

## **"MY SERVANTS THE PROPHETS."**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**March 30, 2025, 6:00 pm**

**Text for Sermon: Deuteronomy 18:15-22; Jeremiah 7:25; Hebrews 1:1-2**

### **Introduction.**

Before I started preaching the five wisdom books I did a general introductory sermon on wisdom literature in the Bible. It seemed good to me to do a general introductory sermon on the prophets before launching into the last 17 prophetic books in the OT.

But the real challenge for all of you is to remember what I say tonight because we won't take up the book of Isaiah until May. We have a lot of special services between now and then.

### **The Prophetic Books.**

The OT is sometimes referred to in its entirety as the Law and the Prophets. When it is said that way it is distinguishing between the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, and then all the rest of the books.

We can break down those books into subsets.

First, there are the Former Prophets, meaning Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. They include the history of Israel, as written from a prophetic perspective most likely by prophets. They are sometimes referred to as oral prophets because they didn't leave any records of their utterances.

Oral prophets like Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Elijah and Elisha.

Then comes the seventeen books we come to now in our journey along the Biblical Route 66. These are referred to as the Latter Prophets or the writing prophets.

And this subset can be further divided into the Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. And the Minor Prophets, the twelve shorter books at the end of our English OT. Those twelve got grouped because they could all fit on one papyrus scroll.

They are not minor because they are of lessor importance, they are not, they are prophets equal in importance to the major prophets. They are minor because their books are shorter.

The latter prophets make up over 25% of the OT, yet they are often neglected. They are long, they seem less relevant. This is the least read and least understood section of the Bible.

All of the "writing prophets," that is, prophets who have left books in their names (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and the rest), lived during the time of the divided kingdom, from roughly 800 B.C. – 450 B.C.

The books of II Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah, give us the historical context for these prophets. These historical books recount the events leading up to the exile, the exile itself, and the early stages of restoration after the exile. You could say they lived and prophesied and wrote during the time of the death and resurrection of Israel.

Their messages came in many forms: dreams, poetry, sermons, and even elaborate apocalyptic visions like in Ezekiel and Zechariah.

They are usually in poetic form with all the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, filled with figurative language, striking imagery, and parallelism.

### **The Prophets.**

The institution of the office of prophet has a divine origin, it is from God. It is the gracious gift of God to reveal His wisdom and will to us. God has spoken, He is not silent.

Deuteronomy 18 gives the institution of the office of prophet. It is in stark contrast to the practices of the Canaanites.

**Deuteronomy 18:9-14** When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. 10 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer 11 or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, 12 for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, 14 for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this.

All of these practices were an abomination to God, and everyone who practiced them was an abomination to God. This is one reason for God driving them out of the land. Israel was warned to be nothing like the people God was driving out.

It was against this dark background that God introduces His plan. God said there would be no need to resort to strange practices to know Him and discern His will. He would send His servants the prophets.

The prophetic word is the *exclusive* way for God's people to receive God revelation of His will. The only true and legitimate way to know God and His will is through His Word delivered by His prophets and later His apostles.

Moses was the first one set apart, no prophet was equal to him.

**Deuteronomy 18:7-8** *Not so with my servant Moses.* He is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord.

**Deuteronomy 34:10-11** And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, 11 none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt.

Moses was the standard. Like Moses the prophets would be mediators, from God to the people. They were ambassadors, representing God to the people.

Another way of thinking about prophets is as covenant lawyers. They were God's prosecuting attorneys, delivering God's lawsuit against His people for their persistent covenant transgressions.

They were called prophets, seers, watchmen, men of God, messengers of God, and servants of the Lord. The prophet is at the same time a poet, preacher, teacher, patriot, statesman, social critic and moralist. All these titles are descriptive of their calling and office.

The prophet was chosen or called by God alone, he was chosen to proclaim the revealed words/message of God to His people Israel. When they spoke they said, "Thus says the Lord" and "The Word of the Lord came to me." Their words were God's words.

Over a 140 times just in the prophecy of Isaiah he says "thus says the Lord, or the Lord says."

Their words originated from God. The prophet didn't "think" them, he received them. The prophets believed they were recipients of divine revelation. They were the divinely chosen authorized and authoritative spokespersons for God.

The prophets were not called to their office by virtue of any personal qualifications. They were all sinners. Isaiah was a man of unclean lips. Amos was a shepherd. Jeremiah said he had no natural gifts. They owed everything to God, and were accountable to no one but God. They were independent agents of God, under no king or priest.

Their divine call explains their holy zeal and compulsion.

**Amos 3:8** The lion has roared; who will not fear?  
The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?"

Their message is of divine origin. Sometimes this came by physical hearing, and other times by being impressed on their mind. But most all the prophets speak of divinely inspired visions and dreams as God's means of communicating His revelation.

They were the mouth of God, but the prophets were not just *microphones*. They were real people with personalities, temperaments, character and individualism, emotionally and passionately engaged with all their mind, soul and heart. This was a divine-human event and undertaking.

**II Peter 1:20-21** No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

They were primarily forthtellers but also foretellers. They spent more time speaking to current events than to future events. *Forthtelling* is about the will of God, it is exhortation to obey. *Foretelling* is about the plan of God, it is predictive, either warning or encouragement about the coming judgment.

How can a man proclaim something that will take place centuries later?

**Isaiah 46:9-11** I am God, and there is none like me,  
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ...  
11 I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

### **Themes in the prophets.**

There is one great overarching theme or focus in all the prophets, and under this one thing, are numerous secondary or subthemes.

That theme is the exile and restoration of God's people. The sheer number of over two hundred predictions about exile and restoration show how massively significant it is, through every major and minor prophet's writings.

The overarching task of the prophets was to anticipate the coming judgment of God, to warn them over and over, and to prepare the people for the devastating shock of their defeat and exile. And at the same time, the task of the prophets was to hold out hope in the Covenant God's promise and His redemptive purposes to restore His people from the abyss of exile.

You can boil down their essential message to this. Israel must die, but Israel will be resurrected. Like Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones, God's people must die for their sins, but He will make them live again. This message consumes the prophet's work for centuries.

The redemptive purposes of the sovereign God are seen in how God uses the exile and restoration to bring an end to the monarchy, no more kings of Israel, and an end to the gift of prophecy, and how this prepares the way for a new replacement king descending from the line of David, the Messiah who would be the final true prophet, all according to the covenant promise of God.

***Beneath this overarching theme are numerous subthemes in the prophets.*** They made known the holiness of God and called God's covenant people, Israel, to repentance and faithfulness.

They spoke against idolatrous kings, false prophets, lazy priests, greedy merchants with false balances, and judges who favor the rich with no justice for the poor. They denounced empty-ritualism, religion of the lips and not the heart.

The prophets were especially sensitive to evil, wickedness, sin, immorality, the departure from God and the loss of the fear of God. The prophets were horrified at the scandal of sin, the dishonoring of God and His Word.

We don't speak the same language the prophets speak. To us our world is ok, sure there are some bad spots, but all in all life is pleasant enough. There is goodness and decency in our community, we tolerate the injustices around us, we are lukewarm toward the moral climate, we wink at sins or sweep them out of mind or sight.

Not so the prophet. He was the voice of a holy God, scandalized at the idolatry and adultery of our souls, at the faithlessness and pride and self-righteousness, at the carnal lust and pleasure-seeking temptation, the indifference toward what is sacred and holy and eternal.

It was their duty to admonish, reprove, denounce sin, threaten with the terrors of judgment, call to repentance, and bring consolation and pardon. Their activity of rebuking sin and calling for repentance consumed far more of the prophets' time than any other feature of their work.

The prophet's voice is a blast from heaven. They are the zeal of the Lord. God is not all sweetness and light, comfort and peace. God is a consuming fire, a white hot hater of wickedness and sin. With the words of God in their mouth, they could do no other than to speak.

All the OT prophets point to and prepare the way for a unique, greater prophet.

**Jesus.**

**Hebrews 1:1-2** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Jesus is the unique and greater Moses. The Word has come and dwelt among us.

Moses had to say, “Thus says the Lord.” Jesus never once said that, He simply spoke, and the people who heard Him knew something was different, He spoke as one who had personal authority, not a derived authority. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you.”

But of course, Jesus did more than bring a message from God. Jesus does more than simply reveal truths from God. He is God incarnate, the very Word of God, and God’s ultimate revelation of Himself.

Jesus is the one great and final prophet, greater than which there is no other, and He is the fulfillment of all the prophetic promise. The final prophet is God Himself.

**Luke 24:44** Jesus said to them, “... everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

### **Implications and application.**

Throughout all of human history God has sent messengers and prophets through whom He spoke and revealed Himself and announced to the sinful world His redemptive plans and purposes to send a Redeemer.

God’s people have always needed correction. Ever since the fall and to this very day. It is the grace of God that He sends to us messengers of His love, wisdom, faithfulness, warning, rebuke.

Because we are sinful and foolish and negligent and we need instruction, teachers, preachers. Part of my role is to tell you your sin, to warn you of judgment, to call you to repentance, and to hold out the hope of restoration, reconciliation, newness of life and eternal life. Don’t resent God’s message and God’s messengers.

Are the prophets relevant? How can such ancient words ring true for us?

Yes, their words are God’s Words, and God’s Word is eternal, it never goes out of date. We only need to translate their words into our context.

The prophets understood and spoke to human nature and the human problem. Nothing has changed. We are fallen, sinful beings whose hearts are desperately wicked.

*First*, we struggle with the same sins: idolatry, disregard for God’s law, empty religiosity, being in love with the world, hard-heartedness, lust, greed, lack of concern for the poor, and presumption as members of the covenant community.

*Second*, we’re subject to the same judgment.

*Third*, we also share the same hope, hope for restoration, renewal, and rest. We await the same Savior.

The writing prophets reveal God’s character, His redemptive plan, and His call to live faithfully before Him. As we study them, may we respond with repentance, worship, obedience, and a firm hope in Christ, who is the fulfillment of all prophecy (Luke 24:44).