

The Books of the Prophets

“Major” Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (and Lamentations which is attributed to Jeremiah), Ezekial, and Daniel (only called “major” because they’re longer – not because they’re more important)

“Minor” Prophets (“the twelve”): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Prophetes is a Greek word that means to speak on behalf of someone else. NOT a mind reader or a fortune teller. In the Bible the Prophets are speaking on behalf of God.

Are the biblical prophets all found in the books listed above? No! There were other prophets, such as Elija (the first great prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel c. 865 B.C. – he told the people they couldn’t worship God and Baal, but that they had to choose) and his disciple Elisha (c. 850 B.C.).

Historical Context – what’s happening: The Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah are weakened by their division and become prey, first to Egypt, Syria, and Assyria, and later to Babylon and Persia. During this tumultuous time, God speaks through the Prophets, who call for obedience to the covenant (“I will be your God and you will be my people”) and a greater commitment to love and justice. Read Micah 6:8 (p. 963). Which of these is the hardest for you? What do they mean? Do you think this is easier or harder than it was in biblical times?

The Prophets’ message had two parts:

- 1) The people will be saved only by obedience to God (not by political alliances – this is not “Survivor!” – or by worshipping other gods); and that failure to obey God will bring on disaster; and
- 2) It’s not enough to “talk the talk” and simply go through the religious rituals. You also have to “walk the walk” by acting with love, justice, and mercy. At this point in history, picture a room with 100 people who all want to talk at once (kings, advisors, conquerors, rich people, poor people). Who is heard? Who speaks for God? The Prophets!

Diversity! The Prophets were not all the same. Some were called when they were young, and some when they were older. Some went willingly, and some tried to literally run the other way. Some were wealthy, and some were from humble backgrounds. They were called to proclaim God’s message to the people, but it wasn’t a popular (or safe) job. They were seldom received with enthusiasm, but they did it anyway.

Read Jeremiah 1: 4-17 (p. 780). Read Isaiah 6:1-13 (p. 717) and the box on p. 717.

How did the Prophets get their message across? They used powerful words. Sometimes they were words of doom and despair, and sometimes they offered hope. Always they spoke of God’s constant love for his people.

Read Hosea 11:1-12. (p.931) and the box on p. 932. Hosea shows how it feels to love someone desperately and receive nothing in return. “Not even God, with all his power, can force a human being to love him.” God is not an impersonal force like the law of gravity. He is compassionate.

Homework for 11/30: Read Isaiah 5 (715-717) and Jeremiah 34 (p. 820).

Homework for 12/14: Read ALL of the book of Jonah (pp.954-957)