

Actually there is a measure of truth in both approaches, although the liberal approach involves certain rather fundamental errors. It is a misinterpretation to think of the prophets as social reformers in the modern use of the term. They do indeed inveigh heavily against injustice, meanness, personal selfishness and hypocrisy. Rebukes to individual sin, regardless of the class of society in which it is involved, are common in their writings, but the prophetic books contain no presentation of a new social system and no suggestion that the ills of life would be eradicated if only the system of government or of society were changed.

There is also a fundamental difference of attitude toward the prophets. Were they mere human thinkers, applying their own ideas to the situation as they saw it, or were they spokesmen for God, declaring His revelation, and presenting the message that He had ordered them to declare? We, as Bible believers, are committed to the second position. We do not simply adopt this as a presupposition. We find it clearly expressed in the claims of the prophets and in the New Testament attitude toward them. The mistake that we often make, however, is in thinking of them as merely being God's mouthpiece for giving forth predictions of a far distant future, and as writing only for us, with little thought of the needs of their own time.

Indeed, if the prophets were spokesmen for God, and if it was God's will that some of their material be written down, we are justified in expecting that that portion of their messages that God desired should be preserved would have a purpose not only for their own day, but also for believers in distant ages. Yet we often make the mistake of tending to overlook the relation to the contemporary situation. Here the liberal approach contains an emphasis which, while it needs correction, is nevertheless a worthy corrective to an error that we can easily make. The prophets, I think we can say without exception, were intensely interested in the situation of their own day. God sent them directly to their own people. Almost without exception their messages begin with material that is closely related to the affairs of