

**THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS  
OF THE JEWISH  
PROPHETS: A STUDY  
IN BIBLICAL SOCIOLOGY**

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The social teachings of the Jewish prophets: a study in Biblical sociology by William Bennett Bizzell

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**WILLIAM BENNETT BIZZELL**

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# THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF THE JEWISH PROPHETS

## A Study in Biblical Sociology

BY

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## PREFACE

We are in the midst of a *renaissance* in the study of the Old Testament scriptures. The evidence of this fact is to be found in the large number of volumes that are now appearing from the press, dealing with many phases of Jewish literature. This awakening is largely the result of recent efforts to relate the ethical, legislative and social teachings of Israel to the problems and conditions of the present day. The content of the prophetic literature is rich in suggestiveness and social teaching for an age like our own. The realization of this fact makes it desirable to search out and evaluate this social content. This point of view has given a new significance to the work of the Jewish prophet, and stimulated a new interest in his message to the world.

This volume is the outgrowth of studies begun in the University of Chicago several years ago, and since made use of in a series of lectures delivered to college students and instructors. The approach to the study of prophetic literature from the social point of view has aroused a genuine interest, but the fact that I could find no book that exactly met the requirements made the instruction somewhat difficult. It happens that a volume or two has recently appeared which partially supplies this need.

It will be obvious to the Bible student that the study has its limitations. No attempt has been

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made to present a comprehensive analysis of the prophetic books. There are many familiar passages and many important religious views that lie outside the province of this study. The Messianic and religious elements have either been kept in the background or ignored all together. Not that the author thinks these unimportant, or less important, but because they have repeatedly been the subject of discussion by Bible scholars, and at the present time there are many volumes in English that treat them scholarly and adequately.

The plan of study assumes the necessity of an understanding of the political and social situation as a basis for an adequate appreciation of the social teachings of the prophets. As a rule no attempt has been made to separate the political from the social in the background of the prophet's message. This would appear to be desirable, but under conditions of Jewish life it would seem to be hardly necessary or possible. However, it would be impossible to understand the meaning of the social program of a Jewish prophet without taking into account the conditions that produced it. It is believed, also, that every man is influenced in his thinking and public activities by heredity and environment. This makes it highly desirable to know as much as possible about the life of each of the prophets. An attempt has been made to reconstruct the historical background, and to present all the salient facts that appear in the life of each prophet. With these facts before us, it is much easier to get the proper social perspective for an understanding of the prophet's real meaning.



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This study also frankly assumes that the social message of the Jewish prophet *was intended for his own times*. Each had in mind a real and present situation. This fact limits the application of the prophet's social message in two ways. In the first place, the social program of the prophets does not include the social problems that have grown out of new conditions that did not exist in their time. In the second place, there were, in the days of the prophets, acute social problems to which they directed their attention and which have either found solution, or changing conditions have made unimportant. On the other hand, there were incipient social situations, like slavery, which were later to grow into serious problems that baffled the reformers of many generations, but which received scanty attention at the hands of the prophets.

It is hardly necessary to say that the author does not claim great originality for the views expressed in this book. The footnotes and list of readings at the end of each chapter will reveal the fact that many volumes have been referred to in the preparation of the book. However, the diversity of opinions of Bible scholars and the fragmentary nature of the social material has made it necessary to choose between conflicting views, and to collect the social data largely by independent effort. An attempt has been made to preempt the prophetic literature of its social content, and let it convey its own message. The author hopes that in the task he has not made omissions of important data.

The book is offered as a **guide** to individual students and Bible classes who may be interested in the

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social approach to prophetic literature. With this purpose in view, a few topics for reports and investigations and a carefully selected list of books are added at the end of each chapter. These may serve the purpose of either intensifying or broadening the scope of study.

Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. C. P. Fountain, Professor of English, and Mr. Charles E. Friley, Registrar, both of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, for assistance in reading the proof and preparing the index. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance rendered by these gentlemen.

W. B. B.

College Station, Texas.

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