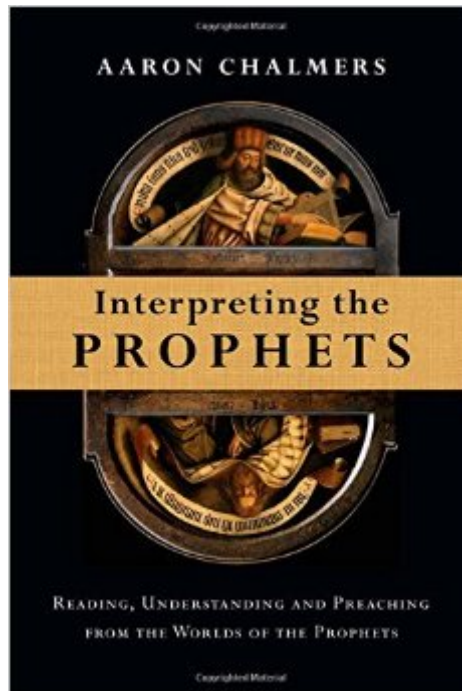


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Interpreting The Prophets: Reading, Understanding And Preaching From The Worlds Of The Prophets



Synopsis

The prophetic books are some of the most captivating and fascinating texts of the Old Testament, but they are also some of the most misunderstood. *Interpreting the Prophets* equips the reader with the knowledge and skills they need to interpret the Prophets in a faithful and accurate fashion. Beginning with the nature of the prophetic role and prophetic books in Israel, Old Testament scholar Aaron Chalmers leads the reader through the various "worlds" of Israel's prophets—historical, social, theological and rhetorical—providing the basic contextual and background information needed both for sound and sensible exegesis, and for sensitive interpretation and application for today. He concludes with a helpful chapter giving guidelines for preaching from the Prophets—including advice on choosing the texts, making appropriate analogies, and the potential problems and common pitfalls to avoid.

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Customer Reviews

Aaron Chalmers is head of the School of Ministry, Theology and Culture at Tabor Adelaide and wrote *Exploring the Religion of Ancient Israel* for Intervarsity's Exploring Topics in Christianity Series (2012). In this new work on the prophets, he introduces students to the "world" of the prophets. In chapter 1 Chalmers explains defines biblical "prophet" in contrast to modern definitions of prophecy. I too have found my students think biblical prophecy is more or less like Harry Potter meets Left Behind. They seem a bit surprised that my Old Testament Prophets course starts with a lengthy section of social ethics and covenant faithfulness! Chalmers also offers a

sketch of how a prophetic book is formed, moving from oral presentation to a written document or collection of documents. He does not shy away from describing some of the prophetic books the results of an editorial process and briefly discusses the *locus of inspiration*, indicating that God's hand is at work in the whole process, whatever that process might be. He concludes *at the end of the day there is still much we do not know about the composition of the prophetic books*, but this is not really a problem because Chalmers is interested in exegeting the final form of the text (31). In chapter two Chalmers describes *The Historical World of the Prophets*. The first half of the chapter is a basic sketch of Old Testament history from the eighth century through the return from exile. He sets each prophet into the history, although he discusses the historical context of Jonah and Daniel in a sidebar, suggesting the *historical context* is not necessarily the same as the final form of the literary works bearing their names.

Aaron Chalmers' *Interpreting the Prophets* is an introduction to, well, interpreting the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. He notes that readers are often turned off of the prophets for a number of reasons, whether it is the difficulty of these writings or their seeming irrelevancy for our time. Against these reasons, he argues for and puts forward a relevant and practical guide to reading the Old Testament prophets and coming to a deeper understanding of God's Word. The book is laid across 6 chapters, each with a focus on a central aspect of interpreting and applying biblical prophecy. These are: (1) What is a prophet and what is a prophetic book?; (2) The historical world of the prophets; (3) The theological world of the prophets; (4) The rhetorical world of the prophets; (5) From prophecy to apocalyptic; and (6) Guidelines for preaching from the prophets. There are many insights which will be valuable for both those wishing to engage with the prophets as laity and those interested in drawing out deep exegetical insights from the text. Chalmers' work serves as a guide for reading without telling readers exactly what various passages are supposed to mean. It is the kind of text that encourages readers to move to the Word and explore it for themselves, laying a solid foundation for interpretation beforehand. One example of the insights Chalmers provides is his critique of those who would see the prophetic literature as speaking primarily to our time. He notes that this approach of trying to match up biblical prophecies one-to-one with newspaper headlines is mistaken for a number of reasons, including making the texts largely irrelevant to its contemporary hearers.

There is no doubt that the Prophets of the Old Testament are the most difficult portion of Scripture to get a handle on. You can go astray in so many ways from an interpretive standpoint. Mr.

Chalmers, teacher of the Old Testament and hermeneutics, writes to assist us in that quest in this volume published by IVP. He specifically wants to deliver something different from what most of us have on our shelves. Other prophecy handbooks aim at content about the individual prophetic books and the prophets themselves. He feels that what is more needed is an ability to get in these books and sensibly interpret ourselves. Though I appreciate the content-driven volumes myself, I can see his point. The volume he has given us, accordingly, is about the complicated hermeneutics of the prophets rather than a traditional volume. He has succeeded, in my view, on some levels. His threefold division of the historical world, the theological world, and the rhetorical worlds is logical. In the historical world section, he spends time well explaining what an Old Testament prophet is. I take issue with some assumptions he makes in regards to the writing process of the prophetic books. Though he is kind to conservatives, he seems to lean more toward a critical perspective of redaction taking place over centuries. There is no concrete evidence to cause me to believe that position, but admittedly a large part of the scholarly world agrees with him. It seems to me Mr. Chalmers's™ theological position stands close to John Goldingay, who is, in fact, oft quoted in this volume. The latter part of the historical section was interesting as was the theological one. The rhetorical section made distinctions that scholars wrestle with more than pastors or Bible students.

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