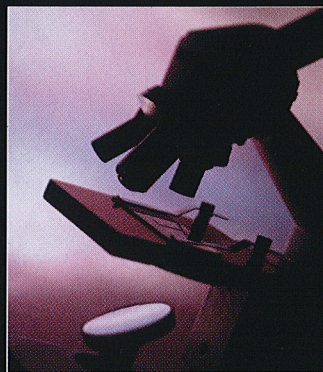




# A PANORAMA OF

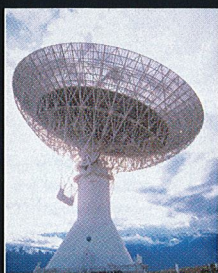
**F**OR MANY YEARS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO LEARN ABOUT THE EARTH BY PUTTING THINGS UNDER A MICROSCOPE IN A LABORATORY. OUR UNDERSTANDING IS NOW GREATLY ENHANCED BY BEING ABLE TO 'STAND BACK' AND TAKE A WIDE-ANGLED VIEW BY SENDING TELESCOPES INTO SPACE AND BEAMING THE PICTURES BACK. MANY OF US NEED TO TAKE THE SAME STEP WHEN WE COME TO READ THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS, ISAIAH THROUGH TO MALACHI. WE COULD PUT THEM EACH UNDER OUR STUDY 'MICROSCOPE', BUT IF WE REALLY WANT TO GET TO GRIPS WITH THEIR MESSAGE WE MUST ALSO STEP BACK AND TAKE A LOOK AT THE WHOLE LANDSCAPE THEY PAINT. LOOKING THROUGH THE 'TELESCOPE', MOUNTAIN PEAKS COME INTO FOCUS - THINGS WHICH ARE HIGH ON GOD'S AGENDA - AND FEATURES THAT SEEM TO THREAD THEIR WAY THROUGH THE PICTURE - RECURRING THEMES THAT EXPRESS GOD'S UNCHANGING HEARTBEAT THROUGH HISTORY.



What will we gain from listening to these men who lived thousands of years ago?

- We appreciate and embrace prophets in the church - their ministry is essentially the same, but from a vastly different perspective. The old testament LOOKED FORWARD to the cross and the coming of the kingdom in anticipation and hope: today's prophets LOOK BACK to the same events declaring the fulfilment of that promise.

- We become a prophetic people - the prophets prophesied into real situations, addressing real people and issues. If we look carefully, we will understand that we face many of those same issues in different disguises. We will be lifted up on to God's shoulders so that we see with his eyes, and will put a stethoscope to his heartbeat so that we feel what he feels.



- The church becomes prophetic - not interested so much in prediction as in pioneering.

Interest in the future ceases to be in foretelling and instead is in finding out how to be the first to bring the future into today. We not only see the goal of what we are to become but we quicken our pace towards it - we 'look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.'

What are some of these repeating themes, these landmarks that we should be looking out for in the prophets?

## GOD IS RULER AND LORD OF ALL

Although the surrounding nations had their own gods, Israel's God was not just one among many or even the greatest among the gods. He is the one true God, the one who lays claim to be the creator of all with sovereign right to rule over everything and everyone.<sup>2</sup> He is an interventionist who exercises his right to rule. He has not wound up the universe like a clockwork toy then stepped back to watch it unwind. Nothing has changed - 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'<sup>3</sup> still. A prophetic people cannot bring themselves to believe that the world is to be deserted and left to

anyone else. Far from retreating into a holy huddle they want to go into his world and take it all back - 'some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell!'<sup>4</sup>

## GOD CALLS US TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

The emptiness of religious tradition unconnected to holy living is exposed. God is seen to be not only intolerant of such religion but angry that it might ever be substituted for true righteousness, or right standing with him. Are we sure that the message we carry is the same one?

- Do we preach a gospel that talks about repentance and do we look for its fruit? Do we have a passion to see people restored to right relationship with God or are we more interested in widening the gate just to swell the numbers? Do we feel angry at sin or are we sticking plasters on fatal wounds?<sup>5</sup>

- Are we committed to seeing the church emerge from the mixture that so often goes in its name? Are we joined to a local body of believing Christians or have we settled for the false security of man-made tradition?<sup>6</sup>

- Do we have a passion for purity? To the prophets, trusting in God and other gods at the same time was as bad as not trusting at all. Do we trust him with our eternal destiny but not our day to day needs? Do we have a 'Plan B' in case God doesn't come through, or are we abandoned to his ways?

## GOD LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE

God's kingdom is founded on both righteousness and justice<sup>7</sup> - right relationship is not only essential with God but also with our neighbour. Protest against social injustice is not enough, our calling is to be an alternative society

# THE PROPHETS

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that demonstrates justice in the way we treat one another and the way we become the love of God to a hurting world. God is deeply concerned with the welfare of the dispossessed - the poor, the widow and the orphan - and if we claim to represent him yet fail to show the same concern then we will fool no-one. 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'<sup>8</sup>

## GOD REMEMBERS COVENANT

The prophets constantly remind us of God's covenant faithfulness. Their graphic language of both judgement and hope doesn't just come out of their imagination but is often rooted in covenant. For example, the picture in Isaiah 11:6-9 is not just an idyllic rural scene! If you compare it with Leviticus 26:22, you see that it is pointing to a time when people will not live under the curse of covenant-breaking but rather in the peace of covenant-keeping. Prophetic people will live in FAITH as they revel in the certain knowledge of God's promise-keeping and the FEAR of God that stops them from treating him casually whilst enjoying the security of walking in his ways.

## THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Even in the times of deepest gloom the prophets could hardly stop themselves looking forward to a time when the reign of God would become evident on the earth. Righteousness and justice, peace and mercy, truth and wisdom and much more besides would all be seen here.<sup>9</sup>

The amazing truth is that the time they were looking forward to is NOW and we are the people they were prophesying about.<sup>10</sup> The kingdom has come and their prophetic hope is being unfolded before our eyes! If that doesn't make you want to read the prophets' books and find out



what they saw then nothing will. If you want to be part of the answer instead of part of the problem then get your telescope out and take a good long look. Happy viewing!•

1. 2 Peter 3:12
2. Isaiah 45:18
3. Psalm 24:1
4. C. T. Studd
5. Jeremiah 8:11
6. Jeremiah 7:4
7. Isaiah 9:7
8. Amos 5:24
9. Isaiah 62:1-11
10. 1 Peter 1:10-12

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