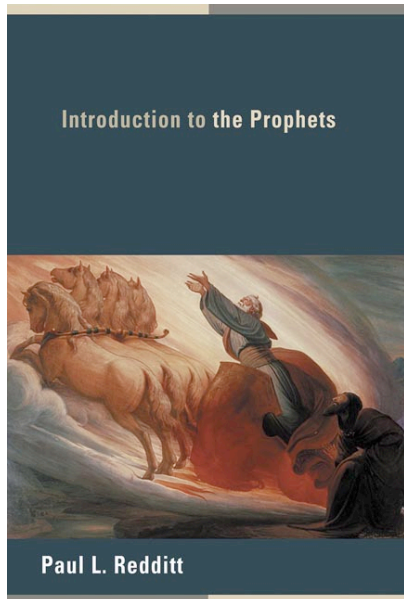


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**Redditt, Paul L.**

***Introduction to the Prophets***

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This clear and accessible volume is designed to introduce college and seminary students—“and other interested readers”—to the writing prophets of the “Old Testament” (x). Writing from a Christian perspective, which the author acknowledges at points influences the “issues I choose to discuss,” Redditt offers a reliable guide to the study of the prophets, which is set in dialogue with the best of contemporary scholarship (e.g., Blenkinsopp, Koch, Nogalski, Overholt, Petersen, Roberts, Sweeney). His discussions of individual prophets lay out basic introductory issues (place in canon, social-historical settings, structure, authorship, and so forth), discuss important themes, and highlight particular problems associated with the different prophetic texts. Clearly designed as a textbook, each chapter concludes with “Questions for Reflection” and an annotated “For Further Reading” section. The volume also includes a series of indices—author, names, subjects, Bible and ancient authors—which along with a glossary should enhance its usefulness as a textbook.

In a short introduction, Redditt employs a well-known formulation, suggesting that rather than simply “foretellers” of future events, as is sometimes popularly thought, the biblical prophets were also forthtellers, concerned to address their own contexts. He notes as well his basic hermeneutic orientation. The interpretive task is to “understand first what

it means in its Old Testament context (xiv); only after this ought one to “approach the question of applied meanings in the New Testament and/or for the contemporary reader” (xiv).

An initial chapter asking “What Is a Prophet?” locates biblical prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context and underscores the role of the prophet as “mediator” (6). Redditt also highlights the criteria laid out by the Bible itself to distinguish true and false prophets—speaking in the name of YHWH and offering true predictions (Deut 18)—noting the obvious difficulties with especially the latter criterion. Following the work of Thomas W. Overholt (and others), he also distinguishes between central and peripheral prophets and asks whether those who may have edited the prophetic texts (sages perhaps) ought also to be termed prophets.

Redditt next turns his attention in the first major section of the book to the “Major Prophets.” Here Redditt briefly describes a range of approaches or methods for studying the prophets. These methods include “historical methods” such as text, source, and form criticism as well as tradition history and redaction and historical criticism. The approaches to the study of the prophets, however, also include “newer methods” such as rhetorical, canonical, social-scientific, structural, narrative, reader, deconstructive, and ideological criticism. Redditt notes that “all these methods yield insights” and that “they are not necessarily in opposition to each other.” His own approach in introducing the prophets, he suggests, will be to “employ a combination of methods” (51).

Redditt next devotes two chapters to the book of Isaiah, discussing in chapters 3 and 4 Isa 1–39 and 40–66, respectively. As the topics of the chapters suggest, Redditt adopts the dominant scholarly view that the book of Isaiah is a composite text, the product of more than a single hand. Redditt carefully presents the major evidence for this conclusion while also engaging the views of “traditional” scholars. After dealing with the book’s basic introductory issues (place in canon, social-historical settings, genre, structure, authorship, etc.), as he does with every prophetic collection, Redditt highlights some of the basic themes of First Isaiah, which include, among others, a concern with justice, punishment for sin, and the idea of the remnant. With each prophetic collection, Redditt also highlights at least one “problem” raised by the texts. In the case of First Isaiah, he addresses the question of Christian appropriation of key passages in Isaiah (7:14; 9:6).

Redditt also distinguishes Isa 40–55 from Isa 56–66. He highlights Second Isaiah’s monotheistic thrust as well as the text’s rhetoric of hope, the figure of the servant, and the “problem” of determining the identity of this figure. With regard to Third Isaiah, Redditt suggests that the basic emphases of the text include a condemnation of leadership for a lack of compassion, struggle for control of the temple, and hope for the future. Chapter 4

concludes with a brief section that highlights certain “intertextual allusions” between the discrete sections of Isaiah, which despite the composite nature of the book point to the manner in which it is also a unified work (106).

In turning to Jeremiah, Redditt singles out for special discussion the prophet’s “call” and suggests that Jer 21:11a—“Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are not gods?—if it is not the work of a postexilic editor, indicates that “one should call Jeremiah the first monotheist in the Hebrew Bible” (120). Redditt also highlights Jeremiah’s “temple sermon,” the prophet’s “confessions,” as well as his controversies with the “prophets” and his rocky relationship with the Jerusalem political elite, especially Zedekiah, which resulted from Jeremiah’s counsel (perceived as treasonous) to surrender to the Babylonians (120–21, 124–26). In the following chapter 6, Redditt also briefly introduces other literature associated with Jeremiah, namely, Lamentations, Baruch, and the Letter of Jeremiah.

In a somewhat shorter chapter on Ezekiel, Redditt not only treats the basic introductory issues noted above but also highlights the literary character of this prophetic book, emphasizes the prophet’s priestly orientation, and identifies as basic emphases in the text a concern with the fall of Jerusalem, the notion of individual accountability, and the future hope Ezekiel articulates.

Although he recognizes that “technically speaking” Daniel is “not a book of prophecy,” Redditt nonetheless offers an introduction to this complex text in chapter 8. He presents the widely held description of apocalypse offered by John J. Collins and discusses the text’s literary setting in ancient Babylon and Persia as well as its probable historical setting in the Hellenistic era. Among the important motifs in Daniel that Redditt highlights are the book’s concern to promote fidelity to God, the possibility of positive Jewish-Gentile relations (in chs. 1–6 at least), and the book’s reuse of scripture, particularly Jeremiah. Redditt also discusses problems that the study of Daniel evoke regarding pseudonymity, the dating of the end times, and the question of unfulfilled prophecy.

In the second major section of the book, Redditt turns to a discussion of the “Minor Prophets.” He offers a thorough and clear discussion of the “Rise of the Book of the Twelve” and opts, with many recent studies, for a synchronic rather than diachronic reading of the Twelve. For Redditt, the “plot for the Twelve” can be described as a movement from “Warnings of Impending Divorce from Israel,” emerging in Hosea, Joel, and Amos, to Obadiah’s, Jonah’s, and Micah’s development of the theme of “Punishment for Judah and Others” (204). In Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Redditt sees “Punishment and Restoration” as the next step in the plot, whereas finally Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi look toward “Restoration, Renewal, and God’s Eternal Love” (204–5). The marriage metaphor, variations on Exod 34:6–7—“YHWH, YHWH, the

compassionate and gracious god, slow in anger...”—as well as the notion of the “Day of YHWH” are the important motifs that can be discerned throughout the Twelve and that help hold its “plot” together.

In each of the next four chapters (10–13), Redditt treats the “collections” of three minor prophets. With each prophetic collection, Redditt follows the pattern of early chapters in providing basic introductory discussions of issues such as genre, date, authorship, and so forth, followed by the identification of basic emphases and problems. Thus Hosea emphasizes idolatry via images of adultery as well as the passion of God and insincere repentance and other matters. Lamentation and restoration by God are important emphases for Joel. Amos underscores YHWH’s demand for justice and the “Day of YHWH.” Obadiah makes use of the “Day of YHWH” theme in envisioning “retributive punishment” for Edom; Jonah underscores God’s “rulership over land and sea” and the divine mercy directed toward even penitent Gentile sinners. Micah, like Amos, offers a message of social justice and points to the failure of political rulers, while also looking toward a renewed Davidic monarchy and the preservation of a “righteous remnant” (276–79). Nahum vindictively looks to the destruction of Nineveh. Habakkuk expects the divine punishment of sinners and the survival of the righteous and also raises the “problem” of theodicy. Zephaniah also deploys the image of the “Day of YHWH” and highlights the motif of divine kingship. Haggai and Zech 1–8 both are concerned with the temple and a potentially restored monarchy; Zech 9–14, too, is concerned with the monarchy and points to the “lowly messiah” whom God restores to “his rightful place” (337–38). Malachi, finally, offers important images of God as father, master, king, and refiner, while also revealing a deep concern with the temple and practices associated with the temple (e.g., sacrifice, tithing). This prophet’s concern with divorce might suggest as well that in the marriage controversy during the restoration period, prominent in a text like Ezra (and to an extent Nehemiah), those who produced Malachi “opposed the mandated divorces” (353).

Redditt concludes his introduction to the prophets by pulling together eight themes that emerge from his study: God’s election of Israel; the oneness of God; the worship of God; Israel’s fidelity to God; social responsibility; punishment for sin; God’s fidelity to Israel; and eschatology. He also writes briefly of the canonization process of the prophetic texts and then more fully, before briefly speaking of the way the Qumranites and Philo made use of the prophets, of the manner in which the New Testament makes use of the prophets.

As with any introductory Bible course, with any introductory textbook on the Bible (or, as in this case, a certain portion of the Bible), decisions about what to include and not include, what to emphasize and what to leave aside, have to be made. No single course,

nor any single textbook, can “do it all.” Those of us who teach introductory Bible courses typically depend on the course readings to cover certain matters important to the study of the topic and lectures and discussions to cover other issues. One conspicuous choice that Redditt has made in his work, which will likely be of interest to teachers of the prophets, is to limit his introduction to the prophets to the so-called writing prophets. The prophets and modes of prophecy depicted in the Deuteronomistic History are not treated.

Be that as it may, Redditt’s introduction to the prophets does an excellent job of introducing in an accessible way important aspects of the scholarly, especially historical-critical, study of the writing prophets. Redditt also highlights well certain important themes and theological-ethical issues that emerge from the different prophetic texts. These discussions, however, tend to be brief, or at least briefer than some might prefer. Those teachers who place a premium on asking students to engage such theological and ethical matters will thus have to supplement Redditt’s text in some way. The inclusion of “Questions for Reflection” at the end of each chapter, which regularly raise afresh many of the important issues Redditt briefly addresses in the body of his chapters, seems to suggest, however, that Redditt recognizes this characteristic of his textbook. These questions, in fact, seem to invite instructors and students to supplement the material presented in the book in ways appropriate to their own courses and to formulate their own questions for reflection.

Despite inevitable, and unenviable, choices involved in penning an introductory text, and despite the fact that others might have made other choices, Redditt should be congratulated for offering a valuable introductory study of the writing prophets of the Old Testament. Students can learn much from Redditt’s contribution, which appears based on long experience in the classroom and which is obviously founded upon the author’s erudite command of the subject.