

3. Old Testament Prophets (4Q 2026 Gift of Prophecy)

Biblical material: James 5:17, 18; 1 Kings 19:1-16; 1 Kings 22:1-14; Exod. 15:20; 2 Kings 22:11-14; Jer. 14:1-15; 2 Chronicles 20:20.

Quotes

- We must remember that the Old Testament prophets were guided by the Law of God, the Bible. They did not call Israel to new ways, but to old ways. They reminded their leaders of who God had always been, and what he had always said. In the same way, activism disconnected from Scripture is not prophetic. The true prophet, like the true Christian activist, calls people back to the God of the Bible. Unless our vision for society is grounded in God's Word, we aren't prophets. We're just political agitators. *Thomas McKenzie*
- Prophets hate stagnation and old wine. Prophets love new wine and new wineskins. Prophets release freshness. *John Eckhardt*
- For every prophet there are a thousand interpreters to distort the essence of the religion, to replace the bright flame with the heat of the inquisitors' pyres. *Sergei Lukyanenko*
- The whole inspiration of our civilization springs from the teachings of Christ and the lessons of the prophets. To read the Bible for these fundamentals is a necessity of American life. *Herbert Hoover*
- Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, "edgemen," who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure. *Victor Turner*
- The unique impression of Jesus upon mankind - whose name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world - is proof of the subtle virtue of this infusion. Jesus belonged to the race of prophets. He saw with open eyes the mystery of the soul. One man was true to what is in you and me. He, as I think, is the only soul in history who has appreciated the worth of man. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Questions

What first comes to mind when you think about Old Testament prophets? What was their primary role in dealing with the people? What of the women mentioned in the Biblical material who are identified as prophets? How do we view prophets in our modern society? To what degree does the prophet's humanity affect the message from God?

Bible summary

James 5:17, 18 describes Elijah as a man like us, but that God answered his prayers regarding both withholding and sending rain. In 1 Kings 19:1-16 God gives courage to Elijah who was running away from Jezebel. 1 Kings 22:1-14 is the story of the true prophet Micaiah and the four hundred false prophets. Exodus 15:20 describes Miriam as a prophet. 2 Kings 22:11-14 refers to Huldah the prophetess. Jeremiah 14:1-15 speaks about those who claim to speak for the Lord but who do not. "Trust in his prophets, and you will be successful." 2 Chronicles 20:20.

Comment

Once God had established Israel's system of worship, why then should he have felt the need to send prophets? Weren't the priests sufficient mouthpieces for God's messages to his people? The answer very clearly is that they were not. In fact the Old Testament reveals an ongoing conflict between the priests as the "custodians" of religion, and the prophets who spoke for God to call people back to a living relationship to him.

Perhaps because the priests were a kind of religious dynasty, they tended to view their role more as a kind of “family business.” Certainly there were some who just exploited their position, like the sons of Eli. Because of this situation with the priests, the prophets fulfilled an essential role in speaking up for God.

While the Old Testament prophets were operating in a very different time and place compared with today, nonetheless they still speak to us, particularly in their strident support for the oppressed and disadvantaged. Theirs is a call to truth and honesty, to a personal commitment to God.

In contrast to the usual call and response of the Old Testament prophets is the story of Jonah. Looking at this example shows the opposite to what is the prophetic office and experience, so it’s helpful to see this as a way of understanding what the prophets generally were not! Let’s take another look:

God calls his prophet. The man of God! And instead of saying “Yes, I’ll do what you say, God”—he decides to run away and take ship for Tarshish!

Now if you look at all the other Old Testament prophets, even though they often had reservations about their tasks, they did as God told them. Isaiah says “Here I am. Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8). Young Samuel replies “Here I am.” God calls. The prophet responds.

But not this prophet! He had other ideas! He gets on a ship going in the opposite direction, and goes to sleep. Now if he were a true man of God, would he be so unconcerned that he would be sleeping during a terrible storm? You can imagine what the others thought! They wake him up, and tell him to pray too. And after casting lots, the finger points at guilty Jonah. And he tells them why they’re in this mess—because of him and his rejection of God!

Jonah tells them to throw him overboard. But these good, religious sailors don’t want to do this, and try to row for the shore. But the sea grows wilder, and so they eventually do as Jonah says, even praying for forgiveness as they do so! Good religious sailors and bad, wayward prophet. Strange reversal of the normal roles!

After his near death experience, and being saved by the fish, now Jonah *does* do as God tells him. He goes to Nineveh with this message of imminent destruction from God. The Ninevites are the Enemy (which is maybe why Jonah didn’t want to go there in the first place!) *Incredibly, the Ninevites repent!* Another opposite. Usually the Israelites ignored the word of God. But these heathen people accept the message of God’s judgment, and respond! No wonder Jonah was surprised.

More than surprised. *Angry!* He hadn’t wanted them to repent. Now he was God’s man again, he wanted to be seen as the great hero. Now he’s angry with God because it makes him look like a false prophet. He says he’d rather die! God’s man is really still on the run, because he doesn’t understand the true character of God.

So God sends him the acted parable of the vine that withers—to show that ultimately God is in control, and that he is to be the one who chooses, and does what is good and right. And shouldn’t God choose to do good? he asks Jonah.

Ellen White Comments

In these “schools of the prophets” young men were educated by those who were not only well versed in divine truth, but who themselves maintained close communion with God and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. These educators enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people both for learning and piety. The power of the Holy Spirit was often strikingly manifest in their assemblies, and the exercise of the prophetic gift was not infrequent. These schools, or colleges, were of untold value to Israel, not only as providing for the dissemination of religious truth, but as preserving the spirit of vital godliness {ST July 20, 1882}

This prophetic gift rested upon the judges and elders, to establish the confidence of the people in them, and to be a sign that God had chosen them to unite their authority with that of Moses, and assist him in the work of subduing the murmurings of the people during their sojourn in the wilderness, and thus ease the task upon Moses. {1SP 283}