

## STETS MODULE 1B - Theological Anthropology: Pastoral & Personal Foundations

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This module helps students orientate themselves theologically, socially and personally, as they enter training for ministry and mission. It includes a suite of tools - theological reflection, social analysis, and personal review - to help students enhance their understanding of their own, and others', identity and vocation. The module is grounded in theological understanding of human personhood, paying appropriate attention to theological anthropology, scripture and Christian individual and corporate experience, resisting over-individualistic accounts of human identity. 1B is intended to stimulate and equip theological reflection on students' own life- and faith-stories, in the light of other people's and God's stories.

## Unit Two - What am I called to do?

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'vocation' – from the Latin verb 'vocare', meaning 'to call'.

What does it mean to be 'called'? What impact might it have on a person's life? Is calling a personal matter or is it something that happens corporately to a whole community of faith – or is that a false dichotomy? In this unit we begin to explore the experience of vocation, focussing in particular on the callings of some of the Hebrew Bible prophets and St Augustine of Hippo. We will revisit the concept of calling later in this module, in unit 6.

## Vocation & Calling

If you are an ordinand, you will have been reflecting on your own sense of call to ordained ministry during the process of selection that led up to your arrival at STETS. You will probably also have become quite comfortable about talking about that sense of call. However, there is a sense in which every Christian has a 'calling' (some would call this a 'vocation', others would reserve the term 'vocation' for a calling to ordained ministry of some kind – we will explore this further in unit 6). In our first reading excerpt, you will find that Aveyard and Muir are working with a broad definition of 'vocation'. They invite you to do an exercise to find out more about different sorts of 'calling'. We suggest that you arrange to talk with just 2 people, drawn from the final 3 categories in Aveyard and Muir's list: a person with a 'secular' calling/ someone doing an unpaid task to which they feel called/ someone feeling 'called' to a particular kind of life. Aveyard and Muir offer you some useful questions to help structure these conversations.



[CLICK HERE](#) [Aveyard, I. & Muir, D. (1998) *Fit for the purpose*, Nottingham: St. John's Extension Studies, p.6]

Time guide: this exercise should take 2 hours.

During selection for initial ministerial training it is perhaps natural that attention becomes focussed on what is dissimilar in your sense of calling compared with the other kinds of callings that we have been exploring. However, it is important not to lose touch with the similarities between your sense of calling and that of others. Sometimes we hear an ordinand talking about 'my vocation', as if it is something separated from the wider Church and just to do with a sort of 'hotline' between God and that person: that can become a very reduced idea of calling. God's call comes to individuals, but also to the Christian community as a whole. Ideally, those two types of calling – for the individual and for the Church – should be kept in creative tension.

Stephen Platten, Bishop of Wakefield, has argued that vocation should be closely rooted in what the *Church* is called to be: 'Vocation begins with all who would live the Christian life. This requires a real understanding of what the Church is for and indeed what it is called to be. Vocation, then, is not simply a personal direct line to God, even though since the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation it has often seemed to be so. Emphasis upon the individual's personal relationship with Christ emerged in both traditions and often submerged the truth that humanity is created and redeemed in solidarity and not only through individual lives. This is a point made abundantly clear in the writings of St Paul, and notably in his letter to the Romans. In recovering that sense of solidarity both within our humanity, and through the Church of God, vocation, then, needs to be seen rather differently. It now becomes an offering of an individual or individuals within the community of the Church to see whether their particular talents, skills, character and abilities are such as to resonate with the vocation to which the whole of God's Church is called. We are called to sing the Lord's song in chorus and not alone. This means the broadest possible engagement between humanity and the God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer within God's world.'



CLICK HERE TO READ [ Platten, S. (2007) *Vocation : singing the Lord's song*, London: SPCK Publishing, pp.xiii-xiv.)



Continuing Platten's metaphor, would you consider yourself a solo artist or a member of the chorus... or both, at different times? How will you make sure that you resonate with the vocation of the whole Church? (if you are a musician, the metaphor shouldn't be pressed too far!).

Time guide: 15 minutes.

## The call of a People

Whilst it is true that God personally calls individuals, God never calls them in isolation. In our next reading extract, Justine Allain Chapman, currently vice-principal of the South East Institute for Theological Education (SEITE), analyses a variety of different responses to God's call exemplified in the Hebrew Bible (aka The Old Testament) and liberation movements today: some calls are dramatic, others are 'inherited'; some are 'within', others are 'in the air'; some are experienced as a direct call, others come through one's community.



CLICK HERE TO READ [Chapman, J.A., 'The Call of a People' (2003) in Richardson, C., *This is our calling*, London: SPCK, pp.13-21]



Justine Allain Chapman reminds us that 'other people, whose lives are closely linked with ours, are affected by the relationship we have with God' (p.14) – in what sense, if at all, will members of your close family share in your calling? Also, how do you respond to the 3 questions on p.21?

Time guide: reading: 19 minutes; reflection - 20 minutes.

Sometimes a person's identity is so dramatically transformed when they answer God's call that they receive a new name. Your name (especially, in our culture, your first name) is such an important part of your identity that changing your name sends out a strong message about a shift in your identity – and is itself a sort of 'rite of passage' that helps effect that change. Kate Middleton is expected to be known one day as [Queen Catherine](#). There are a number of times in Scripture when individuals respond to a calling from God and receive a new name – e.g., Abram ( [Gen 17:5](#) ), Simon ( [Mark 3:16](#) ), and, maybe, Paul (or is that just a change of language?) ( [Acts 13:9](#) ) – can you think of other examples? Can you remember who Pope Benedict XVI was before he was made Pope? (He was [Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger](#) ); in choosing this name, the Pope was making an important statement about the sort of spiritual leadership he hoped to emulate and embody. When people join religious communities as monks or nuns they are usually assigned a new Christian name. I wonder what it feels like to lose your first name and be given a new one? In Britain, many women

change their surname when they get married, though this does not necessarily happen in every case – but a radical change to your first name would probably have even more impact. Name change can also be applied to whole groups or nations: for instance, God’s People is renamed in the prophecy related in [Isaiah 62:4-5](#) – they are no longer called ‘Forsaken’ and will, instead, be called ‘Hephzibah’, which means ‘My Delight is in Her’.

## God’s name for you

What is God’s name for you, I wonder? You will have been given a name or several names by your parents; you may have been given an extra ‘Christian name’ at your baptism; you may have been given nicknames by your friends... and enemies. Sometimes other people may see you in terms of their stereotypes – you are ‘one of them’, without an individual name. But what is God’s name especially for you – imaginatively inscribed on a ‘white stone’, according to [Revelation 2:17](#)? Our next reading extract comes from Francis Dewar’s collection of stories and quotations exploring ‘God’s calling for everyone’.



CLICK HERE TO READ [ Dewar, F. (1996) *Invitations : God's calling for everyone : stories and quotations to illuminate a journey*, London: SPCK, pp.86-9.]



Follow up Francis Dewar’s invitation to reflect on p.86 and then ask yourself whether you can begin to hear God’s name for you.

Time guide: we invite you to dwell on these extracts, reading them slowly and meditatively; allow yourself 45 minutes for reading and reflection.

And now a moment of light relief - These links take you to two different representations of a song by the Ting Tings called 'That's not my name'.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN4YMli-Esw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E879PGIGwPg>

Former STETS staff member, Kathy O’Loughlin, writes: ‘What I particularly like about it is how the singer rejects all the names she is being called but towards the end dares to hope that someone is calling her the names she wants to be called. These names then underlie the previous names in a melody, as if the singer is able to pay attention to the good names despite the clamour of the bad ones. The second clip gives you written lyrics but the first shows the Ting Tings performing...

enjoy!’ Time guide: 6 minutes

We will shortly be exploring some of the callings of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. The call of one of these prophets has become iconic for Christian ordained ministry: the words of Isaiah 6: 1-8 frequently form part of ordination services. But, first, here is a brief overall introduction to prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, by Paula Gooder (adapted from STETS

Module B4). You will not have time to look up every reference she cites: please focus on the Amos 7:12-17 passage and the others that she cites in full. [Paula Gooder](#) is a writer and lecturer in Biblical Studies; she is a visiting lecturer at King's College, London, associate lecturer at St Mellitus College, London, and theological adviser to the Bible Society, as well as being a Reader in the Church of England and a member of General Synod. Time guide: this section of the unit should take about 30 minutes to read.

## Introducing the prophets

The study of prophecy, and the prophetic texts, is a study of ancient Israel and its struggle to listen and respond to God. The prophets offered to God's people God's vision for the world: a world in which the people lived in close relationship with God and in which the poor were cared for and injustice was unknown. Time and time again the people saw this vision and could not, or would not, accept it.

But there is no simple definition of what a 'prophet' was. As John Goldingay has pointed out:

'Defining prophecy is a notoriously difficult matter. Any description of prophecy that has bite will turn out not to apply to every Old Testament prophet, let alone to prophets in the New Testament. A definition that does apply to every prophet will turn out to be somewhat vacuous and/or to apply to people other than prophets.'

When we cannot define something, or find that our attempts to do so become vacuous, then one strategy is to utilize Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances". [1] A family may have a characteristic profile—a shape of nose and chin, a shape of body, a level of intelligence, a way of walking and thinking, a strength in certain emotions and a weakness in others. Individual members of the family may not have all these characteristics, but to qualify as sharing the family resemblance, they will manifest most of them. In a parallel way, we might suggest that prophets have a set of family resemblances. Individual prophets may then lack some of these without this imperiling their being identified as prophets or imperiling the accuracy of the profile. Conversely, features of character or ministry that appear in only one or two prophets may not be indications of the nature of prophecy but rather may be features of these individuals' ministry or person.'

[ 'Old Testament Prophecy Today' – John Goldingay

[http://documents.fuller.edu/sot/faculty/goldingay/cp\\_content/homepage/homepage.htm](http://documents.fuller.edu/sot/faculty/goldingay/cp_content/homepage/homepage.htm)  
accessed 1/12/10]

It is important to recognise that, unlike the priesthood, prophetic ministry was not restricted to men alone. There were some powerful and influential female prophets in Israel whose role should not be underestimated. Although we do not hear as much about them as about the male prophets, they played a vital role in Israel's history. Take for example Huldah, the prophet whom Josiah consulted after they had found the book of the law in the temple. Huldah was responsible for instigating Josiah's reform (look at 2 Kings 22:13-20).

## **Narrative and classical prophets**

You may be aware that prophets appear in two different capacities in the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis – 2 Kings we come across prophetic figures whose lives, deeds and sometimes words are described; further on in the Bible we encounter the words of other prophets whose pronouncements are recorded in books bearing their names, e.g. Amos, Isaiah and so on.

As a result, we have two different types of encounters with prophetic characters:

Prophets about whom we know quite a lot about their lives—where they lived, when they lived, what they did and how they acted—but very little about what they said. These are often called the narrative prophets.

Prophets about whom we know a lot about what they said because we have whole books of their prophecies, but very little about their lives. These are often called the classical prophets.

In practice, it is very difficult to compare these two types of prophets because we have little to compare. For example, we do not know if Elisha was much like Amos because we know very little about what Elisha said nor much about what Amos did. We are not comparing like with like.

Nevertheless, scholars have often felt that an important shift occurred in the eighth century BCE, when the words of prophets began to be recorded and preserved much more than prophetic words had been previously. An interesting question – to which we shall return below – is what caused this shift?

## **Institutional and independent prophets**

One of the interesting questions that surround a study of prophets in the narrative books is what relationship these prophets had to the temple and to the king.

Traditionally, scholars believed that there were two groups of prophets.

First, institutional prophets, who were paid by the king and the priest to prophesy. They are thought to be characterised by being more 'ecstatic', e.g. having trances and visions.

Second, independent prophets, who prophesied because the word of the Lord came to them but were often opposed to the king and the temple. These are thought to be characterised by more verbal prophecy: 'the word of the Lord came to me and said...'

Scholars also used to believe that the narrative prophets were institutional prophets and the classical prophets were independent prophets. In fact, as scholars now realise, the evidence is much more complex than that.

There are various features worth noting:

Groups of prophets existed in Israel who apparently wandered around prophesying and having ecstatic trances. See 1 Samuel 9:10-13; 2 Kings 2:1-8.

At least some of these ‘company of the prophets’ were personally known to the king. An interesting example of this is a story in 1 Kings 20 which tells of a member of the company of prophets who had to go to great lengths to bandage his face so that the king would not recognise him. See 1 Kings 20:35-43

Some of the narrative prophets prophesied what the king want to hear but others did not. See 1 Kings 22:1-37

On the whole the narrative prophets prophesied to the king and may have been paid by him – but this did not always prevent them from criticising him. See 1 Kings 12:22-24 and 2 Kings 7:1-5

On the whole the classical prophets prophesied to the people (of Israel and elsewhere) but Isaiah prophesied both to the people and to the king. See Isaiah 2:1-5; 7:1-9

Some classical prophets had famous visions. See Isaiah 6:1-10



One piece of evidence in this jigsaw is so important that we need to explore it in detail here. One of the most fascinating texts in a study of prophecy in this period is [Amos 7:12-17](#). Read this passage now.

Notice that Amos, one of the most famous of all prophets, claims here that he is neither a prophet (*nabi*) nor the son of a prophet. It is worth knowing that ‘sons of the prophets’ is the name used of the bands of prophets we looked at above. This term has dropped out in the NRSV through their policy of inclusive language. It is possible that this is what Amos is referring to here. He has a clear idea of what a prophet is and denies that he is one – but if Amos is not a prophet, who is?

This short passage tells us something very important about prophecy and prophets in this period. Amos tells us in v. 14 that he is not a prophet (i.e. a professional prophet) but in v. 15 that he has been called to prophesy.

## The structure of the Hebrew Scriptures

The importance of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible is clear from the way in which the biblical books are organised. You may be aware that the order of the books in the Christian Old Testament is different from that of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Christian Old Testament follows the order of the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible – but the Hebrew Scriptures are different.

The Hebrew Bible falls into three sections

- *Torah* (or Law)

- *Nebi'im* (or Prophets)

- *Ketubim* (or Writings)

Hence the Jewish name for Hebrew Scriptures, 'Tanak', which is made from the first letter of each of the collections of books with two vowels added.

You will notice that the second section of the Tanak is focussed around the prophets – but not quite in the way you might expect. Of course the prophetic books are there:

- the three major prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel –

- and the twelve minor prophets – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

These are known as the latter prophets, but also in this collection are what are known as the former prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings). The identification of these historical books as prophecies is interesting and quite important. Christians, following the Septuagint, call the books after the most significant leaders that feature in them. So the books of Joshua and Samuel are named after one great leader, and the books of Judges and Kings after a number of leaders. This indicates that, within Christian tradition, these books have been regarded as largely about leadership. In Jewish tradition they are considered to be about prophecy.

No study of prophecy, therefore, can properly ignore the narrative prophets for, within Jewish traditions, they play an equally important role in the development and influence of prophecy.

Prophecy, however, is not restricted to the collection of the prophets. A few figures in the Torah are also called prophets.

It is important to recognise, however, that these figures seem to have a slightly different role than their later counterparts.

Those who are called prophets include:

- Abraham (Genesis 12:7)

- Aaron (Exodus 7:1)

- Miriam (Exodus 15:20)

- Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

- Another prophet who is similar in various ways to these is Deborah (Judges 4:4-5), who is found not in the Torah, but in Judges.

## **‘Former Prophets’**

When we arrive at the former prophets, we begin to meet some much more familiar prophetic characters such as Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha, as well as others who are much less familiar such as Ahijah and Micaiah ben Imlah. One of the strong characteristics of prophets in this period is their involvement with the politics of the land. The prophets of this time seem to regard it to be their role to be in ‘opposition’ to the King, just in the way in our political system there is the ‘government’ and the ‘opposition’. At a time when there was no critique of political power many of the prophets assumed this role.

## **Classical prophets**

We noted above that some kind of shift took place around the 8th century BCE, which led to the messages of the prophets being written down and preserved in books or, more accurately, anthologies. ‘Anthologies’ is a better word than books here, because the prophetic writings are characterised by having a string of prophecies side by side that are not always obviously connected chronologically, thematically or structurally.

Until the 8th century, by and large, the prophetic messages were addressed to a single figure – the king. The prophets of the 8th century (Hosea, Amos, Micah and Isaiah) were different, because they addressed their messages to the people as well as to the king. This could have been a contributory factor in causing these messages to be recorded. Where messages have a single recipient, the prophet can be relatively confident that the messages have been received; but where the recipient is a nation or group of people they may need preservation (either orally or in writing) in order to be passed around fully.

Another factor to draw in here is the nature of the messages. Many of the prophecies in the narrative books had immediate or very near impact (e.g. do or do not fight this battle etc.) but the messages of the 8th century prophets had a longer range (e.g. if you continue to act in this way you will be destroyed). It may be that the prophecies were preserved as a means of testing whether they were correct or not. Their subsequent fulfilment would have proved them to be genuine prophecies and therefore worthy of an even longer shelf life.

See for example the following quotation from Deuteronomy 18:22

‘If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.’

Not only were the words of the 8th century prophets proved to be true, they were confirmed with enormous consequences for Israel and Judah. In order to understand this, we need to delve a little into the history of the period.

First we need to set the history in context. Around 922 BCE, the two kingdoms of Israel (northern 10 tribes) and Judah (southern 2 tribes) split apart. From then on the two nations were entirely separate, with separate kings and capitals. To a certain extent, they also had separate centres of worship, though there is some evidence that some people from the

north still travelled south from time to time to sacrifice at the temple. Anyone who has read the books of 1 and 2 Kings will know that the history of this period was a roller-coaster of prosperity and poverty, security and danger.

The 8th century, however, was relatively peaceful. Israel and Judah's enemies (such as the great Assyrian empire) were occupied elsewhere and their other historic enemies were likewise relatively quiet. As a result for a time prosperity began to rise. However, towards the end of the 8th century this prosperity began to fail once more and the security of the nation looked more fragile. The four great 8th century prophets began to prophesy into this context of recent prosperity that is beginning to wane. Two prophesied in the north (Amos and Hosea) and two in the south (Isaiah and Micah).

Another moment of immense historical significance was the fall of the kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. This was the moment at which the prophecies of the two great northern prophets (Amos and Hosea) came true. In alliance with Syria, the northern kingdom rebelled against the mighty Assyrian empire and were punished by the complete destruction of their lands.

The southern kingdom of Judah remained at this point because they refused to join the coalition in rebellion against Assyria. As a result, they survived for over a hundred years until they rebelled against the next big empire of the period – Babylon – and were themselves taken off into exile. There were three waves of exile in roughly 598, 587 and 581.

We move from the relatively optimistic view of Isaiah that, if the kings and the people would only trust in God, they would remain secure and protected by God from world events, to the prospect of devastation and destruction. Isaiah's optimism was not justified and Judah turned out to be no more protected from world events than her sister nation Israel had been. The task of the exilic prophets was to make sense of this disaster and to give the people of Judah some sort of hope for the future.

In fact, the great exilic prophets of Jeremiah and Ezekiel did much more than this. The responses of Jeremiah and Ezekiel not only provided explanations for a people in exile but set down markers that allowed the people's worship of God to continue and grow despite the exile. They were so successful in doing this that they revived and transformed the religion of Judah and ensured that it lasted well into the future. Indeed, some of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's theology (such as the new covenant) can be seen woven into New Testament theology.

During the exile the religion of Judah transformed from being a local religion focussed entirely on worship in the Temple in Jerusalem to being a world religion. It was still focussed on the Temple but was now followed by people in countries other than Judah. To begin with this was largely people in Egypt and Babylon, but with the Jewish diaspora it very quickly spread to communities all over the Middle East and Europe.

The events of the exile took place on a world stage, against a backdrop of the general upheaval and unrest that occurred in the 7th to 6th centuries BCE. If looked at from the perspective of the Ancient Near East in general, the events that befell the tiny nation of

Judah are miniscule in comparison with huge turmoil of the period, but we are not looking at it from this perspective. We approach the exile from the perspective of Judah.

The exilic prophets fit importantly into this history:

*Jeremiah* prophesied to Jehoiakim (Jehoichin's father) the impending disaster, but Jehoiakim took no notice. Jeremiah remained behind after the first wave of exile and continued prophesying to Zedekiah. But he also took no notice. After the second wave of exile Jeremiah decided to stay behind with Gedaliah, but when Gedaliah was murdered Jeremiah was taken by Johanan to Egypt where he remained.

*Ezekiel* on the other hand appears to have been taken away into exile in the first wave of the exile (see Ezekiel 1:2) and to have spent his time prophesying in Babylon, both before and after the second wave of the exile.

As we will shortly see, Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) belongs to the closing years of the exile.

The end of the exilic period ended almost as dramatically as it began. The crucial figure here is Cyrus of Persia. Cyrus became king of Anshan in 559. The capital at this point moved from Anshan to Susa and this was where Cyrus reigned.

Cyrus' first campaign was against the Persians' near neighbours, the Medes. Contrary to what might appear from some biblical texts, the Medes and the Persians were not the same people but neighbours and, in Cyrus' time, the Medes were the overlords of the Persians. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Cyrus led the Persians in a rebellion against the Medes and overthrew them in about 550 BCE. A short time afterwards (546 BCE) Cyrus defeated Croesus (who has remained famous for his wealth through the phrase 'as rich as Croesus') who was king of Lydia in Asia Minor. He went on from there to defeat the Babylonians in 538 BCE and as a result of this defeat took over their whole empire. As a result, Cyrus' empire was one of the largest the Ancient Near East had ever seen.

Cyrus is a fascinating character, on a par in some ways with Alexander the Great. He rose to high prominence in the ancient world within the space of about ten years (the crucial period is 546-528 BCE). He was killed in battle in 530 BCE but in his short reign transformed the Ancient Near Eastern world.

Cyrus recorded the account of his defeat of the Babylonians on the so-called 'Cyrus Cylinder' which is now in the British Museum. You can see it [on-line](#) or, better still, you can go and see it in the Museum! On the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus records that he achieved his victory with the help of Marduk (the chief god of Babylonians) and that he returned to their proper temples various images that he found in Babylon that the Babylonian empire had plundered after victory.

It is this action of Cyrus that was significant for the people in exile: as well as returning images to their proper homes, Cyrus also allowed the people to return home. Cyrus' decree is recorded both in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and in Ezra 1:1-7:

Ezra 1:1-7 - In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared: 2 'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Any of those among you who are of his people -- may their God be with them! -- are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel -- he is the God who is in Jerusalem; 4 and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.' 5 The heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites -- everyone whose spirit God had stirred -- got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. 6 All their neighbors aided them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with animals, and with valuable gifts, besides all that was freely offered. 7 King Cyrus himself brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.

You will notice that although there were obviously no idols to send back to the temple, there were the temple vessels and these were sent back to Jerusalem for when the temple would be restored.

This background allows us to date the situation into which Isaiah is speaking in 40-55 quite accurately. We know that Isaiah knows of the existence of Cyrus (' Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus', Isaiah 45:1) but it is also clear that nothing has happened as yet:

Isaiah 48:14-20 - Assemble, all of you, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. <sup>15</sup> I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. <sup>16</sup> Draw near to me, hear this! From the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there. And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his spirit. <sup>17</sup> Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go. <sup>18</sup> O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea; <sup>19</sup> your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me. <sup>20</sup> Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, 'The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!'

It is clear to Isaiah that something dramatic will happen very shortly but has not yet taken place. This dates Isaiah's writing to the period between 546 BCE, when Cyrus' influence was growing exponentially, and 538 BCE when he defeated the Babylonians.

Isaiah 40-55 had promised an extravagant and glorious future for the people. But after Cyrus had conquered the Babylonians and allowed the people they had exiled to return home, the reality was somewhat different from this - the return was an ignominious and disheartening experience. The people were quickly disillusioned so much so that they needed great

encouragement both to rebuild the temple (in the time of Haggai and Zechariah) and to rebuild the city walls (In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah). In this period we find a shift away from monochrome local, religion to a sense of diverse global religion. The post-exilic prophets include: Isaiah 56-66 (Third Isaiah); Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi; Joel; Jonah.

## The place of prophets in Israel's life... and ours

After your introduction to prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, we turn now to read an extract from a three-volume Old Testament Theology, by Professor John Goldingay, Old Testament Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. Here he focuses on the place of prophets in Israel's life... and ours. John Goldingay teaches in the US, but comes originally from Britain. He is a preacher, as well as a teacher, and you will find that his writing throws up plenty of resonances with our own contexts.



CLICK HERE TO READ [ Goldingay, J., 2009. *Israel's life*, Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, pp.759-60, 764-92, 805-7, 816-9 (ch.7)] – please see guidance below.

Time guide: reading - 2 hours 5 minutes; bible reading – 75 minutes; reflection – 30 minutes.

There are 4 extracts from this chapter:



Before you read the **first extract**, jot down your own definition of 'prophet'; then read pp.759-60; then revisit, and maybe refine, your definition.

Now read the **second** (and longest extract): 764-92. Here we begin to focus more clearly on the call of the prophet. The call of Amos is cited as an example of how someone became a prophet – by specific divine initiative and not by training. The true (as opposed to the false prophet) is someone who has been claimed and consecrated by God – and here Goldingay cites the calls of Jeremiah and Moses. But, notice that Jeremiah is not called because of any special 'deep commitment or spirituality or insight' on his part (p.777). True prophets bring back Israel to her vocation. True prophets need to be good students with God as their mentor – notice that it is not just about learning from past thinkers (p.780). True prophets are heralds, but also worshippers who personally respond to the news that they proclaim. This extract ends with an extended reflection on an argument between the prophet Habakkuk and God, which according to Goldingay is actually 'apparently the process that makes him into a prophet' (p.786). Habakkuk is 'argumentative' and yet also 'patient': notice the distinction Goldingay draws between 'theological reflection', on the one hand, and 'prophecy' on the other hand (p.788). Habakkuk is also 'interruptive' and ultimately 'responsive'. As a prophet, Habakkuk is not simply passively moulded by divine initiative, but enters into energetic dialogue with God.

In the **third extract** from Goldingay (pp. 805-7), we explore the personal impact of acted-out prophetic signs on the prophets themselves: being a prophet involves a person's whole being, in demanding ways.

And, in the **final extract** (pp. 816-9), we focus on the prophet Jeremiah's costly calling – which he had no wish to undertake. Notice the comparison that Goldingay draws between Jeremiah, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Isaiah (who was a 'volunteer') and a Christian ordinand ('believing he or she has a call to the ministry' (p. 816)). We will return to the issue of 'burn-out', mentioned on p.819, in a later unit of this module: the strategy mentioned on p.819 is not always the best way to take care of yourself in ministry.



What aspects of the prophet's calling do you find most familiar (e.g., being 'plucked from [your] previous occupation' (p.764)) or most disturbing (e.g., that 'most prophets lead Israel astray' (p.768))? To what extent might you be called to be a prophet as well as priest/minister/pastor...?

Time guide: reflection – 30 minutes.

Please make sure to stop and read the primary text to which Goldingay is referring – the Hebrew Bible. You will not have time to look up every reference he cites, but you should ensure that you read the following passages when you get to the relevant pages:

p.764 – [Amos 7:12-17](#)

p.765 – [1 Kings 13:11-34](#)

p.768 – [Micah 3:5-8](#)

pp.771-3 – [Jeremiah 23](#)

pp.776-7 – [Jeremiah 1:1-19](#)

p.778 – [Isaiah 49:1-6](#)

p.779 – [Isaiah 50:4-9](#)

p.781 – [Isaiah 61:1-3](#)

p.783 – [Isaiah 52:7-10](#)

p.784 – [Zechariah 11:4-17](#)

pp.786-92 – [Habakkuk](#) (whole book)

p.806 – [Jeremiah 32:1-44](#)

p.806 – [Ezekiel 3:22-7](#) & [4:1-5:4](#)

p.816 – [Jeremiah 20:7-18](#)

## Augustine's Conversion

One of the most famous calls in Christian history is that of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 – see *STeTSlearn* history timeline). It is usually described as his 'conversion' but could equally well be designated as his 'call'. Augustine later spoke of it in such terms. In fact he saw it as a 'shout', not just a 'call':

“Too late have I loved you, O Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Too late I loved you! And behold, you were within, and I abroad, and there I searched for you; I was deformed, plunging amid those fair forms, which you had made. You were with me, but I was not with you. Things held me far from you—things which, if they were not in you, were not at all. You called, and shouted, and burst my deafness. You flashed and shone, and scattered my blindness. You breathed odors and I drew in breath—and I pant for you. I tasted, and I hunger and thirst. You touched me, and I burned for your peace” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 27).

Before we read about Augustine's conversion/call, here is an overview of his life and context, by Judith Rossall:

Augustine was born in Tagaste, in Africa (in modern day Algeria), of a pagan father, Patricius, and a Christian mother, Monica. (Monica was named a Saint and is frequently the Patron Saint for associations of Christian mothers!). Monica was deeply influential in introducing Augustine to Christianity in his childhood, but he lost his faith in adolescence and at the age of 17 took a concubine. Such an arrangement was a normal part of the Roman culture in which Augustine lived, as is the fact that she bore him a son, lived with him for 15 years (only to be dismissed when he wanted to get married to an heiress) and yet is not even named in any of his writings! Having read a lost treatise of Cicero, Augustine developed a new interest in spiritual things and became a Manichaen.

Manichaeism was a radical offshoot of Gnosticism, this sect based its philosophy on the idea of a conflict between dark and light. Its followers believed that the entire universe was intended to release particles of light which had been stolen from the World of light and imprisoned in human minds by Satan and that believers should practise severe asceticism to enable this release. It also taught that Jesus, Buddha, the Prophets and Mani (founder of the sect) had been sent to help in the task. (Cross & Livingstone 1997, p. article on Manichaeism).

Having held a series of teaching posts in Carthage and Rome Augustine went to Milan where he came under the influence of St Ambrose, the local Bishop. He regularly went to hear Ambrose preach, initially because he admired his rhetoric but increasingly because the actual content of the sermon touched him. Forced by a form of asthma to retire from his teaching position (at the age of 32), Augustine found himself struggling with questions of destiny and human nature and experienced a famous and very dramatic conversion. He gives his own description of that conversion in his *Confessions* (VIII). We will read more about his conversion shortly.

Augustine was baptised on Easter Eve of 387CE and the next year returned to Africa where with some friends he established some kind of community at Tagaste, (there is some debate about whether this could really be called a monastery). But his reputation grew among Christians and when he then travelled to Hippo and attended Church, he found that the local bishop's sermon was (rather pointedly) on the urgent needs of the church. The congregation seized him and pushed him forward and Augustine found himself 'consenting' to become their priest. This is a good example of a call to ordained ministry being mediated by the Church! As he wryly commented to his congregation in Hippo 35 years later,

I feared the office of a bishop to such an extent that, as soon as my reputation came to matter among 'servants of God', I would not go to any place where I knew there was no bishop..... I came to this city to see a friend, whom I thought I might gain for God, that he might live with us in the monastery. I felt secure, for this place already had a bishop. I was grabbed. I was made priest.....and from there, I became your Bishop.' (Quoted (Brown 1967:138) )

Augustine was to have an immense influence on the future of theology and the Church, especially in the West. Augustine shaped the Medieval paradigm of mission, and he also had a profound influence on the Reformers.

Our next reading extract is a commentary on Augustine's account of his conversion/call. Here Stephen Cooper agrees that what Augustine is describing is a 'decisive moment' in his journey of faith, but also wants to see it in the context of a series of (continuing) events: 'to tell his own story, Augustine must relate the stories of other people that moved him along the way' (p. 136). This is a well-trod road to conversion, albeit of 'searching and not finding' (p. 155). In particular, Augustine has St Antony's story in his mind. The reference to 'Ambrose', on p. 138, is to the Bishop of Milan, to whom Augustine had been sent before his conversion. Augustine says: 'I hung on his words intently, but, as to his subject matter, I was only a careless and contemptuous listener' (*Confessions* V, 23).



CLICK HERE TO READ [Cooper, S. (2002) *Augustine for armchair theologians* 1st ed., Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, pp.135-155].



There are stories within stories in Augustine's account: are there any stories about others, or told by others, that have helped you sense your calling and articulate it? To what extent is a person's call unique and to what extent is it similar with, say, Augustine's or those of the Hebrew Bible prophets?

Time guide: reading - 35 minutes; reflection – 20 minutes.

After his conversion/call, Augustine says:

'Then we went in and told my mother, who was overjoyed. And when we went on to describe how it had all happened, she was jubilant with triumph and glorified you, *who are powerful enough, and more than powerful enough, to carry out your purpose beyond all our*

*hopes and dreams* (Eph 3:20). For she saw that you had granted her far more than she used to ask in her tearful prayers and plaintive lamentations. You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith, where you had shown me to her in a dream so many years before. And you *turned her sadness into rejoicing*, (Ps 30:11) into joy far fuller than her dearest wish, far sweeter and more chaste than any she had hoped to find in children begotten of my flesh.' (Confessions VIII, 12)

Note that Augustine simply assumes without question that conversion to Christ will mean being called to celibacy. Are there aspects of our own culture about which we make the same unconsidered assumptions?

We will return to Augustine in Module 1C and explore his disagreement with Pelagius and his thinking in *City of God*.

## Wiki – 'Vocation'



So, how do we define 'vocation'? You are invited now to contribute your definition to the [wiki](#) for this module (here on *STeTSlearn*) – or, if someone has already posted a definition, to refine the existing definition. 'Wiki is a collaborative editing process, it's a group of people coming together to collaboratively write something' (Wikipedia boss, Jimmy Wales, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-12171977>, accessed 16 Jan 2011). Together we should be able to come up with a good definition!



## Tutorial discussion starters

'Other people, whose lives are closely linked with ours, are affected by the relationship we have with God' (p.14) – in what sense, if at all, do you expect members of your close family to share in your calling? (Chapman 2003:14)

What aspects of the prophet's calling do you find most familiar (e.g., being 'plucked from [your] previous occupation' (p.764)) or most disturbing (e.g., that 'most prophets lead Israel astray' (p.768))? To what extent might you be called to be a prophet as well as priest/minister/pastor...?

To what extent is a person's call unique and to what extent is it similar with, say, Augustine's or those of the Hebrew Bible prophets?

Augustine simply assumes without question that conversion to Christ will mean being called to celibacy. Are there aspects of our own culture about which we make the same unconsidered assumptions?

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[1] See *Philosophical Investigations—Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Oxford: Blackwell/New York: Macmillan, 1953, pp. 65-67).