



READING RESPONSIBLY

Correctly Handling the Word of Truth

LESSON 03: PROPHECY

Seers or Tellers

I. Introduction

Read Ezekiel 4:9-17. What do you think of this sermon illustration?

→ [Read Ezekiel 4:9-17](#)

⁹“Take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them in a storage jar and use them to make bread for yourself. You are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side. ¹⁰Weigh out twenty shekels of food to eat each day and eat it at set times. ¹¹Also measure out a sixth of a hin of water and drink it at set times. ¹²Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel.” ¹³The Lord said, “In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them.”

¹⁴Then I said, “Not so, Sovereign Lord! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No impure meat has ever entered my mouth.”

¹⁵“Very well,” he said, “I will let you bake your bread over cow dung instead of human excrement.”

¹⁶He then said to me: “Son of man, I am about to cut off the food supply in Jerusalem. The people will eat rationed food in anxiety and drink rationed water in despair, ¹⁷for food and water will be scarce. They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin.

II. Overview of Genre & Context: Wisdom Literature

- Biblical books:
 - English Division
 - Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
 - Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi
 - Hebrew Division
 - Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
 - Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Book of Twelve
 - Note: Hebrew Bible ends with 2 Chronicles
- Timeline
 - Major events
 - 1020-922: United kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon
 - 922: Kingdom divides
 - 722: Assyria destroys Israel (north)

- 587: Babylonia destroys Judah (south)
 - 539: Cyrus/Persians conquer Babylonia
 - 538: Cyrus issues edicts for return of exiles
 - 520: Work begins to rebuild temple
- Pre-exilic (8th Century)
 - Isaiah 1-39
 - Hosea
 - Joel
 - Amos
 - Micah
 - Jonah (?)
- Pre-exilic (7th Century)
 - Nahum
 - Zephaniah
 - Jeremiah
 - Habakkuk
- Exilic (6th Century)
 - Ezekiel
 - Isaiah 40-55
 - Obadiah
- Post-exilic (6th-5th Century)
 - Haggai
 - Zechariah
 - Malachi
 - Isaiah 56-66
- Content
 - Oracles, sermons, messages
 - Stories about the prophets
 - Letters
 - Visions
 - Often collected/edited by others (e.g., Baruch)

III. Big Issues: What is a Prophet

A. Intercessor

→ Read Genesis 20:7

Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."

→ Read Amos 7:1-6

¹ This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. ² When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign Lord, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

³ So the Lord relented.

"This will not happen," the Lord said.

⁴This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: The Sovereign Lord was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. ⁵Then I cried out, "Sovereign Lord, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

⁶So the Lord relented.

"This will not happen either," the Sovereign Lord said.

B. Visionary

→ [Read 1 Samuel 9:8-9](#)

⁸The servant answered him again. "Look," he said, "I have a quarter of a shekel of silver. I will give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take." ⁹(Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.)

C. Ecstatic

→ [Read 1 Samuel 19:23-24](#)

²³So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. ²⁴He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

D. Miracle Worker

→ [Read 2 Kings 4:32-35](#)

³²When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. ³⁴Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. ³⁵Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

E. Political Counselor

→ [Read 1 Kings 22:6-8](#)

⁶So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men—and asked them, "Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?"

"Go," they answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

⁷But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?"

⁸The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."

"The king should not say such a thing," Jehoshaphat replied.

F. Messenger

→ [Read Judges 4:4-6](#)

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor.

G. Preacher

→ Read Jeremiah 1:4-10

⁴ The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

⁶ "Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."

⁷ But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

⁹ Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Big Issues: What time periods do prophets address?

→ Past. Read Hosea 11:1-4

¹ "When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

² But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me.^[a]

They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.

³ It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.

⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.

To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.

→ Future. Read Hosea 11:5-6

⁵ "Will they not return to Egypt
and will not Assyria rule over them
because they refuse to repent?"

⁶ A sword will flash in their cities;
it will devour their false prophets
and put an end to their plans.

→ Present. Read Hosea 11:7

⁷ My people are determined to turn from me.
Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.

IV. Specific Examples

A. Conditional or Unconditional

→ Conditional. Read 2 Chron 7:14

if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

→ Unconditional. Read Ezek 38:8

After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety.

→ Combination. Read Jonah 3:4

"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

→ Read Jonah 3:5

The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

→ Read Jonah 3:10

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

B. About When and What?

→ Read Isaiah 53:4-6, 11

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

¹¹After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

→ Read Isaiah 41:8-9

⁸"But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
you descendants of Abraham my friend,
⁹I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, 'You are my servant';
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

→ Read Isaiah 43:10

"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord,
"and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.

- Stats (Fee and Stuart, 182)
 - < 2% is messianic
 - < 5% describes new covenant age
 - < 1% describes events yet to come
 - See Ezek 25-29 (oracles against nations): fulfilled within decades

V. Reading Prophecy Responsibly: Strategies/Encouragement

A. Know the historical context

- Had to mean something to original hearers
- Not always included in prophetic literature. But much included in Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah.

B. Know Your Limits.

- You are not Jesus or Paul.
- You can't re-interpret passages with the freedom they do.

C. Look for God's heart

What is God concerned about?

D. Clarify the prophetic role: helping people process loss

- Jesus \leftrightarrow social justice
- Why did this happen? How can we prevent it from recurring?

VI. Next Lesson: Genesis

VII. Closing

Question: Read Genesis 1-2. Which came first? Plants or humans?