

tribes, called Judah with Jerusalem as its chief city. Amos and Hosea spoke God's word to the northern tribes. Isaiah and Micah proclaimed the word of the Lord to the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

This movement of the Spirit of God through His prophets continued for a full 300 years. As a result a large part of written prophecy was recorded. This revelation of God reached far beyond the messengers of that time. It became an important part of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus drew from the prophets' writings to instruct the people during his time on earth. And the whole Christian Church is blessed to have the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. Sadly, few study them as they should.

During this long period, pure worship of the true God was almost lost. Many Jews offered sacrifices at local pagan shrines (Amos 4:4; Micah 6:6). Heathen priests stood against God's prophets. One told Amos, "Get out, you seer. Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there" (Amos 7:12).

God raised up a leader here and a king there who began to cleanse the land of these heathen shrines, but idolatry continued. God was angry with His people (Jer 17:4).

A remnant of faithful souls waited for God to act. They looked for a time when God would come to their aid. Amos said this was a false hope (Amos 5:18) The Day of the Lord would be a day of darkness and judgment not of light.

ARE THERE PROPHETS TODAY

"God spoke...through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son..." (Heb 1:1-2).

Jesus told His disciples about John: "All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John...he is the Elijah who was to come..." (Matt 11:13-15).

So God sent John the Baptist, the last prophet, to prepare way for the Prophet of all prophets, Jesus Christ (Deut 18:18).

TALK ABOUT

1. What name did Jesus give John the Baptist (Matt 11:14)? 2. Who bought God's last words to men (Heb 1:1-2)? 3. Have you studied God's word? 4. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). 5. Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

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The Meaning of . . .

PROPHETS



**Written
by
Fred Morris**

To the Reader: *Keep your Bible beside you. Read the Bible verses as you study. Most of the Bible verses are from the New International Version. You may have a King James Bible or another translation, so the words may be a little different, but the meaning will be the same. Ask God to guide your mind to know His truth. He has promised to do this for you (John 8:32).*

Ask a friend to join in the study with you. You may be able to help each other with something that you do not understand. Talk together about the questions. You will be blessed and so will your friend.

PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the English translations of the Bible the word “prophet” and the verb “to prophesy” are used rather loosely. A person who spoke forth or spoke openly about God was often called a prophet. The word ‘roeh’ or seer is translated ‘prophet’ (1 Sam 9:9), or one who was in direct contact with God, or one through whom God spoke (Num 11:17-29).

I would seem that a man could be trained to be a prophet or seer. In the early period of Israel’s history there was a “school of the prophets” in several cities (2 Kings 2:9-18). Elijah and then Elisha visited these schools and taught the men.

There was a school at Bethel, where the wicked king Jeroboam had set up a golden calf idol. And one at Jericho which had been rebuilt in spite of God’s curse on that place (Joshua 6:26).

We do not know much of how these young men prepared themselves for such a ministry. We can be sure they studied God’s law and the disciplines associated with the life of a prophet. We may wonder what became of them, or whether they followed the true God of Israel at all.

Elisha told them not to speak to him of his master leaving him (2 Kings 2:5). Perhaps they were mocking the young Elisha. And, when Elijah was caught up to heaven, they refused to believe he was resurrected by an act of God.

The root word ‘prophet’ is used of King Saul when he went to Naioth at Ramah intending to kill David (1 Sam 19:23-24). We are not told what Saul said, but it would seem that God’s Spirit came upon him and prevented him for going further. He lay in a trance “all day and all night.”

If Saul’s ‘prophesy’ or the words that he spoke as he walked along were of God, I believe the Spirit would have had them recorded in Scripture. While Saul lay in a trance or stupor, “all day and all night,” David escaped and went to Jonathan at the King’s court.

WORDS OF WARNING

John wrote to Christians, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)

Jesus told His disciples, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in

WOMEN WHO WERE PROPHETS

Women played an important part in the ministry of God’s word. They were sometimes called ‘prophet.’ We find the names of these women in different parts of the Bible.

Miriam, sister of Aaron, is called “Miriam, the prophetess” (Ex 15:20). She led the women in singing and dancing after the victory of the Red Sea. The prophet Micah said she was a leader in Israel (Micah 6:4). Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses’ authority by asking, “Has not the Lord spoken through us” (Num 12:1-2).

Deborah was a judge in Israel after the people entered the Promised Land. The writer of Judges said, “Deborah, the prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time” (Judges 4:4).

Huddah was a prophetess in the days of the Kings of Israel. When the priests cleaned the Temple they found a lost scroll. They believed it was part of the law of Moses, but they were not sure. Some of the leading court officials took the scroll to Huddah the prophetess to ask her about it (2 Kings 22:14). She said to them, “Tell the men who sent you to me, ‘This is what the Lord says: ...’.” And she gave them a message from God for the King, Josiah (2 Kings 22:16-20).

In the New Testament Luke wrote about an aged woman named Anna, “There was also a prophetess, Anna...who never left the Temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying” (Luke 2:36-37). Luke said that Philip, the evangelist had “four unmarried daughters who prophesied...” (Acts 21:8-9). The word ‘prophesied’ means they ministered in public (1 Cor 11:5). This proves that gifted women played an important role serving the Lord in the early Christian Church.

TALK ABOUT

1. Can you name some prophets who were women? 2. Can you name any other prophets? 3. Did gifted women serve in the early Church (Acts 21:8-9)? 4. Why is it important for all Christians to study what the prophet wrote?

THE PROPHET’S MESSAGE

The prophet’s message was meant to make people more aware of God: **a)** His holiness (Isa 6:1-6). **b)** His majesty and splendor (Ezek 1:1-14). **c)** His divine tenderness and love (Jer 31:3). **d)** His desire to redeem man from sin and bring them into His rest (Deut 30:19; 1 Kings 18:21; Isa 11:10). This greater understanding of who God is, His purpose for men and women and what He requires of us was intended to lead men to repent and seek forgiveness (Isa 55:6).

Each prophet had a personal experience of God. The Holy Spirit came upon the prophet and gave him or her the wisdom of God. But all the prophets’ messages came from the same God Almighty. This is the reason for the unity of the Scriptures. It is not made up of many parts, but is one whole.

A TIME OF GREAT TROUBLE

The eighth century before Christ (BC) was a time of great trouble and many wars. God sent His prophets to both the northern tribes, called Israel and the southern

Jeremiah.”

These people of Jerusalem stood against God’s truth as Jeremiah presented it to them. The words used here help us distinguish between the three parts of the Old Testament Scriptures: **a)** The teachings of the law. **b)** Counsel from the wise. **c)** Words from the prophets (Jeremiah 18:18).

TALK ABOUT:

1. Why did God tell His prophets to do strange things? **2.** Did God’s prophets speak their own words?

THE PROPHETS STUDIED GOD’S MESSAGE

Peter said the prophets “searched intently and with the greatest care...” what God said to them (1 Peter 1:10). They wrote God’s words on scrolls and studied them carefully. They listened for God’s Spirit to teach them. When they had no message from God they did not speak.

God controlled their pens and directed their thoughts as they wrote. God’s Spirit was with them. He was the sole author of the history of salvation as it is recorded in the Bible (Heb 12:2).

There are three groups of prophetic books in the Old Testament.

1. Moses, Joshua, Judges and Samuel all spoke God’s message to the people of Israel. They are sometimes called “the Former Prophets.”

2. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are called “the Major Prophets.”

3. The twelve books that are placed after the Major Prophets are called “the Minor Prophets.”

There were many other great prophets who spoke for God like Elisha and Elijah. Some appeared briefly and gave the people God’s word. Other men like Nathan and Gad were probably more like court chaplains (2 Sam 7:10-16).

The Bible writers refer to the prophets by various names:

a) Man of God (1 Sam 9:6). **b)** Seer (1 Sam 9:9). **c)** Man of the Spirit (Hos 9:7). **d)** Watchman (Ezek 33:7).

All God’s prophets were chosen by Him and set apart to live holy lives and speak His words to the people. God told young Jeremiah, “I knew you before you were born...I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). The prophets spoke to their own generation. Their message had a deep meaning for those around them. Some of Jeremiah’s prophecies were against the sins of that day. Some told of the judgments of God that would come upon Judah and Jerusalem because they did not obey God. Other prophecies were against the heathen nations.

Because the prophet’s messages were the living words of the eternal God, they not only spoke to those people who lived long ago, but also speak to us who are living now “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11 KJV).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did the prophets write and study God’s words? **2.** How do we group the prophets? **3.** Can you name some of the great prophets of God? **4.** Do you tell God’s message to others?

Shepherd’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matt 7:15).

Moses told the people of Israel, “The nations ...will listen to those who practice sorcery...But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me...You must listen to Him” (Deut 18:12-15).

God would allow false prophets or “dreamers” to rise up and test His people, offering them “other gods” which were no gods at all. They were told to “purge this evil from among you” (Deut 13:1-5).

GOD’S PROPHETS PREACHED HOLINESS

God’s prophets preached God’s righteousness and they lived holy lives. Noah lived in a time of violence and crime. I am sure there were many false prophets who laughed at Noah and his sons. They were building a big ship out in the middle of a rich piece of farmland.

There was no water for miles around. Yet, day after day, Noah warned the people that God would send a flood and wipe them all away. He preached that “God is righteous” (2 Peter 2:5). And he lived what he preached. Noah’s own life condemned those ungodly people who laughed at him. They may have wanted to kill him and rid the world of the man who troubled their consciences, but the Lord protected him.

Jesus said, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt 24:37). You will know the true men of faith because they will be preachers of God’s holiness. They will live what they preach (Matt 7:15).

TALK ABOUT

1. Does The Bible warn us about false prophets? **2.** What did Jesus say about them (Matt 7:15). **3.** John called false prophets anti..... (1 John 2:18)?

SATAN’S SPIRITS PREACH LIES

You can be sure there were plenty of the other kind of preachers around long before John wrote his letters to Christians.

While Noah was preaching God’s righteousness, they were telling the people just the opposite. “Rain,” they said. “What is rain?” “A flood of water? But this is high ground. I don’t think we have anything to fear. It is all in his imagination.” Everything will remain as it always has been.” They did not know that it was God speaking to them. The words were not Noah’s words at all.

The Bible makes it quite clear: “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20).

WOULD BALAAM BLESS GOD’S PEOPLE

Balaam was a witchdoctor. He worked black magic. Everyone knew he had great powers. But Balaam got his power from Satan. He worshipped idols and talked with the spirits.

In the land of Moab, far from where Balaam lived, King Balak was very troubled. A great multitude of foreign people had camped just across the border of Moab and the king feared they might attack his country. This large group of people were God's people, Israel. Moses was leading them toward the land of Canaan, which God had promised to give them.

These people were not like any other people king Balak had ever seen. They were camped in orderly rows of tents and the king heard that they killed anyone who stood in their pathway. The king Balak was so worried that he didn't know what to do. Then he had a great idea. He would send for prophet Balaam to curse these people, so that they would perish by plague or natural disaster.

But Israel was God's special people. He chose them and made a special agreement or covenant with them: If they obeyed Him, He would bless them and multiply their number (Deut 7:7-9). They were not to worship idols like the Moabites and the Canaanites. They were to be a holy people.

King Balak sent his trusted servants to king Balak. He trusted them will much gold and other precious gifts. The messengers told Balaam about the fierce people who had come out of Egypt and now camped on the border of Moab.

"Come quickly," they said to Balaam. King Balak is very troubled. "Come and put a curse on these strong people." That night Balaam sat by the fire thinking. Then he heard a voice speaking to him. It was God's voice.

"You must not put a curse on this people," God told him, "because they are blessed" (Numbers 22:12). So, in the morning, Balaam told the king's messengers, "Go back to your own country. I cannot come..."

When the messengers returned to king Balak, they were afraid of what the king might do to them. Balak was puzzled. He did not know what to do next so the sent some of his finest princes to summon Balaam, and he doubled the amount of treasure which Balaam would receive if he cursed the Israelites.

They said to Balaam, "Do not anything stop you from you coming to me, because I will give you a big reward and do whatever you say. Come quickly and put a curse on these people for me" (Num 22:16).

TALK ABOUT

1. Why did the king send for Balaam? 2. What did he want Balaam to do? 3. Why did Balaam want to do this?

BALAAM DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO

Balaam did not know what to do. He wanted to help king Balak. He wanted the treasure which the king would pay him.

But God, the god of Israel, said to him, "Don't go!" He decided to wait until morning. Perhaps God would change His mind.

"Stay here tonight," he told the princes, "and I will find out what more the Lord will tell me." But Balaam was pretending. He let the princes think he was listening to God's voice, but he was planning what to do in his own wicked heart. And he badly wanted the treasure the king had offered him for his services.

God exalts His own name. He brings honor and glory to Himself. And He

shows His power in any way He wishes. He spoke to Balaam again. This time God said, "Go with these men, but do only what I tell you" (

Next morning Balaam called his servant to saddle his donkey and he started off on the long journey to Moab. God was angry with Balaam and sent an angel to stand in the way, The angel had a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey saw the angel and turned off the path into the field. Balaam beat her with his staff. The angel moved further down the pathway. God is patient with us; He does not want anyone to die in their sins and he gave the old witchdoctor another chance to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

AN ANGEL STOOD IN THE WAY

The donkey saw the angel standing at a narrow place in the pathway, but Satan had blinded Balaam's eyes. There was no place to turn to the left or the right, so the donkey pressed against the stone wall beside path and crushed Balaam's foot. He was angry with the animal and beat her again with his rod.

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel. He fell face down on the ground (Num 22:31-35). Then the angel said to Balaam, "Your path is a reckless one before me...If the donkey had not seen me and turned away, I would certainly have killed you, but I would have spared her."

Balaam answered, "I have sinned....If you are displeased, I will go back."

"Go with he men," the angel said, but speak only what I tell you."

King Balak was pleased to see Balaam and quickly took him to a high place where they made sacrifice to their gods. But from there he could see only a part of the people of Israel.

God put a special message into Balaam's mouth and he could not change it – it was not a curse but a blessing (Num 23:7). This happened three times, so king Balak was very angry and sent the false prophet home (Num 24:10-11).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did Balaam know that God did not want him to curse the Israelites? 2. How did he find out? 3. God did a miracle to stop a false prophet from saying things that would harm His people ___True___False?

PROPHETS DID STRANGE THINGS

At times God asked His prophets to do unusual and strange things. He asked them to act out His message. Jeremiah wore a yoke around his neck to show the bondage that a foreign power would bring on the people because of their sins (Jer 27:2). Ezekiel acted out the siege of Jerusalem (Ezek 4).

Prophets called the people back from their wandering ways and challenged them to seek the Lord and worship Him only (Deut 6:5). The people did not always like what the prophets said. God told young Jeremiah, "They will fight against you, but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you" (Jer 1:19). God stood by His prophets to protect them.

The prophet told the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, "Turn from your evil ways, each one of you..." They replied, "Come, let's make plans against