

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/9/2024

What Was a Prophet?

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

What was a prophet? Often our first lesson in worship each week is a reading from a prophet. But just what was a prophet in Old Testament times? And do the things they said have real meaning for us today?

A prophet is different from a profit spelled with a “fi” rather than a “phe.” That’s probably obvious and many people know that, but now and again, I hear someone confuse the two. “Profit” is the income one earns above costs in a sale. It is an economic term.

A prophet in the Bible is someone looked upon as having been sent to a group of people to speak on behalf of GOD, usually by divine inspiration. Often, a prophet serves in both a teaching and revelatory role. They declare or teach GOD’s truth on contemporary issues while revealing information about the future. Prophets appear at GOD’s call generally because GOD’s people have strayed from GOD’s directives or at a time of crisis. They speak to the people to call them back to godly behavior or to give them messages of hope.

There are more than 133 prophets named in the Bible, both Old and New Testament, and sixteen were women. Other people prophesied or spoke a specific message from GOD. Seventeen of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are named for prophets.

While we might revere the prophets today, getting tapped by GOD to be a prophet was not necessarily a good thing when it happened back then. Their messages were generally ignored and the prophets themselves were scorned. Isaiah described Israel as a “rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD’s instructions. They say to the seers, ‘See no more visions!’ and to the prophets ‘Give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.’” (Isaiah 30:9-10) When you give a message like that, it’s probably not going to go over well. Of course, when the message comes from GOD, you really don’t have a choice about whether to speak it.

Many prophets like Hosea and Joel died peacefully. Others were not so fortunate. Isaiah was sawed in half and buried. Amos was tortured and then slain with a staff. Jeremiah and Habakkuk were stoned to death by their own people. Ezekiel was murdered. Zechariah was killed by the king, had his blood sprinkled on the Temple altar, and then was buried.

One of the main messages the prophets brought which the people didn’t like was to stop worshipping idols. Many tribes surrounded and interacted with the Israelites in Old Testament times. Each of these groups had their own gods and made idols to them that they could worship. They believe that the gods oversaw different situations or actions and would provide blessings if you worshiped them. Interactions with the other people including intermarriage brought these pagan idols into the Israelites' awareness. Since these gods promised good things and required little, the Israelites would begin worshipping them along with or, worse, apart from the GOD of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, GOD would send a prophet to call the people back.

Ancient people also believed that gods dwelt in specific locations, so when the Israelites were taken into captivity in Babylon and then Assyria, the temptation was to worship the gods of those places. The belief of many was that GOD was back in Jerusalem and didn’t know or didn’t care about the exiles. But this is one of the things that made GOD different. GOD sent messages through prophets telling the people that GOD was everywhere, had not forgotten them, and, if they were faithful, would bring them back to Israel one day.

Things haven’t changed all that much since then. We have our own gods that we worship or pursue, though we don’t always think of them that way. Wealth, power, and fame are some of the things that are revered

today. Though we don't make little statues of these gods, they still are here. All false gods have one thing in common: they are creations of humankind. Our world tells us that these things are most important and should be pursued because they are what will bring us peace and happiness. Yet, many have found these idols to be false when life really matters. None of these things love us. GOD created us and wants what's best for our lives, and we will find the truth of that only when we look to the ONE GOD.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey