

ESTIMATE CONCERNING THE PROPHETS

WERE THEY RATHER CRUDE PREDICTORS OF THE FUTURE?

The prophets were primarily men with a message for their own time, denouncing the sins of their people and summoning them to repentance. Many predictions which have been interpreted as eschatological obviously deal with events which the prophets expected to happen within the normal course of history. The common, but in my opinion erroneous, interpretation of many prophetic utterances as eschatological sayings depends on a number of peculiarities in the prophetic sermon, which suggest an eschatological content, but which are characteristic of the general prophetic style and mode of thought. (Lindblom, p. 362)

The prophets like to think and speak in mythological categories, even when describing events which belong to the normal process of nature and history. It is particularly tempting to give an eschatological interpretation to descriptions of ecstatic visions. On the whole, in interpreting the prophetic texts we need to make allowance for the prophets' use of exalted and poetic language, the visionary or revelatory character of their utterances, their highly-strung temperament, and, last but not least, their use of symbols, metaphors, and ambiguous diction. Because of these features the prophetic sayings often seem to refer to another sphere of existence or an entirely new order; but this need not indicate an eschatological content. It was an essential part of the prophetic thought and experience to be acutely aware of the divine presence, the divine realm, and the divine power in history and nature. This is reflected in the prophetic utterances; but it does not always imply eschatology. (Lindblom, p. 363)

In the predictions of the prophets "it is of course impossible to distinguish exactly between literal sense and poetic fantasy. (Lindblom, p. 415)

Sandmel says that 19th C. scholars minimized the element of prediction in prophecy. "From that generation we have inherited the misleading epigram that the prophets were not 'fortellers' but 'forth-tellers'. In fact they were both." Sandmel says that a prophet((in contrast to a priest)) was usually not the functionary of an institution. He was . . . a layman who was believed, or believed himself, to be close to the Deity. (Sandmel, p. 48)

The prophet, it should be noted, speaks of the future as well as of the present. The notion commonly held in the past that the prophets did not predict or foretell events is contradicted by every prophet whose words have been preserved. Sometimes the word of God is related to imminent events, sometimes to the distant future, and this word he reveals to the prophets. (Muilenburg, in Peake's, 476)