



HOW TO READ A PROPHETIC BOOK

Between the poetic metaphors and the persuasive rhetoric, it may be hard to figure out what the prophets are saying. I have found that it is helpful to ask a simple series of questions whenever reading an oracle:

1. Determine whether this is an oracle of doom (predicting disaster) or an oracle of salvation (predicting restoration).
2. Identify any prophetic form that might be present. This might help determine if there is one or more oracles.
3. If this is an oracle of doom, ask:
 - Who is being condemned?
 - Why are they being condemned (i.e. what specifically have they done wrong)?
 - What's the form of the punishment (loss to an enemy, plague, drought, etc.)?
 - Will everyone be destroyed, or will there be a remnant who are saved? If there is a remnant, do they survive because they somehow deserve it, or are they just the lucky few?
4. If this is an oracle of salvation, similar questions can be asked: who is saved, when and why?
5. Finally, pay attention to the view of God, expanding his relationship to the nation. What metaphors are used for God: warrior, judge, etc.? Does God govern only one of the Jewish nations, all 12 tribes, all people, etc.?

--Corrine Carvalho