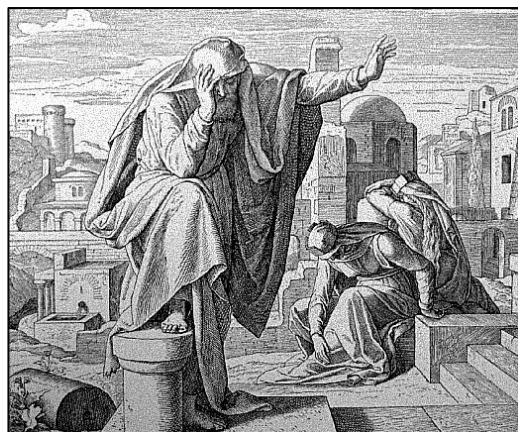


THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET

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.



WHY DID GOD CREATE PROPHETS ANYWAY?

Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?

Jeremiah speaking to God, Jer. 20:18 NIV



Sometimes the prophets themselves didn't even know the answer to this question. Jeremiah several times asks God to use some other means or person than himself. Yet God still consistently chose to use him and other prophets.

We saw in the first study that prophets were often called upon to do strange things. God expected their obedience to be absolute. Yet why He didn't intervene in the affairs of His people directly, rather than using intermediaries is for some a mystery (sometimes even the prophets themselves).

After all, didn't He appear to Adam directly in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), Moses directly through the burning bush (Exodus 3), and Saul of Tarsus directly on the road to Damascus (Acts 9)? So why did God create prophets?

1. How did God speak to His people from the time of the exodus according to Jeremiah 7:22-26?

2. Based on Jeremiah 11:7-8 what was the theme of the prophets' messages to God's people?

3. Do you believe there are people today fulfilling a similar role to that of these Old Testament prophets? If so, how?

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT “SIN” IS

If I was to ask you to define ‘sin’, you might actually identify things that are considered ‘sins’ without really defining ‘sin’. A major ministry of the prophet was to warn God’s people to turn from sin. When God established His covenant with Israel He used a prophet, Moses, to announce the initial warnings.

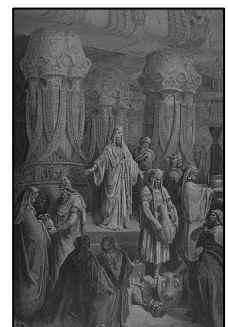
4. Read Deuteronomy 11:16-17; 28:15-29. A covenant of necessity must contain penalties that are agreed to by both parties. Note some of the warnings that God gave Israel if they disobeyed God-

5. Since Israel agreed to the terms of their covenant with God, what did they deserve as a nation the moment they collectively broke their covenant with God?

Yet, the Scriptures declare that despite their rebellion, God was *compassionate, merciful, and slow to anger* (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). The Scriptures declare both God’s reluctance and yet His just nature to punish sin.

6. What do the ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah reveal about the idea that some have that God is purely a harsh and judgmental God?

What is the core of all sin? *Rebellion*. Failure to submit to God is *sin*. Some would say *pride* is the essence of sin. But pride is a statement of rebellion against dependency on God. *Those who have greater reason to be proud have the greater need to be humble!* In the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah’s day this is why they addressed much of their warnings directly to the (proud) kings and leaders of Judah.



7. Note Jeremiah’s message in chapter 23. Who is it addressed at? What did God expect from these particular people?

8. Repentance demands humility. In what way was God reinforcing His message to His people when He sent meek prophets to them?

Sin has taken up residency in every human heart, and until the Resurrection Day we are all subject to its lure. Remembering that at its core it is *rebellion against God* we can see that it is not merely lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, murder, swearing, blasphemy, but anything that is *rebellion against God and His authority*.

9. Since all authority is ordained and appointed by God (Romans 13:1; Hebrews 13:7, 17), did these prophets defy God's appointed authority when they stood up to kings and governors, and thus inadvertently sin themselves?

10. Should we respect a leader even if they haven't earned our respect or support? Note the following Scriptures before writing your final answer: Exodus 22:28; Leviticus 19:32; Romans 13:1, 5; Hebrews 13:17; 1Peter 2:13,18; Acts 23:1-5

Sin seeks to justify rebellion. But the prophets warned both kings and commoners against their rebellion toward God. The prophets own lives showed remarkable submission to God, and His authority as represented by priests and kings. Today we worship in "Protestant" churches. It would be fair to say that "Protestant" churches are the most fractured and divided members of the body of Christ.

11. Why are our churches described as being "Protestant"?

12. Is there a link between being a Protestant and the Protestant church being the most fractured and divided members of the Body of Christ?

While the prophets were scathing in their attacks on kings and priests for their wickedness, they were still submitted to their authority. Even Christ Himself placed Himself under submission to the High Priest (Matthew 26:62-64). I wonder where the prophets are today? What would they say to God's people today?

13. Read Jeremiah 18:1-12. What is God trying to say to His people? How does He want us to be before Him?
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FINALLY, A UNITED, SUBMITTED PEOPLE

The prophets reveal that in the last days God would raise up a new people who would serve Him wholeheartedly.

14. How will these people respond to God based on Jeremiah 31:16-22?
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May we be such a people.

Amen.

WHEN THINGS DON'T LOOK TOO GOOD

At the end of three years the Assyrians took it. So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel.

Second Kings 18:10

When Isaiah was around, the main threat against Israel and Judah was from Assyria. These people were proud (Isa. 10:12), brutal and godless. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh (Gen. 10:11; 2Kings 19:36).

1. Note how the LORD felt about the Assyrians according to Nahum 1:14 -
-

During the time of Isaiah, Israel had survived seasons of civil war by dividing into two nations. To the north was a confederacy of ten tribes, which became known as *Ephraim* or *Israel*. To the south this nation became known as Judah. Each nation had its own king. Judah maintained a royal dynasty with the descendants of King David. Israel however refused to allow the dynasty (or 'House of') David from ruling over them (this had its origins in 1Kings 12:16). Their kingdom was marred by coups and betrayals. The Books of First and Second Kings largely details the history of Israel, whereas the Books of First and Second Chronicles details the history of the kings of Judah. Isaiah is mentioned in Kings and Chronicles.

2. How did Assyria begin its oppression of Israel as implied in 2Kings 15:19-20?

3. According to 2Kings 15:29 was this a good long-term strategy on the part of Israel? Explain-

Even though the kings of Israel had failed to appease the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser, with money, the king of Judah thought he could succeed at winning the favour of the Assyrians using the same method.

4. Note where king Ahaz sourced the money for the king of Assyria (2Kings 16:7-8)
-

If we read the following verses after the above reference we see that king Ahaz totally submitted himself to the Assyrians. He changed whatever he could in order to please and impress the Assyrians: *even spiritual things*. Today we must be vigilant not to surrender our finance to the “Assyrians” (the gurus of finance and power) or change our spirituality to conform with their system of worship (impressive and costly shows).

5. Note how Second Chronicles 28:1-2 sums up the life of king Ahaz.
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6. Ahaz did not walk with or trust the LORD God. Having read Second Kings 16:7-8, do you see any irony in the statement found in Second Chronicles 28:5? What can we learn from this? (Note verse 6.)
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Into this environment was born Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz (2Kings 16:20). He would have seen his father do some detestable things (2Chronicles 28:3-4).

7. List some of things mentioned in these Scriptures above that describe the wickedness of Ahaz-
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If anyone was schooled in evil and wickedness (considering the example of his father), it was most certainly Hezekiah. And surely this would have led to Hezekiah to follow in his father’s footsteps. Yet something happened to prevent this.

8. Note how Hezekiah’s life is described in Second Kings 18:1-7. Describe Hezekiah’s character and walk with the Lord based on this passage-
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9. Why did Hezekiah succeed in all he did? (2Kings 18:8)

During Hezekiah's life the prophet Isaiah guided him. Most probably the account of Second Kings, which was probably written and edited by Jeremiah, was based on the records of Isaiah. Many prophets were appointed to serve as royal historians (note 2Samuel 24:11; 1Chronicles 29:29). It is extremely likely that Isaiah was the royal historian. As such he would have been with young Hezekiah as he grew up. He would have been highly qualified to retell the young Hezekiah all that God had done and why He had done it. He may have even warned Hezekiah not to emulate his father's wickedness.

10. Most probably under Isaiah's influence, Hezekiah initiated some radical reforms. List some of those reforms, and what do they tell us about Hezekiah? (2Kings 18:4-8)

At this time the Assyrians came against the northern Kingdom of Israel and besieged it. They took control of its capital at Samaria, and exiled the Israelites to Assyria as captives (2Kings 18:9-11). The Assyrians at this time were the world emperors. Hezekiah initially rebelled against the Assyrians domination (2Kings 18:7). When he realised it was perhaps wiser to pay the demanded tribute than be destroyed, the Assyrians were incensed. In a rather lengthy speech outside the gates of Jerusalem, they did their best to intimidate the people of Judah. Many of their taunts were half-truths and blatant lies.

11. Note their taunts and list some of the half-truths and lies they used to intimidate the people of God. (2Kings 18:17-25)

From this we can also see how the enemy taunts us in our walk with God. He will use lies and half-truths to dissuade us from following God. Hezekiah had done the right thing, but now it looked like things weren't going too good. But with the encouragement of the prophet Isaiah (note 2Kings 19:2), Hezekiah was able to lead Judah into one of the most miraculous military victories in all of history...

12. Read 2Kings 19:3-4. Based on this how was the godly Hezekiah really feeling about the threats from the Assyrians?
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Rather than turn away from God in times of intense pressure, the godly need to turn to Him for strength and provision. This is what Hezekiah did.

13. How would you have felt, and why, if you had received the words that Isaiah sent to Hezekiah if you were in the same situation? (2Kings 19:6-7)
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Hezekiah received a brief reprieve when the Assyrians suddenly left temporarily to attend to another military matter (2Kings 19:8-9). But before leaving, they left Hezekiah an extremely intimidating letter, which greatly distressed him (2Kings 19:10-13).

14. What can we learn from Hezekiah's response to this letter? (Note 2Kings 19:14-19)
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Isaiah is then sent to Hezekiah with an extremely encouraging word from the Lord (2Kings 19:20-28) in response to his prayer. Isaiah also gives him a sign from God, which was shortly fulfilled. God did thwart the Assyrians plans to attack Jerusalem. In one night the Angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2Kings 19:35). Much of the early parts of the Book of Isaiah deal with the threat posed by the Assyrians, and the LORD's response to these threats. Therefore, even when things don't look too good, if we seek and obey God, they can turn out OK.

Amen.