

ISRAEL'S PROPHETIC TRADITION AND REFORMATION OF SOCIETY



Israel's prophets saw its history in very religious terms. After Israel settled in Canaan, many Israelites adopted their religious practices of the Canaanites. For years, Israel's prophets prophesied the wrath of God coming down on them, in the form of destruction by foreign oppressors (Assyrians for Israel, Babylonians for Judah). There was usually a way out of the times of trouble, however...

1. Repent and return to Yahweh
2. Renew the Mosaic covenant
 - a. Ceremony celebrating a renewal of the covenant could be used (with King Josiah)
 - b. Observe Sabbath year
 - c. Follow ethics in the Ten Commandments
3. Tear down altars to other gods
 - a. Elijah and the prophets of Baal
 - b. Evaluations of most kings

The books of the prophets mentioned a continual struggle in Israel, between worship of Yahweh and the pagan Canaanite deities. The reason for this was variously described as wickedness and lack of faithfulness. The prophet Hosea used the image of a prostitute to describe Israel's rejection of her "husband," Yahweh.

Trust was to be placed only on Yahweh. In fact, the prophets routinely warned Israel against relying on foreign military alliances to protect them, calling Egypt a "broken reed." Instead of relying on foreign alliances, Israel was called to trust upon Yahweh. The prophet Samuel saw Israel's insistence on having a king (up till that point it had been ruled by "judges") as a rejection of his prophetic office, and of Yahweh Himself. Samuel therefore tried to warn the Israelites not to demand a king.