

## Editorial

# The Reception and Contemporary Significance of the Hebrew Prophets and Prophetic Literature: Introduction to the Special Issue

Bradford A. Anderson 

School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music, Dublin City University, D09 N920 Dublin, Ireland;  
brad.anderson@dcu.ie

This Special Issue of *Religions* focuses on the reception and contemporary significance of the Hebrew prophets and the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The essays in this Special Issue focus on the remarkable afterlives of these texts and traditions: from their impact on the traditions of Judaism and Christianity through the centuries, to their use and influence in religious, social, and cultural contexts down to the present.

The authors of these articles explore a range of time periods, themes, and interpretive traditions related to the Hebrew prophets. To begin with, several essays investigate the early use and reception of the prophetic literature in antiquity. Lydia Lee's essay offers a discussion of one of the earliest examples of the use of the prophets, specifically, the Greek translation of the Septuagint and its relation to Hebrew traditions. In her essay, 'The Tyrian King in MT and LXX Ezekiel 28:12b-15', Lee draws on diverse textual traditions from antiquity to compare the Hebrew and Greek of this text from Ezekiel. Lee makes the interesting observation that when situated within broader traditions in the ancient Near East and the second Temple period, both the MT and LXX can be seen to draw from other traditions, while also serving as a springboard for further interpretive endeavours. In his essay, Steve Moyise explores 'The Use and Reception of the Prophets in the New Testament', looking in particular at specific quotations, clusters of allusions, and narrative patterns that are found in the New Testament. Moyise concludes that the New Testament writers drew on and used the prophets in a variety of ways, in order to make relevant a range of issues ranging from inclusion of Gentiles, to connecting the life and work of Jesus to the larger story of Israel. A final contribution which focuses on antiquity comes from Riemer Roukema, who investigates 'The Reception of the Hebrew Prophets in Ancient Christianity', focusing on the second to the fifth centuries CE. This essay explores how the Hebrew prophets were used in diverse ways in early Christianity, from allegorical and figurative readings concerning Jesus, to the rise of more historical readings in the Antiochene tradition, while also highlighting the various challenges and opportunities that accompanied the use of these texts from the Jewish Scriptures by the early Christians.

A second set of articles in this Special Issue focuses on the history of interpretation, and the way in which the prophets have been received in later interpretive traditions. The essay from Bradford Anderson focuses on the reception of Hosea 1–3 through the centuries, and draws out some of the significant topics and themes that have been explored in relation to the early chapters of Hosea, including the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, the depiction of the children, and the rhetoric used in these chapters, notably the depiction and treatment of the woman. Although these themes and questions have persisted through the centuries, the underlying assumptions concerning these questions have changed considerably through the years. Thus, while Hosea has long been understood as a text concerned with divine love and repentance, changing perspectives and approaches have meant that this prophetic work is an increasingly difficult and problematic text for contemporary readers. In her



**Citation:** Anderson, Bradford A. 2022. The Reception and Contemporary Significance of the Hebrew Prophets and Prophetic Literature: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Religions* 13: 709. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080709>

Received: 11 July 2022

Accepted: 29 July 2022

Published: 2 August 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

essay, Julia O'Brien traces the origins of the description of the prophets as 'forthtellers not foretellers' in modern, Protestant thought, and the ubiquity and rhetorical use of this terminology. She contends that this catchy collocation became a way to prioritise rational, scientific interpretation of the prophets that promotes the work of the prophets as preachers rather than predictors—, and with it, to dismiss the unscientific and 'uneducated' perspectives of those who might wish to highlight the latter. In this sense, the phrase functions as a boundary marker in modern thought between acceptable and unacceptable engagement with the prophets. Walter Houston's contribution also looks to the modern era, exploring the important early twentieth-century work from John Skinner on Jeremiah, *Prophecy and Religion*. Houston situates Skinner's work historically and theologically, demonstrating that Skinner's education and religious context can help us understand why he understood Jeremiah to be such an important figure, and in turn, why this prophet played such a significant role in Skinner's understanding of the history of religion more broadly. Houston also highlights why Skinner's work is important for reflection on the intersection of evangelicalism and critical scholarship on the Bible.

Another important element of the reception history of the prophets can be seen in the way in which these texts and traditions are used in social and cultural contexts. Two essays in this collection explore these issues, focusing in particular on the use and reception of the prophets in literature. Michael Avioz investigates the reception of the prophet Jeremiah in modern Hebrew literature. Exploring both fiction and poetry, Avioz shows how the prophet and his book have been taken up in diverse ways for literary ends in modern Hebrew literature. In a similar vein, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer demonstrates how Jonah—the prophet and the book—has also been taken up and used in twentieth century world literature. She highlights how the diverse modern engagement with Jonah can help us see the text with fresh perspective, while also drawing attention to the various ways in which the prophet has sparked the imagination of thinkers and writers.

A final set of essays explore the contemporary significance of the Hebrew prophets, investigating the intersection of prophetic discourse and diverse contemporary issues. L. Juliana Claassens offers a reading of the prophet's lament in Jonah 2 through the lens of trauma. Pushing back against readings which doubt the prophet's sincerity, she draws on contemporary trauma theory to suggest that this poem can be understood as a response to war and trauma, and an attempt to give meaning to traumatic events, with implications for contemporary readers experiencing the same. Stacy Davis looks at the fascinating—and perhaps unexpected—use of Ezekiel and Daniel in contemporary eating and dietary plans based on the Bible, especially prevalent in evangelical Christianity. She argues that such usage is problematic in part because it divorces the texts from any historical or literary context, while also connecting notions of weight and spirituality in a problematic manner. Tchavdar Hadjiev brings our attention back to Hosea, exploring some of the complex and problematic imagery in this book that equates God and husband, and which has come in for particular criticism in recent decades. Hadjiev suggests that Ricoeur's notion of the 'conflict of interpretations' may be a helpful way forward in thinking about the diverse way in which readers can and do engage with Hosea, highlighting how readings of trust and readings of suspicion create a dialectical tension that maps on to Ricoeur's notion of interpretive conflict. Finally, Jeremiah Cataldo asks whether the prophets actually teach us to protest, and if so, how. Drawing on historical and contemporary issues of race in the United States, he contends that while the prophets have been (and continue to be) used for diverse purposes, the prophets can and should inspire a hermeneutical position which directs us toward a preference and concern for the marginalised, and with this an impulse to protest injustice.

The wide-ranging articles in this Special Issue demonstrate the important and interesting work being undertaken on the use, reception, and contemporary significance of the Bible and the Hebrew prophets in particular. I would like to thank the contributors for their excellent essays, as well as their timely engagement throughout the process. This Special Issue took shape during the COVID-19 pandemic, when scholars found themselves

constantly pressed with new and unexpected tasks. I am grateful that in spite of these challenges, this Special Issue has come to fruition, and this is due in large part to the contributors and their commitment to this project. I would also like to thank the editorial team at *Religions* for their careful and helpful attention throughout the process, and in particular to Ms Jaya Liu, for her very helpful guidance and assistance along the way.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.