



The Prophets (Perennial Classics)

By Abraham J. Heschel

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Abraham Heschel is a seminal name in religious studies and the author of *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man*. When *The Prophets* was first published in 1962, it was immediately recognized as a masterpiece of biblical scholarship.

The Prophets provides a unique opportunity for readers of the Old Testament, both Christian and Jewish, to gain fresh and deep knowledge of Israel's prophetic movement. The author's profound understanding of the prophets also opens the door to new insight into the philosophy of religion.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

According to the popular definition, a prophet is one who accurately predicts the future. But in the Jewish tradition, as Abraham Joshua Heschel explains in *The Prophets*, these figures earn their title by witnessing the world around them with outstanding passion. Prophets are those whose "life and soul are at stake" in what they say about "the mystery of [God's] relation to man." They are "some of the most disturbing people who have ever lived," and yet they are also "the men whose image is our refuge in distress, and whose voice and vision sustain our faith." Heschel's book, one of the classic texts on the subject, contains sophisticated, straightforward discussions of each of the Hebrew prophets, the primary themes of their preaching, and comparisons of Israel's prophets to those of other religions'. Throughout, Heschel avoids the two great temptations in any discussion of prophesy: overstating the supernatural quality of a prophet's epiphany ("A prophet is a person, not a microphone"), and reducing prophesy to a merely human phenomenon. Instead, Heschel describes the prophet's peculiar status as God's spokesman in a way that does justice to its complexity: "He speaks from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of his own situation."
--Michael Joseph Gross

Review

Abraham Heschel was an Orthodox Jewish scholar who was born in Warsaw and fled the Nazi regime, ending in the United States. "The Prophets" is an expanded English translation of his German doctoral thesis, first published in 1962. Both volumes are here conveniently reprinted in a single volume, marking the hundredth anniversary of his birth.

Heschel's approach to the prophets seeks to take account both of their divine inspiration and of the human personalities through which this came. He rejects any approach that stresses revelation to the exclusion of the human role or that views the prophets in purely human terms. The key to the prophets, for Heschel, is the divine pathos. Their writings reveal the passionate God, being 'filled with echoes of divine love and disappointment, mercy and indignation'. Much modern theology has moved away from the traditional doctrine that God is impassible, not subject to feelings or emotions. Heschel's work has been influential in that move, as for example on Jiirgen Moltmann's "The Crucified God."

In the first volume Heschel expounds the thought of a number of the prophets: Amos, Hosea, First and Second Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. The second volume focuses especially on the divine pathos. But doesn't 'anthropopathic language', speaking of God's feelings in human terms, prejudice the transcendence of God? There are two opposite errors to avoid. On the one hand we must not make God so 'Wholly Other' that he remains unknown. On the other hand we must not reduce him to human terms. The prophets used anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language of God, but did not imagine that this described him adequately. Adapting Isaiah 55:8, 'My pathos is not your pathos, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and my pathos than your pathos.' The essential meaning of the divine pathos 'is not to be seen in its psychological denotation, as standin

About the Author

Abraham J. Heschel (1907-1972), born in Poland, moved to the United States in 1940. A professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Heschel became an active and well-known participant in the

Civil Rights movement and the protests against the Vietnam War.

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