

Lesson 14

THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL



To lead the people of Israel God gave them kings. They protected the nation from enemies. Israel was blessed with wealth and prosperity. A great temple was built in Jerusalem. But their loyalty to God and his commands deteriorated. The king and his court began to exploit others. Forgetting the true God they started worshipping other gods. **Their lives became steeped in immorality. Prophets were people ordained to bring back to God the Israelites who went on with their lives as if God did not exist.**

The common meaning of the word 'prophet' is, **'the one who speaks for God'**. The prophets of Israel pointed out to the people their faults, accused them harshly and warned them that unless they repented, they would be punished. They exhorted people to leave the path of evil and come back to the path of goodness.

There are many prophets who exerted great influence in the history of Israel. The Old Testament contains books named after many of these prophets. The books-**Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel**-are comparatively large ones. Their mission in the history of Israel also was great. **These four are known as the great prophets.** The Bible also contains very small books named after the twelve other prophets. **These are, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.** These are known as the lesser prophets.

Israel also had some great prophets in whose names there are no books in the Bible. Chief among them are **Elijah and Elisha.** We read about them in the book of Kings. Israel had several other prophets as well. The disciples of these prophets collected the great proclamations of them and later wrote them down as books. We can also learn about a certain period in the history of Israel from the books of prophets. Among these prophets the most notable ones are the following.

The Greater Prophets

Elijah

King Ahab of Israel had built a temple for the god Baal and sacrificed two sons for this god. **Prophet Elijah warned the king that he would be punished for idolatry. He advised the king to repent and return to the Lord God.** Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal. Their sacrifice was not accepted. But when Elijah offered sacrifice, God responded. Fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and even the altar. Seeing this, the people fell on their faces and said, **"The LORD indeed is God! The LORD indeed is God!"** (1 Kings 18:39). Elijah was the prophet who in this way worked to strengthen the faith of Israel in the true God.

After Elijah the one who took his place was Elisha. God's love for the downtrodden was made clear through Elisha. Elisha performed many miracles.

Isaiah

He was from Jerusalem. Isaiah had experience of the supreme holiness of God through the revelations that God gave him. God used sanctifying fire to purify the tongue of Isaiah. He presents a nation that had neglected their God. He mourned that the people of Israel had disregarded God's Commandments and gone astray. The nation became riddled with injustice, treachery, immorality, falsehood and all sorts of evil. Isaiah's prophecies are full of admonitions against these.

Isaiah also prophesied about the advent of a savior who would redeem the whole world. Some other visions that we get from his prophecies are the infinite love of God, conversion and the days of hope.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was the prophet whom God had engaged to warn sinful Israelites about the imminent slavery awaiting them. Even when Jeremiah was a boy, God called him, sanctified and strengthened him and was sent to the people as a messenger from the Lord. The Lord touched the tongue of Jeremiah and said: **“Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over the nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and pull down; to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant”** (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

He spoke vehemently against the moral decay of the people and injustice in society. He told the people that God hates those who pretend to be pious externally but are full of falsehood, deceit and treachery at heart, He taught that the temple and sacrifices in the temple become meaningful only when justice, fellowship and mutual love find a place in society. He had to suffer many physical and mental hardships for being truthful to the message that God entrusted him with.

Ezekiel

When the people of Israel were in captivity in Babylon, prophet Ezekiel came with the mission of instilling hope in them. He instructed the people using prophecies, parables, symbols and imageries. **Some of his messages of hope were: Israel will grow as a new nation; a true shepherd shall come to lead them; the spirit of God shall give new life to Israel; a new temple shall be constructed; Glory of God shall be manifested again.**

Teachers of the Church

Prophets are people who tried to guide the people of the Old Testament through the right path. **In a similar way, the doctors of the church are people who give guidance to the New Testament people, the Church.** The children of the Church are supposed to abide by the teachings of Jesus in whom all prophecies came to their fulfillment. The apostles instructed the early Christians as to how these teachings are to be followed. We can see these clearly in the letters of St. Paul and others.

As the church instituted by Jesus grew up, some false ideas and teachings came up. Then some doctors of the Church came forward to correct these fallacies and to teach the right things. They could point out whenever there were mistakes regarding matters of faith, and lead the believers along the right path. **Chief among the doctors of the church were the 'fathers of the church' who lived in the early centuries. Irenaeus, Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Basil, Athanasius, Ephrem, Jerome, John Chrisostom, are prominent among these holy and wise men.** There were also other 'fathers' and 'doctors' of the church who, through their writings and speeches gave proper guidance to the children of the church.

In recent times, the Popes publish letters or encyclicals with the aim of strengthening the faith of the children of the church and clearing their doubts. All these contain guidance to lead a life according to the teachings of Jesus. When we understand them properly and live accordingly we shall be able to grow as the children of the Church.

Let us Pray

O God, who blessed Israel with prophets and teachers, help us to obey the directives given by the authorities of the Church.

Read the word of God and narrate

Narrate the miracle that prophet Elijah performed to prove that the Lord is God. (1 Kings 18:20-40).



Word of God for our Guidance

Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate (Amos 5:15).

My decision

I will follow the teachings of the Church that helps me to understand the path of God.

Let us do

Write the names of the prophets who guided the Israelites along the path of God.

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Let us find out the answer

1. With what purpose were the prophets of Israel appointed?
2. How did each prophet guide the people of Israel along the path of God?
3. What are the messages of hope that prophet Ezekiel gave to Israel?
4. Who are known as the teachers of the Church?
5. Write down the names of five fathers of the Church?