



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS217

COURSE TITLE: THE PROPHETS



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**CRS217
THE PROPHETS**

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CONTENT

Introduction
What You Will Learn in this Course
Course Aims
Working through this Course
Course Materials
Study Units
Textbooks and References
Assignment File
Presentation Schedule
Assessment
Tutor-Marked Assignment
Final Examination and Grading
Course Marking Scheme
Course Overview
How to get the Best from this Course
Facilitator/Tutors and Tutorials
Summary

Introduction

CRS217: The Prophets is a one-semester, 2-credit unit course. The course is available toward the award of first degree in Christian Theology. The course material can also be useful for students in other levels of Christian Theology. Besides, those who wish to broaden their knowledge on religious ideas, especially prophecy and prophetism in the Old Testament can find this course material beneficial.

This course is made up of 15 units where we shall trace the evolution and development of Israelite prophetism. The factors responsible for the emergence of the prophetic ministry in Israel would be examined. The activities and the messages of the prophets in those periods before the exile would be made a focus of our searchlight.

The course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through the materials. It also emphasizes the need for Tutor – Marked Assignments (TMAs). Detailed information on TMAs is found in a separate file, which will be sent to you later. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to this course.

What You Will Learn in this Course

The overall aim of CRS217 is to draw your attention to the centrality of prophecy in Israelite religion and its relevance in contemporary socio-religious set-up. You will understand why prophecy and prophetism are important concepts in the evolution and development of the religion of the Israelites. You will also find out why biblical scholars regarded the religion of the Israelites as prophetic in character.

Course Aims

The aim of this course is to help you discover the importance and contemporary relevance of the ministry and message of the prophets in ancient Israel. This will be achieved by:

- Introducing you to the history and development of prophecy in ancient Israel.
- Exposing you to the classification of prophets in the Old Testament.
- Giving you the distinctive traits that distinguish ancient Israelite prophets from those of other cultures in the ancient Near East.
- Helping you understand the socio-political background of the Biblical prophets.
- Leading to better appreciate and appropriate the message of the prophets.
- Giving you an overview of the processes involved in the composition of the Old Testament prophetic books.
- Challenging you to further probe deeper into the life and messages of the prophets in the Old Testament.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, there are set overall objectives. Besides, each unit has its specific objectives. The unit objectives would be included in the beginning of each unit. You should read them before you start working through the unit. It is advisable that you refer to them during your study of the unit to check on your progress. At the end of every unit, you should also revise the unit objectives. In this way you can be sure that you have done all you are expected to do in the unit.

Listed below are the broader objectives of this course. It is expected that by meeting these objectives, the overall aims of the course must have been achieved. At the end of this course, you should be able to

- Discuss the meaning and goal of prophecy.
- Discuss extensively the origin and development of prophecy in ancient Israel.
- Account for the factors that led to the emergence of prophets.
- Discuss the roles and functions of prophets.
- Appreciate the messages of the prophets.
- Compare and contrast activities of Israelite prophets with those of other cultures.
- Evaluate the socio-political contributions of prophets in Israel.
- Appreciate the contemporary relevance of the prophetic ministry.

Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read the recommended books and the other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at points during the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignments file
5. Presentation schedule

You must obtain these materials. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

There are fifteen study units in this course. They are listed as follows:

Module 1: The Nature and Development of Israelite Prophecy

Unit 1: Concepts, Definitions and Meanings

Unit 2: History of Israelite Prophecy

Unit 3: The Nature of Israelite [Prophecy](#)

Unit 4: Some Common Phenomena Related to Prophecy

Unit 5: Introduction to Old Testament Prophetic Literature

Module 2: The Pre-literary Prophets and the Major Literary Prophets

Unit 1: The Pre-Literary Prophets of the Old Testament

Unit 2: The Book of Isaiah

Unit 3: The Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Unit 4: The Book of Ezekiel

Unit 5: The Book of Daniel

Module 3: The Twelve Prophets

Unit 1: Amos and Hosea

Unit 2: Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah

Unit 3: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

Unit 4: Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel

Unit 5: Jonah

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply the material in some ways, and thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with your tutor-marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

Textbooks and References

We have included a list of books that are relevant for every unit. You will gain greatly if you read such books and similar ones on the topics treated. Reading the books will help to build your knowledge and thereby enhance your understanding of the course.

Assignment file

In this file you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count toward the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignment will be found in the assignment file itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

Presentation Schedule

The “presentation schedule” included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments as and when due.

Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of this course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, there is a written examination. While working on your assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted

to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark. At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

There are fifteen tutor-assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best three (that is, the three with the highest grades of fifteen assignments) will be counted. The total mark of the best three will be 30% of your total course mark.

Assignments for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

Final Examination and Grading

The examination will consist of questions you will come across in tutor-marked assignments. You are therefore advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination.

Course Marking Scheme

The table below gives a breakdown of the course mark:

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1-15	Three assignments, best three marks of the assignments counts for 30% of course marks.
Final examination	The final examination counts for 70% of overall marks.
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of works you should take to complete.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of unit)
Course Guide			
Module 1: The Nature and Development of Israelite Prophecy			
1	Concepts, Definitions and Meanings	1	Assignment 1
2	History of Israelite Prophecy	2	Assignment 2
3	The Nature of Israelite Prophecy	3	Assignment 3
4	Some Common Phenomena Related to Prophecy	4	Assignment 4
5	Introduction to Old Testament Prophetic Literature	5	Assignment 5
Module 2: The Pre-literary Prophets and the Major Literary Prophets			
1	The Pre-Literary Prophets of the Old Testament	6	Assignment 6
2	The Book of Isaiah	7	Assignment 7
3	The Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations	8	Assignment 8

4	The Book of Ezekiel	9	Assignment 9
5	The Book of Daniel	10	Assignment 10
Module 3: The Twelve Minor Prophets			
1	Amos and Hosea	11	Assignment 11
2	Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah	12	Assignment 12
3	Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi	13	Assignment 13
4	Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel	14	Assignment 14
5	Jonah	15	Assignment 15
	Revision	16	
	Revision	17	
	Examination	18	

Table 2: Course Overview

How to Get the Best from this Course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of the distance learning system. You can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Following this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives enable you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. The objectives should guide your study. After studying the units you must cross check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you adhere strictly to this art of checking whether the objective is achieved or not, you will definitely improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a “Reading” section. Whenever you need help, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read through this course guide thoroughly.
2. Plan your study schedule. You should refer to the ‘course overview’ for more details. Find out the time you are expected to spend on each unit and when and how to turn in your assignments.
3. Stick to your study schedule. Do not allow anything to get you distracted from your study schedule.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the introduction and objectives for the unit.
5. Gather the study material you need. All you need or a unit is given in the ‘Overview’ at the beginning of each unit. The study unit you are working on and one of your set books should be on your desk at the same time
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit has been arranged in a sequential order. Instructions would be given on where to read from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm you have achieved them.
8. Do not proceed to the next unit, until you are sure you have achieved the objectives of the unit you are working on.
9. Do not wait until your assignment is returned before working on the next unit. Keep to your schedule.

10. When you complete the last unit, you can be preparing for exams. Be sure that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide).

Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. The dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor will be communicated to you. This will be done as you are allocated to a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact our tutor by telephone, e-mail or discussion board if you need help. The following might be the circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings.
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises, and
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comment on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to interact with your tutor by asking questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To maximize the benefits of the course tutorials, it is advisable that you prepare a question list before attending them. When you participate in the discussions your intellectual life will be deeply enriched

Summary

CRS217 intends to expose you to the background history and development of prophecy and the prophetic ministry in ancient Israel as well as the relevance of the prophetic ministry in contemporary socio-religious set-up. On successful completion of this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

1. What is prophecy from the biblical viewpoint?
2. What distinguishes a prophet from a soothsayer?
3. What makes a person a prophet?
4. Discuss the evolution and development of Israelite prophetism?
5. Account for the rise of prophecy in the time of the kings?
6. What factors led to the emergence of the prophets?
7. Why are the messages of the prophets unpopular among their contemporaries?
8. Discuss the processes involved in the composition of the prophetic books?
9. Why is it difficult to distinguish the true and false prophets?
10. Of what relevance are the messages of the biblical prophets in contemporary times?

The questions you will be able to answer should not be limited to the ones above. The Prophets is a course you will find interesting and stimulating. It is a course that covers important aspects of the Israelite religion and history. I hope that as I lead you through this course you will find it a worthwhile challenge and experience.



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Unit 1: Concepts, Definitions and Meanings

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Module 1: The Nature and Development of Israelite Prophecy

UNIT 1: CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS AND MEANINGS

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 OBJECTIVES	1
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	1
3.1 Definition and Description: Prophet, Prophecy and Prophetism	1
3.2 Etymology of the Term “Prophet”	2
3.3 The Concept of Prophet in the Greek World	3
3.4 Some Biblical Terms for Prophet	3
3.5 The Old Testament Understanding of Prophet	5
4.0 CONCLUSION	5
5.0 SUMMARY	5
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	6
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	6

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is expedient for a student of theology to know some of the terms associated with the course such as prophecy, prophetism and prophets. This is important especially in a situation where many different understandings are associated with prophecy. In addition, it will help the student to engage more actively and fruitfully in the up-coming discussions in the entire course as they relate to the issue of prophets and their functions in ancient Israel.

The etymology of the term, the concept in the Greek world and the Biblical perspective would be among the issues to be raised in this section. A good understanding of the preliminary material will put the student in a good position to match with some of the challenges posed by the present Nigerian situation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit the student should be able to:

- define prophecy, propheticism and prophet meaningfully
- explain the etymology of the term “prophet”
- discuss the concept of prophet in the Greek world
- identify the biblical terms associated with prophecy
- know the meaning of some terms that are related to but not identical with prophecy
- give a summary of the OT understanding of prophet
- explain what made Israelite concept of prophecy distinct from other ancient cultures.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition and Description: Prophet, Prophecy and Prophetism

Prophecy, in a wider context, is a mode of communication between the divine and the human,

which usually takes the form of dialogue. The messages in both directions are channelled through individuals (prophets) who are recognized by others in the society as qualified to perform the function. It is a divine and social phenomenon operative within a given context with the most suitable mode of communication for human understanding. The three principal actors in the drama are the deity (giver), the prophet (the human mediator) and the human audience (receiver). Since the prophet is not called to minister to him/herself, the central interest of the prophets would be the human audience, who should understand, interpret and act according to the oracle of the deity. Biblically, prophecy represents the inspired word (message) of YHWH, coming from YHWH through a channel chosen by YHWH (a prophet) for His people. It is a mediated message from YHWH communicated to His people through human agents.

"Propheticism may legitimately be defined as that the understanding of history which accepts meaning only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, divine participation (IDB vol. 3). The common denominator in the three terms is the deity, who calls the prophet

The usage of the word "prophet" is today associated with a variety of meanings, which also go beyond the religious boundary from where the term originated. For example, weather forecasters are called "prophets of weather". Exponents of a new ideology and teaching are called prophets. In the light of this, it is necessary for us to explore the meaning of the term.

In its broad sense, the term, prophet, refers to a person who speaks by divine inspiration. He/She is an interpreter through whom the will of a god or deity is expressed. The prophet is charged with a divine message, which is often received and/or expressed in different forms. It also refers to a specially gifted person, who has profound moral insight and exceptional powers of expression; the chief spokesperson of a movement or cause. All these views will present the prophet to be tied with social and a personal religious experience.

In a technical sense, the prophet is associated with the second of the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, comprising the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. Any of the personalities identified in the bible is also regarded as a prophet, so also the author/redactor of the above mentioned books of the bible is also associated with the name prophet.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. What is the difference between prophecy and prophetism?
2. Define the term prophet taking into consideration the broad and narrow sense of the term.

3.2 Etymology of the Term "Prophet"

Prophet is derived from a Greek compound noun *pro* and *ph,thj*. - The stem, *ph-* – "to say," "to speak," "to proclaim" carries a religious connotation, and the prefix *pro*, is a temporal adverb with such a connotation as "before, in advance". This may suggest the meaning: one who predict; one who tells beforehand. It appears to be confirmed by the use of *pro,fhmi*, to predict, proclaim in advance.

It is in the prefix *pro-* that the difficulty of determining the meaning of the noun lies. Indeed, when one examines the combination of *pro-* with other correlative verbs of speech in Greek (such as *proagoreu,w* (*prole,gw, profwne,w*), in earlier writings, it is evident that in no case does the object of the verbs point to the future. Their obvious meaning is "to declare openly," "to make known publicly," "to proclaim" to state publicly, to proclaim aloud "making public declaration."

The religious flavour of the stem fh,mi gives the word a special weight, and expresses the authority which can be claimed for the prophet's word.

The Hebrew equivalent for prophet are ro'eh, hozeh, 'ish ha-'elohim and nabi. These terms we shall explain in a later section in this unit (cf. 3.4). Important for you at this point is to bear these terms in mind as we proceed.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List the Greek and Hebrew terms associated with the concept of prophet.

3.3 The Concept of Prophet in the Greek World

The nature of the Greek prophet is more easily ascertained from his/her place in public life than from etymological considerations. The words derived from this root are firmly tied up with the Greek oracle.

- i. The prophet expresses something for the content of which she or he is not responsible, since the prophet has him/herself received it indirectly from the god.
- ii. The prophet does not give advice unless the prophet is asked for it. The initiative is the questioner's alone, not the god's or the prophet's.
- iii. The words of the Greek prophet are always addressed to a unique, historical, concrete, present situation in the life of the client. The advice then given embraces the whole range of counselling help which is called for, even up to the present day, by the troubles and needs of men and women.
- iv. The prophet is called to his/her office by the oracular institution, and so not by a god.
- v. The prophet is usually inspired to understand and/or achieve things which may be impossible for the mortals.

To sum up, a prophet is a person, employed by the oracle, who by direct inspiration or by the interpretation of sounds and omens declares the will of the gods to a person who asks for advice. Accordingly, prophecy means to proclaim the counsel and will of the gods concerning a historical, concrete, present situation, in response to a definite question put by the client.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss at least five different ideas associated with the concept of prophet in the Greek secular world.

3.4 Some Biblical Terms for Prophet

If you read through the bible, you will discover the four biblical terms that designate a prophet are ro'eh, hozeh, 'ish ha-'elohim and nabi. The earliest is ro'eh or "seer," which goes back to the general term "to see." The ro'eh, therefore, is the one, who understands God's ways and plans and is consulted to ascertain God's will in a matter. Samuel is called a ro'eh (I Sam. 9:9), and an editorial note explains that the ro'eh was later called a "prophet," or nabi. This reference itself shows the transition to the term nabi. Samuel's role in this particular account is that of a clairvoyant, but Samuel performed also as a priest and participated in Hebrew politics. The term ro'eh is used of Zadok, a priest in David's time (II Sam. 15:27), and it is possible that some priests were clairvoyant. The word ro'eh contains no hint of ecstatic behaviour but suggests that divine disclosure came through some form of trance. If as some have suggested, signs and omens were employed, then the ro'eh is best understood as a counterpart of the Babylonian baru.

Hozeh is another term associated with prophet in Hebrew. It also means "seer." It is derived from the root hazah, "to see." In II Sam. 24:11 we are told that the prophet Gad, who is called David's hozeh, obtained messages from Yahweh but no hint is given about how the message came. In II Kings 17:13 the term hozeh is used with "prophet" to designate those by whom Yahweh had warned his people. The prophet Amos is called a hozeh, perhaps in derision (Amos 7:12). Isa. 29:10 refers to covering seers' heads so they could not obtain messages. Studies of the words hozeh and ro'eh have failed to demonstrate any marked difference in meaning, and most English translations render both by "seer."

The third term, which stands as the distinctive word for prophet in Hebrew, is nabi (plural, nebhiim or nebiim). It is derived from the Akkadian root nabu which is not found in Hebrew. It is also a cognate of the Arabic Naba'a. It is used as a noun about 309 times in the OT, of which 92 instances in Jeremiah alone, to designate a prophet.

Though the exact etymology is uncertain, it could mean "to call," "to speak," "to proclaim," "to name," "to announce." But "to call" at present seems the best option. However, the storm continues in scholarship if the verb should be understood in the active or passive sense. A camp of scholarship argues that the etymology is parallel to the Greek, and therefore should be understood in the active sense: one who calls, forth-teller, preacher (cf. Kraus, 1966). The other sees the meaning from the parallel development in the Akkadian, which indicates a passive sense, that is, one called, one appointed (Albright, 1957). Thus, behind the passive form stands the deity or YHWH as the agent, the one who calls. In other words, the prophet is the one called by the deity "to call-out" the oracles of the deity, the divine words. So, it is YHWH, who called the prophet, empowers the prophet to speak for YHWH to His people (Amos 3:8; Jer. 1:7,17; Ezek. 3:4). In other words, the prophet is "a speaker" or "a spokesperson" or a "mouthpiece" (Ex. 4:16) the one who "calls out" or "proclaims."

Consequently, the position here is that the two aspects of the verb is very important and fundamental in the understanding of the concept and mission of a prophet. It is YHWH who calls the prophet (passive) to call-forth YHWH's message (active) to the people (Deut. 5:5).

Besides, the three terms used to designate the office of the prophet (cf. I Chr. 29:29 - Samuel - Ro'eh; Nathan - Nabi' and Gad - Hozeh), a fourth one is "a man of God" ('ish 'elohim) or "the man of God" ('ish ha-'elohim). Further than designating only a "speaker for God," it embraces in a wider context "a holy" or "inspired person." It is in this sense that the Chronicler would pay distinct respect to the inspired leaders of the past who play an important role in his interpretation of history and titled them 'ish 'elohim - Moses (I Chron. 23:14; II Chron. 30:16, cf. Ezra 3:2) and David (II Chron. 8:14, cf. Neh. 12:24, 36), - along with the prophets - inspired unnamed prophets (cf. II Chron. 11:2; 25:7 f.), Samuel (I Sam. 9:6-10) and Shemaiah who warned Rehoboam against attacking Israel (I Kings 12:22-24). Both Elijah (I Kings 17:18-24; II Kings 1:10-13) and Elisha (II Kings 4:7, 9) are given equally the title.

It is important to note that the Hebrew writers did not employ the terms in such a manner to make a clear distinction between "men of God," "seers" and "prophets" as contemporary scholarship does. The terms describe, perhaps, one reality, that is "men of God" as they were believed to be inspired of God.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss four biblical terms associated with the concept of prophet.

3.5 The Old Testament Understanding of Prophet

From the Old Testament perspective, a prophet is the mouthpiece of God. The prophet is the YHWH's oracle bearer; a proclaimer of the word. The prophet is one called by YHWH, sanctified and divinely inspired YHWH, to reveal the oracle of YHWH to the people.

The Prophet is called to warn, exhort, comfort, teach and counsel the people of YHWH. The prophet is bound to YHWH alone and thus enjoying a freedom that is unique. The prophet is a covenant mediator who delivers the word of YHWH to His people in order to shape their future by reforming their present. The prophet remains an intermediary between YHWH and His people. The prophet is a visionary, ahead of his/her contemporaries, and courageously warns against impending dangers and doom.

The Ancient Israelite prophets are fundamentally a proclaimer and preacher, ethical teacher, who instructs and calls the people of YHWH to repentance through words and actions. They addressed local, national and international issues. They warned against the future consequence of the present and gave exhortations that provoke spiritual dedication that would ensure divine blessing to the people instead of destruction.

They are best recognized as charismatic personalities, men under the compulsion of an experience that causes them to utter, despite opposition, challenge, mockery and imprisonment, the words they believed to be Yahweh's words given to them, words representing Yahweh's will, Yahweh's intentions, Yahweh's purposes, and Yahweh's action. Their concern was with their own immediate present. If the understanding and interpretation of that immediate present demanded recollections from the past or indications of what the future might hold, then past and future were utilized. If the best and most meaningful presentation called for dramatic enactment, utilizing legal or mourning or folksong modes of utterance, then these forms were used. To resist the demands of God or to flee from their assigned role was impossible. The prophet would prefer to remain faithful to the call of YHWH and suffer the consequences, though with the conviction that YHWH will vindicate the prophet at the long run.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the basic Old Testament understanding of the concept of prophet?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The term prophet could be viewed from different perspectives. And there is today a world of difference between the early original usage of the word and its usage in the modern times. Unfortunately, the etymology of the term prophet is further engulfed with ambiguity that had led to the misunderstanding of prophecy as more of foretelling rather than forth-telling. But the incontestable fact that runs through every discussion is that the prophet is a spokesperson of a deity, a mouthpiece and representative of the deity that sent the prophet to declare the deity's will. Again, from the Old Testament's viewpoint, no one can be a prophet by his own volition, except the one is being sent.

In the subsequent discussions the student will be exposed to the immense contributions made by the prophets to the socio-political development of Israel as custodians of public morality. This becomes a challenge to contemporary religious leaders.

5.0 SUMMARY

The understanding of some technical terms such as prophecy, propheticism and prophet are very

fundamental to the understanding of the course. Consequently, they are raised as critical aspect of the study.

The terms associated with prophet in Greek world derived are firmly tied up with the Greek oracle, and their meanings more easily ascertained from the role of the prophet in public life than from etymological considerations. Consequently, a prophet is a person employed by the oracle, who, by direct inspiration or by the interpretation of sounds and omens, declares the will of the gods to a person who asks for advice. Accordingly, prophecy means to proclaim the counsel and will of the gods concerning a historical, concrete, present situation, in response to a definite question put by the client.

Ro'eh (seer), hozeh (seer) and nabi (prophet), and sometimes "a man of God" ('ish 'elohim) or "the man of God" ('ish ha-'elohim are some of the biblical terms to depict a prophet. It is observed that the Hebrew writers did not employ the terms in such a manner to make a clear distinction ^{between} "men of God," "seers" and "prophets" as contemporary scholarship does. The terms describe, perhaps, one reality – the subjects have some special relationship with YHWH as inspired people of YHWH.

Furthermore, the OT portrays the ancient Israelite prophets fundamentally as proclaimer and preacher, ethical teacher. They prophets are called to awaken the conscience of the people and lead them to repentance through words and actions. They addressed challenging and burning issues, warning people against the future consequence of their present actions. They also give exhortations that provoke, promote and sustain spiritual dedication that would ensure divine blessing to the people instead of destruction.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the difference between the Greek and Old Testament understanding of prophet?
2. Do you think that your traditional culture has the concept of prophecy and prophetism and prophet?
3. Is the modern usage of the term prophet a betrayal of the original meaning?

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UNIT 2: HISTORY OF ISRAELITE PROPHECY

1.0 INTRODUCTION	7
2.0 OBJECTIVES	7
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	8
3.1 Prophecy in Ancient Near East	8
3.1.1 Prophecy in the Nomadic World	8
3.1.2 Prophecy in the Settled Area	8
3.2 The Origin and Rise of Prophetic Movement in Israel	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2.1 The Origin of Prophecy in Israel	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2.2 The Rise of Prophetic Movement	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3 Development of Israelite Prophetism	11
3.4 Cessation of Prophetism in Israel	12
3.5 True and False Prophecy	13
4.0 CONCLUSION	15
5.0 SUMMARY	15
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	16
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	16

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Israelite prophecy went through different phases of development, which are of interest to modern scholarship. Several efforts have been made to read the history back to the origin of the institution of prophecy in Israel. Interestingly enough, the general consensus is that, though there remains something unique about Israelite prophecy, prophecy as a phenomenon cannot be a special reserve of Israel or the Yahweistic religion. This becomes the centre of the discussion in this unit. We shall be introduced to some of the challenging issues that are associated with “prophecy in Ancient Near East, the origin and rise of prophetic movement in Israel, and the development of Israelite prophecy.” You shall also be exposed to another area of scholarship concern, that is, the duration in Israel. In other words, what does it mean to speak of cessation of prophetism in Israel? Could there had been a time in the history of Israel when there was a ‘prophetic vacuum?’ In addition, we shall discuss briefly the concept of “true and false prophet,” and will finally conclude by arguing that is nothing like false prophet per se, but false prophecy.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- know other Ancient Near East neighbouring states that had influenced Israelite prophecy
- itemise some of the prophetic mechanisms that Israel and other Ancient Near East neighbouring states shared in common
- identify some of the factors that led to the emergence of prophetic movement in Israel
- describe the development of prophecy in Israel
- prove that there was never a time Israel lived in her history without prophecy

- know the technical and practical complexities associated with the notion of "true and false" prophets.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Prophecy in Ancient Near East

It is true that Israelite prophecy embodied in Elijah and in the great individual prophets from Amos. It may not be understood as a distinct phenomenon uniquely Israelite or the Yahweh religion. Prophets appear in many religious and cultures, including those of the Ancient Near East, where "inspired" persons engaged in activities similar to those recorded of the Hebrew prophets (Noth, 1949-50). The facts may be very few, nevertheless, important. They prove that the Israelite prophets followed to some extent an established tradition of ancient Near East. This shall be considered under broad religious lines – the nomadic religion and the religion of the settled area corresponding to the concept of seers and nabis respectively.

3.1.1 Prophecy in the Nomadic World

One form of prophecy that could have influenced the Israelite prophecy is rooted in the nomadic world and closely associated with Arab tribal religion, which may correspond with the Arabic kahin (Fohrer, 1974). Unfortunately, there are no direct accounts but only few allusions of inspired persons, or even 'men of God' appearing as seers among the nomads. They appear to be counterparts to those found in pre-Islamic ancient Near Eastern and biblical sources. A typical example will be the patriarchs or Balaam (Numbers 22-24). The seers or kahins proclaim divine instructions primarily on the basis of dreams and presentiments. They give divinations obtained through trances, dreams, and ecstatic experiences and at times the oracles are spoken in rhythmic prose. Dervishes, experiencing religious ecstasy induced by convulsive dancing or drugs or music or special exercises or some combination of these, are able to interpret dreams, disclose the future, and "see" events occurring in distant places (Pedersen, 1946). This can be associated with some of the accounts relating to divine possession in the OT (cf. Judg. 6:34; I Sam. 10:6 ff; 11:6; 19:18-24; II Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26

Generally, the seer sense is not necessarily associated with a sanctuary as was typical of other prophetic figures. It is not because there is any opposition between both. Rather, in early nomadic culture the activities of priest, magician, and clan leader might coincide with those of the seer in a single person. The seer's primary contact with the other and higher world is through the sense of vision. Hearing plays a lesser role. So, the oracles are usually based on what comes into view and what the seer observes. A typical example of this is Balaam, who has to see the Israelites before he could curse them. Like a kahin in other recorded cases, he opens his soul and his spirit, ready to receive the first impression given him by outward appearances.

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Hebrews might have retained and kept alive very ancient patterns in their development of prophecy. On entering Canaan, the Hebrews might have brought along with them those traditional elements associated with nomadic religion. However, the idea of the Israelite prophetic movement underwent change and development that may be clearer from the evidence to be presented.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What are the main functions of a seer?

3.1.2 Prophecy in the Settled Area

Another form of prophecy is rooted in the settled area of the ancient Near East. It is obviously linked to the stimulating vegetation and fertility cults. This form of prophecy may be identified with ecstatic prophets at sanctuaries and/or royal courts. This class of prophets are best designated by prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:19ff); II Kings 10:19), hence the existence of prophets as an internationally known phenomenon (Jer. 27:9) rather than special reserve of Israel. In addition, the association of the phenomena of prophecy with Anatolia (westernmost Peninsula of Asia), Egypt, Syrian-Palestine, Babylonia and Assyria becomes another point to the advantage of the claim.

i. Anatolia

The main witnesses to prophetic activity in Anatolia are the Hittite text. In a Hittite text King Mursilis II (reigned c. 1334-c. 1306 BC) mentions the presence of prophets, but there is no information about the type of prophecy. However, the texts emphasise the cases of inspired persons who communicated with the divine either directly through a dream or indirectly by incubation of liver divination. Also, the inscription of Zakir, king of Hamath (ca. 800), speaks of seers and persons who could foretell the future.

ii. Egypt

It has been argued by many scholars for long that prophetic activities in Egypt are much more linked with the activities of priest, and not much is known about oracle giving by inspired individuals acting as charismatic prophetic figures. But some recent studies, for example Hess, 2007, has demonstrated that in Egypt as well in the early part of the second millennium there are examples of prophecies and the development of mythologies that may have had an effect on later West Semitic religious beliefs. The Instruction of Merikare from about 2000 BC includes texts where the author twice mentions prophecies before his time. The concept of future prediction also occurs in the rubric, "what the ancestors foretold," as found in the Admonitions of Ipuwer. That is to say, some ancient texts contain what has sometimes been regarded as prophetic utterances.

Again, in the Egyptian mantic (divinatory) texts there are prophetic sayings, although the particular concerns of the texts are more political than religious. The papyrus text "The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant" is considered by some authorities as a prophecy, since the peasant is forced to deliver speeches, saying: "Not shall the one be silent whom thou hast forced to speak." This compulsion to speak in the name of the divine is called by some scholars the "prophetical condition."

iii. Syria Palestine

In Syrian-Palestine (including Phoenicia, Syria, Edom, Moab, Amon), prophetic activity is well established. In the Phoenician city of Byblos, for instance, the prophetic activity is diffused, and the common title for a prophet is nabi. The story of Ahab and Jezebel, the daughter of the Phoenician King (King of Tyre), attests to the existence of many prophets of Baal ca. 450 (cf. 1 Kg 18:20). There is also the famous story of the Egyptian emissary –Wen-Amun or Un-Amun, who went on a state-visit (about 1100) to Byblos where a servant to the prince of Byblos ran into ecstasy and prophesied that Wen-Amun's mission was approved by the Egyptian god Amun (Amon-Ra). And in Moab, king Mesha is reported to have received commands from his god Chemosh to attack Israel (ANET 320-321). In another instance, an Aramaic inscription from Syria records that the god Ba'al-shemaim told King Zakir (8th century BC) through seers and diviners that he would save the king from his enemies.

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, chapters 22-24, the Mesopotamian prophet Balaam (who may have been a mahhu) from Pethor, whom the Moabite king Balak had asked to curse the

invading Israelites, is mentioned. In chapter 27, verse 9, of Jeremiah, another Old Testament book, it is said that prophets, diviners, and soothsayers were in the neighbouring countries of Judah: in Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. Since so little is known about these prophets, the question of the uniqueness of Hebrew prophecy is difficult to assess

iv. Babylonia

The document from Mari, an ancient Babylonian caravan city on the middle Euphrates, in the northwest Mesopotamia, which goes back to Tall al-Hariri of the 18th century BC, has some striking parallels to Hebrew prophecy.

i. The document shows that the Sumerian had a term for ecstatic, which probably means ‘the man who enters heaven.’ In a letter from Aleppo, an ambassador of Zimrilim, king of Mari, mentions of apilum, ‘answerer’, who had a feminine counterpart and normally performed his duties at sanctuary as prophet.

ii. The Mari prophets, associated with the West Semitic Hanean people (Fleming 1995, 145), spoke the word of the god Dagon just as Israelite prophets spoke the word of Yahweh.

iii. Though the two key words in the document for prophet, muhhum (an ecstatic, a frenzied one) and apilum (the one who responds), are connected with the cult, there are incidents indicating that the muhhum was not bound to the cultic setting. He received his message in a direct revelation from his god just like the Hebrew prophets. The apilum, on the other hand, usually acted within a group of fellow prophets just like the Hebrew ecstatic prophets. Many of their sayings are political in nature, but there are also oracles that deal with the king's duty to protect the poor and needy, indicating that an ethical dimension was present among the Mari prophets. The messages could also contain admonitions, threats, reproofs, accusations, and predictions of either disaster or good fortune. iv. The more striking feature is the appearance of male and female prophets within the apilum or muhhum and muhhutum, depicts some form of ecstasy. They also belonged to a class, who receives mandates from the deity with whose temple they are associated through omens, dreams, or visions and ecstatic experiences, which they transmitted in the form of oracles.

v. Other Mesopotamian texts make reference to baru as a prophetic title and priestly figure. Baru may be understood as a divinatory or astrological priest, whose prominent function is to interpret omens, hence an interpreter of omens. The message obtained by the baru is called tertu – a probably cognate of the Hebrew Torah. The baru declared the divine will through signs and omens, and thus by some the baru is considered a prophet. The baru studies such omens as the configurations in animal entrails, patterns in bird flights, or designs created by oil on water to secure messages (cf. Lindblom, 1962; Johnson, 1944) Though he might possibly have had visions, he was not in actuality an ecstatic. The art of divination became very elaborate in the course of time and required a long period of training.

vi. One can also attest to Babylonia priests and priestesses, who supported the king with ‘spoken dreams’ just as the Hebrew prophets did.

v. Assyrian

i. There was another form of ecstatic prophecy in **Assyria**. It was exercised by priestesses known by name, especially those associated with the Ishtar Temple at Arbela. In the fifteen century B:C: a letter of Rewassa of Taanak mentions an ummanu of Astarte who was expert in magic and could

foresee the future. Assyrian kings, and their message is sometimes introduced with the clause familiar to what one finds in the OT: "Do not fear."

ii. In one of the maqlu ("oath") texts, in which an asipu priest is being sent forth by his god, the deity first asks "Whom shall I send?"

iii. In addition, related cultic officiants (munabbiatu) of the goddess Ishara used names derived from the Akkadian (not West Semitic) word, nabi, meaning also "to name," that is, to invoke ancestral and protective deities. One sees here some close link why the Syrian general Naaman expects Elisha, a nabi', to call on the name of his deity (2 Kings 5:11).

iv. Omina (omens) texts containing promises or predictions are also known in the Old Testament, thus depicting the Mesopotamian divination as largely omens. The use of such omens as prophecy is guided by a theory, which Wilson (1980) identifies comprising two components of the hypothesis in ANE:

a) All aspects of reality are interconnected, all functioning as interlocking reality. Every event is connected with the other. And events have predictive potential if all the past contexts of the events are known.

b) Reality includes both the natural and supernatural elements, and thus the gods themselves are involved in everyday happenings. Because of this belief in the interconnectedness of reality, Mesopotamians considered all events as potentially ominous. That is to say, every event is an omen requiring an interpretation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the difference between prophecy in Egypt and in Babylon?

3.2 Development of Israelite Prophetism

The origins of Israelite prophecy have been much discussed without textual evidence because there is none. Traditionally, the Israelite seer is considered to have originated in Israel's nomadic roots, and the nabi` is considered to have originated in Canaan, though such judgments are virtually impossible to substantiate. But the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan collaterally connects them to Canaanite forms of prophecy. Hence the structure of the prophetic and priestly function in Israel and Canaan become very much the same.

However, the early stage of the prophetic ministry is dominated by the seer (hozeh or ro'eh) (1 Sam 9:1-9) whose principal function is to describe events, present or future, past, which are hidden from the ordinary man. The seer is in essence the man people consulted in order to find lost articles. A fee is usually required for the service of a seer. A perfect example of a seer was Samuel, who was consulted by Saul while searching for his father's asses (1 Sam 9:1-10).

With the rise of the monarch and the setting up of the great sanctuaries, the seers were no longer mentioned. At this period, the nabi are mentioned for the first time in Israel about the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the tenth century BC, a period that coincided with the rise of the monarchy. So, the nabi and the monarch emerged after the religion of YHWH has long become established in the agricultural areas of Palestine. The early nabis are ecstatic in character, operating from the cultic high places making music, dancing and singing (1 Sam. 10). Samuel too is associated directly with these ecstatic bands. Yet, Samuel as the man of YHWH stands always

above the group. He is a man held in honour because “all that he says comes true (I Sam 9:6). So, in Samuel the two functions, the seer and the nabi, converge.

Of course, the nabis tended to be gregarious and usually appeared and acted in bands. This may be partly because ecstasy is held to be infectious. In contrast to the seer, their social and moral standing was low, as is shown not merely by the amazement of Saul’s friend at his association with such disreputable people (1 Sam 10:11f). With the passage of time however, the group gradually came into prominence, because kings and nobles patronized them. Their status in the society therefore improved considerably. This led many to join the guilds of the ecstatic, and moreover, because many of them became consultants and found their ways into the palace. Thus, this marked the beginning of the professionalisation of the prophetic ministry. Sycophancy and formality would find its way in professionalism, thus bring the prophetic ministry into disrepute among the people.

However, individuals who saw the excesses of the ecstatic prophets separated themselves from these guilds of nabi. The first person of whom this independence is recorded is Micaiah son of Imlah (I Kgs 22:5-28). Micaiah and his contemporary Elijah appeared in marked contrast to these official prophets. They stood alone and spoke upon the impulse of their own experience with YHWH. Micaiah, in opposition to both the deceivers of the king and the views of the majority of the prophets, presented the word of YHWH as he understood it. His message did not support the throne; it spelled out doom and disaster. Micaiah then stood outside the ranks of official prophetism. For the first time, a prophet of woe stood opposed to other prophets, expressing both an idea and an attitude that would characterize prophecy for the next centuries. Prophetic independence of the throne was established and oracles of denunciation were often directed towards the king.

After Micaiah, individual prophets had become a familiar figure. It was no longer on the crowds of ecstatic prophets that the people relied for divine message. It was rather the single independent speaker whose words they held to be due to the direct inspiration of YHWH. The classical or literary prophets fall into this category. This fact is seen in Amos indignant repudiation of any connection with the ecstatic nabis, when he declared, “I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. The Lord took me from behind the flock and the Lord said to me, go prophesy to my people Israel” (Amos 7:14-15). Isaiah is named as “the prophet” only three times in his book, all in chapters 36-39, a section that is actually copied from 2 Kings 18-20. Jeremiah is called a prophet twenty-one times, but in his own speech the term is used only of those sent in the past and of contemporaries who are also alleged to be liars. Twice, Ezekiel is indirectly referred to as a prophet (Ezekiel 2:5, 33:33); otherwise “prophet” is also used of the past, or of contemporary liars. Nowhere is Hosea or Micah or Malachi called a prophet. Zechariah is only the “Son of prophet”. Only Habakkuk and Haggai are called prophets and in the remaining books of the prophets the word is not even used.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Trace the development of prophetism in Israel.

3.3 Cessation of Prophetism in Israel

The office of prophet would seem to have come to pass away in Israel after Malachi. It does seem not to have reappeared until 400 years later with John the Baptist. It may equally appear uncertain how the New Testament gift of "prophecy" relates to the Old Testament. Yet New Testament prophets (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32; I Cor. 12:10,28-29; 14:29,32,37; Eph. 4:11) claim not to be

revealers of new revelation or Scripture, but the forth- and foretellers of God's will in the context of the covenant.

Again, the cessation of prophecy would seem to have been suggested in Ps 74:9 (cf. Lam 2:9, 20) and endorsed by 1 Macc 9:27 (cf. 4:46; 9:27;14:41). Yet the same prophecy will be understood in the context of an expectation of an eschatological prophet connected with the person of Moses on the basis of Deut. 18:15-18 (cf. Acts 3:22 f.; 7:37; and Jn. 6:14; 7:40) and with the person of Elijah on the basis of Mal. 3:1 (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 1:17, 76; 7:27) and Mal. 4:1-6 (MT 3:19- 24; cf. Matt. 17:11; Mk. 9:12; Lk. 1:17. It will be honoured and fulfilled in the realities of the NT (Heb 1:1, cf. Matt 1:22; 2:15, 23; 13:35; 21:4, etc.). In other words, there is never in Israel a prophetic age in the sense of a fixed historical period. Prophecy is always accompanied and opposed by living and fruitful rational or anti-charismatic trends.

Furthermore, prophecy is always challenged from within by the question of its legitimacy. What distinguishes prophecy in Israel is its tremendous ability to live on in ever new forms. When the vivid prophetic manifestations of the post-exilic period finally had to give place to a nomistic rationalism, there were easily discernible historical reasons for this. After the death of Herod, prophecy was entangled in political developments as never before in Israel's history. After the overthrow of the hierocracy in Jerusalem, which was also a serious defeat for all charismatics, Pharisaic Rabbinism set to work creating a Palestinian patriarchate on a nomistic rational foundation. Thus the Canon was fixed and all movements which did not correspond or bow to the Pharisaic Rabbinism norm were eliminated. At the same time all literature, which went beyond the pew dogmatic limits, was suppressed, and the schema triumphed whereby the wise men were the legitimate successors of the prophets.

The rabbis naturally saw in apocalyptic the legitimate successor of prophecy. "Up to this point (i.e. up to Alexander the Great) the prophets preached through the Holy Spirit. From then on, bow thine ear and hear the words of the wise (i.e. the apocalyptic writers)" (Seder 'Olam Rabbah 30). So, in the rabbinic writings the "voice from heaven" begins to gain importance alongside apocalyptic. God still spoke but only through the echo of his voice (SB II 125 ff.).

Incidentally, Josephus (Ant. 13, 311 ff.) reports that the Essenes had a great number of prophets, who were held in high repute. In other words, for all its consistency the nomistic trend was not strong enough to destroy at once the charismatic element, which was especially dangerous in Zealotism. Hence the second revolt broke out, as it would appear, under the spiritual leadership of Akiba as prophet. The radical defeat and the Roman policy of extermination up to the edict of toleration under Antoninus Pius in 138 A.D. ended all spirit-effected manifestations. With great effort the Synagogue could be reconstructed, but now its official outlook was so strongly dominated by nomistic rationalism.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

What do you understand by the phrase "Cessation of Prophetism" in Israel?

3.4 True and False Prophecy

Another area of interest about prophecy as a form of intermediation in ancient Israel is the legitimacy of claims. As Vawter (1990) correctly observed, true and false prophets abound not only in antiquity, in the OT and NT, within and without the people of God, but also in later times. Nevertheless it is important to note that term, false prophet, is not Hebrew biblical tradition but first

came to be associated with the LXX tradition of pseudoprophets. Otherwise there is confusion of identification since the same word, *nabi*, is used to depict the different concepts in MT. That notwithstanding, the following points should be noted in the understanding of the concept of the identity and functions of “true and false” prophet.

i. Distinction between true and false prophets is difficult

In the eyes of Israel prophets would appear the same, hence the distinction between false and true prophecy in the days of the classical prophets was not always clear. Although there could have been some prophets deluded by their own prophetic devices, erring in judgment, confusing their own hopes and aspirations with the authentic word of YHWH (cf. Isa 28:7; Jer 23:5ff.). Possession of the ecstatic prophetic "spirit" was no sure criterion: prophets might be touched by the spirit and still prophesy falsehood, and most of the classical prophets give no signs of having been ecstatics. The situation becomes even more problematic in Israel when two prophets appear saying things that were contradictory using almost, if not, the same standard language (cf. 1 Kgs 22 and Jer 28). In Jer. 28, the prophet Jeremiah confronted Hananiah, who presented a divine oracle (Jer 28:2-4) from Yahweh.

Yet some countless passages in the OT accuse "the prophets" frequently enough, sometimes prophets and priests together, of every kind of moral and social crime against Yahweh and his people and of cooperating with the worst elements in Israelite rule and practice to frustrate Yahweh's will.

ii. YHWH could deploy the service of both Yahweistic and non-Yahweistic prophets

As Overholt (1989), prophecy can work well if there is one prophet speaking to somebody who will take that prophet seriously. So, if prophecy should have a fatal flaw, it is not necessary because of the person of the prophet as such, since YHWH could use any person for His work but the content of the message.

iii. The prophecy of a non-Yahweistic prophet could be as true

There appears in the history of Israel a situation where the prophecy of a non-Yahweistic prophet was treasured as true within the Israelite tradition that condemned the tradition of that prophet (Balaam) as false. Thus, the oracles of Balaam in Num 22-24 were regarded as true prophecies from Yahweh, although biblical tradition classified Balaam with the enemies of God and his people (Num 31:8,16; Josh 13:22; 2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11 ; Rev 2:14) So

iv. Inconsistency of prophecies from the same prophet

Vawter (1990) observes in line with Aquinas that the same person might prophesy both truth and falsehood, depending on whether or not he had been touched by the Spirit of God, because prophecy is a transient motion rather than a habit (Quodl. 12, q.17, a.26). In other words, prophecy does not preclude the fact that the same prophet might alternately prophesy truth and falsehood. However, a true prophetic word was in every case a distinct gift received from God (cf. Deut 13:2-6, restricting the somewhat unsophisticated criterion of true and false prophecy in Deut 18:21-22).

v. YHWH as the cause of false prophecy

Biblical tradition betrays also the notion that possession of the spirit of Yahweh" is not a guarantee of true prophecy (cf. 1 Kgs 22:5-28).

In OT eyes, the activity of the false prophets was also willed by Yahweh as a means of testing his faithful followers (Jer 4: 1 0; 1 Kgs 22:19-23; etc.).

vi. False Prophets as sycophants

The majority of the false prophets were often those found at the king's court in whose interest it was to tell the king and his officials what they would want to hear. Some were those who derived monetary benefits from favourable prophecies that assured their clients of divine blessings and troubled no consciences. Some of these prophets were the children of their age, who were probably caught up in the common tragedy of their people. They were those, Vawter (1990) believes, who had become so convinced that "the Israelite way of life" represented all that was godly that it had become second nature to measure Yahweh's will according to Israel's performance rather than the reverse. This oft-repeated tragedy has by no means been confined to ancient Israel. In an age when national pride spoke a religious language, it was inevitable that it should also speak in prophecy.

vii. The fulfilment of prophecy not the criterion for true prophecy

The fulfilment of prophecy, even if it had been always evident to the prophet's contemporaries, was not an infallible sign, as Deut 13:2ff. shows; moreover, true prophecy apparently often went unfulfilled, discouraging even the prophet himself (cf. Jer 20:7ff.). When the prophet Hananiah prophesied his own wishful thinking in predicting the end of the Babylonian exile in two years and the restoration of Jeconiah (Jer 28: 1 ff.), Jeremiah could offer little in rebuttal except his conviction of the truth of his own contrary prophecy.

viii. The Word of God as the true test of a prophet

Anyone who really knows God will recognize his true prophet and discern him from the false, for the prophecy must conform to God's designs as he has revealed them. Jesus similarly argued his case before his generation according to John 5:37ff., etc.

If the classical prophets could offer their contemporaries only the testimony of the prophetic word itself, they did nothing more or less than any true prophet could be expected to do: it is the word itself that must find a response in the heart attuned to the reception of God's word. Their own conviction of the truth of their prophecy rests on the same foundations; therefore, the narrative of the prophetic call, the experience of the divine presence, plays a prominent role in the records of the literary prophets. This testimony constitutes their credentials, both for themselves and for those to whom they have been sent.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

1. Do you agree that in the Old Testament prophetic tradition YHWH could deploy the service of non-Yahweistic prophets to achieve a good result?
2. How true is the statement that YHWH can cause false prophecy?
3. Evaluate the claim that the fulfilment of prophecy is not the criterion for true prophecy.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have been taken through the processes involved in the evolution and development of Israelite prophetism. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine where and how Israelite prophecy originated. However, that the prophetic ministry came to prominence during the monarchical period in Israel cannot be contested. If you critically sieve the prophetic tradition, it will be evident that the prophetic ministry went through series of development. Different factors responsible for this were given adequate attention in the main content of the unit.

5.0 SUMMARY

- i. The discussion has shown clearly why many scholars believe that the phenomenon of prophecy is not the exclusivity of the Israelite or the Yahweh religion. Rather the Israelite prophets followed to

greater extent some established tradition of ancient Near East both as nomads and sedentary population.

ii. That notwithstanding, one can still speak about the origin and development of prophecy in Israel.

iii. It has equally become clearer how socio-political and religious factors had led to the emergence of prophetic movement in Israel. These factors are summarised as a reflection of opposition to whatever that threatened the life and survival of the nation of Israel. Hence the movement is conceived to be redemptive to the extent that it sustains hope and assured security in time of emergency. Even the prophetic oracles against foreign nations, which could be seen as representing the Holy War ideology (cf. von Rad, 1965), is a demonstration of the faith in the liberative act of YHWH. In other words, the religion of YHWH is the religion of freedom. The curses poured on Israel's enemies symbolically achieved that, which could not be executed practically is demonstrated (cf. 1 Kgs 22; 2 Kgs 13:15; Jer. 27: 2ff; Isa. 20.2).

iv. It was equally highlighted in the course that the history of the development of prophecy is a very complex and complicating issue for scholarship.

v. Furthermore, it was observed that, contrary to popular belief, there was never a period in the history of Israel that Israel was without prophecy. Even when the vivid prophetic manifestations of the post-exilic period finally had to give place to a nominalistic rationalism with their discernible historical reasons, there was still traces of prophecy as attested by Josephus, and also witnessed in the lives of some of the great Rabbis and the Zealots.

vi. Many issues were raised which would seem to have made it more complex and complicating to identify true and false prophets. However, it was finally concluded that the Word of YHWH is the true text for true and false prophecy.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. State the difference between prophet in the nomadic world and in the settled area.
2. What are some of the evidences to prove that the origin of prophecy in Israel could have had some link with the influences of the ancient Near East cultural milieu?
3. Trace the evolution and development of Israelite prophetism.
4. What are some of the evidences to prove that the origin of prophecy in Israel could have had some link with to the influences of the ancient Near East cultural milieu?
5. Identify some of the prophetic elements in Mari documents that could be related to Israelite prophecy?
6. Explain some of the socio-political factors that could have given rise to prophetic movement in ancient Israel
7. How did Baalism and injustice contribute to advancement of prophecy in Israel?
8. Do you agree with the statement that never a time was prophecy absent from the history of Israel? Give reasons for your position.
9. What are the criteria to evaluate a true prophet?

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UNIT 3: THE NATURE OF ISRAELITE PROPHECY

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	18
2.0 OBJECTIVES	19
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	19
3.1 The Call of a Prophet	19
3.1.1 The call experience	19
3.1.2 The power of the Word	19
3.1.3 Vision experience	20
3.1.4 Symbolic action	20
3.2 The Mission of the Prophet	21
3.2.1 Sustenance of the covenant	22
3.2.2 Call for social change	22
3.2.3 Preservation of tradition	22
3.3. The Role of the Prophet	23
3.3.1 The prophet as a boundary figure and mediator	23
3.3.2 The prophet as religious guardian	23
3.3.3 The prophet as social reformer	24
3.3.4 The prophet as motivator and adviser	25
3.3.5 The prophet as political activists	25
3.3.6 The prophet as priest	25
3.4 The Missionary Quality of the Prophet	26
3.4.1 The prophet and YHWH	26
3.4.2 The prophet and the people	26
3.4.3 The prophet and the self	27
4.0 CONCLUSION	27
5.0 SUMMARY	27
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	28
7.0 REFERENCE AND FURTHER READINGS	28

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The issues raised in the last unit borders principally on the origin and rise of prophetic movement with the conclusion that prophecy is not the uniqueness of the Israelites.

Our attention in this unit will be directed on the call of a prophet, the mission and role of the prophet and the missionary quality of the prophet. We shall also discuss the characteristics of a true prophet.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the call experience of the Old Testament prophet.
- appreciate the significance of the “word,” “vision” and “symbolic actions” in the mission of the prophet
- explain the relationship between the “word” and the prophet; the Identify some of the predominant elements in the call of OT prophets
- itemise and discuss briefly the mission of the prophet
- appraise the multiple roles of the prophet in his/her prophetic mission
- evaluate the missionary qualities of ancient Israelite prophets

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Call of a Prophet

In this section, three main elements concerning the call of the prophet will be examined, that is, the call experience, the power of the word, and some symbolic actions. All these are in one way or another connected with the call, response and missions of the prophet.

3.1.1 The call experience

A prophet’s ministry begin with the prophet’s call experience (see Isa 6; Jer. 1:4-10; Ezek. 1:1-3:15). It might be pursued continuously despite opposition or rejection on the part of his listeners (e.g., Hos. 9:7b); Ezek. 12:21ff.); it might be broken off by external coercion (Amos 7:10ff.) or by the prophet himself on account of failure (Isa. 8:16-18); or on account of his inward conversion to a new message (Ezek. 3:22-27; 24:25-27; 33:21-22) it might be temporarily interrupted. The prophet’s words are usually spoken to those for whom the message is intended.

In other words, the prophets of Israel are called by YHWH to announce YHWH’s word to YHWH’ people. They speak for YHWH and the message carries the authority of YHWH as the ONE who has called them and given them the message. So, it is YHWH, who decides and determines who will be his spokesman. He calls, prepares and sanctifies the prophet for the mission to which the prophet is called. This perhaps is responsible for the occurrence of the call narratives in the extent works of the prophets (see for example Isaiah 6:1-10, Jeremiah 1:4-19, Ezekiel 1:1-15; Amos 7:14). Therefore the “call” is an important element in the making of a prophet, for it is not the prophet who decides to become one, but YHWH, who wills and calls the prophet to mission.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How does one know that one is called to be a prophet?

3.1.2 The power of the Word

The identification of the ‘call’ as intrinsic to the prophetic ministry explains to greater extent the belief in the effectuality of the “WORD” spoken by YHWH through His prophets. That is to say, the “WORD” is the decisive feature in OT prophecy. The prophet has to pass on the "word of YHWH," which the prophet receives. Jeremiah at his call becomes certain that YHWH has set His words on his lips, 1:9; cf. Ez. 3:1 H. Yet Jeremiah does not have YHWH's word at his disposal; he has to wait until it is given him (cf. Jer. 28:11,12). When he does, however, he has to speak it (Jer. 1:17; cf. Am. 3:8). The judgment of YHWH will fall on those who hinder him (Jer. 5:13f.; cf. Am.

7:16 f.). The formal expression, "the word of the LORD came to" is often used to express the receiving of the word of YHWH (cf. 2 Sam 7:4). But above all, the prophets use the formula "thus says the LORD" to introduce their sayings as earlier found in the traditions relating to Moses (Ex. 4:22 etc.) and in the case of Samuel (1 Sam 10:18; 15:2). It comes into general use from the time of Nathan (2 Sam 7:5, 8; 12:7,11) and Gad (2 Sam 24:12). The formula is originally used to denote a messenger (Gen. 32:5), so that it can be called a message-formula. The prophet regards himself as a messenger of YHWH, whose word the messenger has to pass on.

The content of the word is mostly transmitted in the 1st person of the one who gives the commission (Gn. 32:5 f.; 45:9 H.; 1 K. 20:3, 5 etc.). In the prophets, then, it is formulated as a saying of YHWH. It conveys the idea that the saying of YHWH is usually about an imminent action of YHWH. This action may mean salvation or destruction; hence the saying of YHWH is either promise or threat. The content of the word of promise may be events in the immediate historical future (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:31; 20:13, 28; 2 Kgs 20:5 f.) or more distant events (cf. 2 Sam 7:8ff). In the writing prophets the promises are above all eschatological expectations in the broadest sense. The prophets, however, do not merely pass on the word which they have received from YHWH. They themselves are responsible for the correct delivery of their message. They are appointed by YHWH to be "examiners," Jer.6:27. Some of the techniques applied in the symbolic actions

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Do you agree with the statement that the “WORD” is the decisive feature in OT prophetic tradition?

3.1.3 Vision experience

Along with the receiving of the word visions are frequently mentioned, 1 Kgs 22:17ff.; Jer. 1:11ff. etc.; Am. 7:1ff.; Zech. 1-6, cf. the visions at the calling of Is. (6:1ff.), Jer. (1:4ff.) and Ez. (1-3). Since these mostly culminate in a word of YHWH, we must take into account the possibility that the prophets commonly received the word of YHWH within the context of vision.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How significant is vision in the call of a prophet?

3.1.4 Symbolic action

Symbolic actions could be understood within the context of ‘the call experience,’ response and mission-fulfilling actions. This is more evident in the teaching mission of the prophet as demonstrated with the table below.

Prophets	Actions
Hosea	Hosea’s first marriage and naming of his children (1:2-9)
	Hosea’s second marriage (3)
Isaiah	Presupposed naming of one of Isaiah’s children (7:3)
	Naming of another child of Isaiah (8:1-4)
	Wearing the cloth of a captive (20)
Jeremiah	Hiding of a waistcloth (13:1-11)
	Jeremiah’s renunciation of marriage and children (16:1-4)
	Jeremiah’s renunciation of mourning (16:5-7)
	Jeremiah’s renunciation of feasting (16:8-9)
	Breaking of a flask (19:1, 2a, 10-11a)

	Bearing a yoke (27:1-3, 12b)
	Breaking of the yoke — Hananiah (28:10-11)
	Buying a field (32:1, 7-15)
	Burying of stones at Tahpanhes (43:8-13)
	Sinking in the Euphrates of a book containing prophecies of disaster (51:59-64).
Ezekiel	Portrayal of a city under siege (3:16a; 4:1-3)
	Ezekiel's lying motionless (4:4-8)
	Baking of bread (4:9-17)
	Cutting, division, and destruction of hair (5:1-14)
	Departure like a deported exile (12:1-11)
	Trembling while eating and drinking (12:17-20)
	Collapse and sighing (21:11-12 — Eng. 21:6-7)
	Marking and distinction of ways (21:23-29 — Eng. 21:18-21)
	Boiling and tempering of a pot (24:1-14)
	Omission of mourning customs (24:15-24)
	Dumbness and renewal of speech (3:22-27; 24:25-27; 33:21-22)
	Joining of two inscribed sticks (37:15-28)
Zech	Coronation of Zerubbabel (6:9-15)

These actions are sometimes narrated and/or performed by the prophets as a didactic means to confront the challenging situation of their days and also a reply to some of the astonished questions of the people. They are carried out deliberately and can extend over several years. They are performed for a specific purpose and cannot be manipulated for a whim or caprice of the prophet.

The actions accompany the words of spoken prophecy as a kind of variant thus resulting to a prophetic act. Far more than any words could, they emphasize that the message of the prophets is to be an effectual message.

Prophetic symbolic actions could have some ancient 'magical' understanding contextually that the prophet is conscious of the specific purpose of the actions. In this sense, the magical realm can be cited for all the prophetic actions. These examples, however, show not only the originally intimate association between magic and the symbolic acts of the prophets, but also the clear difference between them. According to the belief of the prophets, their actions did not produce the symbolized events mechanically *ex opera operato*. For the prophet's assurance that the event would take place is grounded in the power of YHWH and his will to realize in truth what the symbolic acts declare. Therefore accounts of symbolic acts often include YHWH's directive to perform them and his promise to realize what they proclaim.

The prophets thus consider their symbolic acts effectual not in consequence of magically coercive power but as God's declaration through his authorized representatives of what he was about to do. Indeed, the prophets not only declared God's intent but also through their actions brought about the events announced. And their contemporaries, all of whom undoubtedly knew of such symbolic acts, understood them as effectual proclamation.

3.2 The Mission of the Prophet

The will to action in prophetic movement is prompted by a double purpose: (1) to hold the people steadfast to YHWH, their sole Guardian and Law Giver; and (2) to create a spiritually self-

sufficient, unified people whose life and institutions should be based on justice and austere simplicity. In a sense the two are but one principle, inspired by the tradition of Moses. With this tradition as an accepted guide, the prophets believed that Israel would be a peculiar people and that it would reject all incompatible phases of Palestinian or Semitic civilization.

The prophet's primary mission is to communicate the truth about YHWH, to warn and admonish in order that judgment may be averted (cf. Jer 35:15). The prophecy was not for the future but for the present. The prophets have three basic mission rooted in the past (preservation of the tradition), present (sustenance of the covenant) and future (call for change for better). The mission may be classified under three aspects and is thus briefly explained.

3.2.1 Sustenance of the covenant

The prophet is called to invite the people to accountability to the covenant that they had made with God. The primary mission of the prophet in Israel is to be "covenant mediator," to call the people to live out the Torah, the covenantal provisions to which they had agreed at Sinai and had renewed under subsequent leaders (Josh 24, 1 Samuel 7, Neh 9, etc.). As God has covenanted with them to be their God, they have covenanted to be his people (Ex. 6:7, Deut. 5:6, Jer. 7:23, etc.). In some way, all prophetic activity between Samuel and Malachi addressed that overarching concern as its primary focus. The prophets read historical events in light of the covenant, and interpret those events in terms of the people's accountability to the covenant.

In other words, the Sinaitic covenant remains foundational to Israelite religion (Ex. 19-24). It contains the regulations and the blessings that the people would derive from keeping such rules as well as the curses that would follow the contrary. Through pronouncements, preaching and teaching, the prophets constantly remind the people of their statutory duty-abiding by the letters of the covenants, thus helping in the sustenance of the covenant.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Do you think that the covenant played a dominant role for all the Old Testament prophets?

3.2.2 Call for social change

Prophecy is one of the ways through which YHWH speaks to His people, providing guidance in their current setting and hope in His control of their lives and world events. The message is most often corporate. It is meant to rebuke, encourage, engender faith and repentance, and inform God's people about YHWH Himself and His plan for His people.

Through prophecy, the people are spurred to a change of the status quo for better. They challenge the social injustice and other vices in the society which often lead to social and moral revolution. Simply put: the prophetic call for change is a call for revolution. Often, the prophet takes a historical or theological crisis of the day and projected this into an eschatological setting. This end-time view of history is unique in Israel and its sense of divine election and covenant promises.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How is prophecy a veritable tool for social change?

3.2.3 Preservation of tradition

The prophet is also a custodian of the tradition of the religion of YHWH. He is always there to remind the people of the austere covenantal religion that Israel had brought into the Land of Promise from the desert, which could be severely threatened by Israel's insensitivity to the ethical demands of her religion. This speaks of the mission of prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. With their prophecy of judgment, they challenged the state of the society as a whole. They subjected its cultic and political institutions along with their political and theological options to a biting criticism, and could not hesitate to announce the downfall of the whole Israelite state in the name of YHWH. Prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah felt driven by YHWH to put in question the whole basic national and religious consensus in their society. The prophets called the attention of the people to the need to return to the teachings and instructions as embedded in the Torah. By doing this, the tradition is preserved. Their message developed a great long-term effect which contributed quite substantially to a far-reaching reformulation of YHWH religion in the late monarchy and during the exile.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Discuss the mission of the prophet as a custodian of tradition.

3.3. The Role of the Prophet

The different labels assumed by the prophets as seer, diviner, nabi (prophet) and man of God can be interpreted as a linguistic reflection of different times and places. They can equally be an emphasis on the different roles assumed by the prophets, which may also have some considerable overlap. These prophets are both writers and/or speakers. They receive information from and communicate with the deity in various ways (i.e., auditions and visions).

3.3.1 The prophet as a boundary figure and mediator

Despite the multiple roles assumed by the prophets of the Old Testament, it is still possible to identify one element common to all the prophets. The Israelite prophets functioned as intermediaries between the human and the divine worlds, and represented humans to God (e.g., Amos 7:2), and God to humans (Amos 5:4). They acted with the power of God within the mundane world (so Elisha). They envisioned the cosmic world (Amos 7:4; Zech 1:7-17) and sometimes participated in the divine council (1 Kgs 22; Isa. 6). The prophets often analysed the machinations of humans (Micah 3). They are truly boundary figures.

The prophets spoke for God to the people, calling the people to respond faithfully to the God who had revealed Himself in their history. They also spoke for the weak, the oppressed, the disenfranchised, those who had little voice in shaping their own lives or their own future. As they were speaking for the people, they were equally speaking for God, because their tradition remembered that once they were slaves in Egypt with no voice in their own future until God entered history and delivered them. Such oppression of the helpless by the powerful was understood by the prophets to be a violation of the most fundamental part of God's revelation of Himself, that He is the kind of God who hears the cries of oppressed slaves and responds with grace and deliverance. These dual roles we shall further explore in this section.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How do you mean that the prophet is a boundary figure and mediator?

3.3.2 The prophet as religious guardian

In looking at Old Testament prophets more closely, it is clear that their message is most often calling the people back to proper worship of God. But much of that task is done in the context of the

community, the nation, of Israel. That meant that much of the criticism of the prophets is levelled at religious leaders for their failure to be spiritual leaders. It is also aimed at the powerful, most often also the religious leaders, who used their power and influence for selfish or sinful purposes, and sometimes not only forsake YHWH, but also teach their subjects to do the same.

In the time of the monarchs, Yahwism (that is the worship of YHWH), the religion of Israel went through series of challenges. This is seen in the constant struggle between Yahwism and the nature religions of the Canaanites. It went to the extent that the nature of primitive Yahwism had long been forgotten in Israel. The consequence of this is that in many minds, the essential distinction between YHWH and the pagan gods had been obscured. Thus, Yahwism was in danger of slipping unawares into outright polytheism. This situation calls for reforms and the prophets carried out the early attempts at reform of Yahwism. As loyal Yahwists the prophets fought rigorously for the enthronement of YHWH in the national life of Israel. The activities of Elijah can be understood against the backdrop of this prevailing situation. As deep religious thinkers, the prophets saw the shift of allegiance from YHWH to the emerging world powers in ancient Near East as an abomination. The prophet sees YHWH as the Lord over all creation and all powers were subject to him. To enter into any alliance therefore, portend undermining the person of YHWH (Isaiah 30:1-7).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Describe the role of the prophet as a religious guardian.

3.3.3 The prophet as social reformer

Israel and Judah had undergone drastic socio-cultural, economic and political development. The prophets would appear on the national scene to remind the people the essence of their being as a people and as a nation. They served as a balance to the unrestrained power of the monarchy and the aristocracy (cf. 1 Sam 8:11-17). Politically the crown no longer took cognisance of the poor and the ancestral law (1 Kg. 21), hence a prophet like Elijah would not spare the crown in his utter condemnation of the tyranny of the king. So the prophets stand as a counter voice to those who would allow the allure of power, ambition, and self-serving self-righteousness to blind them to the things of God: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

The state with its taxation and its civil service had brought about a further disintegration of the old social order in Israel. In this wise, urbanisation with its attendant socio-cultural and economic evils become inevitably a necessary evil. The great landowners who were living in the towns gained control over the village people, and the result was a severe social injustice. Because of the burden of taxation, the peasant who were economically weak, were no longer able to maintain their land. The village people became increasingly poor (Isaiah 5:8, Micah 2:1f).

Consequently, the prophets condemned in clear terms those who exploited and despised the poor (cf. Is. 3:14-15; Amos 2:6; 4:1; 8:4-8). They spoke out particularly to challenge, in God's name, those who made laws that allowed the poor to be exploited (Is. 10:1-2, Jer. 22:3). This condemnation of unjust legislators was matched equally by strong words against unjust judges (Amos 5:12).

The prophets were, in the best sense of the term, "counter-culture" Israelites. As Brueggemann (1989) observes, the prophets called the people to live in an alternate reality not governed by the rules of power and success. They called them rather to live out Torah as a faithful response to God. They called the people to abandon the status quo shaped by those who benefited from it most, to

embrace a new future shaped, empowered, and energized by God. They always sang one octave too high, and empowered by a vision of how things could be, a future in which the people and their leaders would live out their calling to be the people of God as a channel of blessing to the world. They had the courage to call into question any preoccupation with the status quo on any level that interfered with that future. As a result, they were often in trouble with those who stand to lose most if the status quo were to be changed and that "could be" future became a reality.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

To what extent is the statement true that the prophet is a social reformer?

3.3.4 The prophet as motivator and adviser

A re-reading of the historical and prophetic books in the light of the course also depicts the role of a prophet as a military strategist. Most often, when an Israelite king was strategizing for war, especially in case of doubts, the prophets would be consulted to inquire the mind of YHWH (cf. 1 Sam. 28:6, 14ff; I Kg 20). Prophet Isaiah was actively involved in the prosecution of the Syro-Ephraimite war and the Assyrian campaign (Isaiah 7); and in another occasion gave assurance to the Israelite king and his people, that the Assyrians would surely be defeated by YHWH (Isaiah 39). Jeremiah, during Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem, was active in offering advice on what to do to prevent the impending doom. But his advice would fall on deaf ears but at their peril (Jer. 42).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Read 1 Kings 20 and identify the role of the prophet as motivator and adviser

3.3.5 The prophet as political activists

An activist has been described as a person who in an event but also supports a policy with vigorous action. In the light of this, the ancient Israelite prophets could be regarded as political activists. This is because they were actively involved in the political life of Israel as a nation. Their contribution in the shaping of the monarchy becomes obvious. They take active part in the appointment and deposition of kings. In YHWH's name they designate candidates for the throne and fight to it that they are deposed again if necessary. Because of an infringement of the rituals of the holy war, the same Samuel who nominates the peasant farmers son, Saul, to be king with the words, furthers also his rejection (I Samuel 10:1, 15:28).

David's episode and, the condemnation and encouragement of Nathan portrays also the dual role of the prophet (2 Sam 7:10-12). Besides, the prophets did merely help to put their respective rulers on the throne, and threaten them later with the end of their government but saw to it (at least Samuel and Ahijah did) that an active opposition, bent on revolution, soon appeared on the scene. Samuel anointed David immediately after the dispute with Saul. Elijah encouraged Jeroboam to rebel. Even Nathan's speech attacking David indirectly promoted Absalom insurrection. Moreover, the end of Omri's dynasty was the responsibility of Prophet Elisha. He was the one who accomplished the task of cleansing the political terrain that had long been defiled by this dynasty (2 Kgs 9:10).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

Identify a biblical passage that gives support to the claim that a prophet could equally be a political activist.

3.3.6 The prophet as priest

An absolute distinction between prophets and priests did not exist in ancient Israel. Some prophets were also priests. At least three prophets—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah—belonged to priestly

families. The priest-prophet connection is even stronger than matters of lineage. The book of Joel offers a remarkable scenario in which the prophet appears to function as a priest (Joel 1:13-14.19; 2:18-20). 20). The prophet Joel undertook such work as one might expect from an intercessory priest. Another prophetic book, Zephaniah, depicts the prophet's (Zeph 3:14-15) calling Israelites to the service of song. They were to praise the deity for having moved from a time of judgment to a time of restoration.

In sum, one remembers that prophets not only could exercise various roles but also could even be or act as priests. Such behaviour should prevent us from thinking about prophets in a simple and/or monolithic fashion.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

Name at least four Old Testament prophets that are associated with the priesthood

3.4 The Missionary Quality of the Prophet

It has been stressed that the call of a prophet is fundamental to the prophet's mission. The call is manifested in the various roles the prophet plays as YHWH energises the prophet to achieve the mission. The intention in this section is to itemise the characteristics of the prophet, who is called to carry out the mission as directed by YHWH. This has been viewed from three perspectives, that is, in relation to YHWH, to the people, and to the prophet as a self.

3.4.1 The prophet and YHWH

The prophet's relationship with YHWH depicts the characteristics of a messenger and a person of faith, under authority with total and absolute obedience and commitment to the mission to which the prophet is called. .

In other words, prophet is a messengers rather than orator. The prophet is under the authority and direction of the Spirit of YHWH and act accordingly. He or she does not speak, except when directed by YHWH; hence the prophet cannot be manipulated through human inducement. It is when the prophet is called and sent, that the prophet can say: "Thus says the Lord." The prophet is also under the obligation to proclaim not the prophet's own word or message, but YHWH's. The prophet cannot contradict the Word of YHWH. Even in the face of opposition, the prophet remains faithful and courage to carry out the mission as set out by YHWH. The prophet remains a person of single faith; faith in YHWH and YHWH alone (1 Kg. 18:21)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 12

What role does faith play in the prophet's relationship with YHWH?

3.4.2 The prophet and the people

The prophet is gifted with the spirit of compassion, patriotism, fearlessness, and the creative insight to read history critically and influence the people through teaching, edification, exhortation, and comfort. The prophet remains an advocate of holiness and righteousness (Is. 58:1, cf. 2 Pt. 2:5), who is equally called to walk along the path with YHWH (Gen. 6:9).

The Old Testament prophet generally understands YHWH as God of justice and compassion; hence within the context of the oracle of judgement, there is always salvation. The prophet is a patriot, whose loyalty to God, to whom the land and the entire people belonged, is unquestionable. The prophet is called to serve the people, to proclaim salvation and call them back to YHWH.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 13

Evaluate the call of the prophet as a call to service.

3.4.3 The prophet and the self

The prophet is equally human with some emotional and psychological challenges that can enhance and/or inhibit the prophetic ministry. For this reason, the prophet as a servant of YHWH is called to carry out YHWH's (not the prophet's) ministry through constant training and retraining, retreats and recollections. In this wise, some of the qualities that flows from such relationship will include humility, self-control, prudence, passion for inspirational creative abilities, sense of timing and rightness

The prophet is extremely prayerful (Is. 62:6), selfless (Dan. 5:13-17; 2 Kg 5:14-19; cf. 1Tim 3:3) and humble (Num. 12:3). The prophet trembles before the LORD, knowing full well that the secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will reveal His covenant to them (Ps. 25:14). The fear of the LORD means to hate evil: pride and arrogance (Prov. 8:13).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 14

Do you think that the prophet owes any service to him or herself?

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the discussion, it is now clear that the ancient Israelite prophets possessed some special qualities that singled them out among their contemporaries. They were messengers of YHWH, whose probity and integrity were no doubt. These, however, did not shelf them from conflict with the powers of their days. Their lifestyle and measure not only challenged and disquieted the conscience of their contemporaries but also became a symbolic and effective means of communication.

5.0 SUMMARY

The ancient prophets were not only messengers of God, but men committed to the one who sent them. Their ethical life and absolute obedience to God in face of hatred, opposition and persecution remain unquestionable. Yet they do not merely pass on the word which they have received from YHWH. They themselves were responsible for the correct delivery of the message, hence certain technic. They are appointed by YHWH to be "examiners," Jer.6:27. Some of the techniques applied in the symbolic actions

The prophet's primary mission is to communicate the truth about YHWH, to warn and admonish in order that judgment may be averted and blessings incurred. This mission is clearly demonstrated in their effort to call the Israelites back to the covenant, asking for change not only on the individual but also social level. They act as the authentic custodian of the tradition of YHWH religion.

In their bid to carry out their mission, one observes the various different roles assumed by the prophets including the priestly function. The advantage of the discovery is that one should no longer conceive the role of the prophet in a monolithic fashion. They are, in the NT spirit, all things to all Israelites.

The missionary quality of the prophets was another area of interest in the discussion. One observes that a prophet is not fundamentally a prophet to him/herself. There is something relational in the ministry of the prophet: to the deity that called the prophet, to the people to whom the prophet is called to serve and also to prophet him/herself, since the prophet is a part of that larger community.

This tripartite relationship makes the mission of the prophet somewhat more complicating and yet interesting.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are some of the possible signs of one called by God to be a prophet?
2. Relate the mission of the Old Testament prophet to the challenges facing religious leaders in the contemporary Nigerian society
3. Describe the roles of the Old Testament prophets.
4. How relevant is the discussion to the socio-political situation in Nigeria of today?
5. Should every prophet have the missionary qualities outlined above in order to function as a true prophet of God?
6. What do you think is responsible for the courage of the Israelite prophets in the face of brutal opposition?

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UNIT 4: SOME COMMON PHENOMENA RELATED TO PROPHECY

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	30
2.0 OBJECTIVE	31
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	31
3.1 Prophecy and Ecstasy	31
3.1.1 The basic features of ecstatic phenomena	31
3.1.2 Israelite prophets and the problem of ecstasy	32
3.2 Prophecy and Divination	32
3.2.1 Inductive divination	33
3.2.2 Intuitive divination	34
3.2.3 Israel's inquiry of the Lord	34
3.3 Symbolic Actions and Magic	35
3.3.1 Prophetic symbolic actions	35
3.3.2 Magical power of the prophet	36
3.4 Prophecy and Dreams	36
SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8	37
3.5 Prophecy and Prediction	37
SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9	38
3.6 Prophecy and Miracle	38
3.6.1 Meaning of miracle	38
3.6.2 Sources of miracle	39
3.6.3 Functions of miracle	39
3.7 Prophecy and Apocalypse	40
3.7.1 Content	40
3.7.2 Literary form	40
4.0 CONCLUSION	41
5.0 SUMMARY	41
6.0 TUTORIAL MARK ASSIGNMENT	42
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	42

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Phenomena can be described as a fact, appearance, something visible. In the context of this course, it could be understood as those tangible and intangible facts that are closely associated with prophecy. They may not necessarily be identified as prophecy per se. These categories may come under the general theme of Ecstasy, divination, dream, prediction, symbolic actions and magic, and apocalypse. A discussion of this sort is of great interest for students bearing in mind that most of the

above listed elements could find home in other world cultures and traditions that are either prior or parallel to the Israelite prophetic tradition. Nevertheless, the conclusion is that these elements could have influenced the O.T. prophecy; they are not in themselves prophecy as such. They may at some level be anti-prophetic and at some other level prophetic.

Another important issue that attracts the attention of theology is the opinion of some scholars that every prophetic message as recorded in the Scriptures arose out of ecstatic experience, that is, in a state of frenzy and abnormality. The implication of this as correctly noted by Otto Eissfeldt touches the religious and theological value of the prophets since the admission of an abnormal or even supernatural state of experience and action would endanger the worth of the divine revelation in the pronouncements of the "Great Prophets", and much more so if one admits that there was great similarity between them and the "false" prophets whom they denounced (Eissfeldt, 1967). Besides ecstasy, other related phenomena would bear some influence on a closer appreciation of the Israelite prophecy.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

- Identify some of the related phenomena that could be associated with prophecy
- Know the difference between prophecy and the discussed related phenomena
- Know that the related phenomena could serve dual role: positive and negative in the advance of prophecy

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Prophecy and Ecstasy

3.1.1 The basic features of ecstatic phenomena

The Greeks who coined the word ecstasy (ekstasis), understood it quite literally to be a state of trance in which the soul was no longer in its place, but had departed from the body; or a state in which the soul, escaping from the body, had entered into a relationship with invisible beings or become united with a deity.

The ecstatic state was thus regarded as a way of ascending to a higher form of living, or at least a way which rendered possible the receiving of supernormal endowments. From a psychological point of view, ecstasy is described as a withdrawal of consciousness from circumference to centre. It is a state in which the absorption of the mind in one idea is so profound that everything else is blotted out, a state in which consciousness of self disappears. One could attain such a condition through gradual preparation or the use of narcotics, alcohol, music and dancing. It could also come by contemplation and complete spiritual concentration as well as by prayer.

Ecstasy is classified as being of two kinds:

- i. The wild or fervid type, described as a state of frenzy arising from the over-stimulation and emotional tension, in which case one is said to be possessed by the spirit. It is often accompanied by abnormal manifestations - gasping, groaning, babbling, and uttering of strange and meaningless sounds, and the performance of frivolous antics.
- ii. The second, more sober or contemplative type, is described as a rapture of the soul in a state of complete calmness, enabling a person to rise beyond the confines of consciousness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you understand by the term ecstasy?

3.1.2 Israelite prophets and the problem of ecstasy

Judging from the type of picture presented by some of the biblical prophets, both earlier and later, some critics seem to portray the Israelite prophets as crude and abnormal personalities, little different from similar ecstatic figures in Oriental heathenism. The prophets are portrayed as dervish-like fanatics. Their ecstatic excitement is described as infectious. They are depicted as 'slavering' and 'dribbling' in the sense of prophesying, or even qualified as 'mad fellow.' Incidentally, the phenomena are not the monopoly of any race, people, or nation, or even any historical period.

That notwithstanding, the challenge of the biblical scholarship is the relationship between the ecstatic experiences and the content of the prophetic message. At this point, one cannot but appreciate the distinction made by Lindblom (1973) between 'orgiastic' and 'lethargic' ecstasy. The 'orgiastic' ecstasy is of an unrestrained type of emotion characterized by frenzied movements (cf. 1 Sam 10:5ff; 1 Kgs 18.46). 'Lethargic,' on the other hand, refers to a state of abnormal drowsiness. It is passive in nature. It can be detected in the story in 2 Kings 8.77ff concerning the behaviour of Elisha. Other terms associated with ecstasy are absorption and concentration, spirit possessed. Then the prophetic ecstasy is understood as a state of concentration rather than absorption. The advantage of making the distinction is that concentration does not destroy consciousness and freedom, hence the OT prophets in the prophetic missions were always free and conscious (Eissfeldt, 1967).

'Spirit-possession', also called 'divine seizure' or simply 'prophetic frenzy', or even 'sacred madness', is an essential feature of the ecstatic experience. The 'possessing spirit' is identified as YHWH's, and it is the 'hand of YHWH' which seizes or grasps the prophet. The 'divine seizure' of the prophet may be overwhelming enough to cause anguish (cf. Jer. 20:7ff)

The unmistakable effect of possession by the Spirit or the grasping hand of YHWH includes a full-scale ecstatic hysteria such that the possessed may be 'turned into another man' (1 Sam. 10.5-6). In such a case the frivolous antics of the possessed may become grotesque. The possessed may perform abnormal or superhuman acts, or lose physical sensation (cf. 1 Sam. 10:7; 11:7ff ; 1 Kings 18:26-9). This spirit may be transmitted or conveyed from one prophet to another (cf. Num 11.23ff).

The spirit is not only shared by transmission, it can also be inherited from a master (2 Kings 2:9, 15) The spirit could also suddenly take a prophet from where he was and transplant him to another place (1 Kings 18.12; 2 Kings 2.16).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the difference between 'orgiastic' and 'lethargic' ecstasy?

3.2 Prophecy and Divination

Divination has been defined as the act or practice of seeking to know the future or hidden things by magical means, instinctive prevision; prediction, conjecture. In this sense, one may consider prophecy as divination and/or a divinatory activity. Though there are various forms of divination, Cicero brings them under two major divisions:

a) Inductive or Instrumental Divination

b) Intuitive Divination

3.2.1 Inductive divination

Inductive divination, also described as mediated or instrumental divination, is the claim to interpret some given omens; hence known as “omen divination” (cf. the presentation in Module I, Unit 1).

Some of the forms of inductive divination include:

- i. Astrology** – Star guessing – study of the stars. Horoscope, even those that study weather is part of astrology.
- ii. Palmistry** – the study of palms. Even today palmistry is developed in Europe
- iii. Chiromancy** – is more the gesticulation of the hand. All these go with magic. Some of this charm is a science of hypnotism
- iv. Necromancy** – e.g. of Saul trying to invoke the spirit of Samuel. Necro is dead – So it is rituals done for the dead; that is invoking the dead to know some information
- v. Extispicy** – the study of the liver and inner parts of animal, a developed science in ancient Babylonians. From what they see in that animal, they can predict a person’s life or future.

The means of inducement during the contact with the supernatural being include the i) interior withdrawal, ii) fasting, iii) ecstasy, iv) intoxication, v) music, vii) dance, viii) incubation and many others.

- i. Interior Withdrawal** – going into oneself, withdrawing, one may be there present but goes into oneself, i.e. a spiritual retreat. Its aim is to help one to know better how to adjust in the future for better.
- ii. Fasting** – it can also be a way to recharge that spiritual battery – to be in line with the spiritual being
- iii. Ecstasy** – this helps one to be high and move in union with super natural being.
- iv. Intoxication** – makes one to become high.
- v. Music** – can charge one’s spiritual energy, or intoxicate a person to be high, at the level of super natural being
 - a. **Dance** – Music can intoxicate and intoxicate and recharges.
- vi. Incubation** – helps one to have contact with the divine e.g. of Samuel who sleeps in the temple is a sign of incubation. As a process of incubation, one may sleep in curfew, church, cemetery.

The acquisition of information is based on the expertise on medium and may take any of the following processes: the inner voice, premonition, clairvoyance or the sixth sense.

- i. Inner Voice** – revealing information pure about somebody or a situation
- ii. Premonition** – assumes more or less a negative connotation that signals some sense of fear, or feelings a happening of past, present or future.
- iii. Clairvoyance** – a pre-understanding of a situation or event that is about to effect. That is, one sees beyond others, that is, one who has a natural sight to see and understand events before its occurrence.
- iv. Sixth Sense** – is more of a super human intelligence that transcends mere human limit. One detects and senses or foresees an event or situation, which is about to happen in a near distant future before it occurs.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. What is inductive divination?
2. Describe some forms of inductive divination.
3. What are the possible means of inducement in inductive divination?
4. What are the possible means of acquiring information in inductive divination?

3.2.2 Intuitive divination

Another aspect of divination is the intuitive divination. It manifests itself in different forms, such as fortune telling (soothsaying), oracle, clairvoyance, dreams, visions, auditions, etc.

- i. Fortune telling** – It is the art of invading the future, revealing to one, what is yet to take place, especially as it affects the individual inquirer.
- ii. Oracle** - Oracle can signify both a place and a saying. Thus in ancient Greece and Rome, a shrine would be dedicated to a particular god where people would normally go to consult a priest or priestess in times of trouble or uncertainty. A good example of this would be the most famous Delphic Oracle of Apollo. People went there to seek for a piece of advice, often in the form of a puzzle or an enigmatic statement, handed down by an ancient Greek or Roman deity. The oracle is believed to come from a deity in response to a request, plea or petition.
- iii. Clairvoyance** – It is the supposed ability to perceive things that are usually beyond the range of human senses.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Describe the different forms of intuitive divination.

3.2.3 Israel's inquiry of the Lord

The discussion so far may be suggesting divination (and also ecstasy) could form part of prophecy. In this wise, the Israelite prophets may be seen to share many characteristics with their counterparts in the surrounding cultures and societies in the ANE. In the eyes of many the presence of such elements could in the prophetic tradition lower the traditional standard of the Israelite prophets. It is equally damaging if the assertion is true that the prophets performed divinatory practices similar to those found among the heathens.

According to Lindblom (1973), 'the prophets were traditionally oracle-givers; and this function was never abandoned during the whole history of prophecy.' Although the sacred Scriptures condemn all acts of divination (Deut. 18.9ff), it seems that such phenomena existed among the Old Testament prophets and priests, and are described in the New Testament as well (cf. Acts 1.26). It has equally been argued that prophecy as presented in the Hebrew Bible is among the common techniques of divination similar to those described in the Mesopotamian text. But Orlinsky (1975) would insist that it was divination, and not prophecy, that finds its parallel in the Mari and other social structures and documents in the Fertile Crescent of old. According to him, it is the Israelite seer and his role that correspond to the Mari ecstatic.

Referring to the names *ro'eh*, *hozeh*, and especially *nabi*', as applied to the prophets, Albright points out that the first two mean 'seer', that is, a diviner who sees what is invisible to the ordinary eye by some kind of clairvoyance or organized divination. 'In practice', he suggests, 'it would seem that the early seers were mostly diviners who had learned indirectly from the elaborate techniques of Mesopotamian and other pagan origin, but who were uneducated quacks from the standpoint of a graduate, a *qosem*'.

Similarities are seen between the Israelite seers and the pre-Islamic Arab *kahins*. Expressly called 'seers', these are said to have acted as interpreters of dreams and finders of camels and other lost objects, and were regularly consulted about various enterprises, particularly before the beginning of raids and wars; they also were believed to be able to detect criminals. The Arabian *kahin* was said to be seer, prophet, priest, and even judge in the same person.

Whatever similarities might exist between the activities of other diviners and those of the Israelite seers, it seems that in Israelite tradition there was also divination that was not opposed to the YHWH religion. The angel of the Lord even sent Elijah to put the question to the messenger of the sick Ahaziah, king of Samaria. 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron' (2 Kings 1ff). In the narrative concerning Saul and the witch of Endor, the rejected king resorted to mediums because the Lord had refused to answer him either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets (1 Sam. 28.3).

The legitimate type of divination is popularly known as the 'inquiry of the Lord', and is a recognized activity of the prophet, for 'formerly in Israel when a man went to inquire of God he said, "come let us go to the seer; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer (1 Sam. 9.9.).

In various circumstances, and especially during misfortunes in life, the 'man of God' was consulted, and he regularly received a modest fee for his service: In sickness (1 Kings 14.1ff; 2 Kings 1.2ff; 8.7ff), and over general difficulties or domestic misfortunes; e.g. loss of animals, etc. (1 Sam. 9.3ff, 2 Kings 22.13). Before embarking on battle, a consultation with YHWH became a clear cut responsibility of the prophet (1 Sam. 14.37ff; 23.2ff; 30.8; 2 Sam. 2.1; 1 Kings 22.5ff; Jer. 37.6ff).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Do you think that if it is proved that the ancient Israelites practiced divination that it will lower the value of Old Testament prophecy?

3.3 Symbolic Actions and Magic

The presence of certain peculiar symbolic actions has drawn further attention of scholars, some of whom, however, have seen in these actions nothing but the last echoes of magical practices. In many other religions, the use of symbolic magic is common, whereby the priests or oracular diviners seek to control events by symbolically enacting what they desire to be accomplished in reality. Such phenomena seem to be present in some of the biblical scenes connected with the Israelite prophets (cf. 1 Kgs 22; 2 Kings 13.15ff; Jer. 27.2ff.; Ez. 4.1-19; 5:1-4).

3.3.1 Prophetic symbolic actions

Some critics, judging from the prophetic symbolic actions of the Israelite prophets, consider the prophets as primitive magicians, diviners, or visionaries. While scholars do not see in these symbolic acts any danger to underrate the high regard of the prophets. For example, Fohrer (1972) denies any place to magic in the prophetic symbolic actions. According to Freeman (1967), the symbolic acts of the prophets are a significant form of the prophetic method for expressing the word of God. They are not expressions of "symbolic magic", but rather a symbolic method of proclaiming the divine revelation. They (symbolic acts) originate from the widespread practice of symbolic magic, but the prophets transform them into religion by assimilating them to the will of YHWH (Robinson, 1953 in Ndiokwere, 1981). These peculiar actions, which accompany the prophetic words, increase the effective power of the words. They illustrate dramatically what the prophets have to proclaim. Yet they are more than that. They have creative effect just as the words themselves. They are 'parabolic actions'. They are parables in action. They are symbolic act, whether accompanied by words or not, is a dramatized prophecy. It comes quite naturally to an imaginative people in love with the concrete. So, prophetic symbolic actions are words in action.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Do you think that the prophetic symbolic actions of the ancient prophets have anything positive to contribute to the Christian faith?

3.3.2 Magical power of the prophet

The prophetic legends often exhibit miraculous features that are of magical nature. This is clearly demonstrated in the case of Naaman (cf. 2 Kgs 5:11). A prophet could make use of visible means to perform a miracle (1 Kgs 17:14-16, 21; 2 Kgs 2:19-25; 3:20-21; 4:1-7; 4:29; 4:38-44; 5:27; 6:1-7; 6:18; 13:1-5).

There is also a general belief that the word of YHWH as spoken by a prophet possessed a kind of effectual power like ascribed words of magic. When Jehu's arrow struck the fleeing king, it marked the realisation of the word of YHWH proclaimed by Elijah and the messenger of Elisha (1 Kgs 21:19; 2 Kgs 9:25). A prophet's prediction of death and destruction in the name of YHWH spelled inexorable doom for the wicked (cf. 1 Sam. 2:27-34; 4:11;; 2 Sam. 12:11-18; 1 Kings 2:26-27; 13:20-24; 14:12-18). Conversely, predicted deliverance was sure to come to pass (cf. 1 Kgs 11:31-32 and 12:20; 2 Kgs 19:6-7, 35; 20:5ff).

Consequently, one may ask whether the conceptions about prophecy and the acquaintance with the virtually magical power of the 'men of God' and prophetic masters were not an echo of ancient nomadic civilization, undifferentiated and unspecialized. The hypothesis may explain some of the phenomena such as the special dress worn by the prophets, which seems to follow nomadic practice; possible ritual tonsure (2 Kgs 2:23), based on the notion that an human hair is a locus of power; the term 'ish (ha) 'elohim, which ascribes to its bearer 'El Powers,' the superhuman and the divine; and the invulnerability of the prophets, at least of the great masters, which could cause the death of anyone who raised his hand against them (2 Kgs 1:9-12; 2:23-25).

Remarkably often it is the prophet himself in the examples given who brings about the result by word or deed. In some cases, however, one brings out a discontinuous or dialectical relationship of the prophet to magic. In this wise, it was not the prophet himself who knew or divined the unknown; it was YHWH who revealed it to him (1 Kgs 13:2; 14:5; 2 Kgs 3:16-17). He did not act on his own authority but at YHWH's behest (1 Kgs 13:3) or by appeal to YHWH's word (1 Kings 17:14ff.) or YHWH Himself might act (2 Kgs 6:15ff; 7:1ff.). Or the miracle might take place after or during a prayer to YHWH (1 Kgs 17:20ff.). What is really evident is the surviving magical element and its significance for prophecy defined: it is the notion that prophetic words and actions are effectual — effectual because based on the will and on the power of YHWH.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Do you see any difference between prophecy and magic?

3.4 Prophecy and Dreams

The discussion on prophecy and dream goes back to the age-long philosophical problem of dream and reality. Is dream identical with reality? How does one differentiate dream and reality? Is one's dream not an extension of one's own waking activities? On this, the English philosopher, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), states a difference: "Certain uniformities are observed in waking life, while dreams seem quite erratic." It is in certain respect, the ideas that are slumbering in the soul, which uninvited put in their appearance without being controlled by consciousness and reason.

But whatever understanding attached to it, many cultures still give dream the status of reality. In some instances, it is accorded a superior status to the banal activities of wakefulness (Webb and Cartwright, 1999). The belief is that it predicts the future. Deities often communicate with humans through the means of dream. The Old Testament tradition itself is generous with accounts of prophetic dreams (cf. Gen. 20:3-7; 28:12-15; 31:10-13; 31:24; 37:5-9; 37:19; 40:5-23; 41:25-32;

42:9; Dan. 4:2-25; 5:12; 7:1 8:1-19; 10:1-21; Joel 2:28). Often it is through dream that YHWH, the God of Israel, communicates with his people, and sometimes reveals the future to them. The interpretations of such dreams are frequently the occupation of prophets, the priests and the elders.

In the contemporary setting, dream interpretation is winning an unprecedented patronage. Those who engage in the trade enjoy profitable sales everywhere among people who follow them in affairs of the heart, in gambling, and in matters of health and work. It is also evident that the so-called prophetic dreams, be it in the Ancient Near Eastern cultures or in the present age, are frequently combined with other phenomena associated with prophecy with the efforts to heal the sick.

So, dream in many respects is cited as an analogous phenomenon of prophecy. Yet prophecy differs from dream in many aspects. A genuine prophetic utterance is received when the prophet is clearly conscious. Secondly, prophetic utterance brings with it a much greater degree of certainty and a greater guaranty of its higher origin than is done even by a dream that seems to be prophetic. In Jer 23:25 ff., it is declared that these two are entirely dissimilar, and the relation between the two is compared to straw and wheat.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

What is the basic difference between dream and prophecy?

3.5 Prophecy and Prediction

Many confuse prophecy with prediction, and many Christians and movements would believe ardently that the bible foretells the course of future events. Unfortunately also, the holiness and/or claim to the authentic call of modern “prophets” are tested on the same litmus. Thereupon this section examines the relationship between prophecy and prediction. In spite of their close relationship, this section will also insist on the difference between both.

The word is derived from the Latin *praedicere*, a compound of *prae* (pre) and *dicere* (to say). It means to declare or indicate beforehand, in advance. As foretelling, it implies the art of telling of the coming of a future event by any procedure or any source of information. When it is related to prophecy, it connotes inspired or mystic knowledge of the future especially as the fulfilling of divine threats or promises. Still another word closely related to prediction and prophecy *Prognostication* is another word, but less in use than the other two. It may signify a learned or skilled interpretation, and could be used as a synonym for prediction or prophecy (*Miriam Collegiate Dictionary*).

However, the emphasis here is that the two concepts (prediction and prophecy) are of different understanding and functions. Aptly put: in the theological sense neither prediction nor prophecy makes the other. Though prophecy may contain predictive element, it does not necessarily predicate the future in the sense of foretelling. When prophets speak of future events even in the category of "prediction," it is done solely for its own sake and absolute. Again,

Prediction in the prophets is in most cases either of doom or of deliverance which will befall a people. It is an immediate consequence of their moral and spiritual condition at the moment of the prophecy. It is not generally for the far distant future, but for the immediately impending future that calls for moral change or a response as people of God in their own present. The margins of the present time are extended to include a near future which is vitally and morally related to that present. That means that such predictions should be differentiated from fatalistic future telling. What is to happen is a necessary consequence of a moral situation and at the same time has direct

affinity with the will of YHWH in the immediate present circumstances.

The moral conditioning and immediate reference explains therefore how a prophetic prediction, far from being inevitably fulfilled with literal exactness, can be modified or withdrawn altogether (cf. Is 38:1-6; Amos 7:1-6). God retains the full freedom of an active will and cannot be tied down by any pre announcement of events or chart or dates, even by his authentic prophet. The reasoning above then explains why some prophetic predictions could remain unfulfilled or fulfilled but not literally.

The prophets of Israel, therefore, were not mere prognosticators; they were spokesmen of a living word from God. Their frequent references to the future, and especially to the immediate future, result from their sense of the spiritual importance and moral urgency of the present. They are forth-tellers rather than foretellers.

The prophets spoke at critical moments of the people's life. Because of this, the prophet is again to be distinguished from priest, on the one hand, and from the sage, the wisdom teacher on the other. The priest normally ministered in terms of the eternal and changeless to that in man's life which was constant or recurrent. The wise man distilled in his teaching the essence of common and long experience. The message of the prophets is differently related to the temporal setting of time.

So, the fulfilment or success of prediction could sometimes, but not always, be a sign to the prophet that he stood in God's counsel and a sign to the people that he was a genuine prophet. Life built more on love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (cf. Gal. 5: 22f.) is more prophetic than the power to predict future events. And the life and the content of a prophet's message is a surer test than the prophet's power to predict future events; if that message is in consonance with that of the great prophets who had been before him, then it is of God, and he or she is a prophet. It is on that ground that Jeremiah took his stand when, contradicting another prophet, Hananiah, he prophesied for Judah further suffering and disaster (28:5-9).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Can there be prophecy without prediction?

3.6 Prophecy and Miracle

3.6.1 Meaning of miracle

Etymologically, "miracle" is derived from the Greek *thaumasion* and the Latin *miraculum*. The term depicts "that which causes wonder and astonishment, being extraordinary in itself and amazing or inexplicable by normal standards" (Zwi Werblowsky, 1999). Miracles are often associated with supernatural events. They are signs (the Greek *semeion* and the biblical Hebrew *ot*) of God's saving presence and design. So, they signify and indicate something beyond themselves. They reveal the presence and actions of the divine. They are in a sense symbolic action demonstrating ultimately the power of the divine (YHWH) and of the saving presence of God and of the consequent obligation to serve and obey him.

Miracles are extraordinary, astonishing and inexplicable occurrences or happenings that are attributed to the presence and action of an ultimate or divine power. However inexplicable they may be, they have an explanation in the sense that they are accounted for in terms of the religious and cultural system that supports them and that they, in turn, are meant to support. Thus, belief in a personal, omnipotent Creator who exercises his providence over his creatures implies a concept of

miracles as deliberate interventions in the course of events by the same sovereign God who also assures their normal regularity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

How can you explain miracle to a primary school child?

3.6.2 Sources of miracle

The source of miracles is always a divine, spiritual, supernatural, sacred, or numinous power that may be conceived in personal form (e.g., God, gods, spirits) or impersonal form (e.g., mana or magic), direct or indirect, that is, through some form of mediation, human or inanimate. The sacred may manifest itself in natural phenomena, such as thunderstorms or earthquakes, that evoke appropriate feelings of awe, but these are not usually considered miracles unless attended by special circumstances--e.g., being predicted by a "man of God" or coinciding with an event of religious significance.

Immediate divine action was often perceived in omens preceding important undertakings, in apparently natural phenomena occurring providentially at critical moments or in miraculous--i.e., sudden and seemingly impossible--cures. In most cases, however, such divine interventions took place. Some of the characteristics of miracle would include immediacy, suddenness, non-repeatability 'abnormality and supernatural.

Human can be the object of miracles, as when her/his disease is miraculously healed, or their subject, as when he performs miracles, such as healing others, in the name of whatever power is moving him or her. The popular belief therefore is to consider human subject as the manifestation of a sacred power, which is inherent in individual persons, places, and objects associated with the miracle. In other words, sacred objects and places could equally be identified with miracles.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

What do you understand by the claim that human can be the object of miracle?

3.6.3 Functions of miracle

Miracle is understood as an accompanying circumstance designed to arrest attention and to impress on everyone the unique character and significance of an occasion, and therefore, could serve any of the following purposes:

- i. As credentials for claimants to religious authority in the form of leadership (cf. Ex. 4) or prophecy (cf. Deut. 18);
- ii. As the demonstration of the superior power of a particular god (cf. Ex. 7);
- iii. As proof of the sanctity of a holy man, a holy site, or a holy object; or
- iv. As evidence of the truth of a particular religion.

In other words, the evaluation of prophecy in the sense of prediction or miracle working is nothing less than a revival of superstition. Jesus always warned that 'it is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father had set within his own authority" (Acts 1.7). Those, who have fallen trap into this belief, have depended more on apocalyptic literature than on prophetic literature.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 12

Which among the functions of miracle do you consider most important and why?

3.7 Prophecy and Apocalypse

The advent of post-Exilic Judaism, with its undue emphasis on law and cult, finally suppressed prophecy. What is left of prophetic heritage is channelled through the teaching of the words of scripture. What remains of prophetic activity is expressed in various literary works that claimed esoteric knowledge of the divine purpose. Some of these works are classified as apocalypse. The apocalyptic writers therefore see themselves as taking over and carrying on the prophetic tradition. But they transcend the prophetic boundary in their use of old mythological motifs.

The book of Daniel is considered to be an example of the Jewish apocalyptic work. The events described usually occurred long ago, but the recounting of these events is for the purpose of hinting and even predicting the events of the future. It is “tracts of bad time”, which provide for the people suffering adversity and persecution, the consolation of great hope in the God who works behind scenes of history. It is based on the religious thought of a dualistic, cosmic and eschatological belief in two opposing cosmic powers, God and Satan (or his equivalent); and in two distinct ages – the present, temporal and irretrievably evil age under Satan, who now oppresses the righteous but whose power God will soon act to overthrow; and the future, perfect and eternal age under God’s own rule, when the righteous will be blessed forever. To convey the idea, more visionary symbolism and predictive elements are deployed more than one could find in the prophetic literature.

3.7.1 Content

Prophecy and apocalypse differ from each other both in matter and form. Both contain predictive elements. But there is a far greater emphasis upon predictive speculation about the future in apocalypse than on the prophetic analysis and insight into history. In other words, predictive speculation is more prominent and relates to longer periods in apocalypse, and involves a wider grasp of the state of the world at large.

Oppression and domination of the great empires creates a thriving environment for apocalypse literature. Consequently, the central theme in apocalyptic literature is of God's sovereignty and ultimate rule over the entire universe. The message is one of both warning of the doom to come at the end of history, and hope in the new age beyond history but under the rule of God, when the righteous will be vindicated.

In both prophecy and apocalypse there is reference to the coming of the Messiah. The messianic hope in the latter is more defined and with a wider reference. Thus, in the prophets and psalmists the Messiah had mainly to do with Israel with any imperial outlook. In the apocalypses, on the other hand, the imperial outlook is prominent (cf. Dan. 7:13; also Rev 11:15).

While the prophet was primarily a preacher of righteousness, and used prediction either as a guarantee, by its fulfillment, of his divine mission, or as an exhibition of the natural result of rebellion against God's righteous laws, to the apocalypticist prediction was the thing of most importance, and in the more typical apocalypse there is no moral exhortation whatever.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 13

Do you evaluate the activities of most of the new religious movements in Nigeria today as apocalyptic or prophetic?

3.7.2 Literary form

There is also a thick forest of difference between apocalypse and prophecy in their literary form.

- i. The apocalyptic authors wrote pseudonymously, using the names of ancient worthies (such as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Daniel, and Ezra).
- ii. While the prophets wrote in a style of so elevated prose that hovered on the border of poetry, the apocalyptists always used pure prose, without the elaborate parallelism or cadenced diction of Hebrew poetry.
- iii. Both make use of vision, but in prophecy, in the more restricted sense of the word, these visions are as a rule implied, rather than being described.
- iv. Apocalyptic language is lavish in its use of fantastic imagery, frequently using riddles and numerical speculations.
- v. In apocalyptic literature angelology came into full blossom, with accounts of fallen angels (fallen stars) caught up in the forces opposed to God, frequently pictured in the old mythological motif of the struggle between darkness and light. Wild beasts symbolized peoples and nations, and there were esoteric calculations and speculations about the different eras through which history was passing as the world approached the eschaton (the consummation of history).
- vi. Again, apocalyptic literature makes more of the use of visionary symbolism, and there one encounters extraordinary images like the beasts of fantastic forms, horns and bowls and trumpets, sings in the heavens, a woman arrayed with the sun and crowned with stars, a man riding on the clouds, the Ancient of Days, seated upon a throne surrounded by the heavenly multitude, etc.
- vii. But more important than the images, the apocalyptic literature has been called “tracts for bad times”. On this basis that it is believed to have originated in attempt to provide, for people suffering adversity and persecution, the consolation of a great hope in the God who works behind the scenes of history. It is therefore in apocalyptic literature that you have more of the predictive element than in the prophetic literature.

Summarizing the difference W. Baumgartner, writes in favour of apocalyptic: “its pseudonymity, eschatological impatience and exact calculations about the last things, the range and fantasy of its visions, concern for world history and a cosmic horizon, numerical symbolism and esoteric language, doctrines of angels and hope of the afterlife” makes apocalyptic different from prophecy.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 14

How do you make the difference between apocalyptic and prophetic writings?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The emphasis in this section had been on the relationship between prophecy and other related phenomena – ecstasy, divination, symbolic actions and magic, dream, prediction, miracle and apocalypse. It shows clearly the relationship between the Israelite prophetic tradition and other traditions, especially those of the Ancient Near East cultural milieu. The conclusion reach is that there could have been a lot of similarities, but one should not lose sight of the differences, which have made Israelite prophetic tradition, not only unique but also to have survived chains of challenges among crowns and thrones.

5.0 SUMMARY

The term, Phenomena, was depicted in this course as tangible and intangible facts that are closely associated with prophecy, but are not in themselves prophecy. Among these are: ecstasy, divination, symbolic actions and magic, dream, prediction, miracle and apocalypse.

The ecstatic state was seen as a supernatural endowment that leads to a withdrawal of consciousness from circumference to centre. The ability to identify the two principal forms of ecstasy paves a way to situate the Israelite prophecy in its rightful perspective.

Divination is a form of inducement to enable one communicate with supernatural beings for the sake of probing into the unknown future or hidden things by 'magical' means, instinctive prevision; prediction, conjecture etc. Among the different forms of divinatory inducement include (i) interior withdrawal, (ii) fasting, (iii) ecstasy, (iv) intoxication, (v) music, (vi) dance, (vii) incubation and many others. Although one could trace some forms of legitimate type of divination in the biblical tradition, it must be made bold that divination is not prophecy.

Symbolic actions and magic are closely associated with prophecy. Symbolic actions speak million words. They have creative effects sometimes more than words themselves. They are 'parabolic actions', dramatized prophecy. They speak from the concrete and therefore make the prophetic message more active and effective. Magic is also identified as evident in the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel. Nevertheless, the Israelite prophetic tradition makes it clear that the magical elements were effectual simply because they were based on the will and on the power of YHWH.

It is true that dream in many respects analogous to prophecy, it differs fundamentally from prophecy in many respects. Prophecy is associated with conscious state.

Another central argument in this unit is that the fulfillment or success of prediction is not always a mark of prophecy. Rather true prophecy is measured on the scale of faithful to the call and proclamation of the word of YHWH.

It was also observed that the measure of prophecy with miracle working was nothing less than a revival of superstition. True prophecy does not, and cannot rely on miracle working but on the authentic proclamation of the word.

The discussion is concluded by drawing the underlying difference between apocalypse and prophecy. It was agreed that both concepts share the essential bond with revelation and the element of future expectation. However, they come opposite directions. Prophecy is like an airplane taking off from the runway of history and soaring into the eschatological future, while apocalyptic is like a plane bursting forth from the tempestuous skies to land on a grotesquely defined future tarmac. The rabbis rightly saw in apocalyptic the legitimate successor of prophecy.

6.0 TUTORIAL MARK ASSIGNMENT

- 1 Identify at five phenomena associated with prophecy
- 2 Discuss the problem of ecstasy in the Israelite prophetic tradition.
- 3 What is the difference between inductive and intuitive divination?
- 4 What is the difference between magic and miracle?
- 5 Examine the claim that prophetic symbolic action is prophetic word in action.
- 6 Discuss briefly the relationship between apocalypse and prophecy.

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UNIT 5: INTRODUCTION TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETIC LITERATURE

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	44	
2.0 OBJECTIVES	45	
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	45	
3.1 The Concept of Literary and Preliterary Prophets		45
3.1.1 Identity of authorship		45
3.1.2 The Ipsissima Verba of the prophets		46
3.2 The Making of the Prophetic Books		46
3.2.1 The production and growth of the prophetic literature		47
3.2.2 The processing of prophetic discourse		48
3.3 Common Theological Themes		49
3.3.1 The covenant and the sovereignty of YHWH		50
3.3.2 Ethical Norms		50
3.3.3 The Law and the Prophet		51
3.3.4 Messianic prophecy		51
3.3.5 Persecution and suffering		52
SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5		52
3.4 Prophetic Genres and Speeches		Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4.1 Prose accounts		Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4.2 Poetic accounts		Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.0 CONCLUSION	52	
5.0 SUMMARY	52	
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	53	
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING	53	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces the student into the Old Testament prophetic Books. It is divided into three main sections. From this stage the course assumed more practical approach, for the student is directly confronted with the OT texts, and at the same time challenged the student to evaluate the message of the text and use the finds to judge the contemporary historical happens.

The first section will discuss how the prophetic books came to be, hence the production and growth of the prophetic literature, and the theoretical stages in the articulation of the prophetic discourses. The second deals on some of the recurrent themes in the prophetic books such as covenant and imperium, ethical norms, justice and obedience, the law, messianism, persecution and suffering.

The third section presents the prophetic genres and speeches, which incidentally are classed into two broad headings: prose and poetic accounts.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit the student should be able to:

- recognize the prophetic books
- account for the process of composition of the prophetic books
- identify some of the predominant theological themes in the message of the prophets
- discuss the literary genres and styles in the prophetic literature

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Literary and Preliterary Prophets

The notion of "literary and non-literary prophets" may convey an idea that is not intended. It is not about the reading or writing ability of the prophets that is in question. It is not about the "authorial" privilege that might finally attribute some of the prophetic works to some specific prophets. The distinction is less about the prophets whose names appear on the superscript. It is more or less about the subsequent fate of their prophecies. Therefore, the concept is thanks to the disciples of the great (literary) prophets, who could guarantee the preservation of the prophecies of their master, and from which one could learn a little about the personality of the prophets themselves.

3.1.1 Identity of authorship

The prophetic literature is not strictly the biography or about the personality of the prophets. It does not consist of books written by the literary authors as the prophets. Rather "the names appearing at the heads of the prophetic books do, with some nuances, identify the substance of the words therein contained with distinct prophets. However, these prophetic words are, in the main, the collected and edited memorabilia of the prophets, not literary compositions of the prophets themselves. They are the result of the editorial joining of the smaller collections of prophecies that have been connected by catchwords, similarity of topic, literary forms, or some similar consideration" (Vawter, 1990).

It is not impossible, but unlikely that the prophets themselves could have made the collection themselves for the following reasons:

- i. The compilers of the prophecies lacked some basic information that would have been available to the authors.
- ii. The biographical material in the third person that forms a substantial part of many of the prophetic books
- iii. One is equally informed of the existence of such disciples and of the role they played in preserving and transmitting their masters' words (cf. Isa 8: 16-20; Jer 36)
- iv. Even the first person accounts in some of the books presupposes the presence of friendly auditors whose duty it was to remember and record (cf. 7:1,4,7; 8:1-2) and may not be read in isolation of the third person (cf. Amos 7:10-17).

So the thesis at this juncture is that the prophecies of the great literary prophets would have been preserved in the circles of disciples probably as originally private material (e.g. the "confessions" of Jeremiah - Jer. 12:1-6; 15:15-21) made known by the master to his followers, not initially intended for the general public. It was only of late that the disciples, or schools of the disciples, could commit them in writing appearing both as the ipsissima verba of the prophets and commentaries. Sometimes the principle of ancient historiography could be at play, thus reading the mind of the prophets as the actual words of the prophets.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What are some of the reasons to support the idea that the prophets themselves could not gather the materials for the prophetic books?

3.1.2 The Ipsissima Verba of the prophets

The possibility that the literary prophets could not have been the sole author of the writings attributed to them raises in some measure the question of the ipsissima verba of the prophet. To what extent do the prophecies of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and the rest appear precisely as they were originally uttered? The answer to the question is not simple, nor does a single answer suffice in every case. The answer could be approached from the two major literary genres associated with the prophetic literature - the poetic and prose materials.

The poetic material

- i. In the majority of the poetic texts primary to a given prophetic book is found a substantial transcription of the prophet's original words.
- ii. It is not unthinkable that in some instances those words had been actually written by the prophet himself using any of the familiar recording media at his disposal.
- iii. Poetic material distinct in literary styles and constants frequently emerge in the prophetic literature.
- iv. The distinctive poetic materials can easily be separated as materials peculiar to a particular prophet hence one can speak of an Amosian or an Isaian materials.
- v. Poetic material belonging to one prophet can be separated from the editorial hand of the compiler or editor e.g. the material of Jeremiah from that of Baruch.

The prose material

- i. A prophet could, of course, produce prose as well as poetry, and there is a great deal of prose in various of the prophetic books that surely has an authentic life situation in the ministry of the individual prophets
- ii. But to determine the ipsissima verba of the prophet in the prose structure poses additional challenge. But in the simplest form, the prose might have been the utterance of relatively short poetic assertions of the prophet.
- iii. The prose sections of the prophetic literature frequently have the appearance of literary productions rather than of addresses to audiences, even when they record words of prophecy that were so spoken.
- iv. They often seem to be paraphrases and summaries of prophecies rather than the actual prophecies themselves.
- vi. The prose paraphrases could also have been the work of the prophet but it is usually more likely that they are recollections of the sense of the prophecies, sometimes preserving snatches of the original words as tradition had transmitted them.

The hypothesis appears to be especially confirmed in the case of Jeremiah, many of whose prophecies have evidently been handed down in circles that were strongly influenced by deuteronomic style and vocabulary (cf. Jeremiah, 18:7).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are some of the challenging in the effort to determine the exact words of a prophet within a particular prophetic tradition?

3.2 The Making of the Prophetic Books

The early section in this unit underscored a point that the Old Testament prophetic literature may not be seen primarily as a direct product of the prophets, whose name they bear. Most of the materials were thanks to the disciples and most probably the schools, of the great prophets. Again, the contribution of any particular individual to the books ascribed to him varied considerably. Consequently, the focus in this subsection will be on the production and growth of the prophetic literature and some of the stages involved in the processing of the prophetic discourse. This brings to the fore the claim that the prophetic work could not have been the product of an individual or a tradition of one generation.

3.2.1 The production and growth of the prophetic literature

Oral tradition played some significant part in the preservation and transmission of the materials of which the prophetic books. Although opinion differs about the stage at which, and the extent to which these materials were committed to writing, our interest is on the dominant model with which various discrete units of account or speech were preserved, collected, and edited.

Collection

- i. The assemblage of the legends about Elisha (e.g., 2 Kgs 4–6) and the vision reports of Zachariah (Zech. 1–6) offer the student a good example of a prose collection in the prophetic tradition. The book of Jeremiah (cf. 21:11–23:40) presents several compelling examples of collections that include both prose and poetry, concerning the Judahite kingship, then the prophet himself. They provide some graphic evidence for the ways in which prophetic literature came to be formed: either the prophet or an editor placed sayings addressing a similar topic together.
- ii. Another different method of collection lies behind Hosea 12–14. Although the sayings are all composed in poetry, they are not similar in their content. Rather, their very dissimilarity (some very negative, others hopeful) permit the creation of a collection that moves the reader from sentiments of judgment to that of restoration. It reveals an editorial arrangement that progressed from punishment to promise.
- iii. A further compelling example is the rearrangement of material such that oracles of admonition such as those in Hos 14:1-3, originally spoken prior to oracles of judgment, were transposed to be read after Yahweh has spoken: “Compassion is hidden from my eyes” (Hos 13:14).

Interpretation

Other dynamics resulting in the growth of prophetic literature is the role of the readers of the earlier oracles, who often found the oracles difficult to understand or otherwise problematic. Accordingly, the readers (scribes) proceeded to interpret them and to include their interpretation as part of the oracles. A comparison of the MT and LXX texts of Jeremiah presents a number of such examples. The reader of the LXX form of Jer 28:16 might wonder why Jeremiah offered such a harsh and abrupt sentence. The MT provided some answers to the question by adding a clause at the end of the verse: “because you have spoken rebellion against the Lord.” Such commentary or explication contributed to the growth of prophetic literature.

Recreation

The original prophetic sayings and accounts possessed a generative power that resulted in the creation of new literature, which is particularly evident in the books of Isaiah and Zechariah. This new literature, sometimes called “deutero-prophetic.” It is another important attempt by Israelites to understand their own times by reformulating earlier prophetic words and accounts. In some cases, the new literature arose in the form of rather short comments, which another prophet might have the privilege to update. Isaiah 11:11 and 16:13-14 may appear as brief notes from the hands of those who preserved and venerated the words of the earlier prophets as they contemporized those earlier

texts. However, these later figures composed not only compact sayings but also major compositions in their own right.

So, the ability of prophetic literature to elicit newer prophetic literature is one of its hallmarks. The book of Isaiah contains two major exemplars of this process. The Deutero- (chaps. 40–55) and Trito- (chaps. 56–66) Isaiah were composed based on the sayings and accounts attributed to Isaiah ben Amoz (chaps. 1–39). In other words, the two later Isaiah compositions are based on those earlier sayings and accounts of chaps 1–39 as a response to Israelites living in the Persian period, long after Isaiah ben Amoz had died. In this process, major topics like the role of Jerusalem/Zion and Babylon are explored over a long period of time.

The orientation of much prophetic rhetoric toward the future helps to explain this kind of literary creativity that is at work. It has the advantage of reading and interpreting prophetically later happens in the light of earlier prophecy (cf. Jer. 25:11 in the light of Zech 1:12 and 2 Chr 36:21).

Intertextuality

There is a final type of literary development in prophetic literature, one exemplified by Hos 14:9 and Mal 4:4. The former text emphasizes the connection between Hosea's words and those who are wise, whereas the latter concludes the Minor Prophets, perhaps even the entire prophetic canon, by calling for obedience to Torah. In both cases, these components of prophetic books link that literature to another portion of the canon: wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs) and the pentateuchal torah respectively.

All of these elements—collection, comment, updating, and linkage—belong to the process by means of which the prophetic canon grew. Of these, the profuse updating or contemporizing of prophetic words and traditions for a new generation seems to be a distinguishing feature of prophetic literature.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How were the various discrete units of the prophetic accounts and speeches preserved to form literary entity?

3.2.2 The processing of prophetic discourse

The prophetic literature must have been conceived as literary entities and not collections with superscription linking the prophecy either to the reign of a king (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah) or simply characterizing the book as “word” (Joel), “oracle” (Nahum, Habakkuk, Malachi), or “vision” (Obadiah). While opinion varies on the possible implication of the superscription, our emphasis is that the prophetic discourse therein could have taken shape through a process of some length involving at least four steps.

Stage I: Personal contact

The first stage is the ultimate source of prophetic activity. It is a moment of deep personal contact with God, in which the ‘spirit’ or ‘word’ of Yahweh comes up the prophet. The prophets appeal to the spirit or the word of YHWH, which encounters them as an alien force, and imposes itself against their personal wishes and inclinations. It shows itself to be the Word of YHWH through its persuasive content and consistent demands, which shatter the ordinary human response to life. It gives rise to a new approach that differs from what went before not only in degree but in essence as well. In such a moment of contact with God the prophet had a special and unique religious experience.

Apart from dreams, which, like the gift of the spirit (Jer. 23:25ff), one can recognise four types of prophetic experiences, which take place in a partial abnormal psychic states: visions (internal sight, e.g., Isaiah 6); auditions (internal hearing, e.g., Jer. 4:5-8, 13-16, 19-22); sudden inspiration (e.g., Isa. 7:10-17); and miraculous knowledge (e.g., the 'foe from the north' in the early period of Jeremiah's ministry). Visions and auditions often occurred together.

Sometimes the unique religious experiences are obviously accompanied by ecstatic experiences (cf. Ezekiel). But ecstasy has no independent significance in its own right. It is not an isolated phenomenon; it merely accompanies the secret experience. Where it occurs, it exposes the prophet to more or less powerful agitation and emotion; the mind reeled, fear and trembling overwhelmed the prophet, his hair stood on end, and his feet refused to obey (Isa 21:1-10).

Stage II: Interpretation

The second stage is the prophet's interpretation of the prophetic experience. The interpretation is completely dominated by the faith through which the prophet lives, which is now intensified and reshaped by the force of the new experience. The new experience is interpreted in such a way that the particular experience is incorporated into the existing picture of YHWH's nature and will, thus making it come alive afresh.

Stage III: Processing

In the third stage, there is added rational processing of the experience. The content of the unique religious experience is to be articulated as the divine obligation, which is effectual in the outward world. It implies that the experience is to be translated into rational and comprehensible words in order not to remain the babbling of glossolalia. The translation is so much a matter of the faith of the prophet himself which often contributes to the appropriate motivation, or the logical consequences of the experience, which are incorporated into the words spoken by YHWH.

Stage IV: Reduction

The fourth stage is paralleled to the third. It is the reduction of the message to artistic form. According to the belief of the period, all oracles — including prophetic oracle — have to be communicated in poetically structured form. There is therefore no genuine prophetic saying not in the form of poetry.

From the description of the processing of the prophetic discourses one could better imagine how the phenomenon known as false prophecy, or still prophets, came into being. Either there is no secret experience giving rise to it, so that everything said is without foundation, or the secret experience is erroneously interpreted by the prophet or wrongly applied.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Describe briefly the four-stage process of prophetic discourse.

3.3 Common Theological Themes

If we understand the prophets as intermediaries, those who act and speak on behalf of YHWH, then they should, in principle, reflect the religious affirmations and theological norms of ancient Israel, which are found in diversified forms. Consequently, we can speak of norms but not norm. As a result, it is difficult, indeed, to talk about a single prophetic theology or a sole prophetic ethical perspective. However, our cursory look at the prophetic books will show us that the following themes can be identified with the books:

3.3.1 The covenant and the sovereignty of YHWH

The covenant treaty and relationship is one of the prominent common core elements ever present in the prophetic literature (cf. McCarthy, 1972 and Clements, 1965). Thus the prophets would always remind Israel to obey that to which they have agreed at Sinai. This becomes more evident in the later prophets who wrestled with a new way to understanding Israel's relationship to its God and in so doing use the image of a new covenant (Jer 31:31; cf. Ezek36:26). The image of Moses as prophet (cf. Deut. 18) would add further weight to the idea.

In addition, the majestic image of God as enthroned in the divine council (cf. the call narratives of both Isaiah and Ezekiel) is another aspect of the theology of the prophets. Isaiah envisions the deity in the Temple, a symbol for the heavenly divine council. In that context, YHWH is surrounded by minor deities, to whom He speaks (cf. Isa 6:8-9; also Jer. 23:18).

Another interesting aspect of the sovereignty of YHWH is read in the commissioning narrative of Jeremiah. YHWH designates Jeremiah as "a prophet to the nations and Kingdoms" (Jer 1:5, 10). The prophet as one with an international role fits better with the notion of God as an imperial and cosmic sovereign than it does with the God who is covenant partner with Israel (cf. Isa 13:1–23:18; Jer 46:1–51:58; Ezek 25:1–32:32 also Joel 3:9; Mic 4:1-2; Hab 1:5-6; Zeph 2:4-15; Hag 2:21-22; Zech 1:11; Mal 1:11). So, the prophets lived in the world of politics, both international and domestic.

Such imperial representation extends to the understanding and interpretation of history. Thus YHWH is equally presented as the Lord of History. He is actively involved in human history. The rise and fall of Empires and Kingdoms is subjected under the divine control of YHWH (cf. Isa. 10:5-15). In addition, the prophets understand history as moving towards a purposeful end. This fact is expressed in idea of "the day of the Lord". It is the period the kingdom of God will be established. A period when justice and good will triumph over the forces of evil and wickedness (cf. Isa. 13:9, Ez. 30:2, Obad. 1:15, Zech. 2:11, 14:1-7).

3.3.2 Ethical Norms

It would appear that the prophets presented two different levels of norms, one for Israel and the other for the rest of humanity. Within the ethical framework one identifies the sayings and oracles devoted to foreign nations (cf. Amos 1–2), thus indicting them for heinous and immoral such as genocidal acts (1:6, 9), violence against noncombatants (1:13), acts of ritual degradation (2:1). The oracles against the nations also include indictments for prideful behaviour that offended Israel's God (cf. Is 14). Finally, there is a strain of language according to which God had designated certain imperial powers (the Neo-Assyrians and the Neo-Babylonians) to act on God's behalf to punish Israel. However, in both cases, Israel experienced such devastation that some prophets would declare that these two countries had overstepped the roles assigned to them by YHWH (Assyria: Isa 10:12-15; Babylon: Jer 51:11-49). Hence, they are to be destroyed. But the norm is one common to all people: excessive violence in time of warfare.

Despite opinion by some scholars that those ethical categories referring specifically to Israel might not necessarily be peculiar to Israel, they are still specifically for the Israelite within the prophetic tradition. The two basic moral categories at this point are righteousness and justice. Quite simply, righteousness involves the principle of beneficence, doing the good thing, and justice the principle of acting out beneficence.

As the reference to Hammurabi's law code suggests, the king is theoretically responsible for administering justice in the ancient Near East. The prophets recognise the same, but go further to

democratise the responsibility for justice and righteousness by challenging the entire population. So the practice is seen as the ultimate responsibility of all, not simply the job of those elders, judges, who are most prominent in the legal system.

The prophets also indict the societal structure as well as the individuals. Along with these categories emerges another norm. Micah 6:8 speaks of walking humbly with one's God, depicting the sense of arrogance and the people's lack of faith in YHWH. It is on this strength that some of the prophets attacked Israelites for their loyalty to other deities outside YHWH (cf. Ez 8; also Ex. 20:3).

Later prophets would wrestle with the realities of human behaviour. Jeremiah would appeal to a new covenant (31:31) or Ezekiel to a new heart (36:26), thus understood as utopian solutions to the intractable tendency of humans to do the errant thing. The ethical norms had not changed, but one recognizes a realization in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah that to enact them is terribly difficult, requiring a moral and religious capacity not hitherto realized.

On the political scene, the prophets insist that to have a sound society, people and their leaders must cease to be unfaithful. Israel must be upright and faithful to YHWH as opposed to the supposed best and strongest human allies (Isa. 30:1-2, Hos.5:13).

3.3.3 The Law and the Prophet

One of the major challenges before the Yahwists is the question of the relationship between prophetic literature and the Torah on the one hand, and the prophetic literature and the writings on the other hand. Incidentally, the biblical writers who depicted Moses as a prophet offer an important way out by linking Moses to the prophetic literature and Torah. Moses is presented as a paradigmatic prophet (Deut 18:15) and also as responsible for Torah. This makes prophecy a part of Torah, though still subordinant to it. In this sense, prophetic literature may be understood as an exposition or admonition based on Torah, rather than an independent word of YHWH. Therefore, it is from this perspective that the Prophet Ezekiel may appear to be such a dangerous text, since it purports to be a new Torah, "the law of the temple" (43:12), which might stand in competition with the pentateuchal Torah.

However, Moses is only one of the several possible paradigmatic prophets. Elijah is another; he has special credentials, since, according to biblical tradition, he did not die. As a result, writers both in the Persian and the Greco-Roman periods could look forward to the return of Elijah "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal 4:5; cf. Matt 17:10-13). Closed though the prophetic writings might finally become, there is still an expectation that a prophet or prophecy would appear in the future (cf. Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2).

Apart from traditions about prophets themselves, there are also canonical formulations that attempted to integrate prophetic literature with other portions of the canon. These texts are of several different types. On the one hand, considerable amounts of psalmic language are embedded within prophetic literature (e.g., the so-called Amos doxologies [4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6] and the catena of thanksgiving and hymn in Isaiah 12). On the other hand, there are texts at the end of prophetic books that call for the reader to reflect on that text from the perspective of another portion of the canon (Hos 14:9 points to wisdom texts, Mal 4:4 to Torah). From this perspective, the law and the prophets are perceived by early readers as a far more coherent body than has been supposed.

3.3.4 Messianic prophecy

The Messianic prophecy has its root in the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7). The prophecy is further supported and assured by the inviolability of the office of the king and priest. But with the fall of

Jerusalem and deportation, the Israelites become disillusioned. The days of prosperity that have so often been expected in Judah have proved continually elusive. Disappointment follows disappointment; disaster follows disaster, as punishment for the people's sinfulness. There is then an attempt to reinterpret the history of Israel, to find a new meaning in the context of the meaninglessness. Consequently, the messianic prophecy becomes dominant. Expectation grows concerning the time in the future when YHWH will raise a king who will deliver Israel from all their enemies. He will establish a kingdom in righteousness, and a prince of the House of David will reign over the kingdom. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and in that day the Gentile nations will come to Jerusalem to learn of God and to walk in His way. The prince is called the Messiah (anointed one) will establish Israel as the kingdom of God. This idea is widely taught in the prophetic books (see Jeremiah 31:32, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 53:55).

3.3.5 Persecution and suffering

Another important theme in prophecy is the notion suffering and persecution. The prophets are sometimes exposed to violent fate. According to Petersen, suffering and persecution of prophets may have occasionally been the case in ancient Israel (cf. Jer 26:20-23), it is more prominent within the Persian (2 Chr 24:20-22; Neh 9:26) and Greco-Roman periods (cf. Luke 13:34; Acts 7:52) rather than the periods earlier than the post-exilic. In other words, the Jeremiah's own rhetoric (e.g., Jer 11:19) on suffering of the prophet could be interpreted as exaggeration. That is to say that the prophets of the 8-5th cent. B.C. might not have been so brutally treated as the picture is presented today.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Evaluate the common theological themes found the prophetic books.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The discussion demonstrated clearly that the prophets were not strangers to their own culture. Their ability to deploy their intellectual and historical insight for the service of their people singled them out. Their theological concern and cravings inform the student how intoxicated they were in the things of YHWH. It was the spirit of YHWH chase them all though as they adapted and deployed the cultural elements of the given environ for a better understanding and appreciation of the message given to the people through them (prophets). They were simply the animators of the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

Much information has been derived from the four subsections of this unit: the concept of literary and nonliterary prophets, the making of the prophetic books, some common theological themes in the prophetic books and the prophetic genres and speeches.

i. The prophets themselves could not have been the sole author of the prophetic literature. The editorial hands of some of their disciples or those very interested in the prophetic business may not be excluded from the canonical prophetic literature. It may be somewhat difficult to make the difference between the ipsissima verba of the prophets in the prose material, but less difficult in the poetic material.

ii. A later findings that the production of growth of the prophetic literature took a very long historical period give further credence to multi-authorial/editorial hypothesis. The literary strategies through which the prophetic canon grew were (i) collection, (ii) comment, (iii) updating, and (iv) linkage. It was further discovered that when the prophets, it ought to be processed assuming more or less the following process - contact with the word or spirit of YHWH, interpretation of the

prophetic experience, rationalisation of the experience and reduction of the experience to artistic form.

iii. The content of the prophetic messages was further viewed and classified both as theological and literary. Theologically, (i) the idea of covenant and sovereignty of YHWH, (ii) the ethical norms of righteousness, justice and obedience, (iii) the central place of the law, (iv) the messianic prophecy, (v) persecution and suffering were stressed as predominant in the prophetic message.

iv. Literary the entire prophetic literature was classified into prose and poetic accounts. The prose material including the following reports: (i) commissioning, (ii) vision, (iii) symbolic action, (iv) legend, (v) historiography, (vi) biography, and (vii) divinatory chronicle. The poetic account as divine oracle were identified to include (i) the prophetic poetry, (ii) the judgement oracle, (iii) the woe oracle, (iv) the lawsuit oracle, (v) the oracle of salvation, (vi) lament and hymn, and (vii) wisdom oracle.

So, the specifically prophetic forms mentioned would display great variety and may always be attributed to socio-political, cultural and secular situation, and many times explained the need of the people to whom the message was to be directed. They ought to make the word of YHWH relevant to the people by using the cultural elements within the environ. Hence one can hardly suppose that their original setting is a firmly rooted institutional prophetic office. The same point is brought out even more clearly by the fact that the prophets take many forms from other spheres of life.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are some of the facts to prove that the historical prophets could not have been the sole authors of the ascribed to them individually?
2. How could one resolve some of the challenges associated with the *ipsissima verba* of the prophets?
3. Describe some of the dominant model in the production of the Old Testament prophetic literature
4. Discuss briefly some of the stages in the processing of prophetic discourses.
5. What are some of the theological themes found in the prophets?
6. Discuss some of the elements of prose found in the prophetic books
7. Which of the divine oracles would be more suitable to the present Nigerian situation?

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MODULE 2: THE PRELITERARY PROPHETS, AND THE MAJOR LITERARY PROPHETS

UNIT 1: THE PRE-LITERARY PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	55
2.0 OBJECTIVES	56
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	56
3.1 Individual Prophets	56
3.1.1 Occasional Prophets	56
3.1.2 Minor Acting Prophets	56
3.1.3 Major Acting Prophets	57
3.1.4 Elijah the Tishbite	58
3.2 Prophetic Groups	59
3.2.1 The Ecstatic Prophetic Group	60
3.2.2 The Monastic Prophetic Group	60
3.2.3 The Cultic Prophetic Group	61
4.0 CONCLUSION	62
5.0 SUMMARY	62
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	62
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	62

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Pre-literary (sometimes non-literary) prophets, recognised as former prophets in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), are found in the historical books of the Septuagint (LXX). They are sometimes identified as early or acting prophets, distinct from the writing (literary) prophets associated with the 15 prophetic books of the bible – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the 12 Minor Prophets. In some studies the book of Daniel is also included. Still it has been observed by some scholars that there are many more other prophets in Israel far greater than those identified in book-form. The group are sometimes referred to as the sons of the prophets, and a whole village could have been inhabited by a band of prophets. Elijah speaks of many prophets of Yahweh that were executed during the reign of Ahab, thus referring to many prophetic figures in the society.

Furthermore, the non-literary prophets could be classified along different lines depending on the interest of scholarship. Such division may include nomadic, wondering and transitional, royal (court) and temple (cult) prophets, individual and group prophets, major and minor prophets. The prophetic guild or group prophet can further be classified into ecstatic, monastic and cultic prophets. But the major division in this unit will follow the broad line of individual and group prophets.

Within the individual prophets, the minor and major acting prophets will be discussed, while in the class of the group prophets, the focus will be on the ecstatic, monastic and cultic prophetic groups.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit the student should be able to:

- Know that the Old Testament did not contain all the list of the prophets that were existing during the OT period, neither the prophetic account concerning the identified ones.
- recognise the different forms of scholarship classification of the Old Testament prophets in general
- identify the minor and major acting prophets
- discuss the ministry of Elijah and his contributions to the prophetic tradition in particular, and the history of Israel in general.
- appreciate the prophetic ministry of Elisha and his relationship with Elijah
- discover role of prophetic schools in the preservation of the prophetic tradition
- understand that the criticism of the cult and other institutions in Israel by the prophet is not on the institutions per se but the abuse associated with them

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Individual Prophets

3.1.1 Occasional Prophets

A roll of individual non acting prophets is mentioned in the bible and in other rabbinic sources. Some of these prophets act only on some occasions as prophets without being prophets themselves - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (cf. 1 Chron 25:1). Eldad, Medad, and the seventy elders (Num 11:24-29), and Saul (1 Sam 10:6-10; 19:18-24) are prompted by the Spirit to behave as prophets on single occasions (Num 11:25; cf. 1 Sam 10:6; 19:23). Six prophets are mentioned but anonymous (Judg 6:7-10; 1 Kgs 13 and 20; 2 Kgs 9:1-10). The Rabbinic tradition identifies 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses. The prophetesses are as follows: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther.

There are also a number of individual prophets whose writings are mentioned by the Chronicler as part of his literary sources. He mentions in this regard the books of Samuel the seer, Nathan the prophet, Gad the seer (1 Chron 29:29-30); the prophecy of Ahijah of Shiloh; the visions of Iddo (2 Chron 9:29); the histories of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer (12:15), who is also called the prophet (13:22); the history of Jehu, son of Hanani, which is included in the annals of the kings of Israel (20:34); the vision of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 32:32); and generally the discourses of the seers (33:18-20).

3.1.2 Minor Acting Prophets

A number of (minor) prophets worth mentioning are the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh (1 Kgs 11:29-39; 14; cf. 2 Chr 9:29), Iddo the seer (2 Chr 9:29) and prophet (13:22; cf. 12:15); the seer Hanani (16:7-10), and his son, the prophet Jehu (1 Kgs 16:1-7); the prophet Azariah son of Oded, upon whom the Spirit of God came (2 Chron 15:1-8)—his words to King Asa were indicated as “prophecy” (v. 8); Shemaiah the man of God (1 Kgs 12:22; 2 Chron 11:2); Jahaziel son of Zechariah, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came (2 Chron 20:14-17), he being a Levite, a member of the singers guild of Asaph; Eliezer son of Dodavahu, who denounced Jehoshaphat with a “prophecy” (20:37); Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest, who proclaimed God's judgment on

King Joash and paid with his life (24:17-22; cf. Luke 11:51); Oded, “a prophet of the LORD,” who told the victorious northern Israelite army to release the Judaeans captives in the Syro-Ephraimite war, which they did (2 Chron 28:9-15); and Uriah son of Shemaiah, the last known martyr-prophet (Jer 26:20-23; also the Lachish letters).

Five prophetesses are mentioned: Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:3-5), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20; cf. 2 Chron 34:22-28), Noadiah (Neh 6:14), and the anonymous wife of Isaiah (Isa 8:3). Noadiah was one of Nehemiah's adversaries who tried to intimidate him, and thus belongs to the category of false prophets. The same applies to the women of Israel “who prophesied out of their own imagination” (Ezek 13:17-21). Prophetic activities among women were part of the religious and cultural heritage of the ANE, including the Hellenistic world.

3.1.3 Major Acting Prophets

Six individual prophets played different major roles in Israel's history and religion. They were Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Micaiah son of Imlah, Elijah, and Elisha.

a) SAMUEL, GAD AND NATHAN

Samuel incorporated in his function the offices of judge, in both the military (1 Sam 11:12) and judicial (1 Sam 7:15-17) sense, of priest (7:9-10, cf. 13:8-15), and of prophet (3:19- 4:1; 9:6-10, etc.). Samuel played a very important role in the establishment and down fall of the monarchy. His outstanding courage and total obedience to the voice of YHWH singled him out as one of the biblical personalities.

Nathan and Gad are the two active prophets in the court during the reign of David. They occupied prominent positions and enjoyed some elevated status. Gad, the prophet, was “David's seer” (2 Sam 24:11). He was David's entourage from the days of David's flight before Saul (1 Sam 22:5), until the end of his reign, when he had to confront his king with God's judgment because of his census (2 Sam 24:1-25; cf. 1 Chron 21:1- 22:1). He, along with Nathan, was instrumental in reorganizing the temple music (cf. 2 Chron 29:25). The events of King David's reign from first to last were recorded in the books of Gad the seer (1 Chron 29:29).

Nathan, the prophet and adviser of David, played a significant role on at least three occasions: when he had to reprimand the king because of his crimes with Uriah and his wife (2 Sam 11:1- 12:23); when David asked his advice on his intention to build a temple for the Lord (2 Sam 7; cf. 1 Chron 17:1-27), and when he was instrumental in instituting Solomon as David's successor (1 Kgs 1:8, 22-27). Besides his assistance in the reorganisation of the temple music (2 Chron 29:25), and his writings on the events of King David's Solomon's reigns (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29), were part of the Chronicler's literary sources. According to the rabbis, Nathan was David's cousin. Incidentally, contrary to the account of 2 Samuel (16:23), Ahitophel, who counsels Absalom, was not counted among the prophets in the tradition of the Chronicler (cf. McKane, 1965).

b) AHIJAH,, SHEMAIAH AND JEHU

At the time of the division of the kingdom, the dramatic action of Ahijah the prophet would have been partially responsible for Jeroboam's revolt (1 Kings 11:29-39). Much later, the prophet, now blind and disenchanted with Jeroboam's lack of enthusiasm for Yahwism, opposed the king, pronouncing imminent death for Jeroboam's ailing son and predicting the forthcoming doom of Jeroboam's house.

During this same period Rehoboam refrained from attacking Israel on the advice of the prophet

Shemaiah (I Kings 12:21-24). An embellishment of Shemaiah's role is given in II Chron. 12:5 ff. and reference is made to a book which the prophet was supposed to have written (12:15). Later, Baasha of Israel was condemned and the end of his line predicted by the prophet Jehu in terms very much like those used by Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife (I Kings 16:1 ff.).

It becomes clear that the courts of the Hebrew kings employed prophets to secure guidance and advice from Yahweh. It is also plain that prophets such as Ahijah (and perhaps Jehu), not intimately connected with the court, were consulted at moments of critical importance. There can be little doubt that, from Samuel's time through the beginning years of the divided kingdom, Yahweh's prophets were instrumental in keeping ethical and religious responsibilities before the king, proclaiming both the will of Yahweh and the judgment of Yahweh when violations occurred.

c) MICAIAH, THE SON OF IMLAH

Micaiah son of Imlah (1 Kgs 22 = 2 Chron 18), played an important role in God's confrontation with Ahab and the Baal cult. He prophesied the doom that would befall Israel and the house of Omri. Consequently, he was physical abuse by Zedekiah and imprisoned with little piece of bread and water as food. What happened to him when his prophecy was fulfilled was not told.

3.1.4 Elijah the Tishbite

a) ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

There were about six originally independent Elijah narratives reporting his activities, which have been assembled in I Kings 17-19; 21; II Kings 1:1-17, together with several legendary anecdotes. These tell of a drought broken by rain, of divine judgement on Mount Carmel, of an encounter with YHWH at Horeb, of the call of Elisha, of the judicial murder of Naboth, and of Ahaziah's request for an oracle.

According to these stores, Elijah appeared in the Northern Kingdom during the period of kings Ahab and Ahaziah, i.e., between 874 and 852 B.C. He represented the class of wandering prophets, not being associated with any sanctuary or living as a member of a prophetic guild. He was obviously more like seer than a nabi.

Elijah exercised his ministry primarily against the background of the policies pursued by Ahab, who was seeking to overcome the problem of integrating both Canaanites and Israelites into his kingdom by means of a neutral approach that accorded both groups parity and equal rights. Since Canaanite civilization had previously been checked or repressed, this policy meant in practice that it would not be promoted because it favoured the advance of Canaanite religious ideas and practices.

Furthermore Ahab, who considered himself a dynastic ruler of the ancient Near Eastern sort, wanted to replace the Israelite conception of kingship with the absolute monarchy typical of the ancient Near East and introduce into Israel the king of royal law associated with absolute monarchy.

Elijah opposed Ahab on both points. He succeeded in having the Carmel region with its mixed population treated as Israelite rather than Canaanite territory, so that YHWH alone would be worshipped there. In the case of Naboth, he supported the continued recognition of the ancient Israelite law of Land ownership, rejecting the notion that the king has power over the life and property of his subjects. Finally, in such questions as who bestowed rain on the land and to whom a sick man should turn to be healed he insisted on YHWH's unique authority, refusing Baal any recognition.

Elijah's message was characterised first by the assertion of traditional elements of Yahwism that were to continue to be recognised in Palestine. He supported Yahweh's claim to sole sovereignty in Israel, and showed himself a vigorous guardian of the religio-ethical way of life that refused to let even the king infringe upon basic human rights and violate the divine command of justice. He demonstrated that anyone anxious for health or should turn to YHWH rather than taking refuge in Canaanite vitalism.

In the second place, Elijah introduced new elements into the faith of Yahwism to preserve its viability within the context of an advanced civilisation and political order and keep it from declining into syncretism. Thus he declared that it was Yahweh, not Baal who bestowed or withheld rain and thereby the fertility of the land, and turned from the notion of YHWH as a god of war and battle to a conception of God in which YHWH's activity is not represented by awesome eruptions and raging storms, but is characterised by quiet governance, comparable to the calm after storm, just as YHWH also reveals himself through his word (I Kings 19:11ff.). It is easy to see how these influences led tradition to compare him to Moses in many points and to depict him as a new second Moses.

Elijah differs from the later great individual prophets in that he still considered Israel to be fundamentally in a state of favour with God, which it was incumbent on the nation to maintain or to restore after an interruption. But he paved the way for those prophets by reasserting Yahweh's claim to sovereignty in such terms that they could measure Israel's failure and guilt against it.

b) ELISHA

Besides some of the trivial incidents associated with Elisha, there are four major incidents that portrayed him as a great prophet: The widow's plight (II King 4:1-7); the woman of Shunem (II Kg 4:8-37); Nemaan the Leper (II Kg 5:1-17); Elisha at Dothan II Kg 6:8-23

The Elisha tradition is found in reasonably coherent form in II Kings 2; 3:4-37; 4:1-8:15; 9:1-10; 13:14-21. Its first strand comprises a narrative cycle of popular miracle stories, whose common element is their association with Gilgal, where Elisha usually lived (II Kings 4:38). This cycle brings together what were originally independent anecdotes reflecting real acts of power performed by Elisha or associating him with widespread motifs. A second group comprises a series of individual narratives of diverse character; all they have in common is their reference to the contemporary political and historical background against which Elisha played his role.

The anecdotes and narratives reveal two aspects of Elisha's activity. On the one hand, they show the effect he had on daily life and events within the circle of his prophetic guild and the ordinary people with whom he came in contact. On the other hand, they extend their horizon to include the authoritative figures of the political world; in the conflict between Israel and the Arameans and in Elisha's attitude toward the reigning Israelite dynasty they agree with contemporary history. Those narratives that exhibit the prophet's hostility to the reigning dynasty (II Kings 3:4-27; 8:7-15) point to the time of Joram, the last king of the Omride dynasty. The turning point was marked by the revolution of Jehu, the intellectual authors of which included Elisha (II Kings 9:1-10), although he retreated completely into the background after it began. According to the rest of the narratives he was friendly to the reigning dynasty and hostile to the Arameans (II Kings 5; 6:8-23; 6:24-7:20; 13:14-19); these events took place in the period of Jehu's dynasty.

3.2 Prophetic Groups

There is evidence to indicate that there existed, in addition to the individual prophets, a school or guild of prophets. Samuel is said to have been head of a group of prophets (I Sam. 19:20), Elijah

had a disciple, Elisha, and a school of prophets (II Kings 2); Isaiah had disciples or pupils (Isa. 8:16), and Jeremiah had a personal scribe, Baruch. It is not unlikely that strong, dynamic, charismatic personalities tended to draw about them those who hoped to share the charisma or who hoped to learn methods and techniques of prophecy. The interest at this stage is to identify the forms of prophetic groups and their respective characteristics.

3.2.1 The Ecstatic Prophetic Group

There is some intimate relationship between the group of prophets mentioned in 1 Sam 10:5ff and 19:18ff. They are described as band or company of prophets (10:5) of venerable community (19:20). The general behaviour of the group is their exuberance and enthusiasm. According to 1 Sam 10 their prophetic activities are accompanied by musical instruments, which are especially fit for enhancing rhythmical movements (cf. 18:10; Exod 15:20; 2 Kgs 3:15). The group is noted with the “prophetic rapture/frenzy” that could sometimes lead to “shouting and dancing”. These prophets are strong, effective, powerful inspired by the Spirit of the Lord (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 19:20, 23)

The ecstasy, with which the group is identified, is often infectious (1 Sam. 10:5 ff.; cf. 19:18 ff.; including the prophet of Baal - 1 Ki. 18:19-40). The ecstatic who could temporarily become “another human” (1 Sam. 10:6) constituted a certain attraction for the Israelites (1 Sam. 10:5).

The ecstasies move freely about the country, putting themselves by the use of musical instruments into a state of trance, and in such a condition babbling out their messages (cf. the phenomena in the NT period in 1 Cor. 14). The content of their “prophecies” (10:5) must be conceived of in relationship with Saul's anointment as king (ch. 9-10): It consists of short prophetic utterances, with accompanying gestures and music, which received special emphasis because it was in the neighbourhood of a Philistine camp (10:4). Saul's participation in the prophetic activities caused bewilderment among the onlookers (10:11-12), but was in itself an indication that the kingship in Israel was intimately related to the prophetic legitimation.

According to 1 Sam. 19:20, Samuel was the head of these ecstatic group of prophets. The prophets acted in consort with Samuel, consequently could not be associated with heathen cult or prototypes. Sometimes their prophetic activities are not welcoming, especially among the orthodox Jews. In one occasions they would be described as “mad fools” (Hos. 9:7). Joshua would appear critical of them (Num. 11:10-30), perhaps interpreting it as a strange, repellent, un-Israelite prophetic phenomenon being introduced into the worship of YHWH. But Moses reply to Joshua (Num. 11:29) may then be understood as the legitimation of this new religious phenomenon which could have caused the orthodox a good deal of perplexity. So, the story as earlier observed by von Rad (1965) could be taken as evidence of an acceptance of the ecstatic movement into the institutions of Jahwism, or at least as an etiology of the prophetic movement which gave it legitimation.

3.2.2 The Monastic Prophetic Group

Another early group of prophets is located within the monastic communities. The group is consistently depicted as sons of the prophets, in the sense of a “Prophetengenossenschaft,” a community of prophets (1 Kgs 20:35; 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1; Amos 7:14). Several groups of them were found in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. They were married, had children, and lived in their own quarters. With exception of 1 Kgs 20:35-43, the groups formed themselves around a prominent figure (e.g. Elisha, 2 Ki. 2:3 ff.; 4:38; 6:1), whom they addressed as “master” or “father”, at whose feet they sat and learned, and with whom they lived in communal dwellings.

According to 2 Kgs 4 and 6 they were very poor people. The group was predominantly of rural composition. Elijah was a Gileadite, probably of a shepherd family (I Kings 17: 11). Elisha was a farmer (I Kings 19: 19), the husband of the poor widow who appealed to Elisha to save her children from bondage was a member of the prophetic guild (II Kings 4:1.). Evidently Quite a poor man! The prophetic groups, in the Elisha tales, were certainly rural and poor. Equally, the Rechabites, desert dwellers, bitter opponents of city civilization, fanatical adherents of the desert tradition, joined the prophets after Jehu's triumph. All these individual facts tend to prove that the prophets of this period were rural folk.

3.2.3 The Cultic Prophetic Group

Some of the figures associated with the cult prophets are Moses (Ex. 2:1) and Elijah (I Kings 18:32ff); Jeremiah (1:1) and Ezekiel (1:3). There is also a mention of Levite, a cultic official, who was inspired by the spirit of God to bring a prophetic message at a time of national crises (2 Chr 20:14). Also, possibly the group of Leviticus singers after the exile were survivors of groups of cultic prophets attached to the sanctuaries. Not only that prophets were associated with temple singers (2 Chr 29:25), they together with Priests were associated together in a way that suggests professional association (e.g. 2 Kgs 23:2).

Other cultic prophets mentioned were Shimei (1 Kgs. 1:8), Zedekiah (1 Kgs. 22:24), and perhaps also Nathan (2 Sam. 12:1 ff.; 1 Kgs. 1:11 ff.) who worked in close association with the court and yet enjoyed an astonishing degree of independence. No books had come down to us from these prophets, unless one includes Nahum and Habakkuk who at least had some affinity with them. There were, however, unmistakable traits of the cultic prophet in Zechariah and still more in Haggai.

The cultic prophets were among the protagonists of an ethical religion, which is an expression of the Israel's faith. The cult is also from the beginning the tangible expression of the same Israel's faith, which the prophets themselves furthered and remained in close rapport with. No wonder then that some of the early prophets were familiar with the rituals and meaning of the cults and that they sometimes spoke in languages borrow from the cult. Some of them were employees of the national sanctuary. Consequently, their activities could not be purely an anticultic or anti-institutional as many have wrongly thought. Their relationship is indeed one of mutual indebtedness. Even prophets and priests were not so consistently and inimically opposed as has sometimes been assumed. The two figures occupy important position in Israel's religion.

The cultic prophet had his place along with the priest in the cult. His task was to give oracles in answer to communal laments, and especially to the king. For this reason he had great influence in the royal court (1 Kgs. 1:8), where he spoke as a man of God (1 Kgs. 22:24 ff.) with remarkable severity (2 Sam. 12:1 ff.). The cultic prophets were feared, because their powerful word could bring success or disaster (1 Sam. 16:4; 1 Kgs. 17:18). Their words of salvation would be formulated after the manner of proverbs. One discovers in Isa. 33:1-24 some traces of prophetic liturgy that gives some insight into the language of these prophets.

It is important at this junction to note that the condemnation of the cult by prophets like Isaiah and Amos, is not to be interpreted to mean that they were against the cult but the lack of moral concern and holy living on the part of those who bring sacrifices and join in the rituals (Amos 5:21ff). Isaiah too brings strong condemnation of sacrifices, the Sabbath and even prayer (Isa. 1), with the intention of showing that it is all-useless in the context of a blatantly sinful life (Isa. 1:15).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The chronicler did not hesitate to make the contributions of the non-literary prophets bold. The enormous contributions of the prophets to the history and religion of Israel formed one of the strongest selling points of the books of chronicle. However, one had come to appreciate the complex nature of the prophetic tradition through the various movements, guilds and groups, which incidentally remained the pulsating force that propelled and sustained the religion even in the face persecution and seemingly annihilation. Another score on the board sheet is the prophetic activities among women, which were part of the religious and cultural heritage of the ancient Near East, including also the Hellenistic world. This brings out

5.0 SUMMARY

- i. The last unit emphasised that the distinction between literary and non- or pre-literary prophets was more of a misconception of the history of literary prophecy, and, in any case, incidental. And the introductory part of this unit went further to raise some consciousness on the varied models of classification of the pre-literary prophets. It also informed the student that there were many more prophets in Israel than what the Old Testament could literarily account for.
- ii. It was also observed that majority of the acting prophets presented in the bible were more of occasional prophets, thus acting sometimes only once as prophets.
- iii. Reading through the Books of the Chronicle, it became clearer that there were many missing prophetic accounts which could have enriched the prophetic literature more. Nevertheless, the Book of Chronicle contributed a lot in this regard.
- iv. The major acting prophets - Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Micaiah son of Imlah, Elijah, and Elisha - played many different major roles in the shaping of the history and religion of Israel.
- v. Elijah and Elisha were obviously the champions of God's people Israel; they were the defence against foreign cult and foreign ways of thought and action. Their purpose was to keep Israel's belief on and worship of YHWH pure, and to preserve to His people their ancient privileges. Yet, the role of Elijah was so prominent and significant that he became the converging and diverging point in the history Israelite prophetism in particular, and the religion of Israel in general.
- vi. Three main prophetic groups were identified in the course of the discussion. These were (a) the ecstatic, (b) the monastic and © the cultic prophetic groups. Each of the group had its own peculiarity, which had enriched the prophetic tradition of Israel. And some of the great (literary and non-literary) prophets were naturally identified with these classes of prophets.
- vii. It was equally emphasised that the prophets were not strictly speaking against any of the social and religious institution of Israel. They only condemned the abuses and lack of the right intention for the things of YHWH

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are the possible classifications of the Old Testament prophets?
2. Mention 8 minor and 6 major acting prophets, and cite the sources where they could be found in the bible.
3. List some of the missing prophetic books that could be inferred from the Books of Chronicle.
4. Discuss the ministry and contributions of Elijah to the prophetic tradition
5. Compare and contrast the ministry of Elijah and Elisha
6. What are the reasons for the condemnation of the cult by the prophets in Israel?

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UNIT 2: THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	64
2.0 OBJECTIVES	64
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	65
The Book and Its Authorship	65
The Book of Isaiah as Three-in-One	65
A Matter for Authorship	67
The Editorial Contribution	69
Isaiah 1-39	70
The Time of Isaiah the Son of Amoz	70
Some of the Editorial Challenges in Isaiah 1-39	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Message and Teaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem	70
Isaiah 40-66	72
The Prophet(s) of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah	72
The Outline of Isaiah 40-66	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Servant Songs	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Teaching of Isaiah 40-55	72
The Message of Isaiah 56-66	73
4.0 CONCLUSION	74
5.0 SUMMARY	74
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	74
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	74

INTRODUCTION

Our interest the last unit (unit one) was on the pre-literary prophets. Some of the pre-literary prophets were mentioned. We discovered that there were more prophets than the Old Testaments contained. We looked at the various groupings of the prophets and then focused our attention on two major prophets of the time - Elijah and Elisha. We also stressed that the criticism of the cult and other institutions in Israel by the prophets was because of the abuse associated with those institutions.

In this unit, we shall concentrate on the one of the major literary prophets in the person of Isaiah. Our attention will be drawn to the fact of the person and authorship of the oracles, the historical context of the oracles, and the prophetic and theological motifs contained in the oracles.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit the student should be able to:

- Identify some of the controversies associated with the authorship of the Book of Isaiah
- Evaluate critically the arguments for and against a single authorship of the book
- See the possible internal classification of the book with respect literary and theological characteristics
- appreciate the socio-political situations when the different oracles in the book were uttered
- Discuss the prophetic motifs in the book
- Discover the theological import of the book

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

The Book and Its Authorship

We may not be surprised to hear that the 66 chapters of the canonical book of Isaiah are composed of two or even three major works (chapters 1-39 [Isaiah]; 40-55 [Deutero-Isaiah]; and 56-66 [Trito-Isaiah]) probably written by different authors at different historical periods. This observation was first made by Ibn Ezra (ca. 1167), and latter supported by C. Doderlein (1775) and G. Eichhorn (1780-83) in the late eighteenth century AD. That is to say that Isaiah the son of Amoz was not the sole author of the book that bears his name.

We shall in this section see some of the reasons advanced by some scholars to come to the conclusion that these works were written at different times in history and by different persons or bodies.

The Book of Isaiah as Three-in-One

Historical Argument

i. The first impression we can get if we are seriously engaged with the canonical text of Isaiah may be that there is a very clear division in the book between chapters 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66. The first 39 chapters are placed in a different historical setting, that is, an eighth century BC setting in Jerusalem during the period when Assyria was dominant power in the region. In the second half of the book (40-66), the audience addressed is looking forward to a time the Israelites would return from exile to Jerusalem (Is. 40:9-11, 42:1-9, 43:1-7, 51:11, 52:1-12, 58:12, 60:10, 61:4). So, the two different sections addressed two different people in different historical periods.

ii. We can equally observe that the first 39 chapters refer to a time when Judah was being constantly harassed by Assyria (from about 742 to 688 BC; cf. Isa. 7:18; 10:5; 14:25). Here also the name of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, is mentioned in Isaiah 36:1, and three times in Isaiah 37 thus indicating the overarching presence of Assyria. While in the last 27 chapters (40-66) of the book of Isaiah, on the other hand, Assyria is alluded to only once, and even then only as part of the past history of Judah (Isa. 52:4).

iii. Furthermore, at the time Isaiah son of Amoz lived, Babylon was not a power to reckon with that will take the people away into exile. So, any reference to Babylon as a political power could be seen as evident after the death of Isaiah. Therefore Isaiah the son of Amoz could not have been the author of that section/

iv. The reference to Cyrus, the Persian king (45:1, 13) who lived more than two hundred years after Isaiah the son of Amos further proves that this section (40-66) must have been written long after the death of Isaiah the son of Amoz.

- v. The addressees in the second section of the book (43:14; 48:20) are no longer inhabitants of Jerusalem but exiles in Babylon. Their Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and now awaits reconstruction (44:26-28; 49:14-23). And Babylon is no longer an ally of Israel (2 Kgs 20:12-13), for she has destroyed Jerusalem and deported the Israelites. This is a sign that the former prophecies about Jerusalem's destruction have been fulfilled (Isa 1:21-31; Jer 7:1-15; Ez. 22,24), and Israel now awaits a new, more glorious future (41:21-23; 42:9-10; 54)
- vi. Contrary to the author of Isa 1-39, Dt-Isa mentions the Davidic dynasty, only once, and then transfers its privileges to the entire nation (55:3-5). In Tr-Isa Israel is back again in her own land, and the problems are different from those pictured in Isa 1-39.
- vii. Again, chapters 40–66 are self-consciously of later speech than that of Isaiah of Jerusalem (1-39). The terminus ad quo (earliest date) of this section (44-66) could be from the period following Babylonian collapse, and the terminus ad quem (latest possible date) may appear indeterminable.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What are the possible strongest and weakest arguments presented in this section to show that the historical periods of the two or three sections of the Book of Isaiah are different?

Theological Difference

- i. The theology of Dt- and Tr-Isaiah shows a shift in emphasis from Isaiah. Before the exile, Israel and especially the inhabitants of Jerusalem were relatively prosperous, overly self-confident, and material-minded. For this reason, Jerusalem stands condemned by God (e.g. Isa. 3.8; 10.11). The city can only hope to be saved from destruction if the people accept God's judgement (e.g. Isa. 1.24-26; 4.3-6). In Deutero-Isaiah, on the other hand, the people were discouraged, dazed, and destitute, severely tempted to apostasy. They were the people in exile, and therefore, must be consoled, not punished; their faith must be sustained, not further tried. Jerusalem is then presented as the centre of hope and joy, even though it stands in ruins (Isa. 52.9-12). In Trito-Isaiah, that is the postexilic era, the faith of Israel must be open to the possibilities of Judaism becoming a world religion.
- ii. Isaiah emphasizes God's modesty, whereas Dt- and Tr-Isaiah stresses the universal dominion and infinitude of YHWH.
- iii. Isa looks upon foreign nations as scourges of divine anger (10:5), Dt-Isa sees them as instruments for saving Israel (41:1-5; 45: 1-7). Tr-Isa opens Temple services and priesthood to them (56:1-8; 66:21).
- iv. Again, Isaiah betrays the idea of the special place of Israel in the salvific history. Thus the nation is led by a king descended from David (11:1). But in Tr-Isaiah, leadership belongs to priests, Levites and princes (66:6, 66:21) and there is no mention of the Davidic dynasty.
- v. The "messianic king" of Isaiah (cf. 9:6-7, 11:1-11) is replaced in Dt.- and Tr.-Isaiah by "the servant of the Lord", a figure not mentioned in Isaiah.
- vi. Tr-Isa introduces us to the beginning of apocalyptic writing, so that not even death will mar the new heavens and new earth created by the Lord (66:17-20). This theology is lacking in the early sections of Isaiah.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Which section of Isaiah do you think that could adequately address the problem of the contemporary Nigerian situation?

Literary Argument

- i. Literarily, there change of mood from threat and condemnation in Isa to consolation and sorrow in Dt-Isa., then sorrow and visions in Tr-Isa.

ii. The division between the two parts of the book is made especially clearer by the four chapters of historical writing (Isa. 36-39) which have been placed at the end of the first part of the book as an appendix. These four chapters contain almost exactly the same words that are found in 2 Kings 18.13-20.19. They tell the story of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem, and Isaiah's part in guiding the decisions of King Hezekiah. This historical section was probably added to the earlier part of the book in order to complete the account of all that the prophet Isaiah had done in Jerusalem.

But Isaiah is not mentioned at all in the later chapters of the book. There is no record that he was deported to Babylon, and none to show that he continued his work there. In fact he would have needed to live for more than two hundred years in order to be both in Jerusalem at the time when the Assyrians were a powerful enemy, and also in Babylon at the time when Cyrus set the Israelites free to return home.

iii. Some of the key words and themes in the discourse of Isaiah, especially in the deutero- and trito-Isaiah give the impression that the writing of the books extends several generations from the pre-exilic to Babylonian collapse down to the time of return and finally restoration. But that notwithstanding, the prophetic mantle of Isa imparts authority to Dt- and Tr-Isa's preaching; they for their part enable Isa's original prophecy to keep in touch with later crises and new theological developments.

iv. The frontier of the differences in language and style is very clear in Is. 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66.

Isaiah is brief, cryptic, and imperious, brilliant in the use of contrast and paradox; his preaching is filled with autobiographical material. Dt- and Tr-Isa never show any autobiographical interest. On the other hand, the style of Dt-Isa is expansive, flowing, impassioned, redundant, solemn, hymnic and lyric more than 1-39.

But Tr-Isa lacks originality in style and fails to sustain images. Unlike Dt.-Isa which is plagued with melancholy and frustration, Tr-Isa sees new visions for the future. This therefore leads to the conclusion that the three sections must have been composed by different authors.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Which of the three major arguments (historical, theological and literary) do you think is more convincing that the sections in the Book of Isaiah was written at different times by different authors?
2. Have the arguments any positive or negative contribution to your religious faith?

A Matter for Authorship

The matter would seem not have been settled even if we have succeeded to convince ourselves that the three sections of Isaiah (chaps. 1-39, 40-55, 56-66) must have been written at different times by different authors. The three works are now canonically one in the Judeo-Christian scripture. How do we then account for the three-in-one work? Who is then responsible to make them one? And why must the three works be classified as one?

In order to clarify some of the issues raised above, many scholars have come up with various different explanations. Some of them will be considered in this section.

One Prophet Responsible for the Canonical Text

In order to solve the riddle surrounding the similarity and difference between the three sections of the book, some scholars are of the opinion that Isaiah of Jerusalem foresaw what would happen to the people of Judah in the future, and then prepared a written prophecy to be published later when

the time is due. The argument is further supported by Isaiah's instruction to his disciples to prepare a written record of his sayings (Isa. 8.16; 30.8)

We can equally see from the description of the two parts of the book that in some ways the second part of Isaiah follows and completes the ideas of the first part. In both parts the prophet recognizes the need for judgement, punishment, and cleansing. In the first part judgement is regarded as a future event, in the second part it is something already completed. Both parts show that God uses foreign nations to fulfil His plans, and that what happens to Judah is always according to God's purposes. Again, all through the book a special title is used for God which is seldom found in other parts of the Bible: 'The Holy One of Israel' (e.g. Isa. 1.4; 5.19, and Isa. 41.14; 48.17).

But the above reasoning would seem to oversimplify the matter. It is true that most of the prophecy in Isa. 1-39 points towards the future; it is usually a message of warning or of hope, based on the behaviour of the Israelites at the time when the prophet was at work. Future events were mentioned only in the context of the people's present attitudes and behaviour, which either deserved punishment or could lead to blessing. To argue that God did know and could inspire Isaiah to write about the future condition of the Israelites is the denial of freewill. It would mean that even repentance is prearranged, fixed and settled for people, without their own will and intention.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Review critically the above arguments and present their respective advantages to convince a sceptic that the Bible is the word of God.

Two or More Prophets Responsible for the Canonical Text

The second explanation is that there was another prophet at work in Babylon in the time of Cyrus. We do not know his name, but he was fully aware of the needs of the people of his time, and was responsive to God and His purposes for that time. This prophet probably wrote his message in secret, and passed it round anonymously as an encouragement to those who were willing to do the will of God.

The links that we have seen between his messages and the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem can be easily explained. This later prophet must have been a man who had studied the records of the work of Isaiah, and as a result had come to understand God's purposes. He did not simply repeat the ideas of Isaiah of Jerusalem. His exilic experiences of God deepened and enriched his understanding. At the same time, he was not afraid to appeal to Isa. 1-39 in his writing. His writings were probably added to those of Isaiah of Jerusalem because men saw that they carried on, developed, and enriched those earlier writings.

However, it is important to note that the content and material of Isa. 40-66 pose other overarching worries to scholarship. Some scholars believe that these chapters all belong together.

Others are of the view that they contain the work of at least two different prophets: one in Babylon, the other in Jerusalem.

A third opinion is that the prophecies may have come from many different sources, and that they were put together because they come from roughly the same period of history. This probably may lead to a brief discussion of some editorial contributions to the work. But before then, we ask ourselves, how did the three works come to be regarded as one?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Reflect critically on the issue raised above and develop additional argument to support or oppose the idea of multiple authorship.

The Combination of the Three Works into One

The focus here is different from the foregoing ones. The interest is no longer on the “who” but on the “why.” Some scholars are of the opinion that there was a practical reason for joining the two sets of writing together. Following traditional literary economy, it would appear that Isaiah 1-39 was not long enough to fill a whole scroll, and there was need to add these latter writings (40-66). This would prevent the wasting of valuable writing materials. In other words, the existence of the works are acknowledged, and probably also from different authors.

The second view is that the Dt- and Tri-Isaiah were already existing as a work but without title. And for the fact that the prophet in Babylon, who was responsible for the work, was not known by name, it became more expedient for the author to ride on the back of an already existing work, hence it was joined to already known work. The whole scroll became one and was known as the Book of Isaiah.

We know actually in spite of all the historical, theological and literary differences we have observed in the canonical text, the division between the two or three separate writings was only marked by titling them simply as (Primo) Isaiah, 'Deutero-Isaiah', and Trito-Isaiah. They still remain as one book, and no modern scholar has attempted successfully to make them separate books.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Why is it not convenient for modern scholars to place the “works” in the Book of Isaiah as different “books?”

The Editorial Contribution

Surprisingly, scholars disagree among themselves about the content of the three sections of Isaiah. They suggest that some parts of Isaiah 1-39 were probably not the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem (the son of Amoz), but were added later, because their content seemed similar. Others disagree that the so-called “addition” has always been part of the original work in 1-39. Such scholarship challenge naturally introduces us to the editorial contributions to the Book.

We accept that the Book of Isaiah, despite the originality of most of oracles, has enormous editorial influence. The editor(s) not only draws principally upon the oral and written traditions of the ‘prophets’ of the Book. The editor(s) also includes some of the reflections and teaching of their disciples (cf. 8:16; 30:8; 50: 10; 54: 17a; 52:6; 65: 13). The editor(s) centres the entire book on Jerusalem. Somehow the first Temple has to be destroyed in the process of purifying the people of false hopes in externals. We also observe that even the new Temple of the postexilic age is itself tarnished by unworthy leaders. This sad, sinful situation leads to its final opening to the Gentiles. The editor has allowed all major sections to open with a sympathetic attitude toward the Gentiles: 11:10-16; 23:17-18; 27:12-13; 33:17-24; 35:5-6; 49:6; 56:1-8; 66:18-21.

It may be sufficient for us to accept at this stage that the trend of contemporary scholarship is to treat the Book of Isaiah as one-in-three part, and that each part contains oracles predominantly from the period of history which it describes.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

What could be the reasons for the editor(s) of the Book of Isaiah to have such overwhelming sympathy for the Gentiles?

Isaiah 1-39

The Time of Isaiah the Son of Amoz

One of the advantages of the knowledge of the historical context of a prophet is that it would help for a better appreciation of the message of the prophet. It is in this wise that we are turning to the historical context of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who was a resident of Jerusalem. Isaiah was, according to Jewish, a relative of King Uzziah.

Isaiah was married to a prophetess and was the father of at least two sons (7:3, 8:3). Jewish traditions from the second century AD say that Isaiah was martyred in the reign of Manasseh. One ancient writer says that Isaiah was 'sawn asunder', which perhaps explains the reference to this sort of martyrdom in Hebrews 11:37. Isaiah is said to have written an account of the reign of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:22), and another of Hezekiah, which is now included in the book of Kings (2 Chron. 32:32).

Isaiah began his prophetic ministry in the year that king Uzziah died (740BC; cf. Isa. 6:1), the period Assyria became a threat to Judah. His ministry extended through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Is. 1:1). Probably because of his relationship with King Uzziah, he was associated with influential people of the city, who were his friends (Isa. 8:2), and had the opportunity to talk freely to the kings who ruled over Judah (see especially Isa. 7).

He lived at the time that the Assyrian empire was a powerful force in the geo-political life of the ancient Near East. It was also the period when Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727BC) extended the frontier of the Assyrian empire and captured Syria; this led to the formation of an alliance between Syria and Israel. Consequently, many of his prophecies would refer directly to the changing events of that time. He warned King Ahaz of Judah against participating in an anti-Assyrian coalition led by Aram and Israel (Isaiah 7). After the death of Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmanesser and Sargon moved against the northern kingdom (Israel). The capital Samaria was destroyed and the people dispersed to different nations in 722 B.C.

Isaiah's final words relate to the siege of Jerusalem, and probably to the second siege in 688 BC (e.g. Isa. 14:24-27; 17:12-14). If this is the date of his last prophecy, then his work as prophet continued for 54 years, and ended when he was about eighty years old.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

Do you think that the brief biography of Isaiah has contributed to your knowledge of the Book?

The Message and Teaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem

i. The Holiness of YHWH

The controlling principle of much of what Isaiah taught was his conviction concerning the holiness and kingly power of the God of Israel, both of which he experienced in his inaugural vision (6:1-13). The expression, "the Holy One of Israel," was his favourite title for Yahweh, whose "glory" did not abide merely in Jerusalem but filled the whole earth (6:3).

ii. The Kingly and Universal Power of YHWH

Yahweh's power is such that all lies under his control, including the destinies of the mightiest nations, who function only as instruments of YHWH's policy (cf. 5:26-29; 7:18-19:20; 10:5-6). YHWH is the God, who has a policy and plan which he carries out in history with supreme wisdom (28:23-29) and ineluctable power (14:26-27). All human plans to the contrary are doomed to futility (7:4-7; 8:9-10). Thus, Isaiah thought it folly for Judah to attempt to carve out its own destiny, especially when this involved turning to Assyria (for help against Syria and Israel) or Egypt (for help in revolting against Assyria).

iii. Absolute Trust and Confidence in YHWH

One may argue and probably correct that one of the principal duties of Isaiah was to guide the kings of Judah in all their dealings with Assyria, that is, both in the early days when Ahaz wanted assistance from Assyria and in the later days when the kings planned to throw off Assyria's control over Judah. In both situations the kings looked for help from other countries. Isaiah would always oppose the idea, urging them to put their trust in YHWH. For Isaiah, to trust in YHWH's help and protection is faith, whereas the failure to do so is lack of faith (7:9b; 8: 17; 28: 16-17; 30: 1-5, 15; 31: 1-3). He strongly criticised the human wisdom of the king's advisers that led Ahaz and Hezekiah into paths contrary to trusting in YHWH (cf. 5:18-19; 6:9-10; 29:13-14,15-16)..

iv. Social Justice

The idea of YHWH's holiness will also be reflected in Isaiah's understanding of social justice. He spoke vehemently against the oppression of the poor and weak of the society. According to him, the oppression of weaker members of society offends YHWH's holiness (cf. 1:10-17, 21-26; 3:13-15; 5:1-10,20-23; 10:1-4). And the rejection of the laws and instructions of YHWH's would invariably attract punishment (5:24).

v. Pride as Cardinal Sin

Isaiah saw pride as the cardinal sin; it is the antithesis of faith. Hence such behaviour would attract judgment (2:11-12,17; 3:16; 5:15-16; 9:8-9; 10:7-16,33; 28:1-4,22; 29:5).

vi. Punishment, Hope and Salvation

Isaiah reveals and justifies YHWH's intention to bring punishment on Israel and Judah (3: 1-4; 1; 5:25,26-29; 6:11-13; 9:7-20). But he also understands such punishment as redemptive and salvific. It prepares the way for restoration (1:21-26). So, Isaiah equally opens a door for hope. His own followers exhibit the faith to be the, or among, the remnants that would constitute the New Jerusalem. Incidentally, Isaiah makes no reference to Moses, Sinai, or covenant. Nevertheless, the Zion tradition and the promises to David's dynasty, inspired him to leave some of the brightest promises for the future in the Old Testament tradition (2:2-4; 8:23-9:6; 11:1-9).

vii. The Picture of Jerusalem

Isaiah believed that Jerusalem will play an important and fundamental part in God's plans in the days that are about to come. Consequently, he teaches that the city will not be destroyed (Isa. 29.5-8), even though Judah will be severely chastised for her sins (cf. Isa. 5.1-7, 13-17). Only a few survivors would remain to share in God's plans for the future, a mere remnant (Isa. 1.9; 11.11). Enemy nations would be destroyed and have no remnant left at all (Isa. 14.22,30; 15.9)

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

Read through Is. 1-39 and identify other possible messages that are not included in the discussion.

Isaiah 40-66

The Prophet(s) of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah

We have earlier stated that no direct information was given about the prophet whose words are recorded in the Dt.- and Tri.-Isaiah. We do not know the name of the prophet, or anything about the experiences of the prophet as a prophet. However, the oracles in this section falls into two parts – Isa. 40-55 and 56-66. The oracles in Isaiah 40-55 are predominantly concerned with the life of the Jews in Babylon, and Isaiah 56-66 with their experiences after the return from exile.

It is possible that there were two prophets, or even that these chapters contain the collected prophecies of a large number of people who worked during the time of Cyrus's rise to power, and the Jews' return from exile. There are similarities in the messages included in both halves of this part of Isaiah. But the chapters Isaiah 40-55 express greater confidence in God, and more hope for the future, than can be found in Isaiah 56-66. If the same prophet produced both parts, then his experience of the return to Jerusalem did not reach up to his high hopes, and the messages he declared in Jerusalem express something of his dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

What are the high hopes the prophet of Tr.-Isaiah which could not have been fulfilled?

The Teaching of Isaiah 40-55

YWHH: The Creator of History

The verb "to create" in connection with YHWH is used over 16 times by the author of Dt-Isa. The author, however, does not introduce the theme of YHWH Creator as a proof or reason but rather as an indication of the exceptionally new and expansive form of what is to happen to and for exiles. This is, of course, different from what the exiles expect.

There are many stronger nations than the Israelites, but the Israelites should remember that it is God who sent His people into exile, and that He did so to punish them for their sins (Isa. 50.1-3). He now plans to redeem them, even though they are still unworthy (Isa. 48.9-11). The foreign gods have had no influence over the history of Israel, despite the boasting of their worshippers (Isa. 41.21-24). Even Cyrus is sent by God, although he does not know it (Isa. 44.24-45.7). God is the Creator of all things. God is in control of all things (Isa. 40. 12-26, 28). God is the first and the last. There is no other but YHWH (Isa. 44.6; 46.9). His will for Israel will be fulfilled.

The New Exodus: A Message of Comfort to Zion

The experience of exile has caused despair (Isa. 49.14), but YHWH is preparing a 'new thing' for His people (Isa. 42.9). There is to be a new Exodus, and God will lead His people through the wilderness (Isa. 48.20-21; 49.9-11). Foreign nations will share in this pilgrimage with Israel as their leader (Isa. 45.14; 55.3-5). God will rebuild Jerusalem, and the whole world will find salvation through Him (Isa. 54.11-12; 45.22). In other words, the Deutero-Isaiah working in Babylon, presents a message of comfort to Zion, to console Jerusalem and give solace to the people (Isa. 52.1-2, 7-8).

The Power of the Divine Word

We observe that from the opening statements of Dt.-Isa (40:5,8) to his final summation (55:10-11), the author concentrates more than any other prophet on the power of the divine word. This word does not consist so much in written or spoken messages as in wondrous deeds of YHWH to His

people. It is a creative Word, the liberating Word and the Word that fulfils all that has been promised.

First and Last

We can also discover that Tr.-Isa. contain series of poems dedicated to first and last, mostly in the literary form of argument, indictment or trial speech (42:12-31; 41:1-5; 41:21-29 + 42:8-9; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:18-22; 46:9-13; 48: 1-11,12-19). These series of poems become prophetic fulfilment of earlier prophecies, the first things, and therefore the necessary fulfilment of the final or last prophecy which ushers in an extraordinary age for Israel.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 15

Read through the text of Dt.-Isaiah and identify other motifs and messages that were not mentioned in the discussion.

The Message of Isaiah 56-66

History and God's Justice

There are some oracles in this passage of Isaiah which are similar to those found in Dt.- Isaiah. Their interpretation of history is almost, if not, the same. They believe that every divine promise is on the point of fulfilment. They extol the justice of God (41:2,16; 42:6; 61:3; 62:11-12).

The New Exodus, Jerusalem and Zion

Jerusalem occupies a centre role in both Dt- and Tr-Isaiah. At times the prophet sees Jerusalem as announcing Israel's return across the desert to its own land (40:9-10), at other times as a lonely widow who will become the happy mother of many children (54:1-10; 65:17-25). The people of Zion are again to take comfort because God is about to renew His care for them (Isa. 61.3). The ruined condition of the city of Jerusalem has caused them despair, but now there is reason for joy (Isa. 64.8-12; 65.18-19). New people will come to Jerusalem as a result of the continuing new Exodus (i.e. the return from captivity in Babylon), and will make the city even more glorious (Isa. 60.4-7). Foreign nations have already provided some servants for God, but many more will follow (Isa. 56.3; 60.10-14).

The Temple

It is true that only once, in a very disputed line (44:28b), does Dt-Isa mention the Temple. But it transfers Temple imagery to the outside world (40:3-5; 53:4-6). But in Tr-Isa., we see how the prophet on bitterly condemns the greedy Temple leaders of the postexilic age (56:9-57:13). The prophet warns that the only hindrance to the fulfilment of God's plans for Israel is the continuing disobedience of His people (Isa. 59.1-4), their selfish act of worship and corruption (Isa. 66.3-4). Their fasts are a mockery, for they do not express penitence (Isa. 58.3-5). God's judgement will come upon all who behave wickedly (Isa. 59.15-19). God's purposes cannot be hindered for ever, He will reign victoriously (Isa. 60.1-3; 66.22).

It must be made clear that the differences between the prophecies of Isaiah 56-66 and Isaiah 40-55, reflect the differences between the experience of captivity in Babylon, and the experience of all that was involved in the return to Jerusalem.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 16

From the discussion, what do you think is the major difference between the Dt.- and Tr.-Isaiah?

4.0 CONCLUSION

A closer look at the materials we have presented in this unit show that the mission and activities of the prophets of the Book of Isaiah are simply the concretisation of the claims made in our earlier discussion on the mission and role of the prophets (cf. Module 1, Unit 3). The prophets of the Book of Isaiah were indeed consciously and actively involved in the social history and religious experience of the people. Before the exile, they warn the Israelites about the moral consequence of their actions. They called for structural and individual change, and constantly reminded Israel of her relationship with YHWH. In the dark age of Israelite history, they remained the boundary figure, the motivators, giving the people hope and guiding them out from despair. So, they remain an indispensable part of the religious history of the people. The discussion further demonstrates in clear terms the complexities in the understanding and appreciation of the prophetic books, especially the Book of Isaiah. It must have exposed our far little knowledge about the prophets of the Book and asks for a more critical study of the Book in order to discover the richness of the mystery of the Word.

5.0 SUMMARY

Many issues have been raised in the course of our discussion on the Book of Isaiah.

- i. Through the discussion we have learnt that the authorship of the work is a complex issue that touches history, theology and literature. Consequently, we observed that the work in its canonical state proved to have been written by more than an author. We equally notice some editorial contributions in the material.
- ii. We identified three major works within the Book, and thus designated them as Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah. We further observed that the material in Isaiah is predominantly pre-exilic, in Dt.-Isa exilic and in Tr.-Isa post-exilic.
- iii. While we insisted on the internal division of the work and the global classification of the materials, we equally discovered that the materials are not radically separate. They sometimes overlapped, thanks to some editorial exercise identified in the Book.
- iv. Each section in the Book has its message and theology, which, though different, yet has some affinity with one another.
- v. We finally discovered that the historical experience of the Israelites and the oracles of warning, threat and encouragement replicate themselves in our contemporary situation, not only as human but also as Nigerians.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the challenges associated with the Book of Isaiah as a Three-in-One production.
2. Evaluate the arguments on the authorship of the canonical text of Isaiah base on single and multiple authorship.
3. What relevance is the discussion on "the editorial contribution" to the Book of Isaiah?
4. What are some of the editorial challenges in Isaiah 1-39?
5. Briefly discuss the message and teaching of Isaiah 1-39.
6. What are the major literary and theological difference between Dt.- and Tr.- Isaiah?
7. Examine the different meanings of the Servant of Songs.
8. What message has the Servant of Songs for the Contemporary Nigerian Christian?

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UNIT 3: THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	76
2.0 OBJECTIVE	77
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	77
3.1 The Book of Jeremiah	77
3.1.1 The Person of the Prophet Jeremiah	77
3.1.2 The Persecution of the Prophet	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.1.3 Historical Background	77
3.1.4 Literary Genre and Sources of Information in Jeremiah	78
3.1.5 The Message	80
3.2 The Lamentations of Jeremiah	83
3.2.1 Title and Authorship	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2.2 Historical Background	83
3.2.3 Lamentation as a Literary Genre	83
3.2.4 The Literary Structure of the Book	83
3.2.5 Sources	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2.6 The Message of Lamentations	84
3.2.7. Liturgical and Moral Values of the Book	84
4.0 CONCLUSION	85
5.0 SUMMARY	85
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	86
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING	86

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The discussion in the last unit was centred on the Book of Isaiah. We observed some of the complexities connected with the book as a prophetic genre and the various opinions by scholars. We raised some critical questions to enable us appreciate the prophets more fruitfully.

We shall equally follow the same pattern of reasoning in this unit, with the aim of motivating ourselves to think more critically in our reading of the Books of Jeremiah and the Lamentations. However, we shall divide the unit into two major sections, dedicating each section to one of the books. In the first section (the Book of Jeremiah), we shall explore the biography of the person of Jeremiah to the extent we can extract from the Book. The historical background of the book and the literary genre and sources of information will form a part of our discussion. We will conclude it by examining some of the message the Book has for the contemporary reader.

The second section, which concentrates on the Lamentations of Jeremiah, takes up the traditional connection of the Book to Jeremiah. Here, we shall examine the questions surrounding the

authorship of the Book, its historical background and the literary genre. We shall make some observations about the literary structure and sources of information in the book. We shall further look at the message and value of the Book in our present age.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the person and experience of Jeremiah as a prophet
- understand why the title of the book, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, is associated with Jeremiah, even though we are yet to prove historically the real author of the Book.
- discuss the historical background of the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations of Jeremiah
- identify the literary genre of both books
- identify the literary sources and classify the materials in the books
- appreciate the message and value of the books

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Book of Jeremiah

3.1.1 The Person of the Prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a young man when in 626 BC he received his call to be a prophet (Jer. 1.2, 6). He came from Anathoth, and his father was a priest (Jer. 1.1) from the clan of Hilkiyah, and probably a descendant of Eli, and distant relation to Abiathar (1 Kings 2.26). Jeremiah could have believed that he had forbidden him by God to marry and to father children, probably because impending divine judgment of Judah would sweep away the next generation (Jer. 16.1-9). His closest friend and companion, Baruch, was his secretary. It has been suggested by scholars that Baruch must have been responsible for the final compilation of the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's career runs from the time of his call to prophetic ministry during the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign through the destruction of Jerusalem (627-587 B.C). It covered one of the most turbulent and decisive periods in the history of the ancient Near East. His ministry began at the time when the Assyrian empire was breaking up, and continued at zenith of Babylonian empire (Jer. 1.2-3). He prophesized for 40 years: a period which spans the reign of five kings in Judah. During his ministry, Babylon and Egypt were struggling for supremacy, with Judah caught in the middle.

The Babylonians allowed Jeremiah to stay in Jerusalem in 587 BC, when they took many of the leaders of Judah into exile (Jer. 40.4-6). After the assassination of the Babylonian governor, Gedeliah, some Jews forced Jeremiah to escape with them into Egypt (Jer. 42.19; 43.2, 5-6), and he probably died there. It is not possible, however, to establish the date of his death.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT

Why do we say that the ministry of Jeremiah was the most turbulent period in the history of Israel?

3.1.2 Historical Background

We shall give a summary historical account of the events of the period of Jeremiah the prophet in order to understand the part played by Jeremiah:

- 621 B.C: King Josiah carried out a reform of religion in Judah.
- 612 B.C: Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, was captured by the armies of Media and Babylonia.

- 609 B.C: King Josiah was put to death by command of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. The Pharaoh appointed Jehoiakim in his place.
- 605 B.C: The Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish.
- 597 B.C: The Babylonians captured Jerusalem, and took Jehoiachin and his court into exile. They appointed Zedekiah as king.
- 587 B.C: Zedekiah led a revolt against the Babylonians, who again attacked and this time destroyed Jerusalem and punished Zedekiah. They took more of the leaders of Judah into exile, and appointed Gedeliah as governor.
- 582 B.C: Further Jews were taken into exile, probably as the result of the assassination of Gedeliah.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT

Read the activities of Gedeliah in the Book of Second Kings, and evaluate whether his assassination was a blessing or curse in the pursuit of the project of Yahwism in Judah.

3.1.3 Literary Genre and Sources of Information in Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah contains the three types of writing found in many of the prophetic books:

- Autobiographical Narratives
- Biographical Discourse
- Poetic Oracle.

Scholars have examined these separately, and discovered some evidence for the way in which the book of Jeremiah is composed.

a. Autobiography

We were informed that Jeremiah in 605 BC deployed the services of a scribe called Baruch, who was also a friend, to write out 'all the words that (God had spoken to him) against Israel and Judah, and all the nations, from the days of Josiah until today' (cf. Jer. 36:1, 2). We also read that the first scroll was burnt by king Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:23), probably for its gloomy nature and anti-monarchy (36:29-30) and those 'words' declared that Judah would be destroyed by the Babylonians (Jer. 36:29) came true. But Jeremiah had the words all written out again (Jer. 36:32).

Jeremiah's own record of the messages which he preached in God's name must have been used as a basis for the book of Jeremiah. Though it may not be possible for us to ascertain with certainty which parts of the biblical book came from that second scroll, many of the passages of Jeremiah which are written as autobiography probably came from that source.

i. The Original Scroll

Jeremiah 25 is headed by the same date as Jeremiah 36. It contains a record written in the first person ('I', 'me', etc.), which mentions the earlier preaching of Jeremiah, and it tells of trouble to come from Babylon. Probably this chapter is part of the original scroll. Other chapters written in the same style are likely to have come from the same source, provided that they refer to the period of Jeremiah's ministry up to 605 BC. These include Jeremiah 1.4-19; 3:6-13; 7:1-8:3; 11:6-14; 13:1-14; 16:1-13; 17:19-27; 18:1-12; 22:1-5; and also part of Jeremiah 19, which now contains material from another source as well.

ii. The Revised Scroll

When the second scroll was prepared it contained the same as the original scroll, but 'many similar words were added' (Jer. 36:32). These may have been oracles from a later time in the ministry of

Jeremiah. If so, autobiographical passages from the later period which are now included in the book of Jeremiah may have come from the revised scroll, e.g. Jeremiah 24; 27; 32; and 35.

b. Biographical Discourse

There are several sections of the book of Jeremiah which describe his experiences in the third person: i.e. 'he', 'him', etc. The man who knew most about Jeremiah's experiences was Baruch, the scribe who shared many of Jeremiah's troubles. He wrote Jeremiah's scroll at his dictation in the time of king Jehoiakim (Jer. 36.4), and read the scroll publicly in the Temple (Jer. 36:10). He had to hide with Jeremiah to escape the king's anger (Jer. 36:19). Jeremiah gave a personal oracle to Baruch, warning him to be patient in this time of trouble (Jer. 45:1-5). When Zedekiah rebelled against Babylonian rule, and Jeremiah opposed the king, Baruch was still with the prophet. He took care of the deed of possession for the land which Jeremiah bought as an expression of his confidence in the future of Judah. after Zedekiah had been punished (Jer. 32.3-5, 9-15).

After the assassination of Gedeliah, Baruch was blamed for Jeremiah's condemnation of the people's plan to escape into Egypt (Jer. 43.3). Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to go with the people of Judah when they left for Egypt (Jer. 43.6).

It seems probable that Baruch wrote the biographical sections of the book of Jeremiah. These include Jeremiah 20:1-6; 26; 36; 45; 28; 29; 51:59-64; 34:8-22; 37-44. Chapters 36, 45, and 51 are included in this list in the order in which they were probably written by Baruch. In the book of Jeremiah they have been rearranged by the editor, and are no longer in the right sequence.

c. Poetic Oracle

Those of Jeremiah's prophecies which are not included within the autobiographical or biographical sections of the book are grouped according to their subject. It is highly unlikely that each group is the record of a single oracle made all at one time. Jeremiah would have returned many times to the same themes in his preaching, and an editor has probably gathered together what he had to say on each subject. In this way readers could see Jeremiah's main themes set out clearly in the book. Some of these themes are grouped as follows:

- 1. Relating to the drought: Jer. 14:1-15.4
- 2. Relating to the kings of Judah: Jer. 21:11-23.8
- 3. Concerning the prophets: Jer. 23:9-40
- 4. Connecting future hope: Jer. 30-31
- 5. Referring to the nations: Jer. 46-51

Most scholars believe that there are at least a few prophecies included in these sections which were not delivered by Jeremiah himself, but which have been added to the book by an editor who wished to preserve a prophecy though he did not know whose it was. Some scholars believe that there are a large number of these additions, especially among the prophecies relating to the nations.

d. The Confessions of Jeremiah:

The confessions of Jeremiah are those prophetic passages within the Book of Jeremiah, which convey the inward struggle which Jeremiah confronted in his undiluted efforts to deliver YHWH's message faithfully to the people. These struggles came as a result of the opposition raised by the people to listen to YHWH through Jeremiah. The people supposed that Jeremiah was glad to preach their destruction. But Jeremiah was announcing to them what YHWH asked him to. Some of these passages show that Jeremiah felt anger and hatred towards those who persecuted him, but he expressed these feelings only to God, not outwardly to the people.

These passages are known as the Confessions of Jeremiah, and are found in Jeremiah 10:23-24; 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:12-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18. It is highly unlikely that Jeremiah used these

passages as part of his preaching ministry. They were probably recorded privately, rather like a personal diary, and only published later. Baruch may have kept this record.

e. Historical Appendix

Jeremiah 52 is taken from 2 Kings 24.18-25.30. It is a historical passage, recording the background history of the time of Jeremiah, but making no mention of the prophet himself. Verses 22-26 from 2 Kings are omitted because they are in fact a summary of the information about the assassination of Gedeliah which had already been given in Jer. 39-41. Jer. 52:28-30 is not found in the parallel passage in 2 Kings. It gives details of the three deportations of the people of Judah to Babylon.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What are some of the literary characteristics of autobiography in the Book of Jeremiah, which differentiate genre from biography?
2. What lessons do you think Christians can draw from the confessions of Jeremiah in their efforts to proclaim the Gospel?
3. How do you explain the presence of the historical appendix in the Book of Jeremiah, which also exists in the Second Book of Kings?

3.1.4 The Message

We can best understand Jeremiah's message if we consider what he said at different periods in his ministry.

a. The Fall of Assyria.

i. Discouragement of Judea from Gaining Independence

We mentioned earlier that Jeremiah became a prophet at a time when Assyria was losing its control over world affairs. At that time he discouraged the people of Judah from trying to gain their independence by making treaties with other nations (Jer. 2.18). He believed that Judah would suffer further attacks 'out of the north' (Jer. 1.13-15).

The Potential Attack of the Scythians

Jeremiah would have considered Scythians as the new potential enemy of Judah, thus advising Judah never to contract any alliance with other nations. These Scythians were nomadic people who usually lived north of Assyria. They took advantage of the decrease of Assyrian power by raiding many parts of the Assyrian empire.

The Anticipation of the Rise of the Babylonia Empire

Some scholars believe that Jeremiah was already thinking of Babylon as the new enemy of Judah. Consequently, Judah ought to be circumspect on the way it transacts its business in the world politics so as not to incur the anger of the new growing world power.

ii. God as Creator and Sovereign

In the book, the prophet stresses the fact that God is the creator and sovereign (Jer. 25:51). He is omniscient and the source of life for those who trust him (Jer. 17:5ff, 13). He demands his people's allegiance and hates idolatry (Jer. 7). Incidentally, in the time of Jeremiah the people ran after other gods and idols (2:13). The situation became so pathetic that idols were even found in the temple at Jerusalem. The consequence of this is the moral corruption and perversion. There was oppression in the land and empty religiosity.

iii. Indictment of Judean Idolatry and God's Judgment

Jeremiah used many of the same words and ideas as Hosea, e.g. he described Judah as an unfaithful wife (Jer. 3.1, 6-10). His chief accusation was that the people of Judah had turned aside from serving God, and were worshipping the Baalim, the fertility gods of Canaan (Jer. 2.23). God had given them good crops, and they had praised the Baalim for it (Jer. 5.23-24). Jeremiah calls Judah a harlot, and says that the people committed adultery by turning away from the true God (Jer. 2.20 and 5.7). God would punish them for their unfaithfulness, but he would welcome them if they returned to Him (Jer. 6.6-8 and 3.12-14, 22). Jeremiah was doubtful whether they had the wisdom to return (Jer. 4.19-26).

b. Josiah's reform.

i. Support of Josiah Based on the Book of Deuteronomy

King Josiah was for Jeremiah a just and righteous man (Jer. 22.15-16). Although there is no record of any specific oracle addressed to King Josiah, we are not in doubt of Jeremiah's support of King Josiah's reforms of the religious life of Judah. We are also told that the reform was based on the law book of Deuteronomy, which was later discovered. Among other things, the reform declared the worship of Baal illegal and idolatrous. It equally discouraged and condemned any false forms of ritual associated with the Yahweistic cult. The reform also necessitated the destruction of high places (several shrines) and fosters the centralization of worship in the Jerusalem Temple, which was an agenda already initiated by David more on political expediency.

ii. A Call for Change of Heart

But later Jeremiah recognized that a book of law could not reform the people. They needed a change of heart. Without that, the people of Judah would probably distort the interpretation of the Law, and make it 'into a lie' (Jer. 8.8). Two false interpretations are especially mentioned in the book of Jeremiah:

- (a) Because the book of Deuteronomy refers to one central place of worship chosen by God, the people came to believe that Jerusalem was especially sacred and would never be captured by an enemy. Jeremiah told them that this depended upon their obedience to God (Jer. 7.2-7).
- (b) Secondly, because the book of Deuteronomy describes the forms of sacrifice which should be made to God in Jerusalem, the people came to believe that sacrifice is especially important in the service of God. Jeremiah told them that God always wants obedience, and sacrifice could not be used instead of service (Jer. 7.21-26).

c. The Reign of Jehoiakim.

The greater part of Jeremiah's prophecies come from the reign of Jehoiakim, before the Babylonians had conquered Judah.

i. Judgment and Suffering of Judah

Judgment against Judah was one of the prominent themes in the oracles of Jeremiah. He announced YHWH's judgement on Judah without offering much hope to the people of Judah except to surrender themselves to the might power of Babylon (Jer. 15.1- 3). Jeremiah made it clear that the armies of Judah would be shamed defeated crushed. Many of the young people would die (Jer. 15:8). The people of Judah will be punished through drought and famine (14:1ff) and invasion by a foreign power (Babylonians) (6:1-15). They would go into exile by God's will (Jer. 17.4). Even in exile they would suffer severely (Jer. 8.3). It is possible that the Confessions of Jeremiah would have been a consequence of the reaction of the people against such distasteful pronouncement.

Some scholars have interpreted Jeremiah's symbolic language and action of the potter as the irreversibility of God's judgment (Jer. 18.1-12). Thus God's rejection of Judah was as complete and final as when a potter has completed a pot, baked it, and then broken it because its shape was not perfect (Jer. 19.10-11).

ii. Prophecy Against Foreign Nations

Surprisingly in the LXX, Jer. 46-51 comes immediately after Jer. 25. Literarily, we may argue that LXX is telling us that the oracles of Jer. 46-51 have some connection with those of Jer. 25. But what is of more interest to us at this juncture is that the prophesies of Jeremiah did not spare any segment of humanity. In other words, YHWH is the judge of all nations. This is also an indirect way of acknowledging the universal kingship and sovereignty of YHWH.

iii. Attack on the Professional Priests and False Prophets

Jeremiah bitterly complained against and criticised the professional priests and prophets because of their unhealthy practices of using their 'office' for material gain, and their contention that the Jerusalem Temple will never fall into the hands of the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 14:14ff; 23:14, 21-22).

d. After the first deportation.

i. Restoration of Jerusalem

We have earlier pointed out that the symbolic language and actions of Jeremiah betrayed the inevitability of YHWH's punishment on the people. However, there is also the theological theme of restoration running through Jeremiah's oracle. In other words, Jeremiah still believed that YHWH would include the people of Judah in His plans for the future. But this great hope rests with the people in exile; those ones, who would be able to serve God in the future. Consequently, he wrote to the exiles in Babylon telling them to settle peacefully there, and to work for the prosperity of that country (Jer. 29.4-7), thus consoling them that the exile in Babylon would not last for ever (Jer. 29:10ff) and that Babylon itself would be overthrown eventually (Jer. 50). The people should wait patiently for God to fulfill His plans by bringing them back to Judah (Jer. 24.5-7). Then they would be able to rebuild Jerusalem, and in those days the people would be faithful (Jer. 33.2-9 and 24.7). This hope gave birth to his great act of faith – buying land – in the darkest days (cf. Jer. 32). But he looked even beyond the return from exile to an ideal future in which Samaria would have a part. Abundance would prevail and Jerusalem would be holy to the Lord because its people had repented and he had forgiven them (31). The Lord will also establish over them the rule of the Messianic prince (23:5-16).

ii. The Anticipation of a New Covenant

We may say that one of the major theological contributions of Jeremiah is the concept of a "NEW COVENANT". According to Jeremiah, the knowledge of the law without obedience to it would amount to the highest form of idolatry (2:8). So, in order that the law may be effectively obeyed, it must be written in the heart of the people. This, of course, can only take place if God will establish a new covenant with the people (31:31ff). Otherwise, judgment is inevitable. However, there would be a new covenant to replace the one which the people had already broken through their unfaithfulness (Jer. 50.4). The old covenant that was based on laws written in books, and which the people did not fulfill has been broken. In future God would write His laws no longer in the book but in the hearts of the people, so that they would gladly serve Him (Jer. 31.31-34). There would be a new king in Judah, chosen by God from the family of David, who would rule wisely and well (Jer. 23.5-6).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What are some of the reasons given why Jeremiah was against Judah going into alliance with other nations?
2. Do you think that the advice of Jeremiah to Judah against contracting any alliance with other nations is based on divine revelation or on Jeremiah's historical foresight?
3. Do you agree with the view that the centralization of cult in Jerusalem has some political agenda behind it?
4. How does the oracle against the foreign nations project the universal kingship and sovereignty of YHWH?
5. Were the professional priests and prophets at all theologically wrong to contend that the enemy shall not conquer Jerusalem?
6. Do you think that God really fulfilled the oracle of the oracle of Jeremiah that YHWH would establish a new covenant among His people?

3.2 The Lamentations of Jeremiah

3.2.1 Historical Background

We have no doubt in any form that the Book of Lamentations contains funeral songs composed shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. We also believed that the destruction of Jerusalem, and above all the desecration of the Temple, calls for a lament. It was unprecedented that YHWH should be so humiliated before his own people. It places the whole oracles and theology of the Davidic dynasty in question. In short, the Babylonian conquest of Judah, and the destruction of Jerusalem put an end to these hopes on the rule of David's family in Jerusalem, Jerusalem as the city of YHWH, and Zion as His dwelling place.

Unfortunately the Book of Lamentation makes no mention of any new concrete circumstances that could bring hope to the Jews. So, one of the implications we may draw from such observation is that the book could have been written before Cyrus rose to power and set the exiles free to return to Jerusalem, i.e. it must have been written before 538 BC.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read through the Book of Lamentations and see whether you could identify any sign of restoration of Jerusalem and the reestablishment of the Davidic kingship.

3.2.2 Lamentation as a Literary Genre

It should be noted here that the book of Lamentations is not the only book that contains individual and community laments. There are individual and community laments in the book of Psalms. Moreover, the Old Testament laments found a paradigm in the overall context of the ancient Near East (cf. 2 Sam. 1:17-27); Amos 5:1-2). For example among the Sumerian we have "Lamentation over the Destruction of wr," "Lamentation over the destruction of summer and wr" etc

SELF-ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT

Identify any other prophetic book that shares the literary genre discussed above.

3.2.3 The Literary Structure of the Book

The book is composed of five separate poems, each contained in a separate chapter. In the Hebrew the first four poems have the form of acrostics each verse or group of verses beginning with a different letter in alphabetical order. The poems in Lamentations 2,3, and 4 make one alteration in the order of the letter, which may suggest that the final order of the Hebrew alphabet had not been

fixed when the poems were written. Lamentations 5 is not in the form of an acrostic, but it does have the same number of verses as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, i.e. twenty-two. .

- Lamentations 1: Jerusalem mourns her destruction.
- Lamentations 2: National lament over the fall of Jerusalem.
- Lamentations 3: A personal lament.
- Lamentations 4: National lament over the fall of Jerusalem.
- Lamentations 5: A prayer for deliverance.

We may observe here that some of the motivations for the acrostic form of the book may include the facilitation of memory and the expression of completeness of grief and despair, and the plenitude of faith and hope.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT

What could be the motivations, outside the ones mention above, for the acrostic form in the Book of Lamentations?

3.2.4 The Message of Lamentations

a. The Embarrassment of Judah

The poems are an attempt to answer the urgent questions of the people of Judah: How could God allow His city to be destroyed, His royal line of kings to be defeated, and His Temple to be desecrated? The Book of Lamentations did not hesitate to provide the answer: it was because of the sins of His people (Lam. 1.8-9, 18). The answers places YHWH as a just and righteous God, who has always been faithful to his covenant.

b. YHWH as the Lord of History

The sovereignty of YHWH and His kingship all over the nations has been one of the reoccurring themes in the prophetic books. This we equally read in the Book of Lamentations. Here YHWH is in control of history, using the foreign nation to punish Judah for her sins. So, the suffering of Judah is not for the sake of suffering, for YHWH does not glory in her suffering, nor is YHWH so weak not to defend His people, His city, His Temple and the royal dynasty. But it is for the profound lessons to be learned from it. Behind the judgment of Judah, which is due to the sin of the people, is YHWH himself. It is not the Babylonians, but God himself who will destroy them, because of their sins (cf. Lam. 2:4-5).

c. Repentance and Hope

YHWH's anger had led Him to hand His people over to their enemies (Lam. 2.2-8). And it would seem that the people's sin have led Him to reject them finally and completely (Lam. 5:19-22). However, YHWH is merciful. There is hope for the future (Lam. 3:31-33). The author still keeps the hope alive. He expresses the assurance that YHWH does not abandon those who turn to him for help (3:22-33). In spite of Israel's sins (1:8, 14, 18, 2:14: 4:13), YHWH will still forgive and restore. His compassion and mercy are everlasting and greater than his anger (3:31-33). What He required of His people is repentance (Lam. 3.40-42, 55-58). He would then overthrow their enemies (Lam. 3.64-66).

SELF-ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT

Can you think out any situation in life where the Lamentations could offer some solutions?

3.2.5. Liturgical and Moral Values of the Book

a. Embodiment of the Corporate Sins of Israel

The book of Lamentations grapples with corporate suffering in the same way as the book of Job struggles with the issue of individual suffering. The writer acknowledges YHWH's wrath against Jerusalem, and this motivates him to pray for her restoration. Israel's sufferings were catalogued in a variety of ways: wholesale killings, king (2:6,9,4:20), princes (1:6:2:2, 4:7, 5:12), elders (1:19, 2:10, 4:16, 5:12), priests (1:4, 19:2:6, 20, 4:16), prophets (2:9,20) and ordinary citizen (2:10-12; 3:48, 4:6) as well as cessation of worship (1:4, 10).

b. A Challenge for Righteousness among the People

The book of Lamentations is read at a Jewish festival which commemorates the fall of Jerusalem, and serves as a perpetual reminder that YHWH requires righteousness from His Chosen People, and will punish their wrong-doing.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT

Do you think that the Lamentations is good enough to be read by optimists?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explored briefly the two books classified among the major prophetic books in order to discover some of their literary qualities, the messages and theological values. It is equally true that we strongly argued that the two books could not have shared a common authorship. However, the affinity between them justifies the consideration of the two under one unit.

Jeremiah was the prophet of the time. Jeremiah was human and supra-human. His experience as a prophet was bordered with ups and downs. Most often he found himself in a corner he would not have wished himself. He complained, shouted and wept for the love of Judah. In midst of trial and condemnation, he never gave up. His courage and doggedness in the face of all oppositions makes him a prototype prophet for our age. He was so resilient, so courageous and undeterred in his ministry. The Word of YHWH was his bed rock, his faith and hope.

The Lamentations, following the tradition of Jeremiah, remained purely human. The sorrows of human are so articulated in the Book. Human finds the answer for the age-long question, the call of despair – "O! Lord, where are you?" While the Book upholds the justice of YHWH, it gives humanity hope that the Lord will not abandon the righteous one. This becomes our consolation even in the midst of suffering, in the midst of persecution.

5.0 SUMMARY

Our focus in this unit has been on the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations. We treated the two books as different but interrelated works. Some of the salient points made during the foregoing discussion are as follows:

- i. Jeremiah the prophet was from priestly family, and did not raise any family because of his vocation.
- ii. The ministry of Jeremiah occurred during the most turbulent period in the history of Israel.
- iii. We also stressed some of the sad human experience Jeremiah underwent for the sake of the Word of YHWH.
- iv. The Book of Jeremiah itself is composed of the literary genre of autobiography, biography, poetic oracle, the confessions of Jeremiah and historical appendix. But thanks to the editorial works that have literarily and artistically interwoven the material to give us the present canonical text of Jeremiah.
- v. The message of Jeremiah embraced many aspects of human relationship with YHWH. Jeremiah did not in any form hesitate to proclaim the sovereignty of YHWH over all powers and kingdoms,

and therefore, should be trusted. Jeremiah's understanding of the covenant of human with YHWH becomes one of the conspicuous points on the scoreboard for Jeremiah. Jeremiah's critique of the priests and prophets of his kind presented Jeremiah as a man of objectivity. Jeremiah simply thought us that in every judgment, suffering and destruction, this is always inherent restoration and reconstruction for the better.

Also in the Lamentation,

- i. we noted that there is no good reason to suppose that that Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations, except for the prejudice of tradition.
- ii. Lamentation as funeral song or dirge is not peculiar with the Book of Lamentations. It could also be found in other texts of the Old Testament, and in the ancient Near East texts.
- iii. We also observed that some of the reasons behind the acrostic structure of the book are to facilitate memory and also to express some sense of completeness of grief and despair, as well as the plenitude of faith and hope.
- iv. We also discovered a very close relationship between the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations. It would appear that the Lamentations serves Jeremiah a fulfilment of his oracles and a deserved conclusion.
- v. The message of the Lamentations is very simple and straightforward: YHWH is just and shall never allow any sin unpunished; yet His mercy is sufficient enough to redeem us once we come back to Him.
- vi. In fact, the author of the Lamentations has left for us a veritable monument, which shall remain ever alive in the liturgical and theological circles.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Do you agree with the statement that the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations are two distinct but interrelated works? Give reasons for your position.
2. Discuss the contribution of Jeremiah to the development of the religion of YHWH.
3. What is so special about the literary structure of the Lamentations?
4. Discuss the liturgical and moral values of the Lamentations.

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UNIT 4: THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	87
2.0 OBJECTIVES	88
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	88
3.1 The Person and Authorship of the Book of Ezekiel	88
3.2 Historical Background	89
3.3 Historical Accuracy of the Book	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.1 Historical Ingenuity of Ezekiel	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.2 Time and Setting in the Book.	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.3 Critical Questions in the Book	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.4 Some Explanations	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4 Literary Style of the Prophet.	89
3.4.1 Revival of Pre-Literary Prophetic Form	89
3.4.2 The Literary Uniqueness of Ezekiel	89
3.5 Ezekiel and Other Traditions.	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.5.1 The Tradition of Jeremiah	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.5.2 The Priestly Tradition	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.5.3 Apocalyptic Tradition	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.5.4 Later Traditions about Ezekiel	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.6 Literary Structure of the Book	90
3.7 The Theology of the Book	90
3.7.1 The Divine Lordship of YHWH	91
3.7.2 YHWH's Holiness	91
3.7.3 Moral and Cultic Demands	91
3.7.4 Individual Responsibility	91
3.7.5 Sin and Grace	92
4.0 CONCLUSION	92
5.0 SUMMARY	93
TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	93
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	93

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We considered the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations in the last unit. In continuation of our study of the prophetic books, we shall concentrate in this unit on the book of the Prophet Ezekiel. Our primary focus will be on the person of the prophet and the historical background of his oracles. We

shall analyse the historical accuracy of the book and the literary quality of the book. It is also of interest to us to probe into some of the traditions that could have influenced the writing, then the literary structure of the book and the theological import of the writings. It is also for our interest to read though the book before proceeding with this lecture. In addition we are advised to read the lecture along with the bible, for at various instances reference would be made to some of the passages in the book.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Give a short account biographical account of the prophet Ezekiel
- Discuss the historical background of the oracles of the prophet.
- Compare the historical dates given in the book and with other Old Testament's accounts in order to appreciate the historical ingenuity of the prophet
- Appreciate the literary quality of the book
- Identify some of the traditions that could have influenced the production of the oracles
- Discuss the theological import of the oracles of Ezekiel and relate them to the contemporary Nigerian Society.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Person and Authorship of the Book of Ezekiel

The Book of Ezekiel (1:1-3) gives handful biographical information about the Prophet himself. He was a priest and one of those deported to Babylon, along with King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C (cf. 2 Kings 24:14ff), that is, before the final deportation in 587 B.C. While in exile, he lived in Babylon beside the river Chebar, which was a canal off the Euphrates at Telabib (cf. Ezek. 3.15). There he received a call to be a prophet. This could probably be five years after 'the exile of Jehoiachin', thus in 593 BC. It is most likely that Ezekiel was thirty years old (cf. Ezek. 1:1) when he received the call. Incidentally the latest of his oracle gives a date in the twenty-seventh year of the exile, i.e. 571 B.C (Ezek. 29:17). We may from this infer that Jeremiah was still working in Jerusalem when Ezekiel began his ministry in Babylon, and that Ezekiel continued with the ministry more than fifteen years after Jeremiah ceased to prophesy.

Ezekiel's membership of the priestly family is evident throughout the book. His concern with the Temple and its ritual betrays his background. However, the prophet was unable to fulfil his calling as a priest while living in exile far from Jerusalem away from the temple. It equally justifies the popular saying: "it was not easy for Ezekiel." That is to say, it was not easy for Ezekiel as a priest to live without the Temple. Above all, it was probably in the year that Ezekiel would have begun his priestly ministry that he was summoned by YHWH to serve as His prophet. The married experience of the prophet adds further to the complexity of his hard encounter in life. Ezekiel was married. But his wife died on the very day Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in 587 BC (Ezek. 24: 1-2, 15-24), thereby leaving him as a torn widower. And there is no mention of children in his marriage.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel was an educated person. He used his knowledge effectively to present his message. His prophecies portray a high knowledge of history (Ezek. 16.3), of mythology (Ezek. 28:11-19; 31:1-9), and of ship-building (Ezek.27:1-9). We also learn from the book that Ezekiel was influential among the exiles. He owned a house, and the elders normally came to consult him in his home (Ezek. 8:1). Throughout his ministry Ezekiel kept a close watch on events in Judah, and adapted his message to the needs of the changing situations.

It is also important to mention that the authorship of the book of Ezekiel is still one of the unsettled issues in biblical scholarship. But whatever position one takes, we must agree on one issue. That is, that the book must have contained some personal contributions of the historical prophet Ezekiel. However, there have equally been some level additions and moderations in the Book over the years probably by the disciples of the prophet.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Explain briefly some of the biographical factors that made life somewhat difficult for Ezekiel.

3.2 Historical Background

The prophetic ministry of Ezekiel must be understood against the turbulent background of the last days of Judah as an independent state. When King Josiah came of age to rule in 628, the Assyrian empire was weakened and tottering after the death of its last strong ruler, Ashurbanipal. Josiah seized the opportunity and began a major reform of Israel's religion along the lines of Deuteronomy's covenant (2 Kgs 22-24). But his untimely death in the battle field against Egypt in 609 ended any further reform. His son Jehoiakim was not so enthusiastic to further the reform (cf. Jer 7, 26, 36).

In 605 political events brought the Babylonians to power over Judah, and Jehoiakim eventually became embroiled in a scheme to fight for independence after Babylon seemed weakened by its near defeat by Egypt in 601. However, he had misjudged, and in 598, the Babylonian army sacked Jerusalem and exiled thousands of its leading citizens. Jehoiakim conveniently died, but they took the new king, Jehoiachin, off to Babylon as a prisoner. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, appointed Zedekiah, a brother of Jehoiakim and uncle of the young King Jehoiachin, as king-regent. He, too, remained quiet for a number of years, and then planned rebellion. This time, the Babylonian siege lasted from 589 to 586 and wiped out all of Judah's cities before taking Jerusalem itself (see 2 Kgs 25; Jer 37-45, 52).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Why do we describe the time of the prophetic ministry of Ezekiel as a turbulent period in the history of Israel?

3.3 Literary Style of the Prophet.

3.3.1 Revival of Pre-Literary Prophetic Form

Expressions

There are conscious imitations or revivals of primitive forms of communication such as the expression: "hand of the Lord" or the "Spirit of the Lord". Such expressions are typical of the Elijah/Elisha cycles.

Autodramatization

Most of the the pre-literary prophets equally deployed prophetic autodramatization, in which the prophets themselves acted out the prophecy. In a similar fashion, many of Ezekiel's phrases and actions are not unique, but imitate the styles and expressions of the earlier prophets (cf. **Module 1, Unit 3, 3.1.4; also Unit 4, 3.3.1**).

3.3.2 The Literary Uniqueness of Ezekiel

YHWH in the First Person Singular

The most striking aspect of the book is the consistent use of the first person singular ("I") by YHWH. Thus, YHWH himself speaks throughout in the first person singular. In choosing this device, the prophet emphasizes the power of the DIVINE WORD that overwhelms him.

Unique Expressions

The book, however, is marked by certain formulas and expressions unique among the prophetic texts: "son of man," "so that you will know that I am YHWH," "set your face against," "I the Lord have spoken." These and other expressions combined with the first-person narrative form to give a unified style to the whole literary text.

Repetition, Allegories and Imagery

The oracles seem much more verbose and repetitive than in earlier prophetic books. They also employ extensive allegories and imagery to introduce oracles, a use rarely found elsewhere.

Other Literary Forms

Panel System:

This is a literary technique, in which parts are constructed parallel to one another.

Spiraling Methods:

Spiraling techniques, in which the oracle moves to a higher or more intense level.

Halving Technique:

The halving technique is a literary method in which an echoing oracle follows the main oracle as an after wave.

All of these observations have strengthened the case that the book maintains a definable style much more likely due to the prophet's own personality and intention than to a school of editors. Ezekiel's prophecy shows strong indications of its original oral form, not only in the use of dramatic gestures and its stress on both speaking and saying, but in the specific references within the oracles to individual moments of crisis that arose during the protracted siege of Jerusalem from 589-586.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Now read through the Book of Ezekiel once more. There many other literary styles we did not mention. Mention them and their locations in the book.

3.4 Literary Structure of the Book

The book of Ezekiel is divided into three stages of the prophet's ministry: oracles of judgment (chaps. 1-24), oracles against foreign nations (chaps. 25-32), and oracles of salvation (chaps. 33-48). This corresponds to a three-part program: divine punishment of Israel, a prelude to restoration by punishment of the foreign powers who oppress Israel, and a promise to Israel of restoration to a new order. The last section in turn has two parts: promise of a new exodus and conquest of the land, i.e., a return from exile (chaps. 33-39) and a new division of the land and rebuilding of the holy city (chaps. 40-48).

3.5 The Theology of the Book

Ezek shares with earlier prophetic writings the conviction that God punishes disobedience and infidelity to the covenant by political disaster (Isa 10; Jer 4-6; Ezek 17). Ezekiel, like his predecessors and contemporaries, treats violations of the covenant in the language of adultery and prostitution (Hos 2; Jer 2; Ezek 16; 23). He certainly agreed with Jeremiah that God willed an

internal faithfulness to the covenant under Babylonian rule rather than a war for independence built on human pride and political motives alone; for Babylon was an instrument of divine correction (Jer 29; Ezek 4; 21).

However, what sets Ezekiel off from other prophetic books is the unique way the prophet develops certain traditional themes of (a) YHWH's lordship over all nations and events, (b) His holiness (transcendence), (c) insistence on both moral and cultic integrity, (d) the responsibility of each generation for its own acts, and finally (e) a conviction that God intends to restore Israel out of a totally free gift of grace.

3.5.1 The Divine Lordship of YHWH

Ezekiel's doctrine of God is most clearly seen in the formula that ends nearly every oracle: "so that they (or, 'you') will know that I am YHWH." God acts in events to manifest that he alone has the power to punish and restore. Divine activity reveals that YHWH does indeed take seriously the punishment of sin while at the same time never forgetting his lasting promise of care and covenantal love toward Israel. Ezekiel rarely stresses the tender side of God (although it is present in 16:1-14; 34:1-31) when an oracle can emphasize the power of God to achieve his ends. Above all, the divine concern is seen in YHWH's ability to give life when there appears to be only death (37:1-14; 47:1-12).

3.5.2 YHWH's Holiness

Ezekiel stresses the distance between our human hopes and actions and the divine will. Example, the prophet is regularly addressed as "son of man," to emphasize his mere mortality even as YHWH's spokesperson. Similarly, in the great vision of the heavenly chariot, he sees only the "likeness" of the "appearance" of God (1:26). Finally, he does not use Isaiah's "Holy One" but speaks instead of the holiness of God's "Name" (20:39; 36:20; 43:7; etc.). Because Israel bears God's name, it must not profane that name by its disobedience, making God a victim of human whim (20:30).

3.5.3 Moral and Cultic Demands

Ezekiel continues the traditions of vehement protest against the corruption of Israel in both injustice and in false worship (Ezek. 5-6; 17-18; 20 and 22). But the preponderance of specific offenses named are cultic, including profaning the Sabbath (20:12, 24), worshiping on high places (6:13; 20:28), and defiling the sanctuary (23:37-38). Ezekiel clearly understood that the root of Israel's turning from YHWH was a loss of "knowing" God and his covenant statutes. Chap. 20, with its remarkable history of Israel's recalcitrance even from the time of the exodus, makes a sharp point-at no time did Israel follow YHWH entirely from its heart – it was always rebellious! God gave his statutes and regulations to enable them to serve him faithfully, but it was not enough (20:40).

3.5.4 Individual Responsibility

The emphatic perceptive transition from corporate sin to individual is another point that makes the oracles of Ezekiel unique. It is about the individual consequences of both obedience and transgression (18:1-32, 33:10-20). Before Ezekiel, the people had been using a proverb that in effect claimed that God was unjust. Thus "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel; 'The Father eats sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge (18:2; also Jer. 31:29)'. For the people felt that the exile had come about partly as a result of the cumulative guilt of the past generations of Israelites who had lived in rebellion against God and his law. So, the exiled accused God of being unjust for punishing them for the sins of the fathers.

But Ezekiel in defence of the divine action of YHWH develops the lesson in chapter 18, thus tracing the cases of a father, a son, and a grandson, and then concludes with the teaching that God is never unjust. He maintains the specific point that each generation will have to take responsibility for its own decisions. Every generation, will confront the consequence of its own sins. Moreover, it is the individual who sinned that will be punished, and not the whole nation (Ezek. 18:1-10). So, the sins of the exiled generation is, or at least partly, responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the discretion of the Temple.

Above all, now is the time for the exiled to act in order to overcome the evil of both the past and the present and to stand before God in judgment and hope for a new future. The thematic passages on the prophet as watchman in Ezek. 3 and 33 build upon this insight.

Why should Ezekiel preach if no one will listen? The answer is in the twofold responsibility involved in warning. The prophet must be faithful to his charge to show God's justice and mercy in action whether anyone hears or not. The people can accept or reject the warning and the explanation of the prophet, but they must bear the burden. God will bring about punishment and salvation no matter what the response of the people is, but the prophet's words serve as a present sign to all of what is really happening and a lesson for all future generations.

3.5.5 Sin and Grace

Ezekiel demonstrates his uncompromising stance with sin. Not only does he find the rebellious spirit deeply ingrained in the human heart, but he has high expectations of human conduct before the holiness of God. He also proclaims the possibility of repentance (see 16:54-63; 33:10-16). Yet God does not act as a result of people's repentance, but out of his own prior holiness and covenant love (16:53, 60-61; 20:40-44; 34:11; 37:1-14).

Chapter 36 would go further to underscore the divine promise of salvation as the work of grace. Thus, YHWH will restore Israel because of his jealous wrath against the derision of other nations who mock his people's lowly fate (36:6). YHWH will act for the sake of His holy name, that is, in order to vindicate his holiness (36:22-23). Then he will give Israel a new heart and a new spirit so that they can obey and be faithful (36:26-28; cf. 11:17-20). Repentance follows God's initiative to save because Israel will recognize that God is still acting for them, and, as a result, they will be ashamed of their conduct (16:54; 36:32).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What makes the theology of Ezekiel different from other prophets?

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have been taken through the book of Ezekiel. You must have equally stumbled on some information which had taken you aback and probably led you to think more critical about your earlier conceptions about the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel. You must have observed the uniqueness of the prophet which is so much influenced by his biography. His education gives him some edge over most of earlier prophets as well as his contemporaries. Ezekiel proves himself to be a good historian and chronicler. His literary style is exceptional and will continue keep Old Testament biblical scholars baffling. Ezekiel is also a wonder theologian of the age. What counts more is not what he said as such, but the perspectival approach. Above all, the entire prophetic tradition is indebted to Ezekiel for the shift from collective to individual responsibility, and subsequent emphasis given to the theology. Ezekiel sings the tenor with octave that every generation will face the consequence of its sins both as an individual and as a nation. Ezekiel is simply the prophet.

5.0 SUMMARY

The discussion in this unit has centred solely on the Book of Ezekiel. Some of the points and issues discussed will be recounted below to enable you refresh your memory.

- i. Ezekiel was a priest, but could not exercise the priestly ministry due to some exigencies associated with his later vocation.
- ii. The authorship of the Book of Ezekiel remained one of the controversial issues in Old Testament biblical scholarship.
- iii. The prophetic ministry of Ezekiel was during one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the Israelites - the exilic period.
- iv. The historical accuracy found in the book has raised a lot of suspicions and awake more interest on the issue of authorship of the book.
- v. Ezekiel adopted many literary patterns of his predecessors, and through his ingenuity excel in literary styles such as the project of YHWH in the first person singular, the use of set forms of expression, the management of repetition, allegories and imagery, and other host of literary forms.
- vi. We also observed that Ezekiel was a man of tradition. He combined a lot of traditions in his writing: Jeremiatic tradition, the priestly and apocalyptic traditions. More interesting, however, what later tradition had made out of the writings of Ezekiel, which had produced a host of heretics and renegades.
- vii. The literary structure of the book that divided it into oracles of Judgement against Judah and against the nation, as well as oracles of salvation has influenced the study of Ezekiel along the line of divine punishment of Israel, restoration by punishment and the promise of a new exodus that leads to the return.
- viii. We ended the discussion by looking at the theology of Ezekiel. Besides following the tradition of the classical prophetic in condemning the social and moral evils and religious abuses of his days, Ezekiel laid special emphasis on YHWH's lordship, sovereignty and holiness. He further insisted on both moral and cultic integrity and on the responsibility of each individual and each generation for its own acts. Finally, but not all, Ezekiel was convinced that YHWH's intention to restore Israel. This act of restoration was interpreted by Ezekiel as purely the free gift of grace.

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Can God be regarded as unjust for sending the people of Israel to exile in Babylon?
2. Discuss the shift from corporate to individual responsibility in the book of Ezekiel.
3. What are some of the critical historical questions concerning the historical accuracy of the Book of Ezekiel?
4. Discuss the literary styles associated with the Book of Ezekiel.
5. What has the high literary technique found in the Book of Ezekiel come to prove in the context of authorship controversies?
6. Examine briefly the major theological themes in the book of Ezekiel.

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UNIT 5: THE BOOK OF DANIEL

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	95
2.0 OBJECTIVE	96
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	96
3.1 The Title of the Book	96
3.2 The Masoretic and Greek Versions of the Text	96
3.3 Historical Background.	97
3.4 Date and Authorship of the Book	98
3.4.1 The Authors of the Book	98
3.4.2 The Date of Composition of the Book	98
3.4.3 Unity of Authorship.	100
3.5 The Structure and Language of the Book	100
3.6 Literary Genre.	101
3.6.1 The Apocalyptic Genre	102
3.6.2 The Haggadic Genre	102
3.6.3 Implication for the Haggadic Genre of Daniel	102
3.7 The Purpose and Message of the Author.	102
3.8 The Theological Significance.	103
4.0 CONCLUSION	104
5.0 SUMMARY	1049
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	10519
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING	1050

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Our attention in the preceding unit was on the Book of Ezekiel. We observed the unique position of the book in the prophetic tradition, thanks to the literary quality and theological import of the Book. In this unit, we shall further explore another major prophet named Daniel. The prophet, like Ezekiel, gave new impetus to the prophetic tradition through his prophetic apocalyptic and haggadic discernment.

Our approach in this unit will be simple and systematic. First, we shall review some of the challenges connected with the title of the Book, the different text versions and the historical background of the book. The date, authorship and language of the prophet will be another area of interest. We shall also discuss the literary structure of the book and genre of the writings. We will conclude the discussion by presenting the purpose and message of the author, and finally the theological significance of the book.

You are reminded to read through the book of Daniel before advancing to the lecture in order to follow the discussion. We also advise you to keep the bible always close to you for reference purpose.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- identify the Daniel of the book as different to other Daniels mentioned in the Old Testament
- appreciate the complexity of the text of Daniel in its various versions
- know the difference between the Masoretic and LXX versions of the Text of Daniel
- discuss the historical background of the book of Daniel
- evaluate the date and authorship of Daniel
- appreciate the two major literary genres found in the book
- discuss the purpose, message and theological value of the book and relate them to the contemporary Nigerian situation

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Title of the Book

The book is named after the chief character of the stories in chapters 1-6, who is said to have received the visions recorded in chapters 7-12. Daniel is described as a Jew living in Babylon, who became influential in the court there, and continued to have authority when Darius the Mede conquered Babylonia. The stories tell how Daniel remained faithful to God in the time of the Exile, and how God protected him from his enemies. The visions describe the events of world history which followed the breakdown of Babylonian power, and the writer used these visions to show how God was directing events towards the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

Although Daniel is shown as playing an important part in the Exile, and afterwards, there is very little information about him in other parts of the Old Testament. Ezekiel spoke of a Daniel who was one of the righteous men of much earlier times, and who could be counted alongside Noah and Job (Ezek. 14.14, 20; 28.3). One of the leaders who returned from the Exile with Ezra was called Daniel (Ezra 8.2). And the name appears again among those who made a new Covenant with God in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 10.6). But it is unlikely that any of these were the same as the Daniel of Daniel 1-6. They belonged to different times.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. How many Daniels are mentioned in the Old Testament?
2. Why do you think that the Daniel of Dan. 1-6 is different from the other Daniels mentioned in the Old Testament?

3.2 The Masoretic and Greek Versions of the Text

The inspired character of the Book of Daniel is never in doubt. But the MT and LXX differ in location of the book within the Judeo-Christian scripture, and also in the text versions. Thus, the MT places Daniel in the Hagiographa (writings), that is, the third part of its canon (after Esther and before Ezra). The LXX and Vulgate on the other hand, include Daniel as one of the prophets, and locate the Book immediately after Ezekiel.

The challenge, however, is not necessary the difference in the location. It is the text versions in their canonical status. The canonical Daniel as given in the LXX and the Vulgate is considerably longer than the canonical Daniel of the MT. Many explanations have offered for such feature. Some biblical scholars have argued that there is some reason to think that the Book of Daniel circulated at

first in more than two forms. We now know from the manuscripts found at Qumran that there were at that time more stories about Daniel in circulation than are contained in any modern Bible.

In any case, the Greek version of the text is much longer than the Aramaic text of the MT in chapter 3. In addition to the information contained in the MT, the Greek version include the Prayer of Azariah (3:24-45) and the Hymn of the Three Jewish Men (3:46-90). It is important for us to note here that these sections were neither an addition to the Greek version nor deletion from the MT. They were there ab initio in the Greek version and formed part and parcel of the text; and at the same time they never formed part of the edition represented by the MT.

Secondly, some scholars are of the opinion that the extra information in the Greek text, under separate headings and in varying position as Susanna, Bel, and the Dragon, placed in the Vulgate at the end of Daniel as 13:1-64; 14:1-22; 14:23-42 respectively, suggest that these information were originally as distinct little books. Another suggestion is that the sources of these stories could be retraced to the Hebrew or Aramaic originals, including most likely the story of Susanna, despite the play on words in the Greek text of 13:55-59.

Also, important for us is to note that the Greek text of Daniel has come down to us in two forms. The first is that found in almost all the manuscripts, designated (for want of a better name) "Theodotion-Daniel". The second is that of the LXX, which until recently was known from only one Greek manuscript. Incidentally, it is the Greek version, containing the extra information or the so-called deuterocanonical, that the early church accepted as forming part of the canon of the Bible the Scriptures according to the Greek text. The so-called deuterocanonical, the Church insists, is divinely inspired and on a par with the rest of the book.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the difference between the Masoretic and Greek Versions of the Text of Daniel?
2. Which version of the text would you prefer? Give reasons for your preference.

3.3 Historical Background.

To understand the literary nature of the book and its theological claims, it is pertinent for us to discuss briefly the historical circumstances surrounding the book. We are already conversant with the relationship between Israel and Assyria. Thus, in the 8th cent. B.C, the Assyrians had turned the kingdom of Israel into a province of their vast empire and reduced the southern kingdom to a vassal state. Toward the end of the 7th cent., Cyaxares, king of the Medes, with the assistance of the Babylonians, captured Nineveh and utterly destroyed the Assyrian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon soon took over most of the former realm of the Assyrians and even extended it by his conquest of Judah in 587. We also remember that most of the people who survived Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah were deported to Babylonia between 598 and 582. However the successors Nebuchadnezzar could not hold the empire together. The Babylonian power continue to deteriorate until the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, who had already conquered Media and made himself master of both the Medes and the Persians, captured Babylon in 539 from its last king, Nabonidus, and his son, Belshazzar. It was after the defeat of Babylon in 539 that Cyrus permitted the exiles to return to their homeland. There was then a slow but steady growth in the number of Jews living in Palestine.

Thereafter the ancient Near East was ruled by the Persian successors of Cyrus the Great, among whom the only outstanding king was Darius I the Great, until Alexander the Great placed it under Greek dominion in 331.

In the 3rd century, Palestine was governed by the Greek dynasty of the Ptolemies, whose capital was at Alexandria in Egypt. Under their Persian and Ptolemaic rulers they enjoyed limited political autonomy and complete religious liberty.

But in the 2nd cent., the batten rulership was changed from the Ptolemies to the Seleucids. It was under the dominion of the Greek dynasty of the Seleucids that the Persian capital was relocated to Antioch in Syria, and Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in his endeavour, both for political and for cultural reasons, to hellenize the Jews of Palestine, tried to force them to abandon their ancient religion and to practice the common pagan worship of his realm. The ultimate outcome of this bloody persecution was armed revolt among the Jews, as told in 1-2 Macc. This conflict between the religion of the Jews and the paganism of their foreign rulers is also the basic theme of Daniel.

However, in Daniel, the conflict is regarded from God's viewpoint as long foreseen and tolerated by him, both to show the vast superiority of Israel's wisdom over all pagan philosophy and to demonstrate the truth that the God of Israel is the master of history, who "deposes kings and sets up kings" (2:21), until he ultimately establishes his universal kingdom on earth.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How can you explain that the Book of Daniel is not about the exilic experience of the Jews but a second century encounter between the Jews and the Seleucids Dynasty?

3.4 Date and Authorship of the Book

3.4.1 The Authors of the Book

For many centuries, the Jews and the Christians believed that Daniel, a prophet and statesman who lived in the 6th century BC was the author of the book. This fact is supported because Daniel speaks in the first person especially in the second half of the book (cf. Dan. 7:2, 4, 6, 28:1, 15, 9:2, 10:2). We can equally think in the same way today if only we are ignorant of the literary genre of Daniel - apocalyptic and haggadic.

For many scholars today, however, Daniel was not the author of the book. Most scholars now believe that the book of Daniel is a work that was composed in the second century B.C. Some of the reasons for this recent position will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

3.4.2 The Date of Composition of the Book

There are several arguments in favour of the date of the composition of the book to be shortly before the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 164 B.C..

a. Linguistic Argument

i. The language in which the book was written supports the idea that it was composed in the time of Antiochus IV. Daniel 2:4b-7.28 was in Aramaic, the language widely used by the Jews after the Exile. The rest of the book was in a style of Hebrew known to belong to a much later time, and may have been a translation from an Aramaic original.

ii. Many of the Persian vocabulary that appear in the work are of later period of contact with the Persian. In other words, it is after a longer period of contact with the Persians than at the very beginning of the Empire, and still long after Daniel's time. The same we can equally say about some Greek words used in the texts.

iii. It is not also accidental that the name of the real writer of this book was not disclosed. No new prophets would have been accepted around the second century B.C after the Israelites' bitter experience of false prophets before the fall of Jerusalem. Thus a custom gradually grew up by

which new writers used the names of people remembered from the past, in order to give their books authority.

iv. It is also possible that the stories of Daniel were told among the Jews before the book was written, and they provided an acceptable introduction to the visions which were newly composed.

v. Unlike Ezekiel, the Book of Daniel is infested with historical inaccuracy. Consequently, some scholars have tried to explain the inaccuracy from the point of view of the writer, who made use of oral traditions which were incomplete. This led the writer to make mistakes about the history of the earlier times, when he tried to give a complete background to the stories in their written form.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are some of the linguistic arguments to support the claim that the Book of Daniel was of a later post-exilic period?

Theological Argument

The theological outlook of the author, with his interest in angelology, his apocalyptic rather prophetic vision, and especially his belief in the resurrection of the dead, points inescapably to a period long after the Babylonian Exile.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Use any standard dictionary of the bible and find out the meaning of the following terms: angelology, apocalyptic vision and prophetic visions.

Historical Argument

i. The historical perspective of the author is often hazy for events in the time of the Babylonian and Persian kings but much clearer for the events during the Seleucid dynasty. This could suggest that the author is more of the Hellenistic age. For example:

- Daniel thought that Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of Jehoiakim (605 BC), and that the first deportation took place then (Dan. 1:1-4). But in fact Jerusalem fell in 598 BC, after the death of Jehoiakim.
- He thought that Belshazzar was the son of Nebuchadnezzar and that he became king of Babylon (Dan. 5:1-2, 13; 7.1). But in fact Belshazzar was son of Nabonidus, and the greatest authority he possessed was as his father's regent.
- The author thought that Darius the Mede conquered Babylon, and became the first king of the new empire (Dan. 5.30; 6.28). But in fact the first king of the new empire was Cyrus. His son Cambyses was next, followed by Darius who was a Persian.

ii. The author gave a detailed description of the profanation of the Temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 and the following persecution (9:27; 11:30-35). But he made only a general reference to the evil end that would surely come to such a wicked man (11:45), who had championed the desecration of the holy place. Contrasting both accounts would suggest that the book was composed shortly before the death of this king in 164, and most probably could have been around 165 B.C.

iii. There is also doubt, taking into consideration the period in question, if a Hebrew like Daniel could have been admitted into the Babylonian priesthood, how much more making him the head.

iv. Scholars are still in search of any extra-biblical allusions to the account of Nebuchadnezzar's madness (cf. Dan. 4:28-33), and the possibility of finding one would seem remote.

v. There is also some discrepancy in the account of the prophecy concerning the coming of four Persian rulers (Dan. 11:2-3). In fact there were eleven Persian rulers before the Greek victories over Persia, led by Alexander the Great. It is, therefore, difficult to see how Daniel could have foreseen accurately the more distant events and yet make mistakes about things that were to happen nearer to

his own time. But this difficulty disappears if we accept that the writer of the book of Daniel was at work in the time of the Greek Empire. His purpose in describing the visions was to convey an important message to the people of his own time. Probably he could only remember the four most famous of the Persian rulers, who were part of history by the time that he wrote.

Consequent upon the facts presented above, we may not hesitate to conclude that the visions of Daniel provide more accurate information about the Greek Empire, which might be the result of clear revelation. But when the visions refer to the time of the Persian Empire they are less accurate. That notwithstanding, we must equally admit that the few historical inconsistencies, which we have pointed out, are of little importance. They could not have negatively affected the message the author of the book is presenting.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Articulate briefly the historical arguments to show that the Book of Daniel could have been written during the time of the Greek Empire rather than Persian.

3.4.3 Unity of Authorship.

Until now we have spoken of the "author" of Daniel as if Daniel were entirely the work of one person.

- i. It is possible that the work was written by a person, for there is surely a singleness of religious outlook, spirit, and purpose throughout.
- ii. It is also possible that the work is a creation of several authors (a more probable view). If that is the case, we can equally say that those authors responsible for the work could have shared the same school of thought.
- iii. Another side of the argument could be that the work could have been a product of one author but with the possibility of using different older sources both oral and written.
- iv. Some exegetes consider the visions in chapters 7-12 to have been written by two, three, or even four different persons.
- v. It would seem that the book, even as it is preserved in the MT, received certain secondary additions after its original composition; such a supposition helps to explain some apparent inconsistencies in the text. For example, the prayer in 9:4-20, which is not entirely appropriate for the context, is written in much better Hebrew than is found in the rest of the book. This may be an older composition that was later inserted into the original work.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Do you agree that there is unity in the composition of the Book of Daniel?
2. How do you explain some of the inconsistencies in the text of Daniel?

3.5 The Structure and Language of the Book

The Book of Daniel as preserved in the MT, Dan lends itself to a natural division of two roughly equal parts. The first part (chaps. 1-6) contains six edifying stories about Daniel and his three companions at the royal court in Babylonia; the second part (chapters 7-12) is made up of four visions in which Daniel beholds, under symbolic images, the succession of the four "kingdoms" that God's people, the Jews, occupied from the time of the Babylonian conquest of Judea until God's establishment of his own kingdom for them.

As the book has come down to us in its Greek version, it also contains two extra materials found in chapter 3 and three stories of Daniel's exploits with Susanna, the priests of Bel, and the Dragon (chaps. 13-14), which seem to share a common purpose with chapters 1-6. In line with the reasoning of Hartman and Di Lelia, we may structure the book as follows:

- I. Exploits of Daniel and His Companions at the Babylonian Court (1:1-6:29)

- i. The Food Test (1:1-21)
- i. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Composite Statue (2:1-49)
- iii. Daniel's Companions in the Fiery Furnace (3:1-97)
- iv. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Great Tree (3:98[31]-4:34)
- v. The Writing on the Wall at Belshazzar's Feast (5:1-6:1)
- vi. Daniel in the Lion's Den (6:2-29)
- II. Daniel's Apocalyptic Visions (7:1-12: 13)
- i. The Four Beasts (7:1-28)
- ii. The Ram and the He-Goat (8:1-27)
- ii. The Interpretation of the 70 Weeks (9:1-27)
- iv. The Revelation of the Hellenistic Wars (10:1-12:13)
- III. Other Exploits of Daniel (13:1-14:42)
- i. Daniel's Rescue of the Chaste Susanna (13: 1-64)
- ii. Daniel and the Priests of Bel (14: 1-22)
- iii. Daniel's Destruction of the Dragon (14:23-42)

Outside the challenge posed by our making a decision between the two versions as we earlier presented, there is another one. It is the difficulty of the strange mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic within the book, which suggests that the author could have made use of the two different languages in the composition. The difference in the language use corresponds only partially to the division of the book into its haggadic and apocalyptic sections.

We describe the first and last sections of the book (Chapters 1-6 and 13-14) as haggadic, and the second section (Chapters 7-12) as apocalyptic. The haggadic section is in Aramaic, except 1:1-2:4a, which is in Hebrew. The apocalyptic section is written in Hebrew, except the first vision (chap. 7). The account of the find is a challenge to biblical scholarship.

However, two major explanations abound:

- i. Probably the whole book, except the Hebrew prayer of 9:4-20, was originally composed in Aramaic, and later on its beginning and end were translated into Hebrew. Some would further explain that the project of the translation was done probably to ensure that the book has a place in the Jewish canon of Scripture, or for nationalistic reasons. The hypothesis explains certain difficult Hebrew passages as representing faulty translations.
- ii. Another explanation is that the author of the Hebrew visions of chaps. 8-12 could have prefixed to his work an older Aramaic collection of four stories (chaps. 2-6) and one vision (chap. 7), then rounded out the whole by composing or translating in Hebrew the introductory story of chapter 1 and, for a smoother nexus, the opening verses of the second story (2:1-4a).

Whatever explanations offered, scholars are not yet unanimous on the matter. It is open for further inquiry.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What are the basic explanations given for the mixture of language in the Book of Daniel?
2. Which of the explanations given for the mixture of language in the Book of Daniel is more convincing to you? Why?

3.6 Literary Genre.

You can still remember the discussion in 3.2, where we mentioned the different locations of the canonical Book of Daniel in the Masoretic text on the one hand, and the LXX and Vulgate on the other hand. Our observation was that the MT placed Daniel in the Hagiograph (writings), the LXX

and Vulgate traditions made the book a part of the prophetic writing. We will be surprised to discover that the author could not have intended to present a work in the prophetic tradition. It rather appealed to a different literary genre which may be strange and surprising to modern readers: the haggadic genre and the apocalyptic genre.

3.6.1 The Apocalyptic Genre

Daniel employed apocalyptic genre in chapters 7-12, which is quite distinct from prophecy (cf. Module 1, Unit 4, 3.7). It consists in a certain mysterious "revelation," received in fantastic visions or transmitted by angels, both about past and present history and about the eschatological establishment of God's messianic kingdom. Inasmuch as this literary device makes use of some famous character of the distant past as the recipient of this revelation, events that are past history to the writer are presented as prophecies of future happenings. In a broad sense, however, this form of writing can rightly be regarded as a kind of prophecy, because it gives an interpretation of history in God's name, as seen by the author of the book.

3.6.2 The Haggadic Genre

The haggadic genre, used in chaps. 1-6 and 13-14, gets its name from the mishnaic Hebrew word *haggida* with the literal meaning: a "setting forth," a "narrative." The term is often used in the sense of a "story" having little or no basis in actual history, but told for the sake of inculcating a moral lesson.

- i. If such a story is a free elaboration of some true event of actual history, it is more exactly called an "haggadic midrash."
- ii. But the story may also be a pure "haggada," i.e., a free composition throughout with no historical basis at all.

Often it is impossible to say how far, if at all, a haggadic story is based on actual history.

3.6.3 Implication for the Haggadic Genre of Daniel

- i. We observe here that the stories about Daniel are clearly haggadic. So, they cannot be taken as strict history. In other words, the author does not intend the stories as historical, and therefore, cannot be accused of error if he makes inaccurate statements about history.
- ii. We have no way of knowing whether the Daniel of these stories was really a historical character, about whom popular legends gradually clustered, or whether he was simply a creation of Jewish folklore. We find a similar situation in Ahiqar of the Aramaic Ahiqar legend, who was a wise counsellor of the Assyrian kings (cf. ANET 427-30). In fact the story shares some common characteristics with that of Daniel.
- iii. For the inspired author of our book the historicity of the person of Daniel or the stories was out of question and unimportant. He stressed the spiritual message that he wished to convey by these haggadic stories.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Explain the two terms: "haggadic" and "apocalyptic."
2. Is it justifiable to classify apocalyptic writing as a kind of prophecy?
3. What is the difference between haggadic story and Midrash haggadic story?
4. What are some of the practical implications of classifying the Book of Daniel as haggadic stories?

3.7 The Purpose and Message of the Author.

- i. The work was written primarily for the purpose of encouraging the Jews to remain faithful to their ancestral religion at a time when they not strongly felt the allurements of the higher worldly culture of Hellenism, which was intimately connected with Hellenistic paganism.
- ii. The primary recipient of the message were the Jews, who were suffering a bloody persecution. It heartens them not to abandon the Law of Moses and accept the religion of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.
- iii. The author of Daniel, therefore, is particularly concerned with demonstrating the superiority of the wisdom of Israel's God over the merely human wisdom of the pagans, and with showing his immense power, which can and will rescue his faithful ones from their persecutors.
- iv. The message is not only for believers of Daniel's own age and place, but for believers of all times. The book has a message of enduring worth: God is the master of history, who uses the rise and fall of nations as preparatory steps in the establishment of his universal reign over all people.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the purpose of the Book of Daniel?
2. Do you think that the Book of Daniel has some relevance in our present age?

3.8 The Theological Significance.

a. The Sovereignty of God

The theme of the book is God's sovereignty, "The Most High God is sovereign over the Kingdoms of men" (5:21). The book of Daniel set out to pursue this thesis. So, in the book we see the emergence of different world powers – Babylon and its fall and the emergence of the Persian Empire. The destiny of the subsequent world powers was also revealed. It was done through an apocalyptic vision. Apocalyptic characteristics such as dreams and visions, often centred on the heavenly throne-room, portraying a future salvation, which transcends ordinary experiences, are seen in the book.

The book sets all the events into the background of God's purposes for the world. God's rule is more certain and more significant than all the empires of men. These will come and go, but God's purposes go from strength to strength, and His rule will crown all things. The rule of the righteous will come, and 'one like a son of man' shall lead them (Dan. 7:13-14, 27). In other words, the kingdom will be for those who lived a holy and righteous life (Dan. 12:2-3)

In several respects, the ideas expressed in Daniel are of prime importance in the history of religious thought. Even in its literary form, the work presents in chapters 7-12 the first clear example of canonical apocalyptic biblical tradition in the apocalyptic style of writing in its fullest development, a literary genre destined to have tremendous influence during the next few centuries.

b. Angelology

We also observe that Daniel gives to the angels a very significant role as the ministers of God, through whom God reveals his will to humans. So, the book goes considerably further than previous books and points the way to the highly developed angelology of the rabbinic and early Christian literature.

c. Resurrection

Likewise, a theological contribution of immense significance is the clear teaching on the resurrection of the dead (12:2), which is something unique in the Hebrew OT. Thus the concept of resurrection is much more meaningful to the Semitic mentality than the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The story provides comfort concerning those who have died for their faith, for there will be a day of resurrection leading to eternal life. Some who have sinned greatly will rise to be

punished (Dan. 12:2-3). Thus we see that the writer of Daniel grasped the truth which escaped the writer of Ecclesiastes.

d. Messianism

Again, the messianism of Daniel brings Israel's hope of salvation to the final stage before its full realization in the New Testament. It is also important for us to understand that the concept of the "son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" (7:13) does not refer directly to an individual Messiah. The reference to individual Messiah is only of later development, which definitely becomes the favourite expression by which Jesus of Nazareth would refer to himself.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The exposé of the Book of Daniel shows clearly that those who go after the historicity of either the person of Daniel or the stories contained in the book are far from understanding the purpose of the writing. Daniel is both apocalyptic and haggadic, therefore should be weighed and judged on a different scale. Once we are convinced of that, we cannot then but appreciate the contributions of the author of Daniel to enriching the prophetic tradition in particular, and the canonical Judeo-Christian scripture in general. Daniel taught us to think apocalyptical and haggadical within the given world of the scripture.

Daniel confronts the challenging issue of inculturation, which has dominated the contemporary theological system. The author is positively bold enough to combine Hebrew and Aramaic for the sake of proclaiming the sovereignty of the "Most High God" over the Kingdoms of men." For him, language is a means and not an end in itself. Hence the argument on language becomes secondary to the author's commitment. Theologically, Daniel has kept us wondering if he was not consciously anticipating Christian theology in his highly developed angelology, messianism, and the doctrine of resurrection. Read Daniel once more with a Christian goggle then judge if he could not stand out as the first Christian theologian.

5.0 SUMMARY

Our discussion regarding the Book of Daniel has been bordered with many historical and literary issues. But probing beyond history and literary brings us closer to the original intention of the author. However, some of the issues raised will be outlined below.

- i. The title of the Book of Daniel may not necessary represent a historical person as such. That, however, does not diminishes the worth of the book.
- ii. Daniel is one of the Old Testament books with complex textual history. There are two main versions of Daniel - Masoretic and Greek versions. The later is further composed of the popular Theodotion-Daniel as found in the Vulgate and the LXX forms. We also stressed the difference between the Masoretic and the Greek versions.
- iii. Historically, we placed the book within the happens of the second century B.C.in the time of the Seleucids dynasty.
- iv. We argued that there were more reasons to believe that Daniel of the 5th century B.C. could not have been the author of the Book. Our argument was built on linguistics, theology and history. We finally reflected different views regarding the single and multiple authorship of Daniel without making a conclusive statement on the issue because of its nature.
- v. We equally observed that the book could conveniently be divided into three sections of haggadic-apocalyptic-haggadic. Some of the challenging issues surrounding the structure and language of Book were discussed. Our conclusion was that the issue would be subjected to further inquiry.
- vi. We went further to evaluate the literary genre of the book and discover that our author unprecedentedly introduced the apocalyptic and haggadic style into the world of the canonical

scripture. We concluded that the understanding of the apocalyptic and haggadic nature of the book answered most of the historical questions raised against the author.

vii. We also appreciate the purpose and message of the book, and discovered the book, though not primarily written for our age, would remain an indispensable treasure not only in the religious circle but also in the literary forum.

viii. Finally, we stumbled on the rich theology of Daniel. According to our observation, the theology of Daniel would ever remain relevant for the Christian theology.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the theology of Daniel and its relevance in the development of some Christian theological themes.
2. What are the practical implications of the literary genre associated with the Book of Daniel?
3. Do you think that the apocalyptic and haggadic nature of the Book of Daniel is good enough to be included in the prophetic books?
4. What lessons can be learnt from Daniel's integrity and leadership qualities by our leaders today?
5. What difference does it make for you to argue that Daniel is not a historical figure?

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MODULE 3: THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

UNIT 1: THE PROPHETS AMOS AND HOSEA

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	106
2.0 OBJECTIVES	106
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	107
3.1 The Book of Amos	107
3.1.1 The Uniqueness of the Book	107
3.1.2 The Prophet Himself	107
3.1.3 The Period of Amos	108
3.1.4 The Beginning and End of the Ministry	109
3.1.5 The Composition of the Book	109
3.1.6 Literary Style and Genre	110
3.1.7 The Theology of Amos	110
3.2 The Book of Hosea	112
3.2.1 Hosea's Family	112
3.2.2 Gomer's Unfaithfulness	113
3.2.3 Hosea's Understanding of the Covenant	114
3.2.4 The Message of Hosea	115
4.0 CONCLUSION	116
5.0 SUMMARY	117
6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT	117
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING	118

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Our attention was drawn in the last module to the prophetic activities of the pre-literary prophets, and the major prophets of the literary class. In this module, we shall concentrate on the 12 Minor Prophets. Of the 12 prophets that will attract our attention, 10 will be associated with the Judah, while only two come from the Northern Kingdom. The two from the North are Amos and Hosea.

We shall divide the discussion into two sections covering the Book of Amos and the Book of Hosea respectively. The personal and social history of the prophets, the socio-political situation of the time and their respective messages to us will be among the issues that will occupy us in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- appreciate the uniqueness of the Book of Amos
- analyse the composition and evaluate the literary style and genre of the Book of Amos
- discuss the personal and social history of the two prophets: Amos and Hosea
- evaluate the different understanding of the covenant as conceived by the two prophets
- discuss the theology and message of the prophets and apply them to the Nigerian situation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Book of Amos

3.1.1 The Uniqueness of the Book

The book of Amos has a unique significance in the Old Testament prophetic tradition, not only because it gives us an account of the oracles of one of the early classical prophets, who may be regarded as an inaugurator of a totally new prophetic tradition. It is also the first literary collection of prophetic oracles preserved in Israel as a separate book. That is to say that there were many prophets in Israel for centuries before the time of Amos, but the record of their activity is embodied in oral traditions and in the general history of the nation. It was Amos and his disciples that taught the classical prophets the value of collection. The collection and preservation did not occur overnight. It took some long process as we earlier observed (cf. Module 1: Unit 5), which took the normal prophetic course. Thus, for Amos, his prophetic activity was considered normal, nothing novel; he was merely doing what God had always intended a faithful prophet to do (2:11; 3:8). But it was the simplicity and thoroughness with which Amos "discharged the office of prophet, combined with the swiftness with which his words were validated by disastrous historical events that induced men to preserve his oracles and some slight record of his activity. Then, as men discovered the power of the written word to perpetuate the spirit and mission of the prophet and to inspire and train others to take up a similar mission, it became the practice for those under the influence of a prophet to record his utterances.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Mention few facts that make the Book of Amos unique in the prophetic tradition

3.1.2 The Prophet Himself

Amos was, until the sudden beginning of his prophetic ministry, a layman with no professional training for a religious office. He was a shepherd (Am. 1:1) and pincher of sycamore fruit (7:14) in the region of Tekoa, some five miles South of Bethlehem and ten miles South of Jerusalem. He could have come from the lower social classes of ancient Israel, for the sycamore fruit is associated with the poor. Nevertheless Amos had some edge that made him outstanding. He had had a deep appreciation of the religious heritage of his people and an ability to express his convictions in poetic language of the first order. Again, his prophetic call would take him to the markets in the larger centres, and might well have journeyed as far Northern as Damascus.

He lived in the first half of the eighth century during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C) in Israel and Uzziah (791-740) in Judah (Amos 1:1), a period in the history of Israel and Judah marked with unprecedented prosperity. Through from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos was called to prophesy in the northern kingdom. His prophetic task of moving from South to North, passing from the Judean city of Jerusalem to deliver his oracles at Bethel and Samaria in the Northern kingdom, has led to attempts to make him a northerner by origin by some biblical scholars. Some theories have equally been projected to support the idea:

- i. One theory is that Amos began as a shepherd and pincher of sycamore fruit in the North, took up his mission there, and removed to Tekoa only when the authorities expelled him from the Northern kingdom because of his harsh pronouncements of doom.
- ii. Another is that there was a second Tekoa in the Northern kingdom where Amos lived, though no historic reference to such a place has been found.

The absence of sycamores in the region of Tekoa, since they grow only at lower altitudes, and their presence at some points in the North, has reinforced these attempts. The sycamore may also have grown, however, in lower parts of Judea not too far from Tekoa, so that Amos could have discharged both occupations in that region. It must also be recognized that, for Amos, Israel and Judah were one people of God, and his concern as a prophet was for the whole nation. The most forceful leadership of the nation in his time was in Samaria rather than in Jerusalem, and it was urgent that he reach with his message those who would be most able to influence national policy.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. What are some of the social challenges Amos would face in his call to the prophetic ministry?
2. What are some of the outstanding qualities of Amos?

3.1.3 The Period of Amos

The first half of the eighth century B.C. was singularly promising for both Israel and Judah. This is partly due to the military exploits of the Assyrian Adadnirari III, who in 805 B.C. crushed Damascus, Israel's northern neighbour, thus to the advantage of the Palestinian states, who had then little to fear from the Syrian for many years to come. King Jehoash of Israel was clever to seize the opportunity to quickly reclaim the border cities of Israel under the Syrian control in its days of power (II Kings 13:25). But the death of Adadnirari III in 782 B.C. weakened the Assyrian empire. It was not until the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C. that the West was once more troubled by the Assyrian.

In this period of temporary peace Israel was free not only to extend her borders but also to control the trade routes of the ancient world that now passed through her territory. As a consequence of the military successes and territorial expansion (2 King 14:25, 15:2; Chronicles 26:6-8), great wealth accrued to the two kingdoms. A rich merchant class developed, sharing the nation's prosperity with the nobility and building for themselves elaborate homes. But the common people had no share in this new wealth. Earlier wars had weighed heavily on them, and now they found themselves helpless before the rapacity of power and land-greedy upper classes. Small farmers were dispossessed to make possible the development of large estates. Israel, whose strength had been in the mass of its solid, independent citizens, was quickly becoming divided into two classes -the dissolute rich and the embittered poor.

The shrines at Bethel and Gilgal were crowded continually by the prosperous citizens who interpreted the nation's prosperity as a certain sign of God's favour and who looked for yet greater days to come. Priests and prophets at the sanctuaries benefited sufficiently from the lavish offerings that they were not inclined to do or to say anything that might dampen the mood of confidence and exultation.

Amos, eyes sharpened by the frugal, austere life of his desert regions, by the insights of faith that came to him from earlier prophets, and by his own intense consciousness of God's justice, would sense the peril in which Israel was placed by the dishonesty of its courts, the maltreatment of its

poor, and the profligacy of its upper classes and concluded that it is ripe for judgment (8:2), thus the doom that awaits Israel.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. How was the down fall of Syria an advantage to Israel?
2. Describe the conditions of the poor in the midst plenty during time of Amos?
3. What significant role did the priests play during the time of Amos?

3.1.4 The Beginning and End of the Ministry

An agreement on the date that Amos began his prophetic ministry is one of the unsettled issues among biblical scholars. For some scholars, the popular mood of confidence in the nation and the freedom from any fear of invasion points to the period ca. 760 B.C. or shortly afterward. For others, that Israel is soon to be invaded indicates that he had knowledge of Tiglathpileser III's westward movement, which began in 745 B.C.

However, Amos pronouncement of doom is based upon his conviction that such corruption and unfaithfulness as he saw in Israel could not long remain unpunished by Israel's God. The duration of his ministry and its geographical expansion also suffer the same uncertainty among scholars. He must have gone beyond Bethel (2:9; 4:1; 6:1), although the termination of his ministry took place in Bethel (7:10-17).

Amos' sharp critique of the existing order in Israel and his announcement of an invader who would overrun the country and carry the populace into captivity had included a specific prophecy of the fall of the house of Jeroboam (7:9). This was interpreted as treason. Amos was accused to the king of conspiring against him and was ordered to return at once to Judah. The spokesman for the king was the priest of the royal sanctuary, Amaziah. His words to Amos were sharp with scorn. He assumed that all the prophet wanted to achieve was that people would be sufficiently disturbed to pay him well for a more cheerful oracle - a form of religious blackmail which apparently was not uncommon.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. What was the possible existing order in Israel which Amos criticised?
2. What was the reaction of the officials to Amos and his message?

3.1.5 The Composition of the Book

They are equally divergent opinions on whether Amos left behind him written documents containing his oracles.

i. Autography

At many points the freshness and force of the text suggest Amos' direct authorship. The remarkably sound condition of the text, however, lends support to the view that either Amos or an amanuensis set down the oracles in writing

ii. Oral Tradition

The Scandinavian traditio-historical school holds that the oracles of Amos, like those of all other prophets, were transmitted orally for a long period.

iii. Editorial Hand

The biographical passage in 7: 10-17, which speaks of Amos in the third person, the superscription in 1:1, the pronouncement of doom on Judah (2:4-5) would suggest some editorial interference at the early stage of the book.

So, we do not rule out the possibility of Amos personally contributing to a part of the work, part of it generated through the dynamic nature of oral tradition, and also some editorial hand. But more important for us at this stage is to consider the canonical book of Amos as one whole unit presented by the believing Community to her people.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What is your opinion regarding the authorship of the Book of Amos?

3.1.6 Literary Style and Genre

i. Poetic Form

The oracles of Amos are cast in a poetic form, which is eminently suited to their content. He shows himself skilled in the use of a variety of meters. Perhaps most effective of all is his employment of the dirge-like Kinah meter, which builds up the feeling of ominous expectation, the very music of the poetry that proclaims the message of relentless doom. The poetry itself is powerful in its simplicity and rarely surpassed by any other prophet in the beauty of its form or the vividness of its images.

ii. Repetition and Refrain

Amos shows genius in the organization of his oracles, thus making effective use of the repetition of certain words as a refrain. In his opening sermon (chs. 1-2) each division begins: "For three transgressions ... , and for four," and within this framework, which remains the same while the content changes, the audience sees episodes of judgment upon neighbouring nations, each one coming closer to Israel than the last. So also the fivefold repetition of the phrase " 'Yet you did not return to me,' says the LORD," in 4:6,8-11, and the beginning of successive oracles with "woe" in chs. 5-6, have this same cumulative effect. We meet the same device again in the three visions of 7: 1-9, where twice the prophet prevails upon God to withhold judgment, and then, the third and last time, is able to restrain the judgment no longer.

Amos can simply be described as a finished craftsman. He is no novice in his employment of poetic forms.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

1. Read through the Book of Amos and identify other literary genres that are not mentioned in this unit.
2. Demonstrate how Amos is a finished craftsman in the use poetic forms.

3.1.7 The Theology of Amos

i. Judgment

Obviously in Amos, the announcement of impending judgment is very consistent. We equally discover his insistent that the unrepented sin of the nation is certainly to bring doom. He is so absorbed in his message of doom that he has no word like Hosea's concerning the future beyond. It would appear that it was the covenant of love between God and Israel that made God more severe in his dealings with Israel than with any other nation (3:2).

ii. Repentance and Restoration

Unlike Isaiah, the doctrine of the remnant in Amos is only in its nascent stage (5:4, 15). But more important for us is that Amos never closed the door for repentance and restoration. He had no hope for the nation as a whole, but surely that which sent him North to brave the insults of priests and people was the hope that some might hear and live. He expected the nation to be decimated (5:3) but not to be totally destroyed (9:8ff).

iii. Reinterpretation of the Covenant

Nowhere does Amos make mention of the covenant, but it is implicit in his conception of the relation between God and Israel. Amos rejected the popular conception that presents the covenant as a legal agreement. For Amos, the covenant is more than an agreement. There is nothing so special about Israel that should attract God to choose Israel. It is not Israel's righteousness or might. But God simply choose them without Israel graciously. So, Israel should not glory on its privileged position among the nations, but rather should see it more as responsibility. It is within this context that we can appreciate Amos' sharp critique of Israel in 9:7, which, of course, could have embarrassed his Jewish contemporaries.

iv. YHWH as God of all the Nations

It is significant that Amos never speaks of God as "the God of Israel." This title implied too often a narrow nationalism which Amos is out to defeat. Yahweh is the God of all nations; the "Lord of hosts." Amos' God is the creator God of the J document, from whom all nations have their life. It is the Lord of history by whose hand the destinies of all peoples are determined. Before his dread power none can stand. He is a God who creates, destroys and recreates. Let Israel persist in sin, and God will use such nations as Egypt or Assyria to punish the sinful nation. And because he is the God of the whole earth and of heaven and Sheol, there can be no place of escape from his wrath (9:2-6)

YHWH has a hand in all their histories, and he holds all equally responsible for their sins against their fellow men (chs. 1-2). In Israel he has made himself known in a special way, and this knowledge is the secret of Israel's unique destiny, but far from conferring special privileges, it creates rather special responsibility (3: 1-2).

v. Justice and Righteousness as Moral Demands from YHWH

The covenant relation of Israel with YHWH places huge responsibility on Israel to reflect in her life the justice and truth and mercy of God. The absence of these in the common life of the nation is evidence that the bond with God has been broken. Amos' primary call to Israel is: "Repent and return to God." Sometimes his emphasis upon concrete changes in conduct: Seek good, and not evil, and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, has seemed open to the interpretation that he was offering a way of salvation by moral reformation. But for Amos all reformation of conduct was dependent upon a radical repentance.

The heart of Amos' faith is the conviction that only a nation in which the dealings of humans with one another are just can be in any true sense a people in covenant with God. For him, it is axiomatic that the whole future for Israel depends upon its relationship with God. Divorced from God, the nation must quickly perish. Therefore, the dishonesty of judges, the cruelty of rapacious businessmen and landowners, and the irresponsibility of prophets were not merely blemishes upon the national life, to be exposed and reformed; they were evidences of a deeper and more serious sickness, the repudiation of its God by the nation, and thus a betrayal of the nation that must bring

its ruin. It is the justice, holiness, and purity of God that calls for justice, holiness, and purity in the common life of Israel.

vi. A New Understanding of "Day of YHWH"

Popular expectation in Amos' time was fixed on a glorious "day of Yahweh" when Israel would triumph over all her foes. The promises of God to Israel that are recorded in the traditions of the past are expected soon to be fulfilled. The existing prosperity is interpreted as a sign of God's favour. But, where king, priests, prophets, and people see only a culmination of national success in the near future, Amos would see only darkness and disaster. He proclaims a day of Yahweh, but it is to be darkness and not light, fiery judgment and not deliverance (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2; 5:6, 18-20). Fire is to consume the filth of men not only in Israel but also among the nations.

vii. Worship and Cultic Exercises

Amos condemned in strong terms the abuses around the altars and other places of worship (cf. 2:7-8, 12; 3:14; 4:4-5; 5:21-27; 7:9; 8:3; 9:1). The evil lay, not in the idols alone, but also in the delusion that God could be kept favourable toward the nation by the offering of sacrifices and by the ritual of the cult. He called for the cessation of such sacrifices, songs, and ritual (5:21-23) because they are direct insult on God, hence God's disapproval of the perversions. That notwithstanding, Amos still have some sympathetic interest in religious worship and festivals (cf. 8:5)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

1. Which of the above theological theme(s) do you think that speaks more to the present Nigerian situation?
2. What are the sins of Israel in Amos?

3.2 The Book of Hosea

The prophet Hosea, whose name comes from the same root as names like, Joshua and Jesus, is said to come from the northern kingdom of Israel. The main evidence cited to support the fact that he is from the northern Israel, is that references are made to places and sites in the northern kingdom. Tabor, Samaria, Bethel, Jezreel, Ramah are some prominent northern towns mentioned in the book. Also, he demonstrated an unequalled love for his native country (northern) Israel in his writings.

The prophetic ministry of Hosea covers the last thirty years of the northern kingdom. His oracles reflect the political uncertainty that the northern kingdom was experiencing at that time. It was a tragic period in which six kings (following Jeroboam II) reigned within twenty-five years (2 Kings 15:8-17:41), four (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahia and Pekah) were murdered by their successors while in office, and one (Hosea) was captured in battle; only one (Menehem) was succeeded on the throne by his son. For years, during the reign of Jeroboam II the nation of Israel prospered (Hosea 4-5). After the death of Jeroboam II, decline set in and the judgment of God, represented by the Assyrian destruction was approaching. For prophet Hosea, the collapse of Israel in 722 BC, was largely due to its adoption of an alien lifestyle borrowed from Canaanite neighbours. Every part of their life was bound up with Baal-worship, and the nation leaders had promoted it (Hos. 5:1ff). Lawlessness and injustices reigned as a result of burglary, robbery, murder, drunkenness and political intrigues were common (6, 7-7:7). This caused this Lord much grief.

3.2.1 Hosea's Family

Hosea 1-3 seems to contain details of Hosea's personal life and of his relationship with the woman Gomer. But scholars interpret these chapters in widely different ways.

Hosea 2 is a parable in which God speaks as the husband (Hos. 2.16) and Israel is the unfaithful wife (Hos. 2.11, 15, 16). Some scholars regard Hosea 1 and 3 in the same way, and say that these chapters have nothing to do with the life of Hosea. But this interpretation is unconvincing, because in these chapters we read of Hosea's own experiences, and of what he did at God's command (Hos. 1.2; 3.1).

Some scholars regard Hosea 1 and 3 as two different accounts of the same events. It is clear that these chapters do come from different sources, because Hosea 1 is a piece of biography, while Hosea 3 is a piece of autobiography, i.e. in the first chapter somebody else tells Hosea's story, and in the third chapter Hosea tells his own story. But the two chapters give different accounts of Hosea's relations with his wife. According to Hosea 1.3, Gomer bore the prophet a son in due time after their marriage, but Hosea 3 makes no mention of children, and mentions a time of stern discipline, which may have included sexual abstinence. Even stronger evidence is the fact that Hosea 3.1 refers to Hosea's wife as an 'adulteress'. This word can only be used of a woman who is already married, so Gomer must already have been Hosea's wife at the beginning of the events described in this chapter. Even though she had been unfaithful, Hosea was to love her again (Hos. 3.1).

So we see that the most convincing explanation is that Hosea 1 and 3 give details of two different events in the relationship between Hosea and Gomer. Hose 1 tells how the prophet took her as his wife; Hosea 3 tells how he reclaimed her after she had deserted him for a lover and then been taken into slavery to pay off a debt.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Why do some scholars regard Hos. 1 and 3 as two different accounts of the same event?

3.2.2 Gomer's Unfaithfulness

It is not clear whether Gomer was a prostitute before she married Hosea or whether she fell into sin afterwards. According to Hosea 1.2, God told Hosea to marry a prostitute.

i. Some scholars accept this as accurate; they explain that Gomer was a cult prostitute involved in sexual relationships as part of pagan worship and honoured by those in Israel who worshipped the Baalim.

ii. Other scholars, however, point out that though the verse describes God's first call to Hosea, it must have been written at a later time in his life. They suggest that in fact Hosea married a woman who only turned to sin after their marriage, and that later Hosea reinterpreted God's call in the light of what had happened, saying God gave him Gomer as a wife. She has become a prostitute.

There is also doubt whether the children of Gomer belonged to Hosea, or were born as a result of her adultery. The first child was clearly Hosea's own child (Hos. 1.3). Nothing is said about the father or fathers of the second and third child, but their names suggest that Hosea disowned them: Not-pitied and Not-my-people (Hos. 1:6, 9). Another interpretation of these verses is that Hosea gave these names to his own children simply as a sign to the Israelites of God's attitude towards them, in much the same way as Isaiah named his children in a way that would be a sign to Judah (see Isa. 7.3; 8.3).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

What are some of the issues raised regarding the marriage of Gomer?

Do you think the children of Hosea are according to Jewish tradition legitimately acceptable?

3.2.3 Hosea's Understanding of the Covenant

The noun "covenant" appears only three times in the Book of Hosea (2:18; 6:7; 8:1). Nevertheless, the prophet was most absorbed clarifying the meaning and quality of the covenant relationship between God and people of Israel. The prophet was conscious that Yahweh had formally initiated the covenant at Sinai and that he had issued directives on Israelite existence. Hosea also claimed that the relationship between Yahweh and his people had its informal beginnings in the era of the Exodus (9:10; 11:1; 13:4). In the covenant offered at Sinai (Exod. 19-24) and renewed at Shechem (Josh. 24), the crucial element was the relationship between Israel and her God.

In Hos. 9:10-13:16 and elsewhere the prophet demonstrates his profound knowledge of Israel's history, which reflects continual violations of the covenant. The cherished association between the transcendent deity and his people had been repeatedly defiled.

Hosea never conceived the Yahwistic covenant as a bargain between equals. But unfortunately the cultic exercises at Bethel, Gilgal, and Samaria have turned the covenant into affairs of equal partners. Hosea knew as fully as Amos had that the callous people were inclined to consider Yahweh a subservient partner who might readily be pressed into supporting their thoughtless aspirations.

In an effort to counter the prevailing religious trends, Hosea called on his people to see the covenant for what it truly was. In his proclamations, he emphasized the word *hesed*, "covenant love," and imputed to that Hebrew noun a new and vital significance (2:19; 4:1; 6:4, 6; 10:12; 12:6). It assumes a profound meaning of "steadfast love" (2:19; 6:6; 10:12), "love" (6:4; 12:6), and "kindness" (4:1). This understanding is important for Israel's appreciation of her covenant relationship with deity. It represents among other realities confidence in the covenant partner as well as devotion to him. It denotes responsibility and loyalty to each other.

In Hos. 4:1 and 6:6, *hesed* has to do with good behaviour in the light of what Yahweh expects of Israel. In both passages, the noun "knowledge" also appears. Together these verses affirm that although Yahweh desires "covenant love" and "knowledge" on Israel's part, these two cardinal virtues are sorely lacking. "Knowledge" relates directly to the confession that Israel was expected to give to the God of Sinai, who had already revealed to her his name, nature, and will. Presently the people, who had perverted their dealings with one another and defiled their relationship with deity, were betrayed by an ignorance that was everywhere apparent. Hebrew man's relationship with God and neighbour had been severely ruptured. And with her breach of faith, Israel had offended the deity. Israel's talent for corrupting the covenant relationship is summed up in Hosea's disclosure (cf. Hos. 4:1-2).

Hosea 4:1-3 reveals that "what Yahweh required was not the mindless practice of ceremonial religion, but a genuine understanding of who, and what kind of God, Yahweh was, and an intelligent grasp of the ethical implications of worshipping him." Israel's bankruptcy thus occasioned Yahweh's negative assessment of his people: "Your love [*hesed*] is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away" (6:4). Israel's *hesed* was remarkably undependable.

Hosea was convinced that the northern kingdom had been woefully delinquent in fulfilling the terms of the previously established covenant between God and people. Accordingly, Hosea let loose harsh threats and judgments that were on a par with those of Amos. Nevertheless, Hosea also spoke of Yahweh's pathos in having to bring a historical catastrophe on Israel and his determination to maintain a highly personal relationship with the people of his choice. Though Hosea was no

exponent of easy salvation, the reality of Israel's heedlessness to divine expectation was set against the reality of Yahweh's extraordinary faithfulness.

Here the prophet made use of a uniquely human experience. He spoke of the covenant as a marriage bond. He symbolized Israel's period in the wilderness as an entirely harmonious matrimony involving Yahweh, the husband, and Israel, the bride. During the period of settlement that followed, however, wife Israel had become enticed by Canaanite Baalism. Nevertheless, her conduct did not result in automatic extinction. Hosea portrays the deity as the compassionate husband who takes back his wayward wife (especially in 2:16-23). In such a manner, the original relationship between God and people was thought to be restored.

Hosea also held that Yahweh had guided Israel as a concerned father guides his young son. Yahweh had instructed Israel in how to walk (11:3). It was he who had brought his son out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan with "cords of compassion" and "bands of love" (11:4). In the intervening years, however, defection had been gross. Here the deity speaks in a highly personal manner, "My people are bent on turning away from me; so they are appointed to the yoke" (11:7). However, Yahweh cannot dispense with this nation, which he still loves. The covenant relationship between God and people has been broken by only one side. Yahweh has yet to say no on the matter. He is thus understood to be the tortured father and husband (11:8) who still grasps Israel with his hesed.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

Describe Hosea's understanding of the covenant.

3.2.4 The Message of Hosea

YHWH as the Lord, Provider and Master of Israel

First of all, when Hosea reflected on Yahweh's way with history, he achieved more depth than breadth. Hosea did not entertain thoughts about Yahweh's providential care of the nations at large. The universalism of Amos 9:7 has no parallel in Hosea's disclosures. The God of Hosea is essentially Lord of Israel and the land that Israel momentarily occupies. As her Lord, Yahweh first knew Israel in the desert, but the subsequent farming population had too often followed the gods of Canaan. Hosea stoutly maintained that Yahweh was Israel's Lord and that the nation's pastoral, agricultural, and commercial pursuits were under his sway. Because Yahweh was provider and master, Hosea denied the validity of the prevailing nature-oriented Canaanite syncretism.

The Exodus as the Foundation of Israel's Faith

For Hosea, it was history that gave meaning and direction to human existence. No preexilic Old Testament prophet was more concerned with the historical traditions of Exodus, wilderness wandering, and settlement than Hosea was. History, more than nature, was in Hosea's view the crucial arena of Yahweh's activity. Hosea also referred to the patriarchal traditions of Genesis (Hos. 12 :2-6, 12), but there he suggested that Iacob's religion was not in harmony with the chief interests of Mosaic Yahwism. Thus, the former had no right to compete with the latter in its quest for the people's fidelity."

Election and Covenant Relationship

On the issue of Israel's election and covenant relationship with the deity, Hosea claimed that Israel's election was actualized as she was called forth from enslavement to the Egyptian pharaoh. In his pronouncements, Hosea reviewed Israel's wilderness experience. Speaking for the deity in the first person he declared, "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel" (9:10). Yet as the prophet surveyed Israel's past, he saw that chosen Israel, who was once Yahweh's bride, had become a

miserable harlot (Hos. 2). Moreover, he portrayed elect Israel as Yahweh's problem child who remains the object of his loving concern. Nowhere is the prophet's expression of election and covenant more tender than in the masterful poetry of Hos. 11 :1-9.

Knowledge and True Worship of YHWH

The present sickness of the nation also concerned Hosea. Essentially that sickness related to a lack of knowledge. The land did not know Yahweh (4:1). The people had rejected knowledge and the law that was an integral part of that knowledge (4 :6). Instead, Israel persisted in a smug course that was especially reflected in a rigorous fertility cult and an over-confident monarchy. Hosea criticized both the cult and the state. He insisted that Israel's participation in Canaanite fertility religion was counter to the interests of a fundamentally austere Mosaic Yahwism, The cult also erred in offering sacrifices to gain opportunities and material goods (4:13; 5:6). Genuine expressions of thanksgiving had all but vanished.

YHWH as the True King of Israel

Hosea linked part of the nation's sin directly with the monarchy. Having turned their backs on Yahweh, Israel's kings trusted only in themselves, and the people were too quick to rely on the judgments of these consistently weak monarchs. Hosea even asserted that Israel became a monarchy without Yahweh's consent. Through its ineffective alliances, the monarchy had become a wedge between Yahweh and his people. The evidence is not clear-cut (contrast 8:4 with 3:5), but the prophet may have hoped for the permanent overthrow of this questionable institution, which had no place in the internal structure and life style of Yahweh's covenant people. In any case, Hosea believed that Yahweh was Israel's true king.

Judgment and Justice

Although he claimed that Yahweh would punish Israel in the days ahead, Hosea was not specific about what political form the punishment would take or when it would occur. Such passages as 8:3 and 10 :10 affirm that judgment would be carried out through the invasion of an enemy nation. Yet he sometimes contended that Israel was already ensnared by her own deplorable activity. "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God" (5 :4). The wrathful judgment was really self-inflicted; it was Yahweh's response to Israel's misbehavior. Nevertheless, Hosea did not regard Israel's chastisement as absolutely final. The purifying discomforts would continue until Israel was acutely aware of her guilt and once more responded positively to the deity. This prophet heard Yahweh saying: "O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit" (14:8).

The Mercy and Love of God

Paradoxically, the God who is consumed by wrath remains the God who is propelled by love for his people. As the concerned husband and father, Yahweh must somehow resolve the dual realities of wrath and love. As for Hebrew man, Hosea hoped that his affections would finally turn toward Yahweh, his Lord.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 12

Which of Hosea's theological thoughts appeal more to you, and why?
Discuss judgement and justice in Hosea.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Amos was the inheritor of a great tradition. In him the prophetic faith of Israel came to a new focus and found expression in a way that was to inaugurate a new era. All succeeding prophets built upon

the solid foundations laid by him. The collection and recording of his oracles was the first step in the growth of a vast and richly varied prophetic literature.

Hosea was not only a contemporary of Amos but also one of the few prophets of the Northern kingdom. In his announcement of a 'return to the desert theology,' he entertained no false hope that judgment may summarily be bought off by a scheming populace. He looked out on the landscape that existed on the other side of judgment. Hosea anticipated a fresh beginning for his people. Of course, the tension, pain, and promise that inform his work were primarily shaped by his own marriage to Gomer.

5.0 SUMMARY

- i. We emphasised the uniqueness of the book of Amos not only as an account of early classical prophets but also the first literary collection of prophetic oracles preserved as a separate book.
- ii. In addition, Amos had some edge that made him outstanding - a deep appreciation of the religious heritage of his people and the ability to express his convictions in poetic language of the first order
- iii. Some reasons why scholars projected the prophet as a prophet of the north
- iv. The period of Amos was a period of social injustice, oppression, and his pronouncement of doom is based upon his conviction that such corruption and unfaithfulness as he saw in Israel could not long remain unpunished by Israel's God.
- v. The book is composed of autography, oral tradition and editorial materials.
- vi. Literary styles and genre are summarised under poetic form, repetition and refrain
- vii. We identified some of the theological themes in Amos which included repentance and restoration, covenant, universalism of Yahweh, justice and righteousness, the 'day of YHWH,' and finally, worship and cult.
- viii. Our discussion on Hosea, who incidentally is the second prophet of the Northern kingdom informed us that his prophetic activities expanded over 30 years of active ministry, and that Hos 1 and 3 are of two different accounts of the same event, and also that the married life of Hosea was surrounded with ambiguity and controversy
- ix. Hosea, in his ministry demonstrated a profound knowledge of the history of Israel and deeper understanding of the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel. For Hosea, YHWH had chosen Israel unconditionally and out of love, hence we spoke of hessed..
- x. However, the two major cardinal virtues, which YHWH expected from Israel as reciprocation, were unfortunately lacking in Israel.
- xi. We gained from Hosea a new thought of YHWH as the Lord, King and Master of Israel. Furthermore, Hosea projected the theology of Exodus, thus presenting Exodus as the foundation of Israel's faith. The election covenant relationship, the true knowledge and worship of YHWH, judgement and justice, mercy and love of God are among the theological themes given to us for reflection.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Analyse the composition of the Book of Amos
2. What are the literary peculiarities of Amos?
3. Discuss the "Day of YHWH" as a theological concept in Amos.
4. Discuss Gomer's unfaithfulness as a prophetic symbol of Israel's relationship with YHWH.
5. Why did Hosea project "Exodus" as the foundation of Israel's faith?

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UNIT 2: HABAKKUK, NAHUM AND MICAH

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	119
2.0 OBJECTIVES	120
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	120
3.1 The Book of Habakkuk	120
3.1.1 Name and Person of the Prophet	120
3.1.2 Date of Composition of the Book	120
3.1.3 Some of the Worries of Habakkuk	121
3.1.4 Nature and Literary Setting of the Book	121
3.1.5 The Dead Sea Scroll commentary	122
3.1.6 Religious Teachings	122
3.2 The Book of Nahum	123
3.2.1 The Prophet Nahum	123
3.2.2 Date of the Prophecy	123
3.2.3 The Political Situation at the Time of Nahum	123
3.2.4 Nature of the Book and its Uniqueness	124
3.2.5 Literary Techniques in the Book	125
3.2.6 Religious Value of the Text	125
3.3 The Book of Micah	125
3.3.1 Micah the Man	126
3.3.2 Historical Background of the Prophecy	126
3.3.3 Structure and Composition of the Book	126
3.3.4 The Socio-Economic Situation Micah's Time	127
3.3.5 Warning and the Proclamation of Doom	127
3.3.6 Some Great Influences on the Public Ministry of Micah	128
3.3.7 The Message of Micah	128
4.0 CONCLUSION	129
5.0 SUMMARY	129
6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT	130
7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING	130

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We discuss in the last unit the prophets Amos and Hosea. Their personal and social history, the socio-political realities that occasioned their respective oracles are among the issues raise. We also examine their individual prophetic messages and their theological significance.

We shall follow the same approach in this unit, making Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah the centre of our attention. In doing this, we shall point out the uniqueness of each of the prophetic books and their respective teachings. You are equally encouraged to apply the lessons to the present situation in the Nigeria in order to appreciate the value of the study.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit you should be able to:

- understand the complexities of the titles in connection with the prophetic books of Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah
- identify some of the contemporaries of each of the prophets – Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah
- evaluate the socio-political and economic situations that occasioned the oracles of the respective prophets
- discuss the central concern of each of the books of Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah
- appraise the theology and message of the prophets and apply them to the Nigerian situation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Book of Habakkuk

3.1.1 Name and Person of the Prophet

The book which bears the name Habakkuk is one of the prophetic books among the Minor Prophets in the OT canon. It tells us only the prophet's name and fact that he was a "prophet". So, little is known about the prophet himself. Some scholars would identify the prophet as one of those from the southern kingdom of Judah, closely associated with the cult. The idea of associating the author with the cultic prophets is founded on the liturgical character of the woes in 2:6-20 and the canticle in chapter 3.

The prophet lived during the last days of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and under the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), and could therefore have worked in the period between 625 BC when the Babylonians gained independence, and 612 BC when they helped to destroy Nineveh. Perhaps his ministry was at the beginning of that period, as he refers to the Assyrians as still oppressing Judah.

The origin of the name Habakkuk is uncertain. His name occurs only at the beginning of the book. Some scholars associate the name with Arabic or Akkadian origin, and others from the rom a Hebrew language meaning "embrace". This is perhaps because he was acquainted with the local and political situation in Judah (Hab. 1:3, 4).

Attention has also been called to the legend in the LXX of Bel and the Dragon, in the title of which the prophet is called "Habakkuk, son of Jesus of the tribe of Levi" (vs. 1). If that tradition is correct, Habakkuk was linked definitely to the priesthood. Some scholars also believed that Habakkuk was probably one of the disciples of Isaiah. He was in all probability a priest (cf. Hab. 3).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give some possible accounts of the origin of the name Habakkuk.

3.1.2 Date of Composition of the Book

The book of Habakkuk was probably written at the time the Babylonians emerged on the scene (Hab. 1:6); that is around the seventh or early in the sixth century BC, that is, between 625 and 504 BC. The observation is supported by the mention of the rise of the Chaldeans (1:6). The Chaldeans were the people from South Mesopotamia who, with their centre at Babylon, replaced the Assyrians as the masters of the ancient Near East in the late 7th-early 6th cent. BC. However, because of the

mention of the numerous conquests of the Babylonian armies, some scholars believe that the book was written long after the Babylonian exile of 586 BC.

The question of more precise dates within this time period for the individual prophecies as well as their specific targets is a more contentious one and is linked to the question of the book's form. Whichever be the case, the prophet Habakkuk was probably a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. When did the prophet Habakkuk live?
2. Who, among the prophets, could have been contemporary of Habakkuk?

3.1.3 Some of the Worries of Habakkuk

The abusive might of the Chaldeans, plus the obvious turmoil both on the national and international scene are the major concerns of the book. On the national front, the prophet questions the seemingly prosperity of the ungodly, which humanity is yet to unravel over the years, was also a major concern for the prophet. In his days, corruption and injustice were the order in Judah, especially Jerusalem. The rich were prospering at the expense of the poor. Evil was perpetrated in the name of God. The prophet appealed to God in form of complaints (1:2-4). However, the response of God to Habakkuk was shocking. God promised to use the Babylonians as an instrument of judgment against his people. For the prophet, it is like God is using evil to punish evil. How can a holy God use an unholy nation to punish his people?

In other words, the 'oppressor' described in Habakkuk 2.6-20 was probably Assyria (also vv. 5 and 8 where 'many nations' are troubled by 'him'). Habakkuk believed that the Assyrians themselves would be punished in their turn by the coming of the Babylonians (Hab. 1:6).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. State the worries of the Prophet Habakkuk about the conditions of the poor and the rich in the society in his days.
2. Do you believe that God can use evil to punish evil?

3.1.4 Nature and Literary Setting of the Book

Majority of scholars observe the literary unity of the book and argue that the author has purposely ignored the specific historical setting of the materials and has arranged them in such a way as to give priority to the theological message, i.e., the power of God over human history and the consequent call to trust and faithfulness (cf. 2:4). The liturgical character is sometimes associated with a liturgy for a day of penitence. This is clearer with the first two chapters of the book, which are in the form of a lamentation and prayer liturgy composed for and used in the Temple worship.

However, the absence of chapter 3, that is, the theophanic hymn, in the Dead Sea Scroll of Habakkuk armed to doubt the authenticity of the chapter. Nevertheless, a direct divine utterance, spoken through the mouth of an official and authorized mediator or cultic prophet, had its place within the liturgy of any particular day in the cultus of ancient Israel. Many psalms show that such a liturgy had poetic and musical form. The same must have been the case as regards the words of revelation in the liturgy of the temple. Therefore, it fell to the temple prophets in the cultus of Judah to attend to the position of the temple singers. Songs were sung in the name of the congregation by such singers. If the prophet Habakkuk was such a prophet, he was very familiar with cultic compositions coloured with Israel's wisdom tradition.

Thus the formal affinities to Israel's liturgical and/or wisdom traditions come from the fact that the author has appropriated and shaped them to express a specifically prophetic message.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read the Book of Habakkuk. Which literary genre is dominant in the book – liturgical or wisdom tradition?

3.1.5 The Dead Sea Scroll commentary

Scholars have discovered in the Dead Sea Scroll on Hab. 1-2 about fifty readings which vary from the received MT of the OT, a few of which seem reasonably conclusive. The oft-debated reading "Chaldeans" in 1:6 is confirmed. For Hab. 1:11 the scroll reads "And he makes his might his God." The Habakkuk Commentary on 1:17 omits the interrogative particle so as to read: "Therefore he bares his sword continually slaying nations and has no pity," thus suggesting merciless slaughter.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What implications can you draw from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scroll Commentary on Habakkuk?

3.1.6 Religious Teachings

Habakkuk makes an important and original contribution to the sum of Israel's reflection on the nature of its God and of God's ways with Israel. The book is filled with truths which stand at the core of Hebrew religion:

i. Apparent Doubt about the Divine Justice as a Process of Religious Experience

i. The book begins with a question which the prophet dares to direct to God, raising doubts about divine justice and God's treatment of the wicked. The question represents a first step in an attempt to deal with a breakdown of order and justice, a situation to which God seems implicitly to assent by silence and apparent inaction.

ii. Faith and Trust a Fundamental to Religion

But despite the doubts the prophet expresses, there is an underlying attitude of faith and trust. This is especially due to the canticle in chap. 3, which, with its ringing affirmation of God's absolute power over creation and history, places the disturbing events recounted in chaps. 1-2 in the wider context of God's saving design. This could have equally influenced Paul in his teaching on faith in in Rom 1: 17 and Gal 3:11, also the writer of Hebrews 10:38.

iii. Condemnation of Oppression, Exploitation, Pride and Arrogance

The key sentence in 2:4 counsel, confidence and trust in God's faithfulness, and the book repeatedly condemns all forms of oppression and exploitation as well as the pride and arrogance that stand opposed to the humble faith demanded by God.

Generally, we can summarise the teaching under the following key points:

- i. History has meaning if one takes the long view and judges events from the perspective of faith.
- ii. Uprightness in the soul is necessary for individuals and nations alike. The righteous shall live by his faith.
- iii. Wealth is treacherous as a basis of human dependence for security.

- iv. Ruthless dealings rebound upon the doer.
- v. God can overrule an evil nation for his righteous purpose. Evil is bound to fail in the end, even though it may seem victorious.
- vi. There is no might but right.
- vii. Trust in God is the only sure basis of strength, regardless of external situations. The ultimate of faith is joy in communion with God.

So, when Habakkuk complained against God about his apparent inactivity and lack of interest in the business of humans, he is only expressing the humanness of our humanity. But he also teaches us in a clear term that no matter how difficult conditions might be, we must continue to trust the promises of God and have confidence that the Lord of the earth would do right (3:16-19). To do this, we have to live by faith (Hab. 2:4).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What are the key theological elements in the teachings of Habakkuk?
2. What theological significance has the Book of Habakkuk to Nigerians?

3.2 The Book of Nahum

3.2.1 The Prophet Nahum

Nahum is also one of the books of the collection of the Twelve Minor Prophets. Only very little is known from the book about the life of the prophet Nahum himself. The name could mean "comfort," "compassion" (cf. Isa. 57: 18). He is generally identified as a cultic prophet from Elkosh, a town in south-western Judah, in the region where the tribe of Simeon had settled, close to the Philistine and Egyptian borders, between Beit Jibrin and Gaza. There is equally no consensus that the sphere of his activity is limited to Jerusalem.

3.2.2 Date of the Prophecy

The date of the prophecy is vague. The fall of Thebes (3:8) to Ashurbanipal in 663 provides some hint on the date of composition of the book. Some scholars place the date closer to the fall of Thebes or around the time of the death of Ashurbanipal (626), because Assyria was still then at the height of its power. Others consider the time between Cyaxares' first attack on Nineveh in 614 and the city's fall to the combined armies of Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians to be a more likely date.

There is also a proposal that Nahum, while in exile in Nineveh, wrote the prophecy as a letter (1:1) to sympathizers in Judah around 660-630. The claim is based on Assyrian loan words in the book, the absence of interest in Jerusalem, and a vivid description of Nineveh. But it is likely that Nahum wrote in Judah close to 612 B.C. during the reform of Josiah before the death of Josiah (609) and before the evidence of Babylonian imperial might quenched the spirit of optimism surrounding the fall of Assyria. This could be supported by the absence of castigation for Judah's sins.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are the two views regarding the date of the composition of the Book of Nahum?

3.2.3 The Political Situation at the Time of Nahum

Before Nahum began his prophetic ministry the Assyrian empire was the world power. And the latter half of the eighth and into the seventh centuries was a period of Assyrian power and expansion. Under such able leaders as Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727) Shalmaneser V (726-722), Sargon

II (721-705), Sennacheis (704-681), and Esarhaddon (680-669) the Assyrian empire reached unprecedented heights of imperial control. In their effort to extend the frontiers of their empire, the Assyrians destroyed many nations and kingdoms. Moreover, their imperial policy of scattering inhabitants of conquered territory into different lands caused a serious commotion in the ancient Near East. The Northern kingdom was also a victim of such imperial might and policy. Thus, the land of Israel was destroyed in 722 B.C. and the inhabitants were taken to different lands; and strange people were then brought in to replace them.

Then, in 625 the Chaldean Nabopolassar founded the Neo-Babylonian state, which was destined to be the leading power in the Middle East for nearly three quarters of a century. He soon brought all Babylonia solidly under his control, then mobilized his forces against Assyria. Marching up the Euphrates to Qablinu, he inflicted on the Assyrian army a decisive defeat. Meanwhile the Medes began attacking from the east. In 614 they took and sacked the major Assyrian city of Asshur, and Nabopolassar made an alliance with their king. Together the Medes and Chaldeans continued their attacks, until at length mighty Nineveh itself fell. The collapse of this imperial capital marked the end of an epoch, and its reverberations were felt throughout the then-known world.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the socio-political situation at the period the Book of Nahum was composed.

3.2.4 Nature of the Book and its Uniqueness

It is most likely that Nahum was himself a temple or cult prophet. According to some scholars" he "historified" elements from the myth of Creation. He identified a historical enemy with the cosmic adversaries who had been conquered at the beginning of the world and whose fight was re-enacted in the New Year Festival.

The primary focus of the book, however, is the prophetic pronouncement of judgement and curse on Assyria, the arch enemy of Israel. Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, will face judgment for oppression, cruelty, idolatry and wickedness. So, the book will go a long way to demonstrate that God is not only "slow to anger" (Nah. 1:3) and "a refuge, for those who trust in him" (1:7) but also one who "will not leave the guilty unpunished" (1:3).

The book also expresses gratitude for the anticipated freedom from tyranny. God's righteous and just kingdom will ultimately triumph, for kingdoms built on wickedness and tyranny must eventually fall, as Assyria did. To curse such an enemy, the very incarnation of evil, is a way of professing loyalty to God.

If you read through the book, you will also observe that Nahum is different from the other literary prophets of the OT particular in one area. It is about his unmitigated excitement over the fall of the enemy at the expense of any criticism of his own people (contrast his contemporary, Jeremiah). Unfortunately Nahum was so obsessed with the defeat of a hated oppressor that he forgot the national corruption, the individual and structural social injustice of his days.

Again, Nahum's poetic genius ranks with the highest in the Old Testament tradition. He sketches scenes of warfare with a vivid sense of the picturesque or horrible detail, thus the cavalry and chariotry charge (2:3-5), the panic of the queen's servants (2:7)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the primary focus of the Book of Nahum?

2. Discuss the uniqueness of the uniqueness of the Book of Nahum in relation to other prophetic books

3.2.5 Literary Techniques in the Book

The prophecy of Nahum comes from a poet of great skill. The work is a combination of many forms. The whole prophecy is similar to other oracles against foreign nations. It contains a partial acrostic poem (1:2-8), a funeral lament ("woe," 3:1-7), and a taunt-song (3:8-19). Several images are drawn of Nineveh: pool (2:9), den of lions (2:12-14), prostitute (3:4-6), yielding fig trees (3:12), swarm of locusts (3:15-17).

Most striking are the wordplay and use of sound. In 2:11, the final devastation of the city tolls like a bell. The moaning and breast-beating of the servants is heard in the sounds of 2:8.

The ironic question in 3:7 portrays some play with words, and sound is echoed in 3:10 and 1:10. Several other verses are alliterative, e.g., 1:2; 2:3; 2:6; 2:9; and 3:4.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Identify the literary styles found in the Book of Nahum

3.2.6 Religious Value of the Text

i. Universal Sovereignty of YHWH

The book projects the universal sovereignty of YHWH. YHWH is Lord of history and of all nations. He controls the destinies of nations both Israel and others. Consequently, he has authority and power to promise, judge, punish and reward.

ii. Threat, Judgement and Promise

Nahum tells his readers that God will execute vengeance against Nineveh, the oppressor and cruel tyrant as a sign of God's faithfulness to his promise: The fall of Nineveh, although once used as an instrument of God's wrath against the covenant people (cf. Isa 10:5-16), is an act of divine justice. Assyria has plundered the nations and torn them like prey for its voracious appetite; now Assyria in turn will be plundered and become the prey of another.

iii. Faith in YHWH

Nahum's prophecy is only intended to make one statement: God who is faithful has not abandoned Judah. The enemy will not prevail forever; the punishment will come to an end. Just as once God delivered those enslaved by Egypt (and one looks in vain for expressions of sympathy for the Egyptians in Exod 1-15), so now God will deliver those oppressed by Assyria. The good news is already proclaimed; feasts of thanksgiving should be celebrated (2:1). He is animated by an intense faith in YHWH, the universal judge, whose jealousy and avenging wrath will not fail to destroy the guilty. The prophet shows also the importance of a dedicated leadership and the ultimate failure of injustice in a national policy.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are the theological significance of the Book of Nahum?

3.3 The Book of Micah

The book of Micah is among the most important books of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name of the book is eloquent testimony of a confession of faith and the best summaries of true religions to be found in the Bible.

3.3.1 Micah the Man

Micah is a Judean prophet of late 8th Cent. BC; a contemporary of Isaiah. His father's name is not given. But according to the superscription, the prophet came from a town named Moresheth, or Mareshah (1:1,14-15; cf. Jer. 26:18), probably Mresheth-Gath, near the old Philistine town of Gath, which has been identified with Tell el-Menshiyeh, near' Araq el-Menshiyeh, ca. 61/2 miles west of Beit Jibrin and 71/2 miles south west of Tell el-Judeideh. The prophet lived, therefore, in a small village of the Shephelah or the low foothills of south-western Palestine halfway between Jerusalem and Gaza, near the Judean stronghold of Lachish and close to the Philistine cities.

The name of Micah may be compared to another prophet's name: Micaiah, son of Imlah, who lived more than a century earlier (cf. 1 Kgs 22:8). The name means "who [is] like [Yahweh]?" (possible allusion in 7:18: "Who [is] God like you:

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the complexity surrounding the name of the prophet Micah?

3.3.2 Historical Background of the Prophecy

We read from the chronological note in 1:1 how Micah received the "word of YHWH" during the reign of Jotham (ca. 750-735), Ahaz (ca. 735-715), and Hezekiah (ca. 715-687). If the editor of the book is right, Micah's activities began a long time before the fall of Samaria (721) and continued for many years, running simultaneously with that of Isaiah in Jerusalem.

During the the Assyrian armies of Tiglath-pileser III conquered Damascus in 732 (with a part of Israel), and Samaria in 722. Ashdod fell in 711. Sennacherib was occupying part of the coastal land, menacing Moresheth and the area; see 1:10-15. Jerusalem was besieged in 701. Danger was not only external. Prophets, priests, and judges accepted bribes; merchants cheated; Canaanite cults were used alongside the Yahwistic ones.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the historical background of the prophecy of Micah.

3.3.3 Structure and Composition of the Book

The book shows a classical organization of prophetic literature: oracles of doom followed by oracles of promise (doom: 1:2 to 3:12; 6:1 to 7:6; promise: 2:12-13; chaps. 4-5). The concluding verses (7:8-20) seem to be a "liturgical text" from the days after the exile.

i. The Nature of the Original Ancient Text

The Hebrew text is difficult. The ancient copies (see, e.g., Qumran fragments IQ14, 1Q 168, and those from Murabba 'at, Mur 88 xi-iv) do not alleviate the situation. The ancient versions were already experiencing this problem.

ii. Additions to the Text

The book itself claims to be the work of Micah of Moresheth. Some scholars have critically questioned the claim based on difference in literary style found between early section of the book and the later. A minimal consensus considers 1:8-16; 2: 1-11; and 3:1-12 as coming from Micah. However, 2:12-13 and at least part of chaps. 4-5 are later additions. Consideration is also giving to 6:1-7:6 as being mainly from the prophet himself. There is also a school of thought that accepted Micah as the author of the whole book.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the scholarship position on the 'additions' to the text of Micah?

3.3.4 The Socio-Economic Situation Micah's Time

It is true that Micah appeared when Israel and Judah was witnessing a terrible socio-political and moral situation. But nothing shows that he plays a major, if any, political role, and little is known of his personal life. His interest was mainly about the internal situation of Judah. His preaching is concerned with sin and punishment, not with political or cultic matters. He is preoccupied with social justice and does not fear princes, prophets, or priests. Not being a member of such groups, he affirms his independence through his message.

In the view of Micah, the nation had lost her moral integrity; she had become sinful and therefore predisposed to judgment. . The times were bad. The greed of the nobles shows itself in the attempts to build up large estates by forcibly ejecting smaller property holders (Micah 2:1-2). The judges seem to have been quite willing to arrest their powerful friends in robbing the weak (3:11). Widows and orphans, without powerful defenders, were cruelly robbed and plundered, and even sold into slavery (2:9). Creditors were without mercy, and common people were oppressed by the rich and powerful (3:10). The religious scene was not even spared. The prophets and priests were corrupt, selfish, immoral and greedy. They merely wanted money, ease, cheap popularity and some assurance that they could continue to live in luxury. Micah in reaction to the situation insists on the holiness of Yahweh. To Micah, as long as Yahweh's people do the right, they will enjoy divine favour (3:7) but when they turn against him, they must suffer punishment (1:2-4, 10-10).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Describe the socio-economic situation of Judah in the days of Micah.

3.3.5 Warning and the Proclamation of Doom

i. The doom of Samaria

It was to Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, that Micah turned early in his prophetic ministry. All eyes were on Samaria. Thus far it had withstood the shock of the Assyrian invasion of Israel, but Assyria was ruthless and strong, and Israel's future was most uncertain. The prophet was well aware that Samaria could not long hold out against Assyrian attack. Micah sought to awaken the capital to the fact of its imminent destruction (cf. 1:6).

Incidentally, the capital city was besieged and captured by Sargon (721 B.C.). The majority of its population (close to thirty thousand people) was taken captive, and in its place were brought in captives from other regions which the Assyrians had mastered (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:24-34).

ii. Warnings to Judah

Micah took the occasion to appeal to his fellow Judeans, that they might take a lesson from Samaria's collapse. He resorted to symbolic prophecy to awaken his people to the degenerating influences of the fertility rites. Naked and barefoot like a slave, he went at an impulse from YHWH and lamented over the sins of the Northern Kingdom and their corrupting influence pouring into Judah (1:8-9). He warned the people social injustice and moral decadence, and presented to them the consequences (2:3-5, 11).

iii. Shame to the Judean rulers and Prophets

The prophet turned to the aristocracy of Judah and questioned their moral stand to lead. For Micah they were irresponsible hypocrites and lovers of evil 1 (3:1-2a). With the official prophets of his

time Micah dealt sharply, for they gauged the quality of their revelation by what the people paid them (3:6). 4. 5.

iv. The doom of Jerusalem

It was clear to Micah that the capital city of Jerusalem was in reality the chief source of licentious and corrupt living. And it was plain to him that as Jerusalem went, so went the nation (1:5). For Micah, the civil officials were criminal profiteers. The judges' hands were itchy for bribes. The priests so manipulated the priestly oracle as to enrich themselves. The prophets had become infected with a materialistic motivation of their sacred calling as the Lord's spokesmen. It is reasonable to believe that 3:9-11a was Micah's first utterance in Jerusalem and most likely at the temple. Micah's country background made all the more clear to him the sense of responsibility that should characterize these heads and rulers, these spiritual guides. Boldly, the prophet predicted the destruction of the capital and even the downfall of the temple (3: 12).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Compare the doom of Samaria and the doom of Jerusalem.

3.3.6 Some Great Influences on the Public Ministry of Micah

i. Amos of Tekoa

Tekoa, where Amos had been reared, lay only 17 1/2 miles east of Moresheth, and the influence of Amos' thoughts upon Micah as he grew into young manhood was probably great (cf. Mic. 2:6 with Amos 2:12; 5:11; 7:10-11). It is almost certain that Micah of the countryside was familiar with the cry for justice that was characteristic of Amos. So, Micah's reputation as a prophet of doom was preserved (cf. Jer. 26:18-19, a century later). It is also likely that he had often been in Jerusalem in the days when Isaiah was preaching there. According to Jer. 26, Micah had preached in Jerusalem so forcibly that he, like Isaiah, had inspired Hezekiah and had led him to inaugurate a reform which later inspired the Deuteronomic reform of Josiah (Jer. 26:16-19)

ii. Moresheth-Gath, the Home Town of Micah

Although it might appear that the Moresheth-Gath, the home town of Micah was not so significant in the time of Micah, its nature and location may help to explain two of the prominent features of Micah's message:

- (a) Micah loved poor farmers and shepherds and felt that these humble country people were the backbone of the nation (3:2-4).
- (b) He observed international affairs in a way which was not exceptional for a dweller of a village placed on the route of foreigner invasions.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the great influences on the public ministry of Amos.

3.3.7 The Message of Micah

The message of the prophet was aimed at strengthening the people morally so that they would be saved from the impending doom.

i. Against False Security

Micah is concerned with the people's rejection of God. Sin is the reason for the coming punishment. The Assyrian king is but an unconscious instrument of God's wrath. A false sense of security (3:11: "Is not the Lord in our midst?") has replaced an authentic allegiance to God. Jacob's rebellion is the

reason why Samaria has fallen; Judah's sins are a menace for Jerusalem. The Lord must judge, and the prophet is the accuser in God's name.

ii. Abuse of Religion and Neglect of Social Justice

Like Hos, Amos, and Isa, Micah is preoccupied with social justice and with the astute wickedness of all leaders, political and spiritual. While princes and merchants cheat and rob the poor and humble, esp. women and children, priests and prophets adapt their words to please their audience. The leaders mistake evil for good and good for evil. Prophecy is rejected and sacrifices are emptied of their relation to God. The covenant is ignored and the Lord must turn his face away from the people and abandon them to their plight. In Micah denunciation and accusation often take on the aspect of complaints.

iv. YHWH's Love and Mercy

The final verses of the book give us an example of the liturgy to be performed: having confessed their sin, the people no longer ask: "Where is Yahweh, your God?" A new exodus is taking place. God's wrath has abated and a new era is beginning. God's steadfast love, his hesed, will be shown to Jacob and Abraham, thus realizing the oath given to the fathers in the days of old.

v. Restoration and Hope

However, a message of hope is inserted in the middle of the book. The Temple shall become once again the centre of the land and of the world. People will come there in procession. A remnant will be at the origin of a new Israel, and its leader will be a true shepherd, a bringer of peace in the name of the Lord. Thus, Bethlehem and Jerusalem will be renewed and the sources of sin will be eliminated.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The issue raised by Habakkuk remains relevant in our days. It is one of the major problems of theodicy - the problem of evil and the righteousness and justice of God. How do we explain the fact that the rich are prospering at the expense of the poor, evil perpetrated in the name of God, yet God would appear silent and unperturbed. It is here that Habakkuk draws in his teaching that no matter how confused and difficult it might appear we must continue to trust the promises of God and have confidence that the Lord of the earth will one day straightened everything.

Nahum is different in his prophetic approach. His prophecy is always about the 'other' nations. He is noted for his unmitigated excitement over the fall of Israel's enemies, especially the Assyrian empire, at the expense of any criticism of his own people. He seemed to forget the corruption of Israel, the individual and structural social injustice of his days. Nevertheless, Nahum's poetic genius ranks him with the highest respect in the Old Testament prophetic tradition.

We equally expressed that the influence of Micah lies in his presentation of the best summaries of true religion ever found in the biblical tradition. His proclamation of doom is so comprehensive to spare no segment of society. He ranks next to Amos in his unalloyed commitment to social justice.

5.0 SUMMARY

- i. From our discussion you might have observed that the prophets to greater extent share the same socio-political and economic experiences, which had occasioned and shaped their prophecies.
- ii. We also noted that the major concern of the book of Habakkuk had always remained one of the existential questions of humanity, which at times render intelligence stupid. Human is yet to give a comprehensive and satisfactory answer to the questions surrounding human experience of evil, and the conviction that the just and righteous God will compensate the victim adequately. This is what

Habakkuk sets out to address, thus the justice and righteousness of God in the midst of evil; and the role of faith and trust in religion

iii. We also emphasised that the nature and literary setting of the book of Habakkuk equally betray the theological and liturgical interests of the author, which is expressed in liturgical and wisdom genres. The genres serve well to answer the sort of questions raised in the book

iv. We observed that the primary focus of the book of Nahum, is on judgement and curse on Assyria. There also lies the uniqueness of the book, which is manifested by the unmitigated excitement of the book over the fall of the enemy at the expense of any criticisms of Israel.

v. The poetic skill applied in the literature followed with funeral lament, taunt-song, imagery, wordplay and use of sound, irony especially in question form marks out another aspect of uniqueness.

vi. The teachings of Nahum include the universal sovereignty of YHWH. Threat, judgment, promise, and faith in YHWH are among the theological themes raised in the Book of Nahum.

vii. In our exposition of the Book of Micah, the identification of the person of the prophet carries along with it some degree of ambiguities. The structure of the book brought out clearly the oracles of doom, of promise, and finally wrapped by liturgical genre.

viii. The controversy surrounding the authorship of the Book based on difference in styles was also brought to the fore.

ix. The socio-economic situation of the time of Micah and the great influences on his public ministry were identified. Amos of Tekoa, the social history of Micah and the geographical location of Moresheth-Gath were among the great influences discussed.

The pronouncement on the doom did not spare any segment of the society.

x. The theological significance of Micah included attack against false security, abuse of religion, neglect of social justice, YHWHG's love and mercy, restoration and hope.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are some of the worries of Habakkuk?
2. How did Habakkuk justify his apparent doubt about the divine justice?
3. Discuss the uniqueness of the book of Nahum.
4. Evaluate the theological concepts of threat, judgement and promise in Nahum.
5. Discuss the socio-economic situation in the time of Micah.
6. Analyse the message of Micah

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UNIT 3: HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH AND MALACHI

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	147
2.0 OBJECTIVES	133
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	133
3.1 The Book of Haggai	133
3.1.1 The Prophet Haggai Himself	133
3.1.2 The Authorship of the Book	133
3.1.3 Historical Background	134
3.1.4 Theological and Historical Significance of Haggai	136
3.2 The Book of Zechariah	137
3.2.1 The Prophet	137
3.2.2 The Relation between Zech 1-8 and Zech 9-14.	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2.3 The Text of Chapters 1-8	137
3.2.4 The Text of Chapters 9-14	140
3.3 The Book of Malachi	141
3.3.1 The Title and Authorship	141
3.3.2 The Person of the Author	141
3.3.3 Date of Composition	142
3.3.4 Historical Background of the Prophecies	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.5 Connection with Haggai and Zechariah	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.6 The Composition of the Book	143
3.3.7 The Oracles of Malachi	143
3.3.8 The Significance of Malachi	143
4.0 CONCLUSION	145
5.0 SUMMARY	145
6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT	146
7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING	146

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding unit, we examined the books and personalities of Habakkuk, Nahum and Micah. We stressed the peculiarities of the prophets and their shared interests. We also underlined that their respective messages could be pointer in our effort to make a better Nigeria.

In this unit, we shall our usual methodology. We shall project the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. While studying them individually, we shall equally make some comparative analysis. We equally expect that whatever lessons that could be drawn from the study, that you should apply

them to the Nigeria situation and come up with some practical solution that could serve that veritable advice to Nigerians.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit you should be able to:

- discuss the persons of the prophets and some of the major issues concerning the authorship of their respective books
- examine the socio-political and economic situations that necessitated the oracles of the respective prophets
- do some comparative analysis of the literary structure and genre of the books, thus stressing areas of special and common interests
- evaluate their major concerns of each book and relate them to the general concern of the common Nigerians
- appraise the theology and message of the prophets and apply them to the Nigerian situation

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Book of Haggai

The book of Haggai is the first of the collection of prophecies dating from the postexilic period; the others are Zechariah and Malachi. It is the shortest of the three, comprising merely two chapters totalling thirty-eight verses. These are made up of four utterances delivered within the space of four months in the second year of the reign of Darius I Hystaspis, king of Persia (522-486)-i.e., in 520.

3.1.1 The Prophet Haggai Himself

The name Haggai is derived from the word for "a festival," which would suggest that the prophet was born on some feast day. Little or nothing is known of his background. He is referred to simply as "the prophet" (1:1; Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He would appear, however, from this description, to have been a conspicuous figure. Jewish tradition has it that he was known as a prophet in Babylon during the Exile. On the evidence of 1:1, he was active in Jerusalem in 520 B.C. This may suggest that he had made his way there sometime before this date. He does not appear to have been of the priestly caste, since he asks the priests' guidance on a matter of Levitical practice (2:11-13). If 2:3 implies that he had seen the temple before its destruction in 586, he was a very old man when he became one of the prime movers for its restoration in 520.

In association with Zechariah (Ezra 4:24-5:1; 6:14; Zech. 1:16) Haggai rouses the people of Jerusalem and their leaders (Zerubbabel and Joshua) to undertake the task of rebuilding the temple. It would appear to be largely because of his energy and enthusiasm, as indicated in his oracles, that the work of restoration was begun almost immediately after his first appeal, and completed within four years (Ezra 6:15).

In later Talmudic tradition Haggai was associated with Zechariah and Malachi as joint founder of the "Great Synagogue." It was considered that with the death of these, the last of the prophets, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel. A number of psalms are attributed to Haggai and Zechariah in the LXX, Vulgate and Peshitta (e.g., Pss. 138; 146-149). This may account for the Christian tradition, as opposed to the Jewish, that the prophet was of priestly descent.

3.1.2 The Authorship of the Book

The form of the book would suggest that these oracles were collected by someone other than the prophet himself, and then set into the editorial framework of :1,3,12,13a,14-15; 2: 1-2, 10,20, with 2:4 and the date in 2: 18 probably also from the editor's hand, and with 2:5 as a secondary gloss

which may be still later. The editorial framework is not likely to have been written by Haggai himself, but it was probably composed not long after his oracles. Haggai is referred to throughout in the third person and is described impersonally as "the prophet." Moreover, the book serves as a record of the effect of the prophet's words, as well as a collection of his utterances.

The editor has made no comment on the oracle to Zerubbabel (2:21-23). Rather the other oracles all seem to be addressed to the people of Judah, but in the framework the editor has enhanced the roles of Zerubbabel and of Joshua by having the oracles addressed primarily to them and by emphasizing the part they played in getting work on the Temple started (1:12-14).

It is, of course, possible, some argued, that Haggai himself compiled the book and chose to refer to himself in the third person. But the general view is that the compilation was done by some unknown disciple not long after the time at which the oracles were first delivered.

Opinion has it too that the origin of the framework of the oracle is found in the circle in which 1-2 Chronicle were compiled. Others argued that the oracle finds more significant kinship with deuteronomic circles, with Ezekiel, and with the Pentateuchal Priestly document.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the challenging issue surrounding the authorship of Haggai?

3.1.3 Historical Background

The Policy of Cyrus and the Return

We read from the text of the Cylinder of Cyrus that when Cyrus, the victorious Persian king had taken possession of the territories of Babylon, he gave general permission to racial minorities exiled there to return to their own countries if they wished to do so. It would appear that the Israelites returned en masse. This is the conclusion we can draw following the Chronicler's rosy picture of a mass return of the exiled Jews to Palestine and the immediate undertaking of the rebuilding of the temple. But the fact remains that only some of the Jews availed themselves of the opportunity to return, and that their first task was to eke out some kind of existence in a land that had suffered much ever since its capital city had been destroyed fifty years earlier.

The Laying of the Foundation of the Second Temple

It was under the leadership of the 'prince of Judah' (Ezra I:8) and "governor" (5:14) of the new Persian province that attempt was made to rebuild the temple, shortly the second year of the return (537 B.C. cf. Ezra 3:8-13). The returnees laid the foundations of a new temple amid the ruins of Jerusalem, as indicated in Ezra 5:16. But we are told in the books of Haggai and Zechariah that the construction continued.

Again, the impression conveyed by Haggai and Zechariah's writings would tend to confirm the view that it was not until the emergence of Haggai as an inspired leader that any serious steps were taken to restore the dilapidated temple at all, and that the rebuilding did not, in fact, start until 520 (i.e., the second year of Darius I), under the governorship of Zerubbabel (ch. 1).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the case made on the silence surrounding the reconstruction of the temple?

The Occasions for the Oracle

Haggai found himself in the midst of people who were more concerned with their own selfish interests than they were with work for the advancement of their society and its religious institutions (Hag 1:2-9). It was in this situation that Haggai set out around 520 BC to proclaim his oracles. He

would argue that they had suffered because they had failed to honour God themselves by rebuilding the Temple (Hag. 1.6; 2.16-17). So, by rebuilding the Temple they would find blessing, even as they began the work (Hag. 1.6; 2.16, 17, 19). Furthermore, the reconstruction would be very urgent and necessary because the day would come when God would make Jerusalem the religious centre of the whole world (Hag. 1.9; 2.7-9). People of other nations would then learn to serve God by giving Him honour there.

However, some of the environmental factors for the lack of concern for the reconstruction of the Temple that finally led to the oracles is discussed below.

Socio-Economic Situation

- i. Although the racial minorities including the Jews were free to return to their own countries, many Jews had preferred to remain in Babylon (Jos. Antiq. XI.iii), especially those who had established themselves most successfully. The action indirectly and negatively affected the speedy reconstruction of the temple since the economic means for such a massive work would be limited.
- ii. Those who returned not only were presumably mostly the poor without enough resources, but also whatever zeal they had for the restoration of the house of the Lord were tempered by finding themselves among people who had become reconciled to the sight of the ruined sanctuary.
- iii. The devastation of the Babylonian conquest was heightened both by harrying tactics on the part of the petty kingdoms which surrounded Judah, and later by the marauding Persian army under Cambyses on its way to invade Egypt in 525 thus using Judah as a passage. They must have had an unsettling effect on Judeans - more, no doubt, on those in Babylonia but also on those in Judah.
- iv. When in addition to this we remember the gloomy picture drawn by the book of Haggai of a people crippled by a succession of bad harvests, with subsequent poverty, it is difficult to think that the period between the return and the emergence of Haggai as a leader can have been anything other than a dispiriting struggle for existence, far less one of religious enthusiasm. Concern for the rebuilding of the temple must have been the least of the anxieties of the sorely tried people of Jerusalem.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are the socio-economic factors that gave rise to the delay in the reconstruction of the temple?

Religious Factor

- i. The destruction of the temple in 586 by the army of Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25:9) would mean the breaching of the walls and the disappearance of the shrine and adjacent buildings, but the whole area with its courts would still be available as a sacred place for those who were minded to worship. An altar for burnt offerings was no difficult matter to erect, if, indeed, the old one had been destroyed, and there is evidence that this was in use (Jer. 41 :5; cf. Hag. 2: 14) and that priests were in attendance (Lam. 1:4).
- ii. There are more sombre indications in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel (e.g., Jer. 7:17-19; Ezek. 8:9-18) that pagan cults, including the worship of Ishtar, Tammuz, and the sun, had established themselves side by side with the worship of YHWH. Even if these were conditions which obtained before the fall of Jerusalem, it would be more than likely that they persisted after the visible reminders of the superiority of YHWH-worship had vanished.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss some of the religious factors that affected the speedy reconstruction of the temple.

Political Incidence

i. When Darius I succeeded Cambyses as ruler of the Persian Empire in 522, revolts broke out throughout the subject provinces. The supremacy of the Gentile masters of the world was threatened. To a prophetic mind such as that of Haggai, accustomed to look for the leadership of YHWH in the signs of the times, this must have suggested the prelude to the end event of history, the final destruction of the power of the Gentiles and the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

ii. With Zerubbabel, a scion of the house of David (I Chr. 3:17-19), installed as governor of Judah, and assuming, in the prophet's mind, the messianic status, the time appeared to be ripe for the rehabilitation of the house of the Lord, so that YHWH might return to his people, as Ezekiel and Second Isaiah had foretold, to establish his throne in Zion (Isa. 52:7-10; Ezek. 43:4-5). It was in such a situation that Haggai uttered the oracles which are contained in this book.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you think that Prophet Haggai correctly interpreted history?

3.1.4 Theological and Historical Significance of Haggai

i. The Centrality of the Temple

The interest of Haggai in the rebuilding of the Temple singles him out as great enthusiast in the affairs of YHWH and Jewish religion. It is evident that without the Temple and the Judaism which centred on the Temple, the legacy of the great prophets would have been quickly dissipated, and Christianity would have had no foundations on which to build. Haggai deserves to be remembered for his contribution to this.

ii. Re-Establishment of the Cultus

The interest in the Temple drove Haggai further to stress the need for the re-establishment of the cultus. The prophecies concerning this, argued some scholars, may originally have been connected with the cultic rites of the New Year Festival. Even if that is the case, Haggai could have taken only the form but gave it a new content. However, the danger is the superficial view that material prosperity is assured provided the mechanics of worship are guaranteed.

iii. Hope and Encouragement

The hope and encouragement which Haggai's message brought to the dejected community of Judah at that time was, in the providence of God, a significant milestone in the Praeparatio Evangelica

iv. The Messianic Age and the Gentiles

The civil governor, Zerubbabel, is given an imminent role as God's elect. In this respect Haggai might be thought to resemble a court prophet, like Nathan in 2 Sam 7. Therefore, for Haggai, the future is the future of Judah, restored with a Davidic ruler and with God once again dwelling in his earthly Temple. However, Zerubbabel was not the Messiah, as Haggai imagined, and the messianic age when it came did not bring about the downfall of the Gentiles and the enrichment of the temple, as the prophet expected.

v. Good Historical Book

The value of the book is more historical. It is together with the book of Zechariah a form of corrective apparatus to the inaccuracies of the Chronicler and sheds a welcoming light on the obscure period between the fall of Jerusalem and the achievements of Nehemiah

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Discuss some of the theological and historical information one can derive from the Book of Haggai.
2. Is it correct to describe Haggai as “a prophet of the Temple?”

3.2 The Book of Zechariah

Zachariah together with Haggai and Malachi, it belongs to a group of prophecies delivered after the Exile. Zechariah gives us some valuable information on the thought and conditions of that period. Just like prophet Haggai, Zechariah was concerned with the reconstruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 520.

3.2.1 The Prophet

Little is known of Zechariah. The name means "Yahweh remembers." He is described (1: 1) as the "son of Berechiah, son of Iddo." In Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:16, however, he is referred to as the son, not the grandson, of Iddo. The discrepancy has been accounted for by supposing that a copyist confused the "Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah" of Isa. 8:2 with this prophet, and that the words "the son of Berechiah" are an intrusion. Zechariah would thus be the son of Iddo. Alternatively the discrepancy is held to be only apparent, since in Hebrew ben may mean either "son or" or "grandson of."

Iddo, father or grandfather of Zechariah, is included among the heads of the priestly families who returned from exile to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:4). Zechariah himself is numbered among the priests (vs. 16); this would suggest that he may have been a cultic prophet. Whatever his relationship with Iddo, Zechariah is generally assumed to have been still a young man when he was associated with Haggai as an advocate of the immediate rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Explain the discrepancy in the biographical account of the Prophet Zechariah.

3.2.2 The Text of Chapters 1-8

Historical background

Zechariah has common historical background with Haggai. The Temple has lain in ruins since its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 586. The factors of external enemies and internal apathy contributed to this sorry state. It was a poverty-stricken and dispirited community (8:10; 1:17). But Zachariah interpreted the general upheaval in the Persian Empire on the accession of Darius in 522, and the presence of a Davidic prince, in the person of Zerubbabel, as governor of Judah as antecedents to the coming of the Messiah. Consequently, he urged the people to embark on immediate reconstruction of the Temple, which, of course, is a 'necessary condition' for the emergence of the messianic age. In other words, YHWH was about to establish his kingdom. His ancient dwelling place in Zion must be restored to its former glory; so that he might once again be enthroned among his people and from there achieve his purposes.

Fired by the prophet's zeal, the people had begun the work of restoration (Hag. 1:14-15), but it seems that before long the enthusiasm of the builders waned. A month after operations had commenced, the prophet had to rally the people once again (2:3), and it would appear that shortly after this (Zech. 1:1), Zechariah added his plea in prophetic exhortation. When Haggai's voice was no longer heard, Zechariah continued for two years (520-518) to proclaim the coming of the messianic kingdom and to urge the rebuilding of the Temple as the necessary prelude. As a result of the combined vigour of the two prophets, the restoration was completed in 516 (Ezra 6:15).

With the emphasis on the reconstruction of the Temple, Zechariah fixes his eyes upon the subsequent glories of the messianic kingdom and Zerubbabel its ruler (3:8; 6:12). It would appear from the rather obscure reference in 6:9-14 that Zechariah proposed to crown Zerubbabel king. Whether for this reason (cf. Neh. 6:7) or because Zerubbabel contemplated rebuilding the walls of the city as well as the Temple (Zech. 2:1-5), it seems likely that the Persian government relieved him of his governorship. At all events, he mysteriously disappears from the scene. The text of 7: 1-2 may imply that a new governor, Bethelsarezer, had been appointed in his place by 518.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Was the historical interpretation of the events in the Persian Empire by Zachariah correct?

Comparing Zech. 1-8 and Haggai

- i. Both in Haggai and in Zechariah we find emphasis on Jerusalem as the place of God's dwelling, on the importance of reconstructing the Temple, on the role of Joshua and Zerubbabel.
- ii. But in Zech 1-8 Joshua has an importance that he does not have in Haggai, and Zerubbabel's importance appears mainly in relation to the rebuilding of the Temple, probably because Zech 1-8 reflects a stage of political evolution at which Zerubbabel had already played his part out and had turned out to be of little real consequence in the historical destinies of Judah.
- iii. In comparison with Haggai, Zech 1-8 shows a greater sense of the importance of God's action and a correspondingly reduced sense of the importance of initiative taken by the people and their leaders.
- iv. Zech 1-8 is less concrete than Haggai, less static, more likely to entail movement, less fixed upon the phenomena of daily existence, more utopian.
- v. Whereas Haggai promotes immediate action and holds out a hope quickly to become reality, Zechariah promotes principles and outlooks that will assure right action when it is needed, and he holds out a hope for a coming age which seems less immediately imminent.
- vi. As in the case of Haggai, Zechariah is spoken of impersonally as "the prophet" (1:1, 7), but on the other hand, there is also a large element of personal reporting in Zechariah (1:8, etc.).
- vii. Unlike the book of Haggai, however, the prophecies of Zechariah spread over a wider range of issues and contribute considerably to our understanding of the later stages of OT theology such as the themes: angelology, messianism, and apocalypticism.
- viii. Although the oracular activity of the two prophets thus overlapped by one month, unlike the oracles of Haggai, which covers only a range of 4 months, (August-September to November-December, 520 B.C. (i.e., the second year of Darius I Hystaspis; Hag. 1: 1), Zechariah's cover a longer period of two years from October-November, 520 (1: 1), to November-December, 518 (7:1). What are the major differences between the books of Haggai and Zachariah?

The Composition

Structure and Content

The date formulas in 1:1; 1:7; 7:1 mark the division of the work into three sections: a prologue presenting the prophet and his fundamental approach (1:1-6); a collection of eight night visions, followed usually by an oracle in which the vision is interpreted, applied, or even modified (1:7-6:15); an inquiry addressed to Zechariah followed by a response which is actually a series of originally disparate oracles (7:1-8:23).

Authorship

- i. There is general critical agreement that the visionary and oracular passages narrated in the first person are the prophet Zechariah's. Some doubt may be raised about the disparate oracles strung together in 7:1-8:23, but there are no positive reasons for denying Zechariah their authorship.

- ii. Since the oracular interpretations following the visions in 1:7-6:15 modify the content of the preceding visions at times, one may suspect their being added to the visions, and since the modifications which they introduce do not all reflect the same tendencies, one may also suspect that they do not all come from the same person. If that is so, then one may think of more than one editorial process involved in the composition of Zech 1-8.
- iii. Zechariah may himself have been an editor of his own prophetic words set down in writing in earlier years.
- iv. There are also some internal inconsistencies resulting from the text which makes difficult to determine the authorship and date of the texts. .

The Significance of Chapters 1-8.

The Temple and Personal Religious Commitment

- i. Zechariah, like Haggai, projected the Temple as the focus of the right relationship between YHWH and his people.
- ii. Yet he has a far deeper conception of the danger of religious formalism and of the individual's need for personal commitment and obedience. Thus in his insistence on the moral obligations of the community, he draws on the thought of classical prophecy and emphasizes the inwardness of the religious life so strongly (e.g., 4:6; 5:5-11) at a time when the general consensus was on mere mechanical correctness of the cultus.

World Peace Rooted in the Tradition of the Great Prophets

- i. Zechariah is enough of a child of his time, who shared its nationalist aspirations and its hope in the triumph of Jewry and the destruction of the Gentiles. But we observe also his reluctance and hesitation in projecting this nationalistic tendency. His basic thought is the Utopian dream of a world at peace, with Jew and Gentile gathered together in a worshiping community centred on the Temple.
- ii. The downfall of the Gentile oppressors and the material prosperity of the Jews, so strongly emphasized in Haggai are of secondary issue in Zechariah. His visions, although apocalyptic, have more kinship with the traditional eschatological hopes of the great prophets than with the bizarre fantasies of the intertestamental period.

Angelology and Demonology

- i. Zechariah marks a significant stage in the increasing sense of the remoteness of God which Ezekiel had fathered. Not only do angels feature frequently in the visions as intermediaries between God and man, but the word of God itself, which the great prophets recognized as coming directly to them, is now communicated even to one who is himself a prophet by an interpreting angel.
- ii. It is in keeping with this development of angelology that the beginnings of a thoroughgoing demonology can also be detected. "The Satan" was not yet a powerful personage of the Prologue of the book of Job nor independent demonic power of I Chr. 21:1 when Zechariah projected the idea. Zechariah's idea paves the way for the NT conception of the ruler of the kingdom of Satan, who wages deadly warfare upon the kingdom of God.
- iii. It is significant also for future developments in the doctrine of evil that in the seventh vision there is the suggestion that sin is a demonic force, rather than the product of man's disobedience, and that it finds its true home among the Gentiles, the enemies of the people of God.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are the contributions of Zech. 1-8 in the development of NT thought?

3.2.3 The Text of Chapters 9-14

The Historical Situation

Authorship

The second part of the book of Zechariah presents vast challenges in respect of authorship, date, and interpretation. We may not prove beyond doubt if more than one author was responsible for chapters 9-14. But based on linguistic, style, history and theology, the author of these chapters cannot be the prophet Zechariah.

Date of Composition

There have been vast differences of opinion among scholars trying to find the historical situations in which the oracles of chaps. 9-14 were uttered. Some associated the oracles in Zech 9-14 to the period before 721, others to the latter years of the kingdom of Judah, or more commonly to the early Hellenistic period.

But some have strongly argued that even the mentioning of old cities and empires in the text must be understood as a reflection on the literary character of these chapters and on the rhetorical procedures. Those old names stand in the text as an exemplification of God dealing with Jerusalem and Judah as he had done to those old cities. And some of these could equally be explained as editorial gloss insertion into an already existing text.

Again that the oracles in chaps. 9-14 manifest an eschatology that is increasingly apocalyptic, thus in chaps. 12-14 more than in 9-11, is not only an indication that the text could have been given in the post-exilic era. It means also that the interest of the oracle is, unlike the earlier prophets, less on direct and concrete contemporary historical reality. It rather shows more concern with a future lacking historical specificity and portrayed in colours which have a tone that becomes more mythological as the apocalyptic tendency is more fully developed.

However, the most we can say from the historical situation is that oracles of chapters 9-14 constitute a collection of anonymous and mainly apocalyptic utterances, having their origin within a range of time between the fourth and second centuries B.C. Even if the apparently cogent argument against a Maccabean date is furthered by some scholars that it may be impossible to add extra material after the canon of the Twelve had been fixed, some authorities are yet to accept such claim.

SELF ASSESSEMENT ASSIGNMENT

Discuss some of the historical challenges based on the authorship and composition of Zech. 9-14.

Composition of 9-14

Zech 9-14 comprises two collections of oracles (chaps. 9-11 and 12-14), each introduced by the phrase "Oracle (lit., "burden") of the word of YHWH." The oracles of each collection are skilfully bound together editorially: in the case of chaps. 9-11 by catchwords and by bi-directional verbal pointers at the points of juncture; in the case of chaps. 12-14 by the repeated phrase "on that day," which introduces most of them. These two collections must have existed independently before they were joined and added to Zech 1-8.

The Significance of Ch. 9-14.

Theology of the Hellenistic Period

Chapters 9-14 provide us with valuable insights into the theological trends of this Hellenistic period about which relatively little is known. They reflect the various levels of thought which characterized a people who saw little outward evidence of the fulfilment of prophetic promises, yet who never relinquished their invincible hope in the vindication of YHWH and his people.

Apocalyptic Understanding of History

The strong apocalyptic note, born of despair, looks more and more toward supernatural intervention as the only salvation of the tiny community of God from the world-wide supremacy of paganism.

Judgement and Salvation for All

In apocalyptic thinking the Gentiles have almost ceased to be regarded as human beings and have become synonymous with the power of evil that violates every law of God. However, there is the emergent realization that the consummation of God's purpose cannot consist merely in the destruction of evil but must include the conversion of evil to good. In the end the Gentiles must be won for God, and Jerusalem must become the spiritual centre of the world, even if this is seen within the limited conception of worship as consisting of Levitical correctness (cf. 9: 7; 14: 16-21).

Anticipation of the New Testament Theology

Significant use is made of the book of Zechariah in the NT, notably in the messianic entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21: 1-11; cf. Zech. 9:9-10) and the betrayal (Matt. 26:14-16; cf. Zech. 11: 12)

3.3 The Book of Malachi

3.3.1 The Title and Authorship

The book, with the title Malachi, is often regarded as the last of the collection of the Twelve Prophets. The evidence for attributing this book to a prophet who bore the name of Malachi is the superscription of 1:1. This, however, is clearly an editorial preface to the prophecies which begin in 1:2 (cf. Zech. 9:1; 12:1). It is possible, but unlikely, that Malachi is a personal name. Some scholars are of the view that it is an abbreviation for "Malachiah." This, however, would tend to mean "YHWH is a messenger or angel," an impossible concept, rather than "the messenger or angel of YHWH," which is the usual translation of "Malachiah."

A stronger argument against the view that Malachi was the name of the prophet is that it appears to have its origin in the Hebrew word for "my messenger" in 3:1. But since the LXX reads "his messenger" in 1:1 and both the Talmud and the Targum of Jonathan identify "my messenger" in 1:1 as Ezra the Scribe, an explanation which was accepted by Jerome, it is unlikely that the author bore the name of Malachi at all.

The tradition in favour of Ezra as the author is no more valuable than similar traditions in favour of Nehemiah and Zerubbabel. Both the themes and the historical allusions of the book would suggest anyone of these names as possible authors.

However, it would seem most probable that the writer is unknown, an editor of the Book of the Twelve having bestowed the name of Malachi upon the author of this anonymous collection of prophecies on the basis of the phrase in 3:1. For convenience, however, he is generally referred to as Malachi.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are some of the opinions represented by scholars in the effort to identify the author of the Book of Malachi?

3.3.2 The Person of the Author

We may know nothing of the author's life. But the writing suggests to some extent the kind of person of the author of the book. Thus:

- i. It appears that the author was a cult prophet
- ii. He was probably active in Jerusalem in the period of Persian rule ca. 450, shortly before the appearance of Nehemiah.

- iii. His criticisms of the priests of his contemporary days notwithstanding (1:6-2:4), he was favourable to the levitical priesthood (2:4-7), and he insisted on the people's obligation to contribute to the expenses of the Temple and the support of the personnel (3:6-12).
- iv. He had a humane concern for the wife who suffers rejection (2:14-16) resulting from mixed marriage, and for the people of Judah who wonder about God's love for them (1:2-5)
- v. He was a defender of social justice. He was convinced that those who wronged and oppressed the defenseless would eventually receive their just deserts from God (3:5).
- vi. He had a religious sense of God's honour (1:6-14) and of the transcendence which enables God to enforce his will wherever he wishes (1:5).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

It is true that the author of the Malachi was not mentioned specifically but we can derive the characteristics of the author from reading through the text. What are those characteristics?

3.3.3 Date of Composition

Reference to Persian Term for Governorship

Unlike most of the prophetic books in the Bible, no specific date or the time of any reigning king or important personality is associated with the book, except by inference (cf. (Pechah; 1:8, cf. Neh. 5:14; Hag. 1:1). It appears that the oracle was proclaimed when the land (Judah) was being ruled by a Persian governor (Pechah; 1:8, cf. Neh. 5: 14; Hag. 1:1), thus the time must be after the return from exile.

No Reference to the Dereliction of the Temple

There is, however, no reference to a derelict temple or to the need for its rebuilding, as in Haggai and Zechariah. On the contrary, the cultus is in full operation (1:10; 3:1, 10). Consequently, the oracle could have been after the reconstruction of the Temple, that is, later than Haggai and Zechariah's prophecies. In other words, the period of the oracle could probably be pointing at a date later than 516 when the Temple is already in full operation. This is also true if we observe that the prophet's complaint is that the priests have grown weary of the ritual (1:13).

The Prophet's Position on Mixed Marriage

Again, we observe that the prophet inveighs against mixed marriages (2:10-16), and demonstrates good support for the abandoned wives. At the same time, there is no suggestion that there is any official legislation against mixed marriage at that particular time. This would point to a date before 444, when Nehemiah appeared in Jerusalem and proceeded, among other things, to deal with the problem of mixed marriage (Neh. 13:23-27). It was, in fact, during Nehemiah's second term of office that he took action on this matter, and for this reason some scholars regard these prophecies as dating from the period between Nehemiah's first and second administrations. This is, however, more than evidence warrants.

The Influence of Deuteronomic Code

We can also argue that the prophet's criticisms on the shortfall of the Temple cultus (e.g., 1:8) are based on the Deuteronomic Code of 621 and not on the Priestly Code of ca. 450-400. The fact that the reference to tithe law in 3:10 is based on P (Num. 18:21), rather than on D (Deut. 14:22-29), does not necessarily point to a date later than the promulgation of the Priestly Code, since any codification may include some legislation which is already established practice.

Lack of Distinction between the Priest and the Levite

Further, the author's conception of the priesthood (2:4-9) makes no distinction between priests and Levites, thus agreeing with the Deuteronomic view (cf. Deut. 17:9), whereas the Priestly Code

distinguished between the Aaronic priesthood (Lev. 1:5) and the Levitical assistants (Num. 18:1-4). For these reasons most support is given to a date somewhere ca. 460-450. If it were possible for us to date the Nabatean invasion of Edom (1:2-5), then we might come to a closer approximation of the date of the composition of the writing.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are some of the argument to place the date of the composition of the book between 460 and 450 B.C?

3.3.4 The Composition of the Book

The book, as we already observed, has close affinity with Zech. 9-14. It would appear to be the third section of a collection of prophecies (Zech. 9:1-Mal. 4:6) which at some point have been added to the Book of the Twelve. The first two sections of work (Zech. 9-11; 12-14) were added to the work of the sixth-century prophet Zechariah, and the third section was given a separate identity under the name of Malachi. The hypothesis is supported by the fact that each of the three sections has a similar and distinctive superscription: "An oracle of the word of the LORD" (cf. Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1). The detachment of the third section from the book of Zechariah has been explained as an editorial device to complete the sacred number of twelve prophets, but clearly the basic justification for the separate existence of this book is that both the theological content and the historical background are entirely different from those of Zech. 9-14.

We can equally observe that apart from the sole resemblance to Zech. 9-14 , Malachi is brought together under a heading beginning with the word "burden" or (with qualification) "oracle" (1:1). Each of Malachi's six oracles has the same structure: An initial provocative statement by Yahweh or by the prophet is followed by a remark attributed to the people or to elements among them, which is in turn followed by a rebuttal in which the prophet provides the heart of his message. The book closes with two editorial appendixes

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you accept the idea that Malachi could have been earlier a third section of Zechariah 9-14?

3.3.5 The Oracles of Malachi

The first oracle (Mal. 1:2-5) is a reaffirmation of Hosea's proclamation of Yahweh's love for Israel (e.g., Hos. 11) and the second (1:6-2:9) a denunciation of the priests for their failure to give the moral and religious leadership that YHWH demands of his ministers. This imputes on them responsibility for the hardships which the people are suffering, and for their lack of spiritual resources to meet them. YHWH asks his priests where are the reverence and honour that even a human father would expect from his children. The third oracle (2:10-16) is concerned with mixed marriages and divorce. It is addressed to the laity. They too have broken covenant with YHWH and with one another. The fourth oracle (2:17-3:5) is a prophecy of the coming of Yahweh in judgment. The fifth oracle (3:6-12) traces the divine disfavour, of which the people complain, to their failure to give YHWH. The sixth oracle (3: 13-4:3) returns to the problem of the moral order of the universe. The devout and faithful section of the community wonder what profit lies in obedience to Yahweh. The conclusion of the book (4:4-6) is probably editorial additions.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the 6 oracles in Malachi and identify the principal audience for each.

3.3.6 The Significance of Malachi

i. Personal Commitment through Religious Discipline and Observance

Malachi shares the genuine prophetic insight which knows that true obedience to God must come from personal commitment, but he also recognizes that for ordinary mortals this must be expressed in sundry small acts of discipline and religious observance. Consequently, it is not enough to merely enunciate high doctrine and moral principles. These must be enshrined in a practical code of behaviour as the people await the final solution of the world's disorder in the Day of Yahweh.

A Call for Holy Ministry and Worship

The prophet emphasises the need for holy ministry (2:5-7) and sincerity in worship and truth under the auspices of any religion (1:11; cf. Acts 10:35). His condemnation of casual attitude towards God (1:12-13) is obvious. His call for correct ritual and worship is simply based on giving YHWH nothing less than the best (1:7-8).

Protection of Marriage and Family Life

In his high doctrine of the institution of marriage and his condemnation of easy divorce, he is more akin to the spirit of the NT than the OT (cf. Deut. 24: 1-4 with Mark 10:2-12).

Lay the Foundation for Ezra-Nehemiah's Reform

The prophet with his insistence on the correct fulfilment of the worshiper's obligation to the priesthood (3:8-10), offering unblemished sacrifices (1:7-8) and his fear of the infiltration of foreign religious practices through mixed marriages (2:10-11) he anticipates Ezra and Nehemiah to the hardening of the spiritual arteries of the prophetic faith, which reached its apex in Pharisaism.

Social Justice and Righteousness

There are many echoes of the older voice of true prophecy in Malachi's oracles. God's holiness and righteous is a reoccurring theme. Human must reciprocate to this through service based on moral obedience, correct ritual obligation and above, honesty, justice and mercy (1:14; 3:5).

Repentance, Reverence and Punishment

The prophet surprisingly sings a very high pitch on the reestablishment of human relationship with God, which is only effective through repentance (3:7), reverence and awe (3: 16). For Malachi, iniquity will not forever go unpunished (4:1).

Day of the Lord and Future Life

His eschatology is partly conventional and partly original. The Day of the Lord in these oracles is largely of the normal prophetic pattern (cf. Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:7-18), but a new note is introduced with the conception of the book of remembrance in which are recorded the names of the righteous (Mal. 3:16) and which points toward later developments in the belief in a future life

Popularised the Theological Concept of Precursor

Significant too is the conception of a forerunner to "prepare the way" for the coming of YHWH at the great Day (3:1). It is not clear whether the author had in mind two separate figures, the "messenger" and the "messenger of the covenant," or whether the latter is an editorial emendation. Nor is it clear whether the "messenger" is a prophetic figure who will proclaim a last chance of repentance before the judgment, and who, as we have seen, one of the editors of the oracles believed to be the author himself (1:1), or whether the concept is rather that of a supernatural "angel of YHWH," almost a manifestation of YHWH himself.

On the basis of the editorial note in 4:5, which identifies the messenger with Elijah redivivus (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11), the idea of a herald of the messianic age came to play a large part in later apocalyptic.

Jesus himself clearly regarded the prophecy as foreshadowing the mission of John the Baptist (Mk. 9:11-13), and the early church without hesitation saw in the relationship of the work of the Baptist to the messianic kingdom inaugurated by Jesus, the perfect fulfilment of this oracle (Mk. 1:2; Lk. 1:17).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Compare the teaching of Malachi on the doctrine of the institution of marriage and divorce with the NT doctrine.
2. Discuss repentance, reverence and punishment in Malachi.
3. Malachi consistently argued that anything less than the best is not good enough for YHWH. Can you remember any other prophet that argued along the same line?
4. Do you agree with the statement that Malachi popularised the theological concept of precursor?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We saw how the interest of Haggai in the rebuilding of the Temple singled him out as a great enthusiast in the business of YHWH and in Jewish religion. He understood the religious sensitivity of the people revolving round the Temple. It is the same interest that drove him to stress the need for re-establishment of the cultus. He is one of those prophets who contributed immensely in the providing complementary historical information that shaded a welcoming light on the obscure period between the fall of Jerusalem and the achievements of Nehemiah.

Zachariah demonstrated his ardent commitment in the reconstruction of the temple but with some reservation on the danger of religious formalism. He was more of a moderate nationalist, who believed in the utopic dream of world peace with Gentiles and Jews gathering together in a worshipping community centred in Jerusalem. He taught the world the positive and optimistic approach to apocalyptic history. His doctrine on judgement and salvation was all inclusive with a positive gate way. He was a prophet of optimism, who bequeathed the later generation rich theological concepts that have shaped the modern thought and with enormous influence on two of the world religions - Islam and Christianity.

Malachi shares the genuine prophetic insight which knows that true obedience to God must come from personal commitment. He was a defender of the institution of marriage, and one who believes that anything less than the best was not worth of YHWH. He sang the holiness of God in a high pitch, and made moral obedience, correct ritual obligation and above, honesty, justice and mercy the bed rock for human relationship with YHWH.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have raised many issues in this unit without pretending to offer satisfactory solutions to all of them. Rather our concern is to expose you to different challenges in the study of the prophet to enable you build up a critical and analytic mind enable you approach personal and nation issues with a broad mind.

- i. We made it clear that the issue of authorship and the persons of the prophets could not be so easy to determine prior to our belief before we went into the course. At some places in the discussion, we observed discrepancy in the bio-data of the prophets (e.g. Zechariah) that could demonstrate the human influence of the message.
- ii. You were exposed to the historical, religious and socio-economic factors that warranted and fashioned the oracles. So of these are rooted in personal experience, and other in the national challenges of the days of the prophets.
- iii. You have equally noted the centrality of the Temple as a major interest for all the prophets, either they were asking for the reconstruction or for correct disposition to the Temple sacrifices.

- iv. The composition of the books manifested varieties of authorial interests either for the sake of politics, socio-economic, history, religion and/or theology. We equally identified some sections of a book which could have been fused into another prophetic book, or even could have stood out independently but for some interest were made part of
- v. Some of the human natural instinct are brought to the fore as playing against the true worship and reverence to YHWH - selfishness, disobedience, lack of interest for the 'other' including the things of YHWH.
- vi. We explored the different theologies, their historical and religious significance not only for the sake of building and holding to the faith, but also for national unity.
- vii. We equally discovered that the prophetic materials gave the NT thought and theology solid foundation, for instance the doctrine of angelology, demonology, precursory. It could be said that the intertestamental literature complemented the project initiated by these post exilic prophetic writings.
- viii. Incidentally, we discover that the prophets saw themselves in one big choir, singing different parts, consciously or unconsciously end up achieving one great harmony. They gave the world varieties to moderate any monotony that could result from the prophetic tradition.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What practical values do the oracles of Haggai for the believers of our age?
2. Discuss the socio-economic, religious and political factors that induced the oracle of Haggai
3. Prove that Zechariah 1-8 and 9-11 and 12-14 could have been three independent works.
4. Compare the teachings of Zechariah 1-8, 9-11 and 12-14. Which of the section is closer to New Testament teachings?
5. Give reasons to either support or oppose the idea that the book of Malachi could have been composed between 460 and 450 B.C.
6. Demonstrate how Malachi laid the foundation for Ezra-Nehemiah's reform.
7. Who among the three prophets discussed in this unit will you vote for your number one prophet? Why?

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UNIT 4: ZEPHANIAH, OBADIAH AND JOEL

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	148
2.0 OBJECTIVES	149
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	149
3.1 The Book of Zephaniah	149
3.1.1 The Prophet Himself	149
3.1.2 Political and Religious Situation	149
3.1.3 Content of the Prophetic Book	150
3.1.4 Date of Composition	150
3.1.5 The Value and Teachings	150
3.2 The Book of Obadiah	151
3.2.1 Name and Title	151
3.2.2 Historical Setting and Occasion	151
3.2.3 The Composition and integrity of the Book	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2.4 The Message	152
3.3 The Book of Joel	152
3.3.1 The Author	152
3.3.2 Historical Situation	153
3.3.3 The Prophecies of Joel	153
3.3.4 Interpretation of the Book	153
3.3.5 Unity and Structure	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.6 Date of the Prophecies	154
3.3.7 The Significance of Joel	155
4.0 CONCLUSION	157
5.0 SUMMARY	157
6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT	158
7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING	158

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we examined we presented the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. We discovered the uniqueness of each of the books and also some common interest that run through the books. We exposed ourselves to certain critical issues that would entail further investigations, and ended up with the challenge of translating our finds into action for a better society.

In this unit, we shall follow the same line of thought. We shall settle on three prophetic books: Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel. We shall examine the personalities of the prophets, the nature,

structure and literary qualities of their books, the historical background of their respective oracles. We shall also review the content of the books and above all the message we could derive from those books.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit you should be able to:

- discuss the persons of the prophets and some of the major issues concerning the authorship of their respective books
- examine the socio-political and economic situations that necessitated the oracles of the respective prophets
- do some comparative analysis of the literary structure and genre of the books, thus stressing areas of special and common interests
- evaluate their major concerns of each book and relate them to the general concern of the common Nigerians
- appraise the theology and message of the prophets and apply them to the Nigerian situation

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Book of Zephaniah

3.1.1 The Prophet Himself

Zephaniah was a Judean prophet whose activity is dated by the Scythian invasion (630-625 B.C. He was born probably not earlier than 660 B.C. and possibly a descendant of King Hezekiah (1:1). His great-great-grandfather Hezekiah was the king of Judah (715-697 B.C.). Incidentally, Zephaniah was the only prophet of the Old Testament, whose lineal genealogy was given in detail.

The abuses and low state of religion described in the book (1:4-6, 3-9, 12; 3:1-3, 7) perhaps confirmed that the prophet must have started his ministry at the time of King Josiah (640-609), when there was an attempt, serious but of limited success and duration, to undo the apostasy of Josiah's predecessor Manasseh. Understanding Zephaniah's prophecy as an early part of this reform (2 Chr 34:3-7), we see why he does not include the king with the other leaders of the society that he condemns (1:8; 3:3-4).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is so unique about the lineal genealogy of Zephaniah?

3.1.2 Political and Religious Situation

Zephaniah lived in a period when the power of Assyria in the West was rapidly expanding. During this period, official protection was given in Judah to the magical arts of diviners and enchanters. Astral religion became so popular that Manasseh erected on the roof of the upper chamber of King Ahaz altars and chariots for the worship of the sun, the moon, the signs of the Zodiac, and all the hosts of heaven (2 Kgs 23:11ff). New impetus was also given to the worship of the Queen of Heaven, the mother-goddess of Assyrian-Babylonian religion. This worship was extremely popular, for entire Judean families participated in it - fathers, mothers, and children playing distinctive parts in the ritual (Jer. 7:17 ff).

But the invasion of Palestine by the Scythians would awaken Zephaniah to YHWH's call to be His prophet. The Scythians were barbarian hordes who poured down through Asia Minor into Palestine

and down to the borders of Egypt in terrorist raids, leaving calamity in their track. At the bribe of Psammetichus I of Egypt (cf. Herodotus 1.103-106) they would not attack Egypt but made Ashkelon and Bethshean to pay more.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the role of the Scythians during the time Zephaniah, and their contributions to the political instability of the period.

3.1.3 Content of the Prophetic Book

Zephaniah came to feel that the Scythians were harbingers of a judgment which Yahweh was bringing not only upon Judah but also upon all humans and animals, birds and fish-indeed, upon the face of the whole earth (1:2-3). With considerable detail and geographical definiteness, he shows how the judgment of God would affect the nations with which Judah is most vitally concerned (2:4-15). The Jerusalemer leaders were equally indicted and under condemnation because they have refused correction, therefore, remained in their sins (3:1-8). Nevertheless, YHWH will save the few righteous remnant of Judah (3:9-20). To this creative nucleus of the future Judah, Yahweh will give spiritual renewal (3.17b). YHWH will also find joy in them (3:14-17). They will not endure disaster any more. Yahweh will save the lame, gather the outcast, and, having brought home the scattered people, he will cause them to be honored among all the nations of the earth (3:18-20).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Could it mean that YHWH used evil to correct the evil?

3.1.4 Date of Composition

If accept the superscription of 1:1 that Zephaniah preached only during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), then we are already into a big worry – literary and historical.

- i. A number of scholars consider that chapters 2-3 contain later poems that cannot be fitted and that even the authentic oracles of Zephaniah have been somewhat amplified in the postexilic period.
- ii. Some of the oracles (2:8-9) appear to reflect the attitude of later Jewish nationalism, and the international situation reflected in the book (3:1-7) is characteristically different from that of Zephaniah during the Scythian invasion (chapters 1-2).
- iii. The conversion of all peoples to the worship of YHWH (3:9) and the gathering of the Diaspora (3:10) constitute typically postexilic themes, bearing the influence of Deutero-Isaianic theology.
- iv. The final poem (3:6-20) belongs to the eschatological pattern in which YHWH himself, the "king of Israel," is "in the midst of his people," and the nations become witnesses of the restored fortunes of Judah.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are some of the literary and historical issues that raise doubt about the authorship of the Book by Zephaniah the prophet?

3.1.5 The Value and Teachings

Historical Material

Zephaniah's words are source material of firsthand importance for the Jerusalem of his day. They are insight to the understanding of socio-political and religious challenges of the Judaism of that period.

YHWH as the Lord of History

In the world of political turmoil, Zephaniah sees the fates of nations in YHWH's hands. The prophet asserts the sovereignty of YHWH, and projected YHWH as the master of history, who uses the foreign nations to discipline the chosen people.

The Day of the Lord and Divine Judgment

The dominant theme is the Day of YHWH (cf. Amos 5:18), when YHWH will devastate the old vassals (now rebellious), Philistia, Moab, and Ammon, and the foundering world power, Assyria. The same God will ravage his own people especially, but not exclusively (1:9), for their false worship. That Day of YHWH will be the ultimate Day of Judgment that awaits all. It will be a day of wrath, of trouble and distress, of crashing ruin and devastation, of darkness and calamity, of clouds and gloom (I: 15), which would mark the destruction of all the inhabitants of the earth (1:18).

But because the destruction is reserved for the rebellious and arrogant, its effect will be purification and formation of a people vastly smaller, but pleasing to Yahweh (2:3; 3:11-13).

Condemnation of Pseudo-Prophetic Activities

The prophet also knows the corrupting character of magical practices, and declares that they have no place in the religion of YHWH.

The Nature of Human

The prophet further acknowledged the dishonest and deceitful nature of the human person. And unless renewed by God, human cannot be saved.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Evaluate the theological concept of the Day of YHWH in Zephaniah and compare it with any other Minor Prophet of your choice. The hatred for Edomite was very loud.

3.2 The Book of Obadiah

3.2.1 Name and Title

The name 'Obadiah' which is used as the title of the book, means simply 'Servant of the Lord'. It is a name quite common in the biblical tradition (cf. I Kings 18:3, 7, 16; I Chr. 27:19; 2 Chr. 34:12; etc.). The book is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It belongs to a literature of anti-Edomite polemic (cf. Gen. 27:39-40; Ps. 137:7; Isa. 34:5 If; 63:1-6; Ezek. 25:12-17; 35; Amos 1:11-12; Mal. 1:2-4; cf. Jer. 49:7-22) and of Day-of-the-Lord prophecies (cf. Isa. 2:6-22; Ezek. 7; Joel 1:15-2:11; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:7, 14-18), to which it bears numerous affinities in thought, style, and diction.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What do you understand by the assertion that the Book of Obadiah belongs to the anti-Edomite polemic?

3.2.2 Historical Setting and Occasion

Israel's hatred of Edom was inveterate in the Book. The etiological narratives of Genesis record the tensions between Jacob-Israel and Esau-Edom (Gen. 25:23; 27:39-40). From the time of the United Monarchy the control of Edom was a fixed policy of the kings of Israel and Judah. The lucrative

trade from Ezion-geber (modern Tell el-Kheleifeh), the port on the Gulf of Aqabah, passed through Edomite territory, and wars, as a consequence, were not infrequent (II Sam. 8:13-14; 1 Kgs. 11:14-17; 2 Kgs 14:22; 16:5-6; 2 Chr. 20; 21:8-10). When Jerusalem fell in 597, Edom exploited Judah's plight, rejoiced in its fate (Lam. 4:21). The Edomites "acted revengefully" against Israel (Ezek. 25:12). They joined with the Babylonians in her destruction, and occupied the Negeb (Ezek. 35:10). The description of Edom's behaviour in Obad. 11-14 is the most definite of all the anti-Edomite oracles, and is generally held to reflect conditions after 597. The only question is whether it should refer to contiguous verses in the book; on this matter there has been considerable diversity of opinion among scholars.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Why was the hatred for Edom so loud in the Book of Zephaniah?

3.2.3 The Message

Verse 15: "As you have done, it shall be done to you," summarizes the message of the whole book. Edom had rejoiced in the sufferings of Judah, and had taken advantage of her defenceless condition. But Edom's own turn for trouble would come. Jeremiah 49:7-22 repeats many of the ideas of Obadiah 1-9. Probably these verses were added to the book of Jeremiah at a later time, when people had forgotten where they came from.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read Jeremiah 49:7-22 and compare it with Obadiah 1-9. What is then your impression?

3.3 The Book of Joel

The book of Joel is one of the twelve Minor Prophets that together make up the concluding section of the OT. In the LXX and Vulgate versions the book consists of three chapters. But the MT version has four chapters. The LXX and Vulgate combined the two chapters of MT into one. In the case of the English versions, it follows the LXX and the Vulgate, thus combining chapters 2-3 of the Hebrew into one chapter – 2:1-27, 28-32.

3.3.1 The Author

The superscription attributes the book to a man named Joel ben Pethuel. The name Joel means "Yo" (YHWH) is God." Incidentally, the name is popular in the Old Testament tradition. 1 Sam 8:2 tells us about one of the sons of David named Joel. The name appears most often in the later book of Chronicles. A dialectal form of Joel's patronym is read in Gen 22:23; 24:15,24, 47; 1 Chr 4:30. It is true that the author of the book is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT, but there is no strong evidence to doubt the historical existence a person that bore such name.

Again, we can adduce concerning the person of the author from his writings. Joel had a deep appreciation for the worship conducted in the Temple (1:8-9; 2:27; 4:16-17). The book also contains cultic terms such as vegetable offering and libation, fast and solemn assembly (1: 14; 2:12,15) Temple personnel such as priests (1:9,13; 2:17), ministers of Yahweh (1:9; 2:17), ministers of the altar (1: 13), and "ministers of my God" (1:13) appear in his writing. All these information could suggest that the author could not have been a stranger to the cultic practices of the Jews.

Some scholars have even gone further to infer that Joel could have been a cultic prophet because his appreciation for the cult and the use of cultic terms. We may see such interpretation as deducing more than the text can bear. That is to say that the appreciation for the cult does not necessarily

make one a cultic functionary just as appreciation of soccer must not necessarily make one a player or referee.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you think that the information from the text is good enough to give us a clue regarding the personality of the author of Joel?

3.3.2 Historical Situation

It is important for us to note that intra-textual evidence places the Book in a period after the Exile, when the worship of the restored Temple had become the lifeblood of the people. It was a time when formalism in ritual had taken the place of moral issues as the main concern of a prophet (2:12-14). The period was also punctuated with disappointment and disillusionment over the failure of earlier prophetic promises. The situation would lead to a growth of nationalism and exclusiveness (2:28-32; 3:18-20). The Jews would see themselves as the victims of a world too corrupt to be redeemed. The only alternative left was to place their hope in YHWH, who would vindicate them by the total and supernatural annihilation of their enemies. Such attitude was further encouraged by the legislation of Nehemiah and the promulgation of the law. The situation reflects the conditions in Jerusalem at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the fourth century.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Describe briefly the historical situation of the time of Joel.

3.3.3 The Prophecies of Joel

The first part (1:1-2:27) appears to deal with a recent historical event namely, a plague of locusts which so devastated the land that the prophet, regarding this affliction as a clear indication of YHWH's displeasure. He therefore called the people to repentance. The people responded to his call. He then predicted the destruction of the locusts and the restoration of fertility to the land.

The second part (2:28-3:21), on the other hand, appears to be wholly eschatological in character. The prophet speaks of a future time when a supernatural visitation of the spirit of YHWH will bestow upon all his people the gift of prophecy. He further depicts in apocalyptic terms the final conflict between the hosts of YHWH and the armies of the heathen nations, ending in the annihilation of the latter and the ultimate vindication of Israel

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read through the book of the Joel and identify the historical and eschatological elements the first and section sections book respectively.

3.3.4 Interpretation of the Book

The book manifests some literary and historical challenges that have given rise to various interpretations. The first part of the book would appear predominantly historical and the second part mostly apocalyptic. However, some themes still run through the two sections. The Day of YHWH as a theological theme occurs in both sections (cf. 1:15; 2:1-2 and 2:31), and elements in the description of the invading army of locusts seem to have already a kinship with the supernatural character of the events described in the second half of the book (compare 2: 2- 11, 20 and chapter 3).

The question has therefore been raised as to whether the locusts are, in fact, real locusts, or whether they are merely symbols of the heathen armies whose destruction is described in chapter 3. If they

are symbolic, either they may represent hostile attacks in the course of the past history of Israel, or they may be wholly apocalyptic in character as in Rev. 9:1-11.

The fathers favoured an allegorical interpretation. The locusts of chapters 1-2 are the powers of darkness which threaten the Church. But in the end God's judgment will fall upon the world. Later explanations identify the four types of locust (1:4) with four great world empires which harried Israel-Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Greek; or Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman-or with four separate assaults on the country during the Persian period. None of these allegorical interpretations is satisfactory. As has been pointed out many times, if the locusts are armed warriors, they cannot be said to be like themselves (cf. 2:4-7).

The view generally held now is that the locusts are real and not symbolic. Close observers of the habits of these creatures, and spectators who have witnessed the devastation they have caused, recognize in the prophet's description an accurate picture of such a fearful onslaught as must have given rise to this book. Their behaviour suggests nothing more vividly than the terrible havoc wrought by invading armies, and might well be described in the highly coloured terms of chapter 2. In the normal manner of apocalyptic thought, as in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, this would lead the prophet, in the second part of the book, to regard such a disaster as a warning of the judgment to come (cf. Isa. 13). The association of the two elements would readily account for the apocalyptic colouring and eschatological references of the first part.

Incidentally, the affinities of the book of Joel would be more with the oracles of Zech. 9-14 rather than with Malachi, especially with the emphasis given to the eschatological and apocalyptic section.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the defect of the allegorical interpretation of the locust episode in the book of Joel?

3.3.5 Date of the Prophecies

The date of the book must be deduced from criteria within the text itself. There is probably a greater scholarly divergence concerning the date of Joel than there is concerning the date of any other biblical book. A minority position would situate Joel in the reign of Joash (837-800). The majority of scholars places the book in the postexilic period, although there is considerable divergence as to whether an early or a late context best fits the book. The reasons for a postexilic date are compelling.

Absence of the Royal Court in the Book

It would appear that the monarchy has disappeared, and many of the people are scattered in exile (3:2-3) when the oracle was uttered. For nowhere in Joel is mentioned of a king or a royal court, despite the fact that all classes of people from priests to elders, from infants to brides are invited to the lament in 2:16-17. In times of emergency it is always the king who normally represents the people before God (2 Sam 21:1; 2 Kgs 6:30). Joel must have been written during a time when the monarchy no longer existed.

The people and rulers of the Neo-Babylonian Empire are also never mentioned, although it was they who brought the kingdom of David to an end and destroyed the Temple in 587. We assume, therefore, that the Babylonians would have probably been replaced by the Persians (539) at the time of Joel.

Prominence of the Temple

The prominence of the Temple is well attested in the oracles, and oracles seem to suggest that the Temple is standing and in full operation (1:13-14; 2:15-17). Again, we may observe that the walls of Jerusalem are intact (2:9), and the community is so small enough to be gathered within the temple courts (2: 16), which are some of the characteristics of the post-exilic period. So, Joel must have been written after 515 when the Temple was rebuilt. With the year 515 we have a terminus post quem for Joel. Since Tyre and Sidon are still in existence as cities to be punished (4:4), we are able to set a terminus ante quem in the latter half of the 4th cent. Tyre was destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332 and Sidon by Artaxerxes III Ochus in 343.

Lack of Cultic Abuse

Furthermore, the cultic reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah seem to have already taken place at the time Joel was written. Our observation is taken from the prominence given to the high priesthood and the ritual figure (1: 13-14; 2: 12-17), in particular the meal offering and drink offering (1:9, 13; 2:14) without indicating any cultic abuses. In addition to Joel's cultic concerns, his antiforeigner tone is reminiscent of the period of Ezra-Nehemiah and later.

Linguistic Designation of Israel and Judah

We may also add that the impression created by the text is that Israel and Judah have ceased to exist as separate nations, thus the names appear to be used synonymously (2:27; 3:2, 16). Again, despite the possible qualification in 2:32, it seems that the prophet drew a sharp distinction between Israel and the rest of the world in his view of the Day of the Lord. Whereas earlier prophets (cf. Amos 5:18-20) had thought in terms of judgment upon Israel for its sins, Joel thinks rather of the punishment of Israel's enemies and the triumph of the Jews (ch. 3). This is clearly a post-exilic mode of thought

Link with Post-Exilic Prophetic Works

There are also points of contact between Joel and postexilic prophetic works. Joel 2:11 is similar to Mal 3:2, although the similarity is not striking. Joel 3:4b is identical to Mal 3:23b and Joel 3:5b is very likely a citation of Obad 17a. One can also compare Joel 4:2-3 with Obad 11 and Joel 4: 19 with Obad 10.

All of this indicates that Joel would have been written after Obad and Mal (5th cent.). In summation we may say that it is clear that the book was written after the rebuilding of the Temple in 515 and before the destruction of Sidon in 343, and after the time of Obadiah and Malachi. A date between the last half of the 5th and the first half of the 4th century seems best to fit the context.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give reason to support or oppose the idea that a date between the last half of the 5th and the first half of the 4th century seems best to fit the context for the production of Joel.

3.3.6 The Significance of Joel

Multidimensional Interest

This fascinating little book has many intriguing features, and these not only theological. Naturalists commend the accuracy of the description of the ravages of the locusts, and litterateurs are impressed by the vividness of the imagery and the poetic quality of the style. It would appear from the number of phrases which can be paralleled in other Old Testament books that the author had modelled himself on earlier masters like Amos and Zephaniah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah.

Indeed, he acknowledges a quotation (from Obad. 17) in 2:32, but he in his turn probably influenced the imagery of the second part of Zechariah. His artistic skill in weaving backward and forward between the historical phenomenon of the locusts and the supra-historical events of the Day of YHWH is considerable. Each of these themes takes on something of the colouring of the other. Consequently, we may agree with the opinion that Joel has used a great deal of previously existing material, but thoroughly reworked them to present a stylistic and theological unity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you agree that with the twin themes of “locust” and the “Day of YHWH” Joel is able to draw the attention of theologians, naturalists and litterateurs to his prophecy?

Sin and Repentance, Judgement and Reward Expressed in Apocalyptic Biblical Theological Terms

But it is in his role as a harbinger of the apocalyptic school that Joel's importance lies for biblical theology. In other respects he shares the older prophetic ideas. The plague of locusts is a certain sign of YHWH's wrath. Repentance is therefore incumbent on the whole community for their unspecified sins. The most tragic aspect of the rift between YHWH and his people is seen as the cessation of the daily offerings, now, in the postexilic theocracy, the guarantee of the covenant relationship.

But given repentance, divine favour will be manifested, not only in terms of material prosperity for the community, but also, and more important, in the restoration of the means of preserving the covenant relationship. By this both Israel and the world will know that YHWH is Lord and that his own people are his peculiar care.

It is on this conventional basis of rewards and punishments that Joel builds his apocalyptic structure. The events of history are projected onto a cosmic canvas and become prefigurations of what lies beyond the natural sequence of occurrences within the time process. The plague of locusts becomes a type of the powers of evil that oppress YHWH's people. Their rout and the subsequent restoration of prosperity are transposed into the final judgment upon the world and its sequel in a golden age for the people of the promise.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the role of Joel as a harbinger of the apocalyptic school.

Import of its Theology

Theologically, the message of Joel is one of hope built on experience. The devastation visited upon Israel by the locusts and drought was immense. However, if YHWH responded to Israel's heartfelt lament and removed this particular disaster, it was a sign that YHWH had not abandoned his people; God was still in their midst. Armed with that conviction, there was every reason for them to hope that the reversal of fortune brought about by the end of the locust plague and drought would continue and bring the final vindication of Israel.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How correct is it to describe the oracles of Joel as the prophecy of hope?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The prophets were children of their own age. Yet they were men who transcended their contemporaries and went beyond the normal. Sometimes they play the minority but never deterred or intimidated by the game of number. They stood always firm on the course to which they were called, ready to die rather than giving up. This Zephaniah demonstrated in no small measure. He was one of the great influences and motivators of the Josiah's reform that aimed at undoing all the apostasy of the time. The prophet was not slow to acknowledge weakness of humans, the dishonest and deceitful nature of the human person. And unless renewed by God, human cannot be saved. Zephaniah did not only proclaim the sovereignty of YHWH but projected YHWH as the master of history, who would even choose the abhorrent Scythians to discipline and bring back His chosen. This would have been a riddle to the contemporaries of Zephaniah but with the light of faith, our prophet was able to realise this.

Obadiah was a prophet noted for his distasteful and anti-Edomite polemic. In the context of playing the hate, he thought us one great lesson that no one should rejoice at the calamity of the other, neither should we take the advantage of the weak because some day the game may revert to the advantage of the weak.

The book of Joel is another taste of the buddy, an intrigue for persons of diverse interest - theologians, naturalists as well as litterateur. In all, the prophet assured us that if YHWH could respond to Israel's heartfelt lament and removed the disaster of locust, then it was a sign that YHWH had not abandoned his people; God was still in their midst. Armed with that conviction, there was every reason for them and also for us to hope that the reversal of fortune brought about by the end of the locust plague and drought would continue and bring the final vindication of Israel and our salvation.

5.0 SUMMARY

In the course of our discussion in this unit, we were able to direct our attention to three important Minor Prophets - Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel. The discussion exposed us to various issues associated with the prophets, which include their personalities, life experience and their special concern for the course of YHWH.

- i. Our discussion revealed that none of the three prophetic books was loud enough to speak on its date of composition. But we were able to argue from the criteria set out in the texts that the books of were all of post-exilic composition with a common theme rooted in the intervention of YHWH for his people.
- ii. Moreover, we saw no reason to doubt the historical existence of the prophets, whose names were connected with the books, even though their personality could be shrouded with controversies.
- iii. We equally discovered that the books shared almost the same historical, political, religious and socio-economic background, which had prompted the prophecies and propelled them to a point of taking bold of the history of the people.
- iv. In our exposition and analysis of the books, we discovered that most often the central message of the books were located and discoverable within the inner structural of the text.
- v. It is equally surprising to discover that the books manifested high level of literary and thematic unity than what one could superficially anticipated.
- vi. The prophet set out not only to condemn false religious practices and other social vices. They contributed positively in setting out theological materials for New Testament thought.
- vii. We finally noted that the value of the books were multidimensional touching different aspects of life, though with special prejudice for theology and religion.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Who were the Scythians, and to what extent did they influenced Zephaniah?
2. What was the indictment against the Jerusalemmer leaders in the book of Zephaniah?
3. List out the passages in the book of Zephaniah where pseudo prophetic activities were condemned, and why were they condemned?
4. Discuss the historical setting of the book of Obadiah.
5. Do you agree that v.15 of the book is the central message of Obadiah?
6. Discuss the historical back of Joel, taking into consideration other prophetic books that shared the same background.
7. What is the relationship between the book of Joel and Zechariah chapters 9-14?
8. What can you offer that the locust incident in Joel could have been a historical reality?
9. Discuss the theological concept of sin and repentance in the book of Joel.

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UNIT 5: THE BOOK OF JONAH

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION	159
2.0 OBJECTIVES	159
3.0 MAIN CONTENT	160
3.1 Identity and Uniqueness	160
3.2 Date of Composition and Authorship	160
3.3 The Story Begins	161
3.4 Structure and Literary Devices	162
3.5 The Place of the Psalm (2:2-9)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.6 Considerations and Interpretation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.7 Message of Jonah	162
4.0 CONCLUSION	164
5.0 SUMMARY	164
6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT	165
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS	165

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit is the concluding section, not only of the module but also the entire course. Consequently, we have chosen the book of Jonah for the project. In the last unit, however, we examined the books of the prophets Zephaniah, Obadiah and Joel. We tried to examine the personalities of these prophets, the nature, structure and literary qualities of their books as well as the historical background of their respective oracles. We also reviewed the content of their books and, above all, their message.

In this unit, we shall look at some of the challenging issues surrounding the identity of the person of the prophet Jonah, the uniqueness of his book. We shall also look into the complexities of the date and authorship of the book. We shall give a summary account of the story to enable all of us follow the discussion very close, and make some positive contribution through the self-assessment exercise. The structure of the story and the literary devices as found in the text will also form an interesting piece for us to deliberate upon. In addition, we shall look into the various interpretations of the text and the text message, which covers the range of history, literature and theology. At every state of the discussion, we shall be relating our finds to the Nigerian environment. We therefore appear for more concentration since the last lecture always carries the summary of the entire course.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- appreciate the uniqueness of the book and the challenge associated with the identity of the person of the prophet
- discuss the complexities surrounding the date and authorship of the book
- give a summary account of the story
- Evaluate the various interpretative approaches to the book
- understand the message of the book and relate it to the Nigerian environment

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Identity and Uniqueness

The challenge of the book starts with the identity of the Prophet Jonah, whose identity was not disclosed in his 'own book'. However, we can read about a prophet in 2 Kings 14:25, whose prediction certainly came to pass. He correctly predicted that Jeroboam II would successfully reconquer from Syria the large tracts of territories previously held by Israel. Could it be the same prophet we referred to in the Book of Jonah? That is, Jonah, the chief character of the book, who is described as the son of Amittai. Opinions of scholars are divided on the matter. Some would see the same Jonah of 2 Kings in operation here, while others have questioned such claim (Harrison, 1973, 905). The issue remains unsettled.

In spite of the fact that mere mention of the book of Jonah comes along with it the ridiculed and disobedient prophet, the story, indeed, if pictured as a stage act, would have great sense of humour. It is a prophetic book with difference. Unlike other prophetic books, it contains no divine oracles or prophetic utterances but stories about a prophetic figure (Harrison, 1973). It contains history and narrative to the practical exclusion of prophecy or divine utterances (Feinberg, 1987, p. 133). It is a story about a prophet, and even more a tract about God (Watts, 1975, 207), whose life style, actions and reactions to issues depict the prophetic message is located.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you see any connection between Jonah the Prophet, and the Jonah of 2 Kings?
What is so unique about the Book of Jonah in the prophetic traditions?

3.2 Date of Composition and Authorship

The authorship of the book is as controversial as the identity of the prophet himself. In the midst of the controversy, three opinions prevail:

- i. The book was written by Jonah the Prophet himself.
- ii. The book was authored by an unknown author, someone probably very close to the Prophet, but not the prophet himself. According to the argument, this could account for such details as would be known only to Jonah, including his dialogue with YHWH. The projection is that the sailors, whose ship presumably returned to port, might perhaps have supplied the account of what happened when the prophet was asleep (1:5) and after he had been thrown overboard (1:16).

There is also a case whether the book is actually the work of person or group of authors either simultaneously or successively. However, the majority opinion is that it is the work of a single author who has exhibited some definite and common literary and theological thread that bound the thoughts together (Stuart, 1979).

Taking into consideration all the divergent of opinions, it will also be good for us to examine briefly the date of the composition of the book before we make any attempt of drawing conclusion.

Argument on the Date of the book could also be seen from three different camps:

i. The camp that jettisons any discussion on the date of composition on account that it cannot precisely be determined.

ii. The group that treats the Book of Jonah as a true historical account of the Prophet Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kgs 14:25. Thus, if the narrative is regarded as historical thus relating it to the Jonah of 2 Kings, we may then assume a date for the composition of the book somewhere between the reign of Jeroboam II and the fall of Nineveh in 612. In other words, the composition of the book is presumably earlier rather than later eighth century B.C.

iii. But once we cannot link the book historically with Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kgs 14:25, the dating of the book as a production of the 8th cent. would seem to have been disconnected. Then scholars have to search for other dates, and the "universalism" implicit in the outlook of the book has led many to believe that the work is of the late 5th cent. That is to say, they read it as a reaction to the separatist and exclusivist tendencies of the period of Ezra and Nehemiah.

But recent scholarship has been reluctant to restrict the book's intent so narrowly, and arguments for a postexilic dating based on linguistic considerations (e.g., the number of "Aramaisms" in the text) have been critiqued. Nevertheless, the work's concern with the question of God's justice and the need for and possibility of repentance coincides well with Israel's historical experience of the exilic and postexilic periods.

Therefore, proposals for more specific dates would include:

- the 6th cent. (contemporary with Jeremiah [cf. 18:7-8], Joel [cf 2:13], Ezekiel [cf. 33:11]),
- the mid-5th cent. (note, e.g., Mal 2:17; 3:14-15), and
- the early Hellenistic period (late 4th-early 3d cent.).

However, the terminus ad quem is 200 BC, by which time it had been included in the "Book of the Twelve" (cf. Sir 49:10). So, with caution, we may conclude that the work could have been written ca. in the fourth century B.C. by an unknown writer who shared the view of Second Isaiah that God's concern for human was not confined to the Jews but was as wide as the world itself.,' and most probably about the time in Jerusalem, when Nehemiah and Ezra had been pursuing their policy of racial exclusiveness, narrow nationalism, and religious intolerance in a misguided attempt to preserve the unique heritage of the Jewish faith.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Discuss the controversy surrounding the authorship of the Book of Jonah.
2. When do you think the Book of Jonah could have been composed?

3.3 The Story Begins

Our Jonah is summoned by YHWH to set out for Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which not only represented the oppressive power of the war lords of the Near East, but, like Babylon and Rome in later years, was also regarded by Jews of the stricter sort as a synonym for the worst infamies, vicious practices, blasphemy, and irreligion of the Gentile world (cf. Nah. 3).

Jonah's mission to Nineveh is to proclaim the judgment of YHWH upon it, but the prophet, for reasons which are not disclosed until later in the story, is unwilling to fulfil his assignment. His reluctance is founded on the ancient animosity between the Jews and the Assyrian. Thus the story simply reflects the unlovely character of the dour, recalcitrant Hebrew prophet, which is finely contrasted with the humane and charitable Gentile sailors, and the readiness of the pagan city to respond to the proclamation of the truth about God and his will for human. YHWH, having issued his initial command to the prophet to pronounce his judgment upon Nineveh, assumes the role of a deus ex machina until the final denouement, when he emerges as the merciful Creator and Father of all, a conception as lofty as any in the OT.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read through the Book of Jonah and make a summary account of the story on a half a page of A-4 sheet. Read through again and see whether you captured every important point.

3.4 Structure and Literary Devices

The parallel between the two accounts of God's commands to Jonah first in 1:1-3 and again in 3:1-4 indicates the book's overall division into two parts. The story itself is told in four "scenes" or episodes which deal alternately with a group of pagans and then with Jonah and God.

In chapters 1 and 3, the sailors and their captain and the people of Nineveh with their king are led to belief in God through their encounter with Jonah. Chapters 2 and 4 focus on Jonah, and the theme of "death" assumes a prominence: Jonah praises God for rescuing him from death by means of the "great fish" in chap. 2 and Jonah wishes for death out of obstinacy and frustration in chapter 4.

Again, the author's artistry is evident not only in the obvious symmetry and balance that characterize the book's structure. A number of literary devices serve to knit the episodes in the book more closely together and to enhance the work's subtlety and complexity. These include the use of key words such as "great" "evil," "appoint," "fear," "descend;" not without significance is the way in which the author plays on and exploits the various nuances of these words.

Irony, which according to some interpreters, borders on satire, is also a key interest of the author. We can appreciate this point better if we observe the contrast between the piety and responsiveness to God's word of the pagan sailors and Ninevites and the narrow-mindedness and obstinacy of the Israelite Jonah and a prophet in this case.

Allied to irony is the author's almost comic use of exaggeration. For example, the word "great" is repeated fourteen times - the episode with the "great fish" (chap. 2) and the image of the animals of Nineveh in sackcloth (3:8).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you agree that the Book of Jonah is a parallel of two accounts?

3.5 Message of Jonah

3.7.1 The Message as History

The book of Jonah finds its place in the OT as the work of an unknown writer of the fourth century B.C. who, in a little tale of the lesson which YHWH taught to a harsh and intolerant Jew, protested against this travesty of the message of 2 Isaiah, and sought to persuade his countrymen that God's love is wide enough and deep enough to include the hated Gentile. Israel, like Jonah, must learn by bitter experience that Jewry has no prescriptive right to be called God's people. Several centuries later the rigorists in the Jewish-Christian section of the church had likewise to be taught that "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11: 18).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the historical reality that the book of Jonah sets out to address?
2. Can the book of Jonah have any historical and prophetic voice in the present Nigeria's democratic dispensation?

3.7.2 The Message as Story

i. Allegorically, it is at this point of history that the author stands. In depicting the immediate conversion of the Ninevites, he suggests the readiness of Israel's neighbours to respond to the message, and in the picture of the prophet sulking in his flimsy shelter he depicts the Nehemiahs,

Ezras, Joels, and Obadiah's of his day, sheltering under the precarious protection of their recently rebuilt temple, uncompromising in their hatred of the Gentiles, hoping for the apocalyptic judgment of God to fall upon them, and still unwilling to recognize the purpose of God to save the whole world and not only the Jews (cf. Ezek. 38-39, etc.)

ii. Parabolically, if Jonah is intended to be no more specific a character than the "certain man" of Jesus' parable, he still remains unmistakably a portrait of the narrow and intolerant Hebrew of Ezra's day, or the narrow, intolerant Christian of our own day, who refuses to face the universalistic implications of the divine revelation and its call to world mission. Moved neither by the words nor by the works of God, he peers out upon the world from his tiny sanctuary, a forlorn, self-centred figure, clutching his faith to his bosom, while ordinary humanity, with its many likable qualities, waits ready to respond to the message of God's salvation, which his religious dogmatism makes him unwilling to share.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the difference between the allegorical and parabolic understanding of the message of Jonah?

3.7.3 The Message as Prophetic

We have already seen that the importance of the work lies neither in the "miracle" of the 72-hour sojourn in the belly of a fish nor in Jesus' reference to the "sign of Jonah" in his preaching. Responding to the particular situation of the Israel of his day, the author gives us insight into developments in the role that prophecy came to have after-the-monarchical period and dares to deal with the very mystery of God.

i. Prophetically, the oracle of Jonah is a brief and blunt announcement of imminent destruction (3:4). But the book as a whole emphasizes the possibility and desirability of repentance as well as the merciful and forgiving nature of God. Some have seen these emphases as evidence of a shift in the role that prophecy began to play from the 6th cent. on; a shift from simply the announcement of what God was about to do, usually judgment and punishment, to the call to "repentance. The theme of repentance is also prominent in other literature of this period, e.g., Dtr, Jer, and Ezek.

Others have seen in this caricature of a prophet (Jonah at first flees from his mission and then sees his prophecy proved inaccurate) "a mild parody of prophecy;" written not only to counter a rigid deuteronomistic doctrine of retribution but also to give voice to "doubt, perplexity, and unease over simple solutions and glib orthodoxy.

It is also important for us to note the satire implicit in the inconsistency between Jonah's confessions of faith in 1:9 and 4:2 and his accompanying actions. But this critique comes not from outside but from within the prophetic tradition and thus represents that "prophetic proclivity for self-questioning" which is "one of the best aspects of its spirit."

ii In the world of theodicy, Jonah, the central human character in the book, the author draws not a stick figure nor a cardboard character but a real human being who, despite his obvious failings, manages to evoke a certain sympathy in his struggle to understand the God in whose service he finds himself. At the root of Jonah's sometimes inexplicable actions and acerbic disposition, one can begin to recognize a sincere striving to reconcile the concept of a just God with the reality of God's mercy. In inviting us to view the problem through the eyes of this reluctant prophet, the author brings us close to the mystery of God.

Not only is it the mercy of God which the author highlights in his parable story; it is a particular quality of that mercy. That mercy is free and unmerited, and, above all, God is free to bestow it on such as the Ninevites.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you think that God's forgiveness in the book of Jonah depends on human repentance?

Do you think that the action of God in the book of Jonah is a challenge for theologian to reconcile God's justice and God's mercy?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We observed this unit the struggle in Jonah and his Israelite folk to understand this God called YHWH. Israel could not understand being the victim of the oppression of Babylon, Persia, and the Hellenistic kingdoms successively would set out for a mission to save her arch-enemies. Thus the legendary city of Nineveh would represent all that is hateful, repugnant, and cruel in such oppressors, and the notion of a God who is willing to show compassion to such as these became a challenging one indeed, but no less challenging than the God who Jesus preached (cf Matt 5:45, and the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10).

We may conclude, without fear of contradiction, that the issue with which Jonah deals primarily is the mercy and justice of God. The book is designed as a counterblast to that policy that made Israel an enclave unto herself. The message of the book is that the real vocation of Israel as the people of God is to spread the good news of God's love among the Gentiles, and not to hoard its religious legacy. The book of Jonah is thus to be reckoned among those OT writings which come closest to the spirit of the Christian gospel. It ends with a question mark, because the author does not know whether the Jewish community of his day will respond to the challenge of the book. The question mark still stands today in the Christian history and challenges all individuals, Churches, ecclesia bodies and Christian communities alike.

5.0 SUMMARY

The course is so designed that Jonah should form the last part of the discussion because of its direct relevance to us both as individuals and as a nation. It is a teaching that challenges us as Nigerians to come out from our various ethnic and religious enclaves to appreciate the fact that the God we profess is greater than any religion or ethnic group. Such conclusion is not a simply assertion but as a result of some critical analytic approach adopted in the course of the discussion.

- i. We saw that the book of Jonah from outstart was unique compared with other prophetic tradition. It was only book that was less interested about prophetic utterances but concentrated more on the figure and personality of the prophet, whose title it bears. The identity of the prophet himself was equally controversial.
- ii. We discovered that the date of composition of the book and its authorship were engulfed with contentions. But our conclusion was that Jonah the son of Amittai could not have been the author, so also that the book could not have been written during the time of Jonah the son of Amittai.
- iii. We identified the major characters in the story - YHWH himself, Jonah, the Ninevites, the sailors and the fish. The narrator allowed each of these characters some significant role in the plot.
- iv. Besides literary techniques such as symmetry and balance, irony, satire, we strongly noted the literary structure of the book posed an interest passage for our discussion. We identified a defined structure and literary device in the book that warranted us to speak of a 'parallel of two accounts'. The author parallelised God's command (1:1-3 and 3:1-4), the pagan nations (1 and 3) and Jonah (2 and 4); Jonah praise God for life (2) and Jonah wishes to die (4), etc. Again, the place of the Psalm and its function in the literature was made an issue. We concluded that the Psalm could as well have

left out of the story without doing any violation either to the literary integrity of the text or the theological value.

v. We exposed the various approaches adopted by scholars to unravel the mystery of the book, thus touching the historical narrative, the story and prophetic aspects. Our conclusion was that the affirmation or denial of the historicity of the book could neither affect the message of the book nor its religious value. The claim was clearly demonstrated in our analysis of the message of Jonah as history, story and prophecy.

vi. Our conclusion was that the choice of Jonah to conclude the course was a design to remind us Nigeria of the challenge for national unity irrespective of our religious and ethnic affiliation. Thus Jonah is a book not only for Christians but for humanity of every age.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the uniqueness of the book of Jonah taking into consideration the identity of the prophet and the place of the book within the prophetic traditions.
2. What is the contention surrounding the date and authorship of the book?
3. Discuss the satire and irony of the book of Jonah.
4. Which of the approaches adopted in the interpretation of the text of Jonah that appeals more to you, and why?
5. Has the book of Jonah any relevance to the Nigerian Society?
6. Do you agree that the book of Jonah is "a book not only for Christians but for humanity of every age?"

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