The Prophets

Saturday 6th June 2026

Teaching by Tom O'Toole

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Introducing The Prophets

Non-Writing Prophets

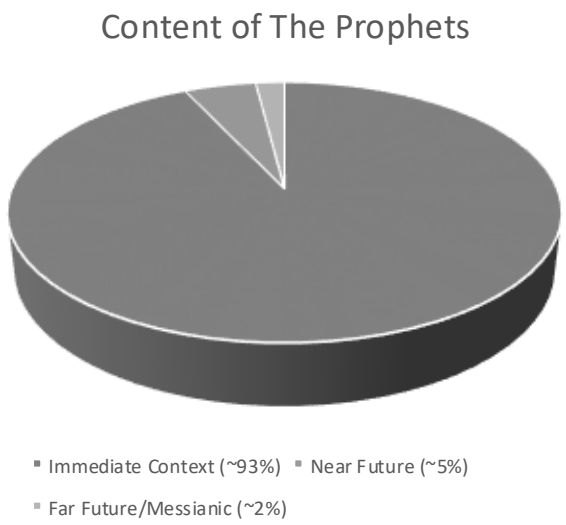
Figures who appear within narrative books like Samuel and Kings:

Examples include Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, Huldah and many others.

Writing Prophets

Three Major Prophets:
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
(Some also add Daniel)

Twelve Minor Prophets:
Hosea, Joel. Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi



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Some Prophets In Action

Nathan "You are the man" (2 Sam 12:7)		***The prophet as a moral truth-teller, exposing hidden personal sin in the context of royal privilege.***
Elijah "This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?" (1 Kings 21:19)		***The prophet as a moral witness against systemic injustice that sees what the powerful do to the powerless and stands with truth and justice.***
Amos "They sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals." (Amos 2:6)		***The prophet as a social critic from the margins, confronting complacency.***
Jeremiah "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot." (Jeremiah 20:9)		***The prophet as a suffering messenger who embodies God's own heart, and whose life becomes a sign of hope when everything looks hopeless.***

The economics of affluence and the politics of oppression are the most characteristic marks of the Solomonic achievement. But these by themselves could not have prospered and endured as they did had they not received theological sanction…. Obviously, oppressive politics and affluent economics depend on each other. Nevertheless, it is my contention that fundamental to both is the religion of the captive God in which all over-againstness is dissipated and the king and ideology are completely at ease in the presence of God.

Walter Brueggemann

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The Message of the Prophets

(i) A Diagnosis of What Is Wrong

God's people had turned away from him, and the prophets laid out the charges against them. All of this comes in the context of the covenant that God had made with his people (see for example Deuteronomy 28).

Idolatry

Isaiah 44:12-15 - The blacksmith… cuts down cedars… It is used as fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.

Immorality

Hosea 4:1-2 - …There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Injustice

Isaiah 10:1-2 - Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees. To deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.

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(ii) A Call to Repent

Having laid out the charge the prophets urge the people to turn back to God.

Joel 2:12-13 - 'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Who might find the call to repentance uncomfortable? And who might have found it liberating?

(iii) A Warning if they Don't

The warning was combined with consequences if the people didn't turn back. They were living as God's people in God's land, but God can't give his stamp of approval to what is happening.

So the story goes into reverse:

Land ➞ Exile: *(Isaiah 39:6-7)*

God's Presence ➞ Withdrawn: *(Ezekiel 10:18)*

But

God's Promises remain so there is still hope

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The Hope of the Prophets

As dire as the warning of the prophets get, they do not leave people without hope. God has not given up on his people or his promises!

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
The immediate crisis is that people are away from the land and the temple. Can God still be with them even in exile? The answer is a resounding **yes!** (e.g. Esther, Daniel, Jeremiah 29:5-7)	Even though God could be with them in exile, the next question is 'will we be here forever?' And the answer is **no**. Through the prophets, God promised that the people would return to the land (e.g. Jeremiah 29:10) and we see the story of this being fulfilled in Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai.	How will the cycle be broken and things ultimately change? The promises of the prophets converge on a figure who Isaiah calls the servant of the Lord (Isaiah 61). He will bear the sins of the people Isaiah (53), institute a new covenant (Jeremiah 31) and give his people new hearts and the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 31). In Luke 4, **Jesus** announces that he is the fulfilment of these promises.

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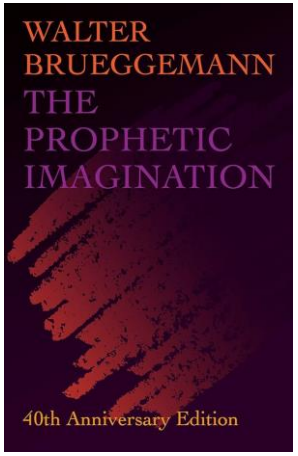
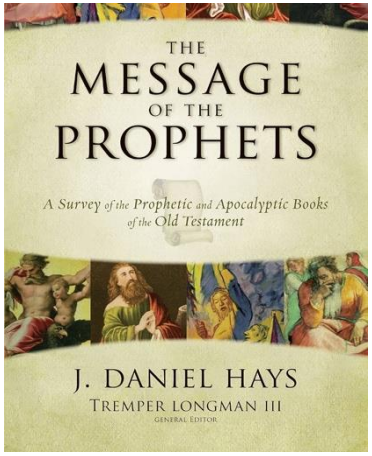
Recommended Resources



The Prophetic Imagination



The Message of the Prophets

The Holy Spirit

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I. God as Spirit vs. The Holy Spirit: The Spirit as Fully Divine

Most of us have a feeling for what we mean when we say "God is Spirit" (John 4:24). It gestures at something — the divine freedom, the invisibility, incorporeality, the impossibility of pinning God down.

And yet when we say "the Holy Spirit," we mean something far more specific: a person, not a property; a "who," not a "what."

Opening questions

How do these two claims relate to one another? When you think of the Holy Spirit, do you instinctively reach for a person or a power or …? Where did that instinct come from — and what might be at stake in it?

- The terseness of Nicaea (325): "We believe… in the Holy Spirit." Full stop.
- Athanasius's binary: either the Holy Spirit is God (uncreated, self-existent) or a creature (made from nothing). No middle ground.

  > *"The one who is from God cannot be from nothing, nor can he be a creature—unless they think that the one from whom the Spirit comes is also a creature!" (Athanasius, Letters to Serapion 1.22.1)*
- Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381): the Spirit is "the Lord and giver of life… worshipped and glorified" with Father and Son.
- What is at stake here? If the Spirit is not God, then the God who brings us to salvation and worship is not who we thought.
- Gregory of Nazianzus: "When I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three."

What follows is an attempt to take seriously both the Spirit's personhood seriously and to trace what difference it makes for how we understand creation, salvation, the church, and the gifts/fruits of the Spirit.

II. The Works of the Spirit

The Scriptures witness to Spirit's full divinity by referencing the Spirit's works: creation, salvation, the church and its sacraments, and the ongoing gathered and charismatic life of God's people.

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A. The Spirit of Creation

The Spirit does not arrive with the NT. The OT already knows the Spirit as the creative, life-giving breath of God, animating cosmos and creature alike before Israel or the church exists.

> *"When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground." (Ps 104:30)*

- *Ruach* in three registers (McGrath): wind/breath; principle of life; the very life of God. All three are present in the creation narratives.
- Gen 1:2 — the Spirit hovers over the formless void; Gen 2:7 — God breathes into the human frame. The Spirit is both the ordering of cosmos and the quickening of creature.
- Irenaeus's proto-trinitarian theology of creation: the Son (Word) and Spirit (Wisdom) are the two hands of the Father by which all things were made.
- *Creatio ex nihilo*: the world owes its existence entirely to God — affirming the Spirit's transcendence while establishing the Spirit's intimate relation to every creature.
  - Athanasius's Creator/creature binary grounds everything: the Spirit is always on the divine side of the Creator/creature distinction.
- The Spirit "befriends matter" (Eugene Rogers): neither material nor disconnected from matter. Through the Spirit, the material becomes sacramental.
  - A Spirit-attentive theology of creation resists dualism: matter is neither the end goal nor the enemy of the Spirit

DISCUSSION PROMPT

How should awareness of the Spirit's presence in creation shape Christian engagement with culture, ecology, and the physical world?

B. The Spirit of Salvation

In the NT, the Spirit who hovered over creation's waters now overshadows Mary, descends on Jesus at his baptism, and is poured out on all flesh at Pentecost. The Spirit is its agent of salvation from beginning to end.

The Spirit and Jesus

- Synoptic pattern: the Spirit is active in Jesus' conception, descends at baptism (in the form of a dove), leads him into the wilderness, and empowers his healings and exorcisms.

- Spirit-grammar in relation to Jesus — descended upon, filled, led by, driven by — each verb implies encounter and movement

  "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest on him — the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might." (Isa 11:2)

- The resurrection breath (John 20:22): Jesus breathes on the disciples — a deliberate echo of Gen 2:7, linking Spirit to new creation and to Christ's glorification.

Paul: The Spirit of New Creation

- "New life in the Spirit" (Rom 7:6): salvation is both ethical and ontological-participatory
- The Spirit is the deposit of the age to come (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13–14). Salvation is already and not-yet; the Spirit is the presence of the future within the present.
- The Spirit intercedes, groaning, sighing on our behalf (Rom 8:26–27). This is irreducibly personal: only a person prays. It also points to how Spirit is the subject of prayer and salvation.
  - Justification and sanctification are both pneumatological: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified… by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).
- Athanasius (the "Divinizer") and Didymus (the “Immutable Sanctifier”): the Spirit's work is *theosis* and sanctification — genuine participation in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

DISCUSSION PROMPT

The Spirit-grammar of the Gospels — "descended upon," "filled," "led by," "driven by" — suggests a rather dynamic view of the Spirit’s work, and Paul sees the Spirit as the future of a new creation, which the Spirit is actively drawing us into now. How do these descriptors shape our understanding of salvation?

C. The Spirit of the Church and the Sacraments

Pentecost and the Community

- Acts 2: repentance and charismatic signs; authority conferred on leadership; the missionary mandate launched. "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17) — the Spirit crosses boundaries of gender, age, and status.
- The Spirit produces synergy: the community in Acts is constituted by the Spirit's presence, not merely organised around shared belief.

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A Sacramental World

- "The most basic relationship between God as creator and the creature is sacramental" (Tyron Inbody): a world made by the Spirit is a world charged with the capacity to speak of God.
- The Spirit "befriends matter" — creation, incarnation, and indwelling.

The Means of Grace: The Spirit's typical way of communicating salvation

- The Institution of the Church: The Spirit works through not against the Church (organization, creeds, preaching, sacraments, etc).
- The Sacraments of the Church: The ordinary way God's presence is communicated, and the people of God are strengthened and unified.
  - Eucharist: the ongoing maintenance of Christian life; Ignatius: the Eucharist is "the medicine of immortality."
  - Baptism: Objective sign of God's work of cleansing and incorporation; Subjective declaration of faith response to the Gospel.
  - The Spirit's role: efficacy depends not on the elements or participants alone but on the Spirit's sanctification (Tertullian)

D. The Spirit of Charisma: Gifts and Fruit

The Spirit's work is not limited to the institution and sacraments of the church. The Spirit also communicates God's power and love to us individually and communally.

The Biblical Pattern

- Paul: charismatic gifts (1 Cor 12–14), prophetic revelation (1 Cor 2:10–12), and moral-spiritual transformation (Gal 5:22–23) are all works of the one Spirit. To have one without the others is to divide the Spirit.
- Gifts are not badges of spiritual status but instruments of service; the purpose of charismata is the building up of the community (1 Cor 14:12).

Pentecostalism and the Empowering Presence

- Pentecostalism's organising claim: the powerful experience of the Spirit at or after conversion is a theological priority (Frank Macchia).
- Simon Chan: what distinguishes Pentecostal spirituality is the experience of the Spirit "not as impersonal force but as personally present and active." Evangelicals tend to speak of the Spirit's operations; Pentecostals speak of the Spirit's presence.
- "Baptism in the Holy Spirit": usually evidenced by spiritual gifts, tongues-speech, prophesy, and miracles/healing

- Amos Yong: “We focus on Pentecostal views of the Spirit’s empowerment as an avenue toward manifestation of the Spirit’s gifts, as enabling power ministry, and as sustaining the missional mandate of the church.” The Spirit as the power of love.

Toward Integration

- Charisma and order are not opposites — they are complementary expressions of the same Spirit who both structures the community and disrupts its complacency.
- The ecumenical gift of Pentecostalism: to remind the whole church that the Spirit is personally present, not merely doctrinally affirmed.

Conclusion: Person, Presence, and Power

A Christian theology of the Holy Spirit unites person and power, presence and institution, creation and redemption, justification and sanctification, the present and the future. The Spirit who hovered over the waters, breathed life into Adam, anointed the Messiah, raised Jesus from the dead, fell on the disciples at Pentecost, and groans within believers is one and the same person — fully divine, fully personal, inexhaustibly active.

CLOSING REFLECTION