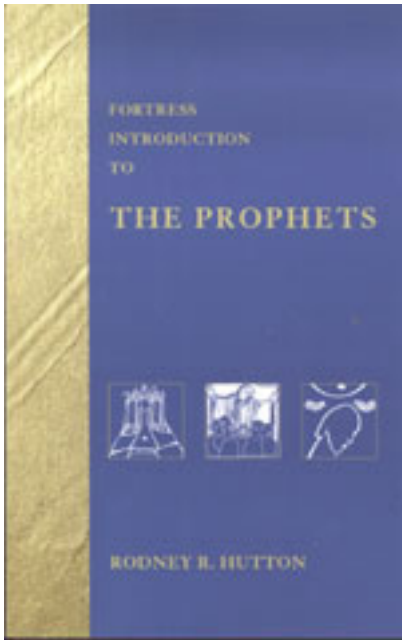


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**Hutton, Rodney J.**

***Fortress Introduction to the Prophets***

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This interesting booklet contains twelve chapters and a select bibliography on prophecy. In what follows, I offer a summary of the main points that Hutton makes. Hutton begins by asking basic questions on prophecy, such as the origin of biblical prophecy, the place of the prophetic corpus within the whole of sacred Scripture, and the like. Judaism tends to understand the prophets to be guardians of the Torah, while Christianity understands them to be foretellers of Christ.

In chapter 2–6 Hutton discusses the origins of Israelite prophecy and the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. In ancient Israel and in the wider world, there were orgiastic forms of prophetic experience (1 Sam 10:5–13) and a more rational, calm, and orderly form. In the second case, the prophet functioned like royal advisor. The two forms were sometimes combined (Isa 20:2–3).

Amos, who was not a professional prophet, is the earliest of the writing prophets. His judgment oracles promised destruction, and there is less hope for the future in his book. The prophet focuses on issues of social justice, not the religious apostasy and Baal worship, as is the case with Hosea, who followed shortly after him.

About the middle of eighth century, Hosea addressed a situation of prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II. His oracles alluded to traditions of the north. The most significant difference between Hosea and Amos is that Hosea was fixated on Israel's apostate religious practices while Amos seemed indifferent to them. For Hosea, the priests were responsible for the lack of knowledge of God. In Hosea's vision of restoration (2:14–23) the people should repent and God will forgive them.

The book of Isaiah of Jerusalem contains the oracles of different persons. Chapters 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66 are attributed to different authors from approximately the same period as Amos and Hosea, during the Babylonian exile, and after the restoration, respectively. The ministry of First Isaiah was to the south. Chapter 6 can be read as the God's response to the failure of Isaiah's initial ministry described in chapters 1–5.

Facing the Syro-Ephraimite crisis about 734 B.C.E., the prophet asked the establishment in Jerusalem to trust in God, who would then provide deliverance. The sign of Immanuel, relating to the defeat of the kings of Israel and Aram, was transformed into a prophecy in later traditions such as Matt 1:23 and played an important role as a prophecy of salvation. In the beginning, Isaiah's oracles focused on social abuses, as was the case with Amos. Later, Isaiah might have been prompted out of retirement in the days of King Hezekiah and delivered a salvific message. In Isaiah's visions, God would protect the city of Jerusalem, then he called for trusting in God and his promises. The problem of the oracles of Isaiah is that the situation of Jerusalem became worse. Hutton argues that in spite of dangerous excesses, Isaiah left sublime prophetic words of universal restoration and peace.

Micah of Moresheth is known especially in Christian circles for two prophecies: 5:2 and 6:6–8. His prophetic ministry is dated to the end of the eighth century, and one of his oracles (3:12) is cited in Jeremiah (26:18). One would say that the prophecy of the destruction of the city failed, since it did not reach its fulfillment in his days. However, according to Hutton, the success this prophecy had is demonstrated in the repentance of the people and that of God (Jer 26:19).

Micah attacks the prophets whose prophecy depends on whether they have been fed or not. Like Amos and Hosea, he condemned idolatry. Like Amos and Isaiah, he condemned social injustice. Micah had a word of restoration and a vision of universal peace.

In chapter 7, which treats the interim prophets, Hutton discusses the reign of Manasseh. He argues that Manasseh began his reign by continuing his father's anti-Assyrian policies and became a vassal of Assyria in the second part of his reign, when Esarhaddon was on the throne. Zephaniah's oracles of universal judgment and against Judah suggest the

religious apostasy of that time. After the language of destruction, Zephaniah invoked the salvation of Judah. After Zephaniah, Nahum focused on Assyria's destruction. Nahum can feel, taste, and hear the destruction of Nineveh. Hutton assumes that the pending destruction of Assyria is the historical backdrop for the prophecy of Habakkuk. Habakkuk asks the question of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. God responds that he is at work in strange ways. The second response is that the people are to wait and to live lives of truth. The last chapter is a separate rhetorical unit in the line of the second response.

In chapters 8–12 of this work Hutton pays special attention to Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah is the most extensive collection of preexilic oracles available. He may have begun his ministry earlier than 614 B.C.E. Nothing happened until the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, when the king remodeled the Jerusalem temple. If one follows the Chronicler's history, the reform movement of Josiah began in 628/27 B.C.E. The remodeling of the temple was part of the reform movement and the decision of Josiah to revolt against Assyrian domination. The book found after the reform gave it a concluding theological completion. In the Deuteronomic Historian's view, however, the discovery of the book initiated the reform. Even though many scholars think that Jeremiah was born in 627 B.C.E., Hutton assumes that Jeremiah began his ministry in that year. Hutton dates his birth to about 645 B.C.E., in the final years of Manasseh.

The book of Jeremiah is set against the tumultuous final years of Judah. It has many rhetorical and structural difficulties. The comparison between MT and LXX shows many textual differences, since MT is shorter than LXX. For many scholars, the LXX presents the more authentic picture of Jeremiah. The book itself tells about the two editions of the scroll containing his prophecy.

The rhetoric divides the book into three cycles of material: chapters 1–6 are to be read as Josianic oracles, chapters 7 as well as 26 marking a transition to a new king; chapters 26–35 move from the reign of Jehoiakim to Zedekiah; and chapters 37–44 treat the reign of Zedekiah.

The book of Jeremiah provides us with a portrait of the prophet, unless we find evidence to call the text into question. Jeremiah is from the priestly line of Abiathar of Anathoth, to the north of Jerusalem. He was against false prophets whose lie was that everything would be alright. The oracles of Jeremiah were bitter and devastating until the end, when he was taken hostage with the Jews fleeing to Egypt.

Jeremiah's prophetic oracles were focused especially on Judah, but we also have some oracles against other nations. According to Jeremiah, Israel had abandoned God, ceasing

even to complain, and then no longer cared enough to remain holy to the Lord. Jeremiah engaged in mockery of the idolatry that was a part of Canaanite worship. Because of the false prophets, the people could not make a clear distinction between worshiping Yahweh and worshiping Baal. Besides Baal, the second lie of the prophets was false confidence in God. Even the temple became a symbol of delusion. Then judgment became irrevocable and hence inescapable.

Jeremiah's metaphor of the potter held out hope that repentance and rebuilding might be possible. The Golah community should exercise this vision already in the midst of exile. God would conclude a new covenant with Israel. In this vision, there would no longer be any need for teaching of the law.

During the exile, Second Isaiah called Israel to remember its past, since history is under the control of Yahweh. Postexilic prophets understood themselves to stand in a long prophetic tradition. From literary prophecy, the apocalyptic literature called people to be aware of the secrets of history. Everything was unfolding as God intended from the very beginning.

What is interesting in this book is the discussion of theological and textual issues against their historical background. Hutton proposes some new arguments, such as his view on the reign of Manasseh (54). However, it seems to me that to devote half of this book to Jeremiah (61–109) is to exaggerate his importance in prophetic literature and theology. The reader will regret the lack of a fuller treatment of Ezekiel and the postexilic prophets, to whom the author devotes only a few lines. As an "introduction," the text should say something about *all* the biblical prophets.