

**UNIT 6 - LESSON 5****THE RISE OF THE PROPHETS****1. WHAT IS A PROPHET?**

A prophet is a man who speaks on behalf of God.

It is necessary to understand that prophecy is not primarily telling about the future. The prophets were men of their time, and their messages were addressed primarily to the people of their day in relation to the circumstances of that day.

The book of Amos may be cited as a typical example of prophetic method. Amos denounces the society of his day as unjust and corrupt (Amos 2:6-7) and denounces the exploitation of the poor by the rich (Amos 8:5-6). He predicts that God's punishment will come to these people in the form of an earthquake and foreign conquest (Amos 8:8; 9:1).

Isaiah's prophecy may be cited as another example of prophetic prediction. In the face of the Syro-Ephraimite attack of 735-4 B.C. Isaiah assured King Ahaz that, before a child shortly to be born had outgrown his infancy, the threat to Judah would have vanished (Isaiah 7:14-16). In another prophecy he said that before an infant could learn to speak Judah's foes would have been defeated by Assyria (Isaiah 8:3-4).

Such prophecies contain predictive elements but the predictions deal with present events and relate them to the immediate future, often in a sequence of cause and effect. Prediction is but one element of prophecy. Amos was concerned primarily with the moral and religious life of his day.

2. THE ORIGINS OF THE PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS

Before the rise of the classical prophets there were several figures in Israel's history who could be termed prophetic antecedents. Although Abraham is once called a prophet (Gen. 20:7), the first person to display prophetic characteristics was Moses, who acted as God's spokesman to Israel. In Deuteronomy 18:15,22 God's word is that there will be raised up another prophet like Moses to be God's spokesman to Israel.

In the period of the Judges the leaders of Israel sometimes had a prophetic function in bringing God's word to the people. Examples of this are Deborah, who was called to be a prophetess (Judges 4:4) and Gideon (Judges 6 – 8).

Following the Judges and leading into the monarchy Samuel very clearly acted in a prophetic function as God's spokesman. It was to Samuel that Israel came when the nation wished to choose a king and it was Samuel who first warned the people of the future consequences of such an action and then, when they persisted, acted as God's representative in choosing Saul as king and anointing him for the office. Later Samuel told Saul that God had rejected him as king because of his disobedience and anointed David in his place. David in his turn was influenced by the prophet Nathan who rebuked him for his sin with Bathsheba and later played the leading part in securing the succession for Solomon against the claims of Adonijah.



UNIT 6 - LESSON 5

THE RISE OF THE PROPHETS (cont'd)

3. THE NINTH CENTURY PROPHETS OF ISRAEL

Under the monarchy prophets no longer enjoyed the political influence of Samuel, but their religious influence remained strong. In the 9th Century B.C. Elijah and Elisha were the leading representatives of what was evidently a strong class of professional prophets in Israel (11 Kings 2:3,5,7). Their importance is such that the editor of the book of Kings departs from his normal method of recording the history of the kings to include a body of material concerned with the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17 – 11 Kings 13). As these prophets did not leave written material, we are dependent on Kings for what we know of them.

Their prophetic ministry included warning kings that they had sinned against Yahweh (1 Kings 18:18) and opposing foreign worship promoted by prophets of false gods (1 Kings 18).

4. THE EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS OF ISRAEL

In the eighth century two figures emerged above all others as God's spokesmen; Hosea and Amos. They prophesied at a critical time in the nation's history for, before that century had ended, Israel was to be overcome by the Assyrians as the judgement of God upon the nation. These prophets were the first to leave written collections of their sayings and some history of their ministry. We will consider both of these prophets in more detail.

HOSEA

THE MAN

Hosea's prophetic ministry began during the latter years of Jeroboam II's reign. After Jeroboam's death the kingdom declined and in little more than 20 years it fell to Assyria. Hosea was probably dead before Israel's fall, but he prophesied in the face of coming judgement.

THE MESSAGE

Hosea's great message is the love of a God who suffers through the faithlessness of His people. In Hosea chapters 1-3 Israel is the faithless wife redeemed by her husband. The prophet's dramatic participation in these events helped him through his own sufferings and loss to enter into and proclaim more effectively God's love for Israel.

In Hosea chapter 12 Israel is portrayed as the child whom God has reared from infancy. How can God forsake his faithless son?



Hosea points to the religious evils of the nation (e.g. chs. 2,4) and warns Israel that judgement must come from God upon his faithless people. (e.g. chapter 9). The closing chapters speak of future blessing for a repentant nation, but are conditional on Israel's repentance.

AMOS

THE MAN

Amos was a herdsman from the southern kingdom of Judah, but was called by God to prophesy in Israel, where he would be regarded with suspicion and hostility as a foreigner (Amos 1:1, 7:10-17). He was not from one of the prophetic schools, but had responded to the direct call of God to the prophetic vocation. It is probable that after delivering his messages to Israel, Amos returned to Judah and resumed his former occupation.

THE MESSAGE

Amos proclaimed that true religion and righteousness are inseparable partners. The religion of Israel had lost its ethical content and was therefore displeasing to God.

The book begins with oracles of judgement upon the nations (Amos 1-2). Judah and Israel are included in the judgement and Israel is condemned for injustice, oppression of the poor, immorality and luxury. Israel's position of privilege bore a corresponding responsibility (Amos 3:1-2). Judgement must certainly follow sin (Amos 3:3-15). Israel has been warned through a series of minor judgements but has failed to repent. The nation must prepare to meet God (Amos 4:6-12). In Amos chapters 7-9 there are five visions of the coming judgement. After these proclamations of judgement the book concludes with hope of future messianic blessing (Amos 9:11-15).

QUESTION 1

Who was Elijah and through the reign of which kings did he live? Briefly describe one incident from his life.

QUESTION 2

What was the purpose of the three year drought? (1 Kings 17-19:3). How successful was it?

QUESTION 3

Read the book of Hosea. How did Hosea's experience help him to understand the suffering love of God?

QUESTION 4

Read the book of Amos. What were some of Israel's failings at this time?

QUESTION 5

What do you see as the main work of a typical Old Testament prophet?

SUGGESTED FURTHER QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY

- A. From reading about Israel at the time of Hosea, how do you think the Christian Church can "commit adultery"?