EXPLORING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Volume 4

The Prophets

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THE PROPHETS

THE DATES OF KINGS AND PROPHETS

The dates of the kings of Israel and Judah are disputed. One view of the chronology is given in *IBD* I, pp. 268–77, in which the authors follow the concept of co-regencies proposed by E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965). Not all scholars are convinced by this solution, and commentators on the prophetic books often accept that dates can only be approximate. The dates adopted in the present volume follow J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1972, second edition) which is largely based in turn on W. F. Albright in *BASOR* 100 (1945), pp. 20–22. In the table below, no account is taken of co-regencies, although these may be needed to solve some problems (for example, see Bright, p. 271, n. 8, on the twenty years given to Pekah in 2 Kgs 15:27).

For different versions of the chronology of the Kings of Judah from Uzziah to Hezekiah see F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Micah* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. xviii.

In the table below the prophets are aligned only approximately with the kings, for ready reference. The table should be used with reference to the discussions of the Date and Destination of the individual prophets. (Jonah and Daniel are put in brackets for reasons that will become clear in the chapters on those books.)

BEFORE THE EXILE

Kings of Israel		Kings of Judah		Prophets
Jeroboam II	786–746	Uzziah	783–742	Amos (Jonah)
Zechariah	746–745			
Shallum	745			Hosea
Menahem	745–738	Jotham	742–735	
Pekahiah	738–737			
Pekah	737–732	Ahaz	735–715	Isaiah, Micah
Hoshea	732–722			
		Hezekiah	715–687	
		Manasseh	687–642	
		Amon	642–640	
		Josiah	640–609	Habakkuk, Nahum
				Zephaniah
		Jehoahaz	609	Jeremiah
		Jehoiakim	609–597	Obadiah
		Jehoiachin	597	
		Zedekiah	597–587	Ezekiel Joel?

EXILE AND AFTER: KINGS OF BABYLON AND PERSIA

(see also table at Daniel: Date and Destination)

Kings of Babylon and Persia		Prophets
605–562	Reign of Nebuchadn(r)ezzar	(Daniel)
562–560	Reign of Amel-marduk (Evil-Merodach)	
560–556	Reign of Neriglissar	
556–539	Reign of Nabonidus	Second Isaiah
549–539	Belshazzar co-regent	
539	Babylon captured by Cyrus the Persian	
539–530	Reign of Cyrus after capture of Babylon	
530–522	Reign of Cambyses	
522–486	Reign of Darius I Hystaspes	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

KEY TO PANELS

This key to the panels helps locate the special and suggested exercises that occur throughout the volume. It should be noted that the panels are not exhaustive treatments of topics, and are meant to be read and used in their contexts. Panels sometimes cross-refer to other parts of the book.

A number of themes may be picked up by looking carefully across the different kinds of boxes (for example: Israel, metaphor, prophecy/prophets, rhetoric).

'THINK ABOUT' PANELS

'DIGGING DEEPER' PANELS

OTHER PANELS

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THIS BOOK AIMS TO DO

This book aims to help students study the Prophets. Like other volumes in the *EOT* and *ENT* series, it is intended to give the student a primary resource to enable him or her to study the texts independently. It provides introductory material on each book, a basic commentary, and pointers to theological interpretation. It is also interactive. Interspersed in the interpretation are a number of panels, which invite the student to think about what has been learnt (Think about), or to take an aspect of the study further (Digging deeper). Some of the panels are simply background notes, supplying extra information to clarify difficult issues or points. Essay titles as such are not supplied, but can be constructed out of many of the panels. A key to the panels enables the reader to see at a glance what topics are dealt with in them.

The book is intended to open onto a range of critical and interpretative literature on the prophets. Each chapter is supplied with lists of commentaries and other works, most of which are referred to in the chapter in question. Items marked with * are considered suitable as first ports of call, while others are more complex, or relate to specific issues.

Above all the book is written in the belief that the prophets have important things to say to modern people. They are sometimes misunderstood, and, in church life, often neglected. That is nothing new for the prophets, as it was neglect that they themselves typically challenged in their hearers, rather than offering them 'some new thing'. So I hope that this book will make a small contribution to their being heard clearly again.

STUDYING THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

PROPHETS AND BOOKS

The study of the prophets can be illustrated by two very different passages from the prophetic books, one near the beginning and the other right at the end. The first is Isa. 6:1–13. In this, Isaiah has his famous vision of God as the heavenly king. It is the most dramatic picture of the prophet's experience of God. Isaiah is overwhelmed by the vision of God's glory, so that he is deeply aware of his own sin. Yet apparently it is this vision that inspires and motivates his whole ministry. The vision leads to

understanding, and to action. It is no surprise, then, that this passage has become the classic text for the idea of call itself. (It is one of the passages that are always read at ordination services in the Church of England.)

The second passage, much less famous, is Mal. 4:4–6. These words close the whole collection of the prophetic books. They exhort the people to remember the laws of Moses, and promises the return of 'Elijah' 'before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes'. The law and the prophets stand together in these verses. The prophets stand alongside a 'book' (Moses' law), and they have themselves become a book. The close of the prophetic section of the Old Testament announces the concept of 'the law and the prophets', a canon of Scripture.

Our study of 'the prophets' lies between these two moments: the conviction of individuals that they had words from God that were urgent, for people then and there; and the collection of the prophets' words for the benefit of new generations, well beyond their own time, right down to us who still read them and are challenged by them.

In studying the prophets we cannot avoid the 'book'. Indeed, 'The Prophets' in the title of this volume refers to a division of the canon of the Old Testament. When we look for Jeremiah, what we find is a book that tells us about Jeremiah and the things he did and said. The book was written (finally at least) by someone other than Jeremiah, for a time and place other than his own. And a number of the prophets are much more elusive than Jeremiah. (How often, when introducing one or other of the prophetic books, I have had to say: 'Very little is known about x'!)

Even so, we will not be wrong to look for the prophet. Isaiah's vision speaks of the central idea in the books: that God spoke to individuals and commissioned them to speak in turn.

The relationship between 'prophet' and 'book' could be stated as a kind of problem or dilemma. Are we being teased with the promise of introductions to real people who finally elude us? Some studies focus so much on the book – in the guise of 'the tradition', or the 'final form' – that we lose the prophet altogether. Some regard the prophetic figures as the fictitious creations of the writers or communities who created the books. In my view, the opposite poles of prophet and book need not be treated as a problem. They are simply an inevitable part of the study before us. Both poles must be respected: the book because it is part of the canonical literature, and the prophet because his God-given message is the controlling idea in the book.

What, then, are the key elements in studying the prophetic books? The following topics correspond to the headings we shall use in this volume when we come to each of them.

THE PROPHET

Each chapter that follows will begin with some notes on the Date and Destination of the prophecy. This will ask questions about who the prophet was, the time in which he worked, and whom he spoke to. But what may we know about the prophets? We have several lines on this.

Information in the individual books

A number of the books give information about the prophets in their introductory headings, or superscriptions (e.g. Amos 1:1; Jer. 1:1–3) and elsewhere (Amos 7:14; Jer.

THE PROPHETS AS A SECTION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The books that bear the names of prophets form a distinct section of the Old Testament. This is true whether we are thinking of the Christian form of the Old Testament canon, or the Jewish form (the 'Hebrew Bible'). The Hebrew Bible is usually divided into three sections: the Law (that is, the Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses), the Prophets and the Writings. In that division, the Prophets section is further divided into the Former Prophets (the Historical Books from Joshua to Kings, without Ruth), and the Latter Prophets. These Latter Prophets are the books that carry the names of particular prophets.

Christian Bibles broadly follow the order of the Greek Old Testament (known as the Septuagint, or LXX), and put these prophetic books at the end of the Old Testament. They also include two books that are omitted from the Hebrew form of the canon, namely Lamentations and Daniel. In the Hebrew form, these two (along with Ruth, Chronicles, Nehemiah, Ezra and Esther) belong in the Writings section. However, Lamentations was linked from a very early period with Jeremiah, and so was attached to that book in the canonical tradition found in LXX. Daniel is different in important ways from the other books in the prophetic collection. In scholarship it is usually classified as 'apocalyptic' rather than prophecy. (This is explained in the chapter on Daniel.) However, as it is like the prophets in its idea of an individual who receives revelations from God, and as it also has specific links with certain prophetic books (especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel), it too found its way into the prophets section of the canon as we have it in LXX, and so in Christian Bibles.

In *Exploring the Old Testament* we have adopted the divisions of the Christian Old Testament. This means, for example, that the volume on the Historical Books includes Ruth and Chronicles–Esther, and also that we deal with Lamentations and Daniel in the present volume. This choice has not been made for dogmatic reasons. But as we expect most of our readers to be using English Bibles, and the discussions presuppose no knowledge of Hebrew, it was the natural choice.

For the same reason we are using the term 'Old Testament'. Of course this is a loaded term, as is the alternative, the Hebrew Bible. Strictly speaking, each of these names implies a claim to 'own' the book in question, either on the part of the Christian Church or the Jewish synagogue. It is not our intention in *EOT* to enter a debate about this, or to be dogmatic about it. And we hope that a Jewish reader could use our volumes for his or her own study. Yet *EOT* is a companion series to *ENT*, and the primary target audience of both is students undertaking introductory courses on the Bible in broadly Christian contexts. In *EOT* this will emerge most clearly from those parts of our studies that reflect on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

25:1–3; Zech. 1:1, 7; 7:1). These point to historical situations, and sometimes give details about the prophet's family and his location in society (Jeremiah and Ezekiel were of priestly families). Some also tell about things they did (Amos 7:10–14; Isaiah 7—8). The Book of Jeremiah tells us a good deal about that prophet, including an incident that gives a clue about how his book came to be written (Jeremiah 36).

However, this kind of information varies from book to book. Some of the headings give little away (Joel 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Mal. 1:1), and the prophets can remain rather shadowy. Even where much information seems to be given, scholars scrutinize it severely to see what it really tells. Since the information is patchy, it probably means that it is not felt to be greatly important in itself. When books do tell us details about a prophet's life, it is likely that this is not for its own sake, but is part of the message of the book. This is

certainly true of Jeremiah 36, for example. (See below, The prophets: Did they write? for more on Jeremiah 36. Some scholars used to talk of 'biographical' parts of Jeremiah, but that idea is no longer popular, because it is recognized that the writers did not have the same interest in people's lives for their own sake as a modern reader might have).

A broad Old Testament picture

Apart from details about individual prophets, we have some glimpses of 'the prophets' as a body. The stories of Elisha, for example, speak of a group of 'the sons of the prophets' (just another way of saying 'the prophets'), who live and work together (2 Kgs 4:1; 6:1). This suggests they were a recognizable group within society. A story of King Saul suggests that they engaged in ecstatic behaviour, under the influence of 'the spirit of God' (1 Sam. 10:9–13). King Ahab expected them to give him guidance when he was facing a big decision, such as whether to go to war (though Ahab was careful to choose which ones he listened to! 1 Kgs 22:6–8).

The prophets as a body come to be regarded as the ones who called Israel to repent. This is how they appear in 2 Kgs 17:13, and there are echoes of this in the prophetic books themselves (Hos. 6:1; Jer. 3:1—4:4). They do not always appear in a good light, however. The story of Ahab already illustrates this (1 Kgs 22:24). And the prophetic books themselves sometimes portray 'the prophets' as unfaithful time-servers (e.g. Hos. 4:5; Amos 7:12–13; Jer. 23:9–40). This raises the question of how people might know the difference between a 'true' prophet and a 'false' one. The book of Jeremiah faces this problem directly. (It raises a quite different point for some scholars, namely whether the Old Testament has a unified view of 'the prophets'. See the panel: Digging deeper: Finding prophets.)

Sociology

The biblical picture has been viewed by some recent scholarship from a particular angle. If we have only limited knowledge about individual prophets, perhaps we can find out something about their 'social location', that is, their place as a group or class within society. Fundamental to this concept is that prophets have 'support groups', that is groups that recognize the prophet as speaking authoritatively.

To try to discover the prophets' social location, scholars have observed how intermediaries are placed in other societies: do they, and their support groups, belong within the 'establishment' or outside it? Do they support or disturb the *status quo*? Sociological studies have examined the different names used for prophets ('prophet', 'seer', 'man of God') and the ways in which they receive messages from God (especially in speech and vision). Variations in these respects have led some to find regional variations in the status and roles of prophets. Northern prophets, for example, have been thought to belong within a particular tradition in which the Mosaic covenant plays a significant governing role in their thought. Southern prophets like Isaiah, in contrast, are said to be influenced by 'vision', and this is related to a theology in which the temple, and the Davidic covenant, play an important role. (Wilson 1980, Petersen 1981 and Overholt 1996 are key studies on this topic.)

One gain of this approach is to give a way of thinking about how a prophet's words might originally have been preserved. If prophets had 'support groups' they will have wanted to preserve the authoritative words. One

reason for this will have been to measure them against events, and have proof of their authenticity. It is clear that there was a great concern to know whether prophets' words were true or false (Deut. 13; 18:20–22).

The question of how prophets' words were preserved comes up differently with different prophets. See, for example, Isaiah: The composition of Isaiah 1—39.

The prophets: Did they write?

A special question in studying the prophets as individuals concerns how they gave their messages. Did they speak only, or did they also write? When they spoke, was it only in rather short poetic oracles, or could they also give more connected 'sermonic' speeches? (This last question comes up sharply in Jeremiah.) These questions are obviously related to the broader question of how accurate a picture of the prophet we are getting from the book.

This is a fundamental issue in the study of the prophets, but there is surprisingly little agreement about it. The classic critical view was that prophets spoke in poetry, and the prosaic sections of their books were written only afterwards by less gifted disciples (proposed by B. Duhm 1901; see L. Stulman 1986 e.g. pp. 8–9). This view has been greatly contested in Jeremiah studies, where a number of scholars have argued that Jeremiah himself uttered the sermonic speeches (e.g. J. Bright; see on Jeremiah: Critical Interpretation). (The debate now seems to have reached an opposite extreme, with some saying the prophets were *not* prophets but *poets*; see Finding prophets.) The idea that prophets were really poetic speakers went hand in hand with the idea that there was a gradual transition from authentic prophetic speech to written book.

While some modern studies play down the connection between the prophet and the written word, others are finding evidence that points in the opposite direction. Referring to Ancient Near Eastern evidence, as well as evidence from writing in pre-exilic Israel and Judah, H. Barstad writes: 'it is probable that prophecies were written down at a very early stage and later collected' (1996, p. 124). Indeed, it is likely that prophecies, when uttered, would have been written down straight away. This may have been because it was regarded as important to record the message from God in the most accurate way possible, or to ensure it reached the right hearer (Barstad 1996, p. 123). (The same point has been made by A. R. Millard (1985) who also thinks the words would have remained unchanged when passed down from one generation to another. See also A. Malamat 1995, especially pp. 55–56.) R. P. Gordon also points to the significance of Ancient Near Eastern evidence in encouraging the search for the forms of prophecy that lie behind the books as we have them (1995, p. 602).

One passage in our books throws light on this question. In Jeremiah 36 we read of how Jeremiah wrote his oracles on a scroll and had it read to King Jehoiakim. The king, who found Jeremiah's words unwelcome, destroyed the scroll. Jeremiah responded by making another, with yet more of his words written on it. Does this episode tell us anything about how prophets *usually* had their words recorded? Or is this a unique incident, caused by the fact that Jeremiah was banned from going himself to the king at that time (Jer. 36:5–6)? It is impossible to be sure. What it does show is that the readers and hearers of Jeremiah would not have thought it strange that a prophet should write down his words

(Barstad 1996, pp. 125–26). We have one other instance of Jeremiah writing, in his letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jer. 29:4–28).

As we said a moment ago, the question of whether the prophets wrote is related to the question of how accurate a picture we have of them in their books. How much of what we read there actually came from them? Commentators vary greatly on this. Among those who attribute very little of the books to the prophets are O. Kaiser (see chapter 1), and R. P. Carroll (see chapter 2). At the other end of the scale are, for example, J. A. Motyer, J. H. Hayes and S. A. Irvine (see chapter 1) and J. Bright (see chapter 2).

As commentators disagree over these basic issues, it follows that there is no scholarly consensus on who the prophets were or what they said or thought. What was the message of Jeremiah? Well, it depends whom you read. What some think is the message of Jeremiah others will attribute to later editors. An example of this diversity is the question of whether prophets were essentially preachers of judgement and doom, or whether they also urged repentance and held out the hope of salvation. (See Isaiah: Is prophecy predictable? See also the panel: Prophetic tradition: How oracles got into books, in Critical Interpretation of Micah.)

Digging deeper:
FINDING PROPHETS

For further discussion on the search for the prophet's own words, see the debate between A. G. Auld, R. P. Carroll, H. G. M. Williamson, H. Barstad and T. Overholt in *The Prophets: a Sheffield Reader* (P. R. Davies ed.). Auld thinks that even the idea of 'prophets' as we find it in the books is late (post-exilic). Carroll supports this, adding that the Old Testament disagrees with itself over whether the 'prophets' were a good thing or a bad thing (pp. 43–44); prophets were really 'poets', 'free spirits', only tamed by an orthodox tradition (pp. 46–48). Williamson, Barstad and Overholt all make responses to this view. One response is that prophetic behaviour was well known in contemporary societies (Overholt). And it is also argued that Auld and Carroll have paid too little attention to Ancient Near Eastern parallels (Barstad, p. 113).

THE BOOK

We have spent some time thinking about how to find the person behind the book. It is now time to think a little about the book. The prophetic books are not just raw collections of disjointed sayings, but carefully constructed pieces of literature. In each of them we meet immediately a voice that is not the same as the prophet's voice. This voice is heard in the superscriptions, the opening words of the book. Already here is a sign of organization, of someone who has set the prophet's words in context and is writing for an audience that may be different from the prophet's original audience.

In addition to superscriptions we also have narratives about the prophets and other characters (e.g. Hosea 1, 3; Isaiah 7—8; Jeremiah 32—44). The narratives and the sayings have been linked together, according to a sense of theme. For example, the story of Jeremiah redeeming the field of his cousin Hanamel is part of the 'Book of Consolation' (Jeremiah 30—33), which also contains Jeremiah's sayings about the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). The sayings and the story are on the theme of salvation,

which is predominant in this part of the book of Jeremiah. Similarly, sayings themselves have often been organized according to a definite structural plan. This is very clear in Isaiah 1—12, where sayings of judgement and salvation alternate. All these features show that someone has thought about what the message of the prophet adds up to, how it fits, not only into his own life, but into the life of the community in which he ministered.

There are further signs of how sayings have been gathered into a book. The two different forms of Jeremiah (Hebrew MT and Greek LXX) show two different attempts to shape the memory of Jeremiah's life and work into a book. The overlapping of material between books is another indicator: between prophetic books (Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–4), and between prophetic books and other types of book (Isaiah 36—39 and 2 Kings 18—20; Jeremiah 52 and 2 Kings 25). This shows a conscious use of existing material. (Both Isaiah 36—39 and Jeremiah 52 present versions of the events in question that are adapted to the interests of the respective prophetic books.) Finally, there are editorial comments, additions, and linkages, e.g. Mal. 4:4–6 [3:19–24]; Isa. 2:5; Hos.14:9 (with the last of these compare Psalm 1 as a 'wisdom' superscription to the Book of Psalms).

The formation of the book

Can we discover the process by which the words of the prophet came to be collected in the book? A good deal of scholarship on the prophets has concerned itself with this question. The same means have been applied to it as to other parts of the Old Testament, especially literary criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Examples of these will be given in the course of the present book. Here we will give some examples and definitions.

Literary criticism In Old Testament scholarship until recently, literary criticism meant noticing such things as inconsistency, incoherence, and differences of style, in order to separate the stages in a book's composition, and find its original form. This method of studying biblical books was at the forefront of scholarship in the modern period, that is, from the late nineteenth century on. In Pentateuchal studies, Julius Wellhausen formulated the well-known four-document theory (JEDP; see G. J. Wenham in *EOT: The Pentateuch*).

In the prophets, the leading name was Bernhard Duhm, whose commentary on Isaiah in 1892 was 'the first genuinely modern commentary on a prophetic book' (Blenkinsopp 1984, p. 28). Duhm wanted to separate out the genuine words of the prophet from later expansions, which he thought inferior. For Duhm, this was not a purely academic exercise, for he had a real religious interest in doing this. He thought that if he could find the true words of the prophet he would also uncover his religious experience, which he believed was a deep and true experience of God. This knowledge of God was bound up, in Duhm's view, with the poetic expression, which he thought marked true prophecy. Literary criticism in its heyday, therefore, had a profound religious motivation, at least for some of its advocates. (J. Skinner's study of Jeremiah (see chapter 2) is a good example of this in English.)

In our own study, the literary critical interest comes out most strongly in Jeremiah, where the prose-sermons were attributed to a different source from the poetic oracles.

Narratives about the prophet were assigned to yet another source. (See Jeremiah: Critical Interpretation.)

The problems with literary criticism are, first, that it made certain assumptions about the form of 'authentic' prophecy, which may not hold true, and second that it devalues much of what we find in the prophetic books.

Form criticism Form criticism is a study of forms of speech as used in specific settings. It was applied with great success to the Psalms, where a setting could be readily identified (Israel's worship), and where a number of recurring elements suggested that Psalms could be classified into a small number of types.

In the prophets, the search for typical forms took the study of prophetic speech much further than literary criticism had done. The pioneer of form criticism, H. Gunkel, thought prophets uttered 'vision-reports' (reports about their experiences of having visions), and spoke words of threat and promise (Tucker 1971, pp. 55–56). The most influential study of prophetic forms has been C. Westermann's (1991, pp. 90–98). He finds three types: accounts (including vision reports), speeches and prayers. The speeches are the most important. These divide mainly into announcements of judgement or salvation, and the underlying idea is of pronouncements by a messenger (Westermann 1991, pp. 93, 98–128). The effect of this is to claim that the prophetic speeches merely announce something that has already been decided. When the prophet announces God's judgement, not only is the judgement inevitable, but the announcement itself has a certain power to set it in motion (Westermann 1991, pp. 65–67). This is different from the idea of a 'threat', which could imply a chance to avoid the judgement by repenting.

The strength of form criticism in the prophets is in the 'messenger'-concept, which recognizes the force of the words spoken. Westermann rightly sees that no distinction can be made between the word of God and the word of the prophet (Westermann 1991, pp. 94–95). We will come back to this under 'Rhetorical Intention' below. The weakness is perhaps in its idea that classical forms of the announcements are brief (Westermann 1991, p. 105), which sets off again on a hunt for the 'original' and therefore (like literary criticism) thinks of some of the writing in the prophetic books as secondary and in a sense a degeneration.

Redaction criticism Redaction criticism is the prevailing type of criticism in modern scholarly writing on the prophets. It is different from literary and form criticism because it is interested in principle in the formation of the books up to their final form. It recognizes that the words of prophets have been recast into new contexts, and so given new meanings. And it assumes that these new contexts and meanings are as important and interesting as any original ones. Redaction criticism has two aspects, therefore: the study of the stages of a book's growth, and the study of the finished work itself, with all the inner relationships between its parts that have been produced by the process.

Most modern studies of prophetic books assume that the book has undergone a complicated process of growth. With a pre-exilic prophet this may mean that his prophecies were first collected together by people rather close to him in time, that the

book was then formed into a shape resembling what we now have in the time of King Josiah or the exile, and finally was filled out by still more expansions (this is the account of Collins 1993, pp. 15–16). Another advocate of redaction criticism is R. E. Clements, who writes:

> Even so complex a composition as the book of Isaiah, which evidently took centuries to reach its final form, shows evidence that, through its many stages of growth, intentional connections and interrelationships between the parts were planned (Clements 1996, p. 204).

The growth of books, then, is not haphazard, but comes out of careful theological reflection. This means that there is an important connection between the process of growth and the interpretation of the book in its final form. Because the process of growth was governed by theological aims, the finished book offers possibilities for theological interpretation by the comparison of its various parts together (Clements 1996). We have already noticed some of the ways in which the raw materials of prophecy have been formed together into books, for example, the careful arrangement of the prophecies in Isaiah 1—12, where sayings of judgement and salvation alternate, making us think about how those two kinds of message might relate to each other.

Redaction criticism, therefore, is an important attempt to account for the 'book'-characteristics of prophecy that we noticed at the beginning of this section. If as readers of the prophetic books we think that they – especially the larger ones – are rambling and shapeless, redaction criticism encourages us to look beyond our first impressions to think about their message as a whole.

Redaction criticism leaves certain questions unanswered, such as the precise means by which smaller units were gradually enlarged into recognizable blocks and finally books. We will meet a number of theories about this in our study (such as W. McKane's 'rolling corpus' in Jeremiah; and H. G. M. Williamson's belief that Deutero-Isaiah shaped the whole block of Isaiah 2—55). Some think the cult (the institutions of Israel's worship life) was the vehicle in which the books were carried as they developed (Coggins 1996, p. 81). See also the panel: Was there an Ezekiel school? in Critical Interpretation of Ezekiel.

THEOLOGICAL THEMES

This section looks for the theological contribution made by the prophetic book in question. In thinking about prophetic theology, we are faced again with the question of prophet or book: are we looking for the theology of the prophet himself, or the theology of the book? The theological themes that we find are, of course, found in the *book*, or even in the books as a collection. R. E. Clements probably expresses the most common modern view when he says that this is where we should look for the theological contribution of the 'prophets':

> It is our contention, however, that it was not until a whole corpus of prophetic sayings came into being as a written record that it became possible and necessary to look for a larger degree of coherence and consistency in their implied disclosure of the divine nature and a genuine theology became possible (Clements 1986, p. 206).

However, the books give us a picture of prophets who were themselves theologically motivated. They believed they were commissioned by the God of Israel (not

'DIGGING DEEPER' PANELS

OTHER PANELS