

# Images of God in the Prophetic Books

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### Session 1: Introduction to Prophetic Metaphor

#### For humans

*Nahum 3:17* [talking to the king of Assyria] Your guards are like grasshoppers, your scribes like swarms of locusts settling on the fences on a cold day-- when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they have gone.

*Jeremiah 2:23-24* [talking to Judah] How can you say, "I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals"? Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done -- a restive young camel interlacing her tracks, a wild ass at home in the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her.

*Isaiah 1:8* And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

*Jer 51:20-23* (talking to Babylon) You are my war club, my weapon of battle: with you I smash nations; with you I destroy kingdoms; with you I smash the horse and its rider; with you I smash the chariot and the charioteer; with you I smash man and woman; with you I smash the old man and the boy; with you I smash the young man and the girl; with you I smash shepherds and their flocks; with you I smash farmers and their teams; with you I smash governors and deputies.

*Amos 4:1-3* Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!" The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness: The time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. Through breaches in the wall you shall leave, each one straight ahead; and you shall be flung out into Harmon, says the LORD.

#### For God

*Hos 13:7-9* So I will become like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them. I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you?

*Hosea 5:12* Therefore I am like maggots to Ephraim, and like rotteness to the house of Judah.

*Hosea 14:5* I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.

*Hosea 14:8* O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me.

*Hosea 4:16* Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the LORD now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?

*Hosea 11:4* (ASV) I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that lift up the yoke on their jaws; and I laid food before them.

(NRSV) I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

*Isaiah 6:1-5* In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts (literally: of the armies); the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

## Session 2: God as a Warrior in the Prophets

*Isaiah 63:1-6* "Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?" "It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save." "Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?" "I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come. I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me. I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WARRIOR MOTIF

#### a. cosmological

*Ps 74:12-17* Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You cut openings for springs and torrents; you dried up ever-flowing streams. Yours is the day, yours also the night; you established the luminaries and the sun. You have fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter.

#### b. in support of monarchy

*Ps 18:6-50* In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice. And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. . . .

God girded me with strength, and made my way safe. He made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights. He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand has supported me; your help has made me great. . . .

For this I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. Great triumphs he gives to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.

#### c. the prophets

##### against the nations

*Isa 34: 5-6* When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment. The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood, it is gorged with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

against Israel

*Amos 5:18* Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. 20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it

**d. apocalyptic**

*Zechariah 14:1-5* See, a day is coming for the LORD, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped; half the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee by the valley of the LORD's mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

**THE DYNAMICS OF THE WARRIOR IN THE PROPHETS**

*Isa 13:4-15* Listen, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering an army for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth. Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty!

Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt, and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.

See, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it. . . .

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. Like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with no one to gather them, all will turn to their own people, and all will flee to their own lands. Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered, and their wives ravished.

*Zephaniah 3:8-20* Therefore wait for me, says the LORD, for the day when I arise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger; for in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed. . . .

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will

remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

*Jeremiah 23:20* The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind.

*Ezekiel 16:42* So I will satisfy my fury on you, and my jealousy shall turn away from you; I will be calm, and will be angry no longer.

*Micah 7:18* Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency.

*Nahum 1:1-8* An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades. The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces. The LORD is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; he protects those who take refuge in him, even in a rushing flood. He will make a full end of his adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

*3:1-13* Ah! City of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty -- no end to the plunder! The crack of whip and rumble of wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end -- they stumble over the bodies!

Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery, I am against you, says the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle. Then all who see you will shrink from you and say, "Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her?" Where shall I seek comforters for you?

Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, water her wall? Ethiopia was her strength, Egypt too, and that without limit; Put and the Libyans were her helpers. Yet she became an exile, she went into captivity; even her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street; lots were cast for her nobles, all her dignitaries were bound in fetters. You also will be drunken, you will go into hiding; you will seek a refuge from the enemy.

All your fortresses are like fig trees with first-ripe figs -- if shaken they fall into the mouth of the eater. Look at your troops: they are women in your midst. The gates of your land are wide open to your foes; fire has devoured the bars of your gates.

**“A Just Anger”****Marge Piercy**

Anger shines through me.  
Anger shines through me.  
I am a burning bush.  
My rage is a cloud of flame.  
My rage is a cloud of flame  
in which I walk  
seeking justice  
like a precipice.  
How the streets  
of the iron city  
flicker, flicker,  
and the dirty air  
fumes.  
Anger storms  
between me and things,  
transfiguring,  
transfiguring.  
A good anger acted upon  
is beautiful as lightning  
and swift with power.  
A good anger swallowed,  
a good anger swallowed  
clots the blood  
to slime.

### Session 3: God as Husband in the Prophets

*Hosea 1:1-9* The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah (Not Pitiied) for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen."

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi (Not My People), for you are not my people and I am not your God."

*2:1-23* Say to your brother, Ammi, and to your sister, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother, plead-- for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband-- that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts, or I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and turn her into a parched land, and kill her with thirst. Upon her children also I will have no pity, because they are children of whoredom.

For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me than than now." She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness.

Now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. I will put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals. I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, "These are my pay, which my lovers have given me." I will make them a forest, and the wild animals shall devour them. I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the LORD.

Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more.

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. On that day I will answer, says the LORD, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "You are my God."

*Jer 3: 19-20* I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD.

*Jeremiah 31:32* It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt -- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.

*Isaiah 54:5 -6* For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God.

## Session 4: God as Father in the Prophets

*Jeremiah 31:9* (RSV) With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.

*Jeremiah 31:20* (RSV) Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.

*Isa 64:8-12* (RSV) Yet, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand. Be not exceedingly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity for ever. Behold, consider, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins. Wilt thou restrain thyself at these things, O LORD? Wilt thou keep silent, and afflict us sorely?,

*Isaiah 1:2-6* I reared sons and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Woe, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, seed who do evil, sons who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the LORD, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged! Why will you be beaten again? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in him, but bruises and blows and fresh wounds; they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil.

*Jer 3:14* (author's translation) Return, O faithless sons, says the LORD, for I am your master.

*Jer 3:19-22* (RSV) I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD. A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel's sons, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the LORD their God. Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness. "Behold, we come to thee; for thou art the LORD our God.

*Malachi***Chapter 1**

An oracle. The word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

2 I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the LORD. Yet I have loved Jacob 3 but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals. 4 If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the LORD is angry forever. 5 Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the borders of Israel!"

6 A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, "How have we despised your name?" 7 By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, "How have we polluted it?" By thinking that the LORD's table may be despised. . .

**Chapter 3**

16 Then those who revered the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the LORD and thought on his name. 17 They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. 18 Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. . . .

**Chapter 4** (author's translation)

5 Behold, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. 6. And he will turn the heart of the fathers unto the sons and the heart of sons unto their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.