

TOWNELEY CYCLE, Toronto 1985

Play 8: Prophets

Modernized text by David Parry

CAST

Moses	Sibyl
David	Daniel

This play in the Toronto production is Towneley VII from the EETS edition: Processus Prophetarum (pp.56-64). Pollard remarks in his notes that "this play is unfinished, the rest of fol.19b, and the whole of fol.20 being left blank." Stevens has more recently suggested that the scribe stopped writing the play when he realized it was out of place ("The Missing Parts of the Towneley Cycle," Speculum 45 [1970], 255). While there is no absolutely conclusive evidence that the play is, in fact, incomplete -- it finishes, indeed, on a rather final-sounding line! -- such evidence as we have does seem to point to the conclusion that we are missing at least the end of David's speech, and perhaps one or two more prophets. God, in The Annunciation, for instance says that his prophets "shall be founden leyte" and then proceeds to list Moses, Isaiah, David, Jeremiah, Habbakkuk, Daniel, and the Sibyl. Of these we have four in the Processus Prophetarum, and are missing two. This might be an indication that Jeremiah and Habbakkuk followed Daniel with their prophecies. On the other hand, it might equally not: God, after all, follows his list in The Annunciation with the words "and myne othere prophetis all." Lacking conclusive evidence one way or the other, we have left the play as it stands in the MS., without editorial additions.

The verse here is fairly easy to deliver, though there is a considerable variation noticeable throughout the play in the patterns of metre and stress. As elsewhere, I have tried to leave the uneven patches as uneven as I found them! Don't be offput by this irregularity -- you may even be able to use it to advantage in getting the actors away from a too-mechanical and oratorical "prophetic" delivery.

The prophetic and other Latin tags found before each speech (and in David's case part-way through as well), should be appropriately and fully delivered in Latin as "authority" for what follows.

All they that in truth shall be
Shall he save, I promise ye. 25

"Trust" shall his name be.
Everywhere this prophet shall be known
And honoured, save by his own,
And in his own country. 30

Hearken all, both young and old:
God, that all things here does hold,
Greet you by me.
His commandments, they be ten;
Behold, ye that be his men -- 35
Here ye may them see!

His commandments I have brought here:
See ye hold them close and dear,
Not as trifles, nor as fables.
For ye shall well understand 40
That God wrote them with his hand,
In these very same tables.

Ye that will hold these things in heart,
Truly, heaven shall be your part,
That highest is of all. 45
And ye that will not do so,
To hell's pain must ye go,
And bide the judgement call.

As I shall tell, so must you do.
The first commandment given you 50
Is this that I say:
Make no god of stump nor stone;
Believe ye in no god but one,
That made both night and day.

Another bids thou shalt not swear 55
For harm nor profit, anywhere,
Falsely against God's name.
If thou shall swear wrongfully,
Know thou then most certainly
That thou shall bear great blame. 60

And know thou well, the third of these:
To keep thy holy day, and please
Thy God with thy whole self.
The fourth commandment hear ye now:
Father and mother honour thou, 65
In sickness and in health.

The fifth commands thou shall forsake
Fornication, and a mate take,
And live in righteous state.
The sixth commands thou shall not be 70
A murderer, for gold nor property,
Nor for love, nor for hate.

The seventh commands thee, have goodwill,
And neither go to take nor steal
From those with more or less. 75
The eighth commands both old and young
That they be true of their own tongue,
And bear no false witness.

The ninth bids thee, upon thy life,
Thou desire not thy neighbour's wife, 80
Nor maiden that is his.
The tenth in every way bids thee
Thy neighbour's goods desire not wrongfully
Do this, and do not amiss.

I am the man God chose for this: 85
To take the ten commandments of peace
In the Mount Sinai;
These words, I tell, are no less,
And my name it is called Moses.
Now have ye all good day! 90

DAVID: Omnes reges adorabunt eum, omnes gentes servient ei.
Hearken here, all ye that may,
And perceive well what I shall say,
Truly, with righteousness.
Look ye put it not away,
But think upon it, night and day, 95
For it is truth, no less!

Jesse's son ye know I am
David is my right name,
And I bear a crown.
If ye doubt this, ye are to blame; 100
All Israel, both wild and tame,
To me bows down.

As God of heaven has given me wit,
I shall sing you verses fit,
With my minstrelsy. 105
See that ye note what I shall tell,
And with a knot ye bind it well,
For it is prophecy.

Mirth I make unto all men,
With my harp and fingers ten, 110
And tell them: be of cheer
For his goodwill, that Adam did make,
And heaven and earth, and for our sake
His son will send us here.

He will descend from heaven's towers 115
To earth, to be man's saviour -- ours
Who were lost eternally.
For this I harp, and my mirth make:
For us he will his manhood take --
This is true prophecy. 120

And then he shall return again
To heaven, a giant of might and main,
Unto the highest place.
And neither king, nor ploughman bold
May any thing from him withhold, 125
Nor hide it from his face.

He shall be Lord and king of all;
Unto his feet shall kings fall,
Submitting them utterly.
Blessed be that sweetest bloom 130
That shall us save when he shall come:
Joyful may we be!

Rich gifts they shall him bring,
And to him make offering,
Kneeling on their knee. 135
Happy the man who might that lord,
That king beloved and adored,
Live long enough to see.

By his ways ye shall him know:
Joy and loving shall he show, 140
But love all things above.
Then shall the light be born from dark
To the unlearned and the clerk:
The righteous spirit's love.

Therefore, king and emperor bold,
Rich and poor, both young and old,
Temper your gladness well
Until that king comes down
To loose us from our prison,
And to free us all. 150

Ostende nobis, domine, misericordiam tuam, et salutare
tuum da nobis.

To us, o Lord, thy mercy show,
For till thou come, to hell we go --
We have no other way.
Lord, when thy will is, to us lend
Salvation, by thy healing hand, 155
Whose mercy we all stay.

Now I have sung this song most fit,
Look that in mind ye do keep it,
I urge with main and mighté
He that made us with his wit, 160
Shield us all from hell-pit,
And grant us heaven's light!

SIBYL: Iudicii signum tellus sudore madescit,
E celo rex adveniet per secla futurus,
Scilicet in carne presens ut iudicet orbem.

Whoso will glad tidings hear
Of him that made all, far and near,
Now listen carefully: 165
The sage Sibyl is my name;
Who hears me not shall bear great blame.
My word is prophecy!

Through Adam's sin were all men slain,
And put to never-ending pain 170

Through falseness of the fiend.
A new king comes from heaven to fight
Against the fiend, to win his right.
His mercy shall he send.

The world shall face his judgement seat: 175
All who have pleased him shall he greet;
Joy to them shall betide.

All shall see him with their eye:
Rich and poor, both low and high --
For none from him may hide! 180

In flesh shall they arise and wake,
And all shall tremble then, and quake
To face that selfsame doom.
With his saints, many a one,
He shall be seen, in flesh and bone, 185
That king that is to come.

All that shall then stand him before
Shall equals be, both less and more,
All of one age and birth.
Angels then shall quake for fear, 190
And middle-earth be burnt by fire --
Yea, and all upon the earth!

Nothing on earth that we have known
But shall be burnt and overthrown --
The waters and the sea. 195
Then shall both the hill and dale
Run together, without fail,
And all shall even be.

At his coming shall trumpets blow,
That all may his coming know. 200
Full sorrowfull shall be that blast!
There is no one shall hear it
But they shall quake, for all their wit,
Be they never so steadfast.

Then shall hell gape wide and grin, 205
That men may know their doom within
From that high justice!
Who have done ill must go to hell;
To heaven those who have done well,
And have used righteousness 210

Therefore, I counsel that each one
Keep them, as well as may be done,
From sin, and from misdeed.
My prophecy now have I told;
God you save, both young and old, 215
And help you at your need!

DANIEL: Cum venerit sanctus sanctorum, cessabit uncio vestra.

God, that made both Adam and Eve,
While they did well he gave them leave
In paradise to dwell.
But when they ate that apple, sure 220
They were then damned, long to endure
The prison bonds of hell,

Through sorrow and pains forever new.
But now his mercy will ensue:
He will his son down send 225
To earth, our flesh for to take;
And this shall all be for our sake,
Our trespass to amend.

Flesh with flesh shall be bought,
That he lose not what he has wrought
With his own hand.
Of a maiden shall he be born,
To save all those that are forlorn,
Evermore, without an end!

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