



By

Mark McGee

How To Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets (Crossway, 2017) by Peter J. Gentry is an excellent book for any Christian who wants to understand the Old Testament prophets. I first encountered the prophets during an investigation into the reliability of the Old Testament. After becoming a Christian, I returned to the prophets and have enjoyed them through the years. As Hebrews reminds us – “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets ...” (Hebrews 1:1). That’s an amazing statement and well worth remembering as we read the prophetic writings.

Peter J. Gentry (PhD, University of Toronto) is professor of Old Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and director of the Hexapla Institute. He served on the faculties of Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College, University of Toronto, Heritage Theological Seminar, and Tyndale Theological Seminary. In addition to writing *How To Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*, Dr. Gentry has also written *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2012, with co-

author Steven Wellum) and *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2015, with co-author Steven Wellum).

The writings of the prophets take up a large portion of the Old Testament. God spoke through them to both Israel and surrounding nations. Jesus and His apostles spoke often about the importance of the prophets and their writings because they were about Jesus.

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Matthew 5:17

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27

“But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” Acts 3:18

“Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.” Acts 3:24

“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”
Acts 10:43

“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”
Acts 26:22-23

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,

and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Romans 1:1-4

The importance of the prophets is not the prophets themselves, but their message from God to Israel and the world about the coming sacrifice and reign of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of the importance of the prophetic message, it is important that we know how to correctly read and understand that message. Dr. Gentry’s new book is an excellent resource for learning how to do just that.

Gentry has a great writing style that is both in-depth and easy to understand. His insights to the prophetic writings have the effect of an increased desire to read and profit from the writings of the prophets. I highly recommend this new book to you.

Here are some helpful notes from Crossway:

About How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets

A Concise Guide to Reading the Prophetic Books

The Prophetic Books of the Bible are full of symbolic speeches, dramatic metaphors, and lengthy allegories—a unique blend of literary styles that can make them hard to comprehend. How can we know if we are reading them the way God intended them to be read?

In this accessible guide, leading Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry identifies seven common characteristics of prophetic literature in the Bible that help us understand each book's message. With illustrations and clear examples, Gentry offers guidance for reading these challenging texts—teaching us practical strategies for deeper engagement with the biblical text as we seek to apply God's Word to our lives today.

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“When reading the Prophets, one may despair like the Ethiopian eunuch puzzling over Isaiah, ‘How can I understand, unless someone guides me?’ Fortunately, Peter Gentry meets us on the road and asks, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Gentry ably guides us through this strange and foreign land.” Lindsay Kennedy, Assistant Pastor, Calvary Chapel Bothell, Bothell, Washington; blogger, My Digital Seminary

“This is just the book I was looking for! And why? To serve as an essential guide and resource text for my Lusaka Lutheran Seminary exegesis of Isaiah class. Gentry succeeds most admirably in his stated objective, which is to enable readers to read and understand the Prophets. And he does so in a way that is truly exemplary, employing a clear, concise, logically developed writing style that makes it relatively easy to probe this potentially difficult subject—the Old Testament prophetic literature. The basic principles

and procedures of text interpretation are given substance in many helpful reading strategies that are exemplified by some crucial biblical case studies—primarily Isaiah, but also other prophetic texts that reflect upon the fundamental covenantal tenets of the Mosaic Torah, Deuteronomy in particular. All the key topics and tactics necessary for more effectively delving into the Prophets are introduced and amply illustrated: literary-stylistic cues, discourse structural markers, function of the foreign nations, Yahwist covenantal theology, biblical chronology and typology, and, of course, correctly discerning the future, including the apocalyptic genre. In short, the author demystifies the Hebrew prophets and successfully relates their writings also to hermeneutical issues facing the church today—all in the space of less than 150 pages. This book would serve as a helpful introduction for adult Bible studies as well as college-level courses on hermeneutics. Scholars teaching at higher academic levels too would benefit from Gentry's excellent pedagogical approach. I had intended to complete my review of this book periodically, over the space of two weeks; however, once I got started, it took me only two days. Whether one happens to agree with the author's

various interpretive conclusions or not (I do!), one must commend him for the careful manner in which he arrives at them. Many readers now will look forward to some sort of a teacher's guide (including various content and application questions) that could accompany this indispensable resource on the Hebrew prophets." Ernst R. Wendland, instructor, Lusaka Lutheran Seminary, Zambia; Internal Examiner, University of Zambia

"Having established a stellar reputation already through his many publications in Old Testament studies—especially in Septuagint and biblical theology—Gentry reflects broad expertise here in his treatment of prophetism as an institution and in the literary output of the canonical Prophets of the Hebrew Bible. This is more than 'just another book on the Prophets: their lives, times, and ministries.' The approach in this case goes beyond the standard of the oeuvres already at hand. Gentry knits together most skillfully the strands of criticism, theology, history, poetry, apocalyptic, and pastoral practicality in a style that betrays at once solid scholarship and transparent readability." Eugene H. Merrill, Distinguished Professor

Emeritus of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“When traveling to a foreign land, the experience is so much richer when you have an experienced guide to explain the unique customs, point out things you might have missed, and take you to places you would not dare traverse alone. For modern Western readers of the Bible, the Prophets are a foreign land, even if we do not initially realize it. Peter Gentry, with his decades of experience traveling in this difficult terrain, can be your expert guide to the biblical Prophets through reading this book. I’m overjoyed that Gentry is sharing in print for a wider audience what I first found so helpful as class lectures a dozen years ago. Pick up this travel guide and experience the biblical Prophets afresh.” Richard Lucas, biblical and theological studies mentor, The NETS Center for Church Planting and Revitalization; associate pastor, Christ Memorial Church, Williston, Vermont

“Peter Gentry is a master exegete and theologian, and in this brief volume he supplies excellent guidance for those of us who desire to read and understand the Prophets with greater biblical faithfulness. With clear prose and numerous examples, he identifies how we should approach the prophetic genre—its grounding in the Mosaic covenant, its structure and use of repetition, its engagement of foreign nations, its use of typology and apocalyptic language, and its appropriation and already-but-not-yet fulfillment in the New Testament. Gentry helps us grasp how the prophets communicated their messages, and by doing so he empowers us to become better interpreters of God’s Word. I highly recommend this book.” Jason S. DeRouchie, Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology, Bethlehem College & Seminary

“Many people set out to read through the Bible but get bogged down in the Old Testament Prophets. Some push ahead anyway, others skip ahead—both missing out on the full counsel of God. But there’s hope—everyone should read Peter Gentry’s new book! Under seven key topics he

asks the right questions, and his answers are the most insightful I've seen. Pastors and scholars: you'll benefit too." Brent Sandy, Former Professor and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana; coeditor, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*; coauthor, *The Lost World of Scripture*

How To Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets

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[We received an electronic review copy from Crossway]

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