

Derek Elkins  
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In 1020BCE, Saul became the first king of the united kingdom of Israel. For the next 100 years, the kingdom of Israel enjoyed a peaceful time, including the famed years under the kingships of David and Solomon. In 922BCE, the northern and southern kingdoms divided, until the northern kingdom, Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 721BCE. In the years between the division of the kingdoms and the time preceding the fall of Israel, prophetic activity seems to have been virtually non-existent.

Beginning with Amos, 760-750BCE, the prophetic voice became a continual presence in the midst of very turbulent times for both kingdoms. In the 40 years prior to the fall of the northern kingdom, four prophets delivered messages to the people of both kingdoms, including Amos, Hosea, I Isaiah and Micah. Strangely, the prophetic voices fell silent again for 60 years between the end of Isaiah's prophecy in 701BCE until the beginning of Zephaniah's prophecy to Judah in 640BCE. When the northern kingdom fell, many of the inhabitants of Israel fled to Jerusalem and the safety that Judah offered. This might offer some idea as to why the prophetic voice seems to have ended so abruptly after the attack of the Assyrians. With the urgency of the migration from Israel into Judah, along with the sense of safety at having reached the protection of the surviving kingdom, the prophets of the north and the

south were forced to wait in order to see what these massive changes in the landscape of the kingdoms might lead to.

The first prophet to break the silence after the fall of Israel was Zephaniah. Beginning in 640BCE and stretching through 587BCE, five prophets, including Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Obadiah prophesied to the people of both kingdoms, living in Judah. Then, in 587BCE, the southern Kingdom fell to the control of the Babylonians, which led the exile of the Hebrew people living in the southern kingdom. The exile of the Judahites brought some of the greatest prophetic voices forward. Ezekiel, Isaiah II & III, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi deliver the resounding prophetic themes of the exile.

The prophets of the exile played an important role in the life of the Hebrew people. The final king of Judah, Zedekiah, was dethroned by the Babylonians in 587BCE. In the absence of a king, the prophets of the exile served as the other type of leadership for the people. In fact, as we analyze the emergence of the prophets, there is a direct correlation between the end of the kingdoms and the emergence of the prophets. As the northern kingdom began to be threatened by the encroaching Assyrians, the prophets appeared with words of warning for the Hebrew people. Then again, in anticipation of the Babylonian attack, the prophetic voice swelled again. Finally, the prophets had a third swell in the 100 years after the exile, which gave a swift end to the prophetic

ministry. Only two prophets came to notoriety after the years of the exile, Joel and Daniel.

In attempting to understand the importance of the prophetic voice among the ancient Hebrews, it is essential that we understand the location of the prophets as being immediately related to the violent overthrow of the northern and southern kingdoms. The prophets were an important voice, combining the political authority of the kings with the religious fortitude of the priests. In the face of the inevitable destruction of the land and culture of the Hebrews, the prophets offered words of challenge and encouragement strong enough to empower a people's hope, faithfulness and survival.