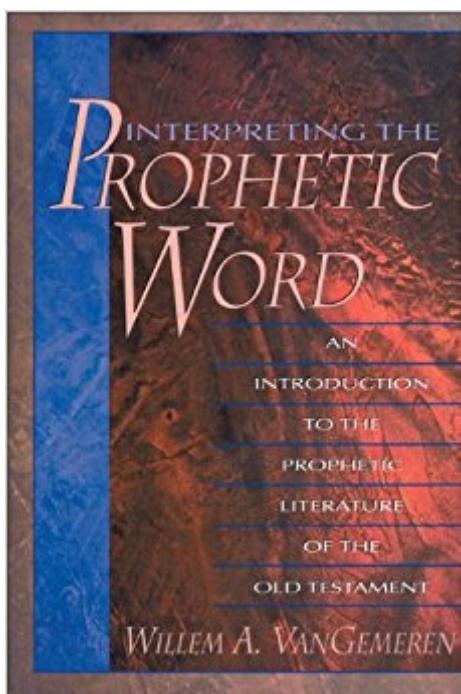


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# Interpreting The Prophetic Word: An Introduction To The Prophetic Literature Of The Old Testament



## **Synopsis**

The diversity of prophetic voices in the Bible provides a message that is rich and variegated. But the variety of the testimony can be lost by limiting one's interpretations or application of the prophetic word. Interpreting the Prophetic Word helps readers understand the harmony of the voices that reveal God's purposes in redemptive history. Dr. Willem VanGemeren explains clearly and fully the background of the prophetic tradition. He then interprets the message of the major and minor prophets, using historical context and literary form and structure as tools in his analysis. He concludes with an explanation of the relevance of the prophetic word today. Dr. VanGemeren's extensive research and scholarship is presented in a readable way to unlock the door of prophecy for readers. He helps them to interpret prophecy and invites them to listen to the prophets and to live the prophetic word.

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## **Customer Reviews**

Willem A. VanGemeren Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

The diversity of prophetic voices in the Bible provides a message that is rich and variegated. But the variety of the testimony can be lost by limiting one's interpretations or application of the prophetic word. Interpreting the Prophetic Word helps readers understand the harmony of the voices that reveal God's purposes in redemptive history. Dr. Willem VanGemeren explains clearly and fully the

background of the prophetic tradition. He then interprets the message of the major and minor prophets, using historical context and literary form and structure as tools in his analysis. He concludes with an explanation of the relevance of the prophetic word today. Dr. VanGemeren's extensive research and scholarship is presented in a readable way to unlock the door of prophecy for readers. He helps them to interpret prophecy and invites them to listen to the prophets and to live the prophetic word.

Textbooks on the prophets of the Old Testament are few and far between on the bookshelves in the offices of evangelical pastors today. While revered and affirmed as canonical texts, prophetic literature in the Old Testament is rarely preached and often misunderstood by evangelicals. The message of the prophets is often lost in a world that demands to have its ears tickled by a glorified therapeutic deism that would have Isaiah and Jeremiah shudder. A quick look in a typical Christian bookstore will leave much to be desired in the prophetic literature department. This presents a chicken and egg dilemma. Is it the lack of resources on prophetic literature that limits the preaching of the message of God through the prophets or vice-versa? The man who has greatly aided in solving this growing dilemma of prophetic ignorance is in familiar territory. Willem VanGemeren, professor of Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has proven himself to be a relevant voice heralding the biblical theology of Old Testament texts and biblical themes in his authorship of *The Progress of Redemption* and his commentary on the Psalms, which is featured in the *Expositor*™'s Bible Commentary. VanGemeren has not just produced a thick space-filler on pastors' bookshelves, but he has given the evangelical world a refreshing work that will be more often in the hands of the pastor and layman than collecting dust on a shelf. One reason, no doubt, that there are few works on prophetic literature as a whole is that there is so much diversity in prophetic writings that it can be difficult to stay focused on an over-arching theme or central purpose. However, from Moses to Daniel (and everywhere between), VanGemeren gives a rich and comprehensive presentation of the prophetic word in the Old Testament for proper and improved interpretation and application.

**Summary** By turning to any page at random in *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, it is easy to see that VanGemeren has a burning desire to see the prophetic word of the Old Testament heard, taught, preached, understood, and realized in a time so far removed from the prophets but at the same time so similar to the historical context they found themselves in. VanGemeren has set out in this comprehensive work to herald the "harmonious testimony" of the prophets which coincides with the teaching of the Lord Jesus and the apostles summed up by the author in these repeated words throughout the work: "that our

heavenly Father has prepared great things for those who consecrate themselves to him by forming a counterculture, his kingdom on earth (13). VanGemeren sets out to show that the different prophetic voices harmoniously witness in their diversity to the purposes of God in redemptive history (13). The author carefully interprets and sketches the writings and messages of each prophet within redemptive history while being sensitive to the historical-political-economical-societal background that each prophet found himself in. VanGemeren desires to exalt the unity and harmony of the message of the prophets while not eliminating or silencing their diversity. This is what makes this work so unique. Not only does the author faithfully give a short commentary of each piece of Old Testament prophetic literature, but he also ties these individual threads together to form a working and beautiful system aimed at giving the reader a correct lens to interpret and apply these writings. Interpreting the Prophetic Word is systematically divided into four major sections. The book is divided in a way that helps achieve the purpose in bringing together the harmonious diversity of the message of the prophets. Chapters one through three give the reader a much-needed introductory glimpse into the nature of prophetism. Chapter one focuses on the uniqueness of Israel's state in a pluralistic world. Israel and her prophets worshiped the One True God and had special revelation rather than man-developed religion. The development of prophetism from Moses to Jesus is heavily, if not exclusively, predicated on this reality. The prophets of God relied on revelation from God while the prophets of, let's say, Baal relied on the religion from man. The tradition of prophetism throughout Israel's history is then probed in chapter two as the prophets' office, role, and message are examined from Israel to exile. A brief explanation and description of the message of both the pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets are discussed in chapter two. The first section then closes with a look at the varying perspectives on interpreting and understanding the prophets, which VanGemeren writes is a truly exciting venture and honor (70). This look at interpretive models leads into the second major section. The second section looks at the message of the Minor Prophets. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are each examined to bring out the historical and literary context of each book as well as focusing on the overarching theme of each book. This section looks both at the Minor Prophets as a whole and individually. This section and the one to follow should be a pastor's best friend when preaching from the Prophets. Together, sections two and three (which includes the Major Prophets) compile a collection of excellent commentaries that drive home the overall message of each prophet that can often be lost with the high poetry of prophetic literature. Finally, the fourth section, which is actually only one chapter included in Part 3 of the book, is properly titled "Living the

Prophetic Word. It ties the thread of the interpretation of the prophets together with the work of the Spirit, the coming of Christ, and the progress of redemption (354). In the words of VanGemeren, "The prophets, our Lord, and the apostles urgently set before us the way of the Spirit, of the whole counsel of God, and of involvement in the progress of redemption" (355). This chapter allows the reader and interestingly forces him or her to reconcile the diversity of the prophets with the overall theme of Scripture within redemptive history. In other words, VanGemeren argues in this closing chapter that interpretation of the prophetic word of the Old Testament must involve the power of the Spirit, *Tota Scriptura*, and the progress of redemption.

**Critical Evaluation** The scholarship and extensive research VanGemeren put into this volume is easily noticed by even a short skim over each chapter. There are many things about this work that make it relevant in our time and worthy of reading. The overall setup of the book makes it a wonderful resource for reference. For example, the major sections of this book, parts two and three, would be bookmarked and highlighted heavily by the pastor preaching a sermon series through Jonah or Micah, to name a couple. The organization of *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* makes it pleasant to refer to. Because of this and combined with the impressive bibliography, this work is worthy of using for academic research, sermon writing, and personal Bible study. A common argument throughout this work is that God desires for his people to consecrate themselves to him by forming a counterculture, which he uses to define the establishment of his kingdom on earth. VanGemeren argues that this motif is present in the Prophets, the teaching of Jesus Christ, and the writings of the apostles. He provides excellent biblical evidence for this in each Prophet and in his closing chapter relates this to Christ and the apostles. His claim and argument are both rooted in Scripture as God has indeed been setting his people apart to be holy as he is holy from Creation on (Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pt. 1:16). This is especially seen in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, heralded throughout all of the Old Testament (as VanGemeren shows us) and is continued and amplified in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles with the ushering in of the kingdom of God on earth and the indwelling of the Spirit in men and women. Judgment follows all who do not establish this "counterculture" while rest is rewarded to all who do. This argument from VanGemeren throughout this work is highly biblical and provides a holistic and refreshing lens through which to view prophetic literature. While the author is careful not to bring any interpretational biases into the writing of this book, there are times when he could be more straightforward in his own interpretation. While it is noble of him to allow the reader to interpret each prophetic writing on his or her own, it would have been helpful for VanGemeren to more strongly interpret each work and then allow the reader to evaluate it. The author seems to objectively, but standishly probe each

Prophet. There are pros and cons with this approach and while his admittedly Â¢ÂœopenÂ¢Â presentation of prophetic literature made his work more concise and more easily readable, it would have been helpful for him to have been a bit more straightforward. Nevertheless, any frustrations experienced by the reader in this regard in chapters 4-11 are resolved with his conclusions and reasoning in chapter 12 which made the book for me. Conclusion In closing, Interpreting the Prophetic Word is a book that deserves to be on every pastorÂ¢Â™s bookshelf and should increase the amount of prophetic literature that is preached from the pulpit. Greater understanding, not only of the Prophets, but also of the Bible as a whole and the Lordship of Jesus Christ will all be gleaned from the reading of this book.

Excellent reference / resource materiel.

Another subject that I did not know a lot about. The subject seemed difficult and hard to really understand. This book brought great light to the subject, but it is a hard book and the author uses academic language that is not easy for all people. It was good though, but not something that I would like to read again.

Good price. exact product. Thanks!!

Awesome & Insightful book!!

little bit dirty

VanGemeren has provided an incredibly useful resource for using the Prophets in the church. He is an excellent scholar on technical matters (see his editing of the NIDOTE but especially his Psalms commentary in the Expositor's Bible Commentary series--arguably the best commentary in that series) but also provides superb oversight of thematic issues that will help preachers understand, arrange, and teach the material in the light of its Old Testament context and New Testament teaching. The prophets, which are too often ignored in church, are incredibly exciting and illuminating when helpfully explained, as they are here. It is hard to read this volume without preaching it to yourself--a rare problem with evangelical biblical studies on the Old Testament. We might have wished for a little more work on poverty and social justice issues, a significant concern of the prophets that (some might say) doesn't come out as strongly as it should. On most critical

issues, one will need to consult OT introductions and commentaries as dealing with such is not van Gemeren's primary purpose. For his helpful focus on "consummation" in Christ, his Kingdom, and (ultimately) the New Creation, Interpreting the Prophetic Word provides a valuable tool for understanding the message of the Prophets in their OT and NT contexts, which should lead preachers, teachers, and students to better application of the Prophets in today's world.

I am a college teacher in Old Testament Prophetic books, and I was looking for a new textbook for my class, as most books on the subject tend to be very dry, or over spiritualized. As a teacher we need to be careful not to jaundice the student's eye. This book has been like a breath of fresh air. I have searched and been dissapointed at the few books on this subject. I was even tempted to put one together myself. This book is very good on content and accuracy, without being too focused on any particular Bible Doctrine. Taking the prophetic at face value, in light of the social, economical, and spiritual state of the nations affected. It does however lack a little in punch, being almost too careful to come straight out and say certain things that should be said. Nonetheless, having searched, and read, and trodged from one book to another, I believe I have found my new textbook, and will not need to write one myself. This is fresh, and probably the most current available on the subject. Thank You, Tim Pritchard B. Th.

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