asirija yra Dievo bėdas nubausi Judėją, bet paskui jis sunaikins ir Asiriją. Šiaip poetiškas tekstas labai („Aš žmogus suteptomis lėpomis ir gyvenu tautoje, kuri turi suteptas lėpas“), bet kažkaip nelabai patiko man Izajas ir tiek.

4. Mikėjas. Pranašauja Dievo rėstybą, bet to nekvestionuoja. Jei reikia, tai reikia.

5. Jeremijas. Drama! Labiausiai kenčiantis ir didžiausis konfliktas su Dievu turintis pranašas šioje knygoje, sakyčiau, beveik hamletiškas. Ginčijasi su Dievu, prašo sunaikinti jo priešus, Dievas jam liepia baigti išsidirbinėti. Norėjo nebekalbėti Viešpaties vardu, bet širdyje pasidarė tarsi karšta ugnis, uždaryta jo kauluose, jis alpo, negalėdamas iškęsti, taigi ir toliau kalbėjo, ir Dievo vardu smerkė žmones. Sielvartauja, kad apskritai gimė. Šiaip buvo tikrai įdomu skaityti pilną Jeremijo pranašystą, jei reikėtų pasiūlyti perskaityti tik vieną pranašą iš šitų šešių, siūlyčiau Jeremiją.

6. Habakukas. Man jis labai patiko jau vien dėl vardo. Jei sakysite, kad jums nepatinka Habakuko vardas, tai aš nepatikėsiu. Tuo metu Chaldejų Babilonija jau buvo masyviai sustiprėjusi, Habakukas klausia Dievo, kodėl juos tokiais baisius atsiuntė, bet paskui nusprendžia, kad ne mums suprasti, kodėl Dievas daro tai ar aną.

Knygą pataričiau skaityti turint kartu ir Biblijos tekstą, nes suteikia daug platesnį ir pilnesnį vaizdą negu atskiros A. J. Heschelio knygoje pateikiamos citatos. Ir kalba kokia, ir vaizdžiai! Mane tikrai labai paveikdavo, kai paskaitydavau vos keliolika puslapių. Nėra lengva skaityti, bet ir neturėtų būti. Dabar norėčiau paskaityti kokią mokslo populiarinimo knygą apie fiziką arba vabzdžius, kad atsigautčiau.

Ken says

My spiritual director, a Benedictine monk, recommended Abraham Heschl's *The Prophets* to me. I had brought to him some badly muddled thinking about the prophets, despite my knowledge of Israelite history and the Bible.

Heschl's book profoundly altered my thinking. He called me to a clearer understanding of the God who called the Hebrews out of Egypt, named them as a people "peculiarly" his own, and demanded their unwavering fidelity.

The prophets were those men who were called by God and given a clear understanding of God's authority and God's righteousness. They also saw very clearly how simple it could be for the people to rely on the God who had chosen, delivered and blessed them. Consequently, they were all the more appalled by the sins of the people.

There was simply no excuse for their infidelity.

I have tried to apply that lesson in my own life. There is no excuse for my sin.

Nor should I want an excuse because to make one implies I have no need of forgiveness and, hence, no need for grace. And there I would not go!

If I can persuade someone I've hurt that I couldn't help it, he or she might be willing to let it go, or to blame someone else for what I did. But if I admit that I did it, I should not have done it, I wish I had not done it, I wish I had not profited by it -- then I can ask, "Please forgive me." And this friend will have the free opportunity to give me that blessing.

But so long as I cling to my excuses the hurt will remain somewhere between us. It will be unresolved even if forgotten.

Asking God's forgiveness requires an act of faith. I acknowledge that I have done wrong, I didn't have to do it, I knew it was wrong, I chose to do it, I profited by it, I wish I had not, and I am willing to make atonement.

Accepting God's forgiveness is an act of faith and, for that reason, can penetrate all the more deeply into those mysterious, inaccessible places of my heart.

As a Catholic the Sacrament of Penance helps me believe that God forgives me, provided I have approached the sacrament with sorrow, regret and true repentance. Acknowledging my sin to another person helps me "realize" both my sorrow and my faith in God. Without actually speaking to another person who has the authority to represent God, how can I persuade myself that I have truly made atonement?

The Prophets lead us on the way of penance. Their revelation remains an outstanding, if under-appreciated, event in human history. They have limned out the way that only Jesus could follow, and he has blazed the trail for his people.

Given Heschl's remarkable achievement with this book, I have to believe it will remain a classic throughout the third and into the fourth millennium.
