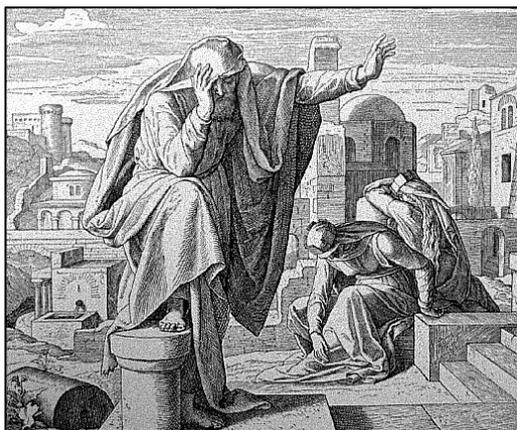


THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET

¹⁸You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. ¹⁹You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid, and many will court your favour.

Job 11:18-19



The Old Testament prophet was often an intimidating character. Fearless, bold, courageous, eccentric, daring, controversial, all describe them. The two most respected prophets after the Davidic Kingdom were Isaiah and Jeremiah. These two prophets are not usually associated with giving hope to people. Rather, they are more often associated with delivering God's messages of judgment to a people that God was seeking to destroy because of their rebellion. But we shall see that these two great men were also some of the greatest voices hope the world has ever heard. In an age today where more young people are voluntarily committing suicide than at any other time, there is an urgent cry for help being desperately made for some *hope*.

1. What was the message given to the exiled Jews found in Jeremiah 29:11-12?
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Many people today have been truly blessed by this powerful prophetic word of God. Consider the following little story-

A young Singaporean woman named Ai Ling was part of a pair who went knocking on doors in Glasgow, Scotland in 1984. At one door they knocked and waited. And waited. They were just about to move on to the next home when they heard a noise inside the house. It sounded as if someone had jumped and landed with a thud. The sound of footsteps followed. Then the door was opened just enough for a distraught face to peer out. It belonged to a woman who appeared to be in her early thirties. Anxiety hovered in her red, puffy eyes.

Ai Ling, being the only one of the Doulos pair who was fluent in English, introduced herself and her companion. The woman eyed them silently, but the door remained open. That was enough for Ai Ling. She began talking about the hope that Jesus offers.

The door opened a little wider. Unthinkingly, Ai Ling glanced from the face of the woman to the room behind. Her words faltered as she gazed in shock. A mirror on a nearby wall gave a faithful reflection of what was otherwise out of sight in a corner of the room, a noose hanging from the ceiling and a chair situated below it.

Ai Ling gave herself a mental shake and resumed talking with a great deal more fervour. The woman listened and tears began to stream down her cheeks. "How could Jesus die for me?" she asked. "What hope do I have?"

"Our hope is in Jesus himself," replied Ai Ling. "He's the only one who can forgive our sins and give us eternal life. Listen to what the Bible says." Ai Ling opened her Bible and pointed out a verse, reading it aloud to the woman, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The woman brushed away her tears and fixed her eyes on Ai Ling's face. A tentative gleam of hope, slipped into her face as Ai Ling talked further.

THE DOULOS STORY, page 147-148

This is just one of thousands of examples of the words of Jeremiah the prophet have pierced people's hopeless situations and brought the hope of God into their lives.

WHO'D WANNA BE A PROPHET?

2. Read Jeremiah 1:6; 15:10; 20:8-9 and determine how ambitious Jeremiah was to become a prophet.

3. Read Isaiah 20:1-2 and then ask yourself whether you could have been as obedient as Isaiah was. What must Isaiah's relationship with God been like for him to obey this command from the LORD?

4. Note Hebrews 11:36-38 which describes the common fate of many Old Testament prophets (including Isaiah). Why do you think many of the prophets were *willing* to suffer in these ways?

WHAT IS HOPE?

A casual reading of Isaiah and Jeremiah reveals that most of their messages carried a theme of *repentance*. Yet both Isaiah and Jeremiah had a powerful message of hope.

5. In the midst of sinful rebellion, what title does Jeremiah ascribe to God in Jeremiah 14:8? (Note verse 22)

Because God is the God-of-Hope it is just never true to say that a person or situation is *hopeless*. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah sensed that even God's summons to His people to repent was really His offer of hope to start again.

6. How could we describe what *hope* is?

The word *hope* as it used in the New Testament means more than mere optimistic expectations.

7. Life can be stormy. We can be spiritually tossed about by the winds and waves of life crashing across our little boats. Based on Hebrews 6:19 how important is it for secure living to have *right* hope?

I think that many of these Old Testament prophets endured what they did because they had hope. They believed that things would get better. They came to know God as the God of all hope.

8. Can you recall any accounts of people who have gone through things where their hope in God was all that kept them going?

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET

9. Read Deuteronomy 18:22 and note the most basic way of deciding whether a prophet was truly from God.

10. Based on this same verse can you see the implication for why the authentic Old Testament prophet was feared?

Isaiah and Jeremiah understood this Scripture (refer to Jeremiah 28:9). Jeremiah in particular ministered during an era when there were many so-called prophets (read one of Jeremiah's complaints about this in Jeremiah 14:13ff). Yet the Lord said that many of these so-called prophets were false prophets. They prophesied what they wanted, rather than what the Lord told them. They were spiritually lax. They were not people of prayer.

11. What qualities do you think an authentic Old Testament prophet possessed?

Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied a very similar message. They were born in different centuries, yet their message to the people of Judah (Southern Israel) was the same. They both met opposition and rejection and one of them suffered brutal martyrdom. Their generations were increasingly religious, yet godless. Their godlessness led them to lose all hope for a bright, holy future. Yet both Isaiah and Jeremiah foresaw past their present generations to the coming of the Glorious Messiah and the eventual gathering of foreign people into God's Kingdom even from "distant islands."

"I will set a sign among them...to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations."

Isaiah 66:19 NIV

The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward; each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong!"

Isaiah 41:5-6 NIV

Today we, in the "distant islands" and "ends of the earth", are living out the fulfilment of these prophecies!

Amen.

