

“Bridging the Testaments: A Postscript on the Series *Of Prophets & Kings*”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden for FUMC
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Scripture Text: The book of Jonah (in song, by Steve
E-M and Prz Tm ensemble) and Daniel, Chapter 3 [NLT]

OPENING

- The significance of the sermon title, “Bridging the Testaments: A Postscript...”
 - The two books for today, Jonah and Daniel, come from the *post-exilic* period or the “intertestamental period”. Unlike the *Prophets and Kings* we’ve been talking about this summer, the book of Jonah is impossible to tie to historical events. It was likely written in the time period of the Persian Empire. And the book of Daniel was more than likely written even later, in the 160’s BC, during the time of the Maccabean Revolt.
 - Written as they were, then, in the years after the age of the classical Hebrew prophets, in many ways Jonah and Daniel serve as bridges to the New Testament; hence, my sermon title today.

TO THE SCRIPTURES: JONAH

- Jonah, the man: The reference in 2 Kings 14:25 to Jonah, son of Amittai, in connection with Jeroboam II of Israel puts Jonah ~ 750 BC.
- Jonah, the book: However, linguistic and cultural clues in the book of Jonah place it likely in the period of the Persian Empire (539 – 331 BC). Persons often mistakenly place the writing as many as 4 centuries before, only b/c of the reference in 2 Kings 14. (*Importance of Midrash to interpreting Jonah.*)
- Set up for 🎵 “Jonah – Not Another Fish Story”.
 - A quick presentation on the 2nd half of Jonah, with primary focus on Jonah 4 and the lessons associated with it. The book of Jonah is not about the titular character’s repentance and obedience to God; his heart could not have been further from God’s. It is about two things:
 1. The heart of God and love for all people, even those whom we would consider God’s enemies.
 2. The fact that sometimes it is God’s enemies that reflect faithfulness to God to a far higher degree than God’s own people!

With this in mind, I wonder if Jesus had this in mind when, in Luke 10, He told a smug teacher of the Law the parable of the Good Samaritan as a stinging rebuke to that teacher’s hardness of heart.

🎵 “Jonah – Not Another Fish Story” (Steve E-M)

TO THE SCRIPTURES: DANIEL

- Daniel: Much later – in the period of the Maccabean Revolt. As such, the events the author of Daniel narrates in the first 6 chapters of the book take place centuries before their being written down. And so, to interpret them as historical reporting is to misinterpret them. (*Unpack this...Daniel 1-6 as “hero stories”, encouraging resilience, courage, and faithfulness in the face of the Hellenizing threats from the Seleucid rulers in Syrian Antioch – and especially, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. One such story is that of Daniel’s three friends being faced with incineration in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. **READING:** Daniel 3:1, 4-6, 8, 12-14, 16-18 [NLT].*)
- The second half of Daniel is an example of early Jewish apocalyptic literature, which would find later expression in the book of Revelation.
 - Interesting that there is a unifying theme in these two parts of the book of Daniel. While they employ VERY DIFFERENT literary styles, they focus them in the same direction: Toward strengthening the identity and faith of the Jewish population in the land of Palestine, so as to ensure the continued vitality of “the faithful remnant” of God’s people who survived even the extreme pressures of Babylonian conquest, deportation, and exile.
 - Some of the Fruit of the book of Daniel: the success of the Maccabean Revolt. It had to look absolutely apocalyptic in its results! – Results that would hold for about a century until the

Roman general Pompey brought the outlying, unstable province of Judah into the Roman Empire (63 BC). (*Expound here as time allows...*)

- ✓ Twenty-six years later (37 BC), Herod the Great would be named “King of the Jews” by the Roman Senate.
- ✓ And 35-ish years after that, Jesus would be born, ushering in what we could call the New Testament period and the Christian era.

CONCLUSION

We’ve covered so much ground in this survey *Of Prophets and Kings*.

My conclusion in all of this is that the only way to truly understand the messages of the Prophets is to situate them in their historical settings – *AND* to appreciate that their fiery words come from a heart ablaze for God and in love with God’s people. To not do so, that is to see their words as somehow having significance only as conjecture about events that would happen millennia after their times, is not only to miss the point. It is to do so foolishly *AND*, as importantly, faithlessly.

God wants us to learn from the lives *Of the Prophets and Kings*, so that their passion and proclamations help to shape (1) our lives of faith *AND* (2) our cultivation of the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven”, as Jesus would later give His life in witness of.

Let us be found faithful and similarly ablaze, if imperfectly, in our response to those messages. Amen!