



ELIJAH AND ELISHA

MESSENGERS IN WORD AND DEED



True Prophet

- God's true prophets speak only the word of God to His people.
- Deuteronomy 18:14-22
- In Hebrew, there are a few words for “prophet.”
- *Nabi* is the most common and comes from the word meaning “to bubble up” as if from a fountain.

True Prophet

- *Ro'eh* and *chozeh* both mean “seer,” referring to how prophets often received God’s word in visions or dreams.
- In all cases, the biblical prophet is a messenger of God.
- He or she speaks God’s Word and only His Word to His people.

True Prophet

- Many people today hear the word “prophet” and think of someone who tells the future.
- That’s not the biblical prophets’ purpose. If it was part of the message,
- God revealed the future to them, but their primary purpose was to call God’s people from disobedience to repentance.

True Prophet

- In Deuteronomy 18, God addressed the abominable practices of the pagan nations that had been living in the Promised Land.
- They had their own “prophets” who practiced sorcery and divination, which God’s people were not allowed to do.
- Magic is an attempt to get God to do what you want, but God’s prophets told them what God wanted them to do.

True Prophet

- In the Old Testament world, “prophets” in every nation claimed to hear from the gods, so people would go to them for advice.
- In each nation, kings hired professional “prophets” as part of their royal team of counselors.
- Often those prophets just told them what they wanted to hear because they were being paid.

True Prophet

- Israel had professional prophets like the other nations, but God also raised up true prophets to speak hard truths to His people – to tell them how they were breaking His law and what would happen if they didn't repent.
- In the time of Jeremiah, the king had paid prophets who were telling him “deceptive words” that Jerusalem was invincible to destruction by Babylon because the temple was there.

True Prophet

- But Jeremiah told them the hard truth that they were about to be destroyed because of their unfaithfulness to God (Jeremiah 7).
- This is why many scholars call the prophets “covenant lawsuit mediators.”
- Their role was to hold the people accountable for the ways they had broken God’s covenant.



True Prophet

- Often, the kings didn't want to hear those messages, so they persecuted the prophets, beating them, throwing them in prison, even killing them.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples they would be persecuted like the prophets before them because they also brought a message calling people to repentance (Matthew 5:12).

True Prophet

- Jesus also told a parable describing how God had sent prophets to His people, whom they had beaten and ignored. Then He finally sent His Son and, instead of finally listening, they killed Him (Matthew 21:33–43).
- Sometimes they heard the prophet's message and turned back to God, but more often, they didn't. Yet God continued to pursue His people.

True Prophet

- The prophet's goal wasn't to condemn the people; it was to warn them. God doesn't want to punish His people.
- He wants them to repent, but He cannot let evil go unchecked (Exodus 34:6–7; Ezekiel 33:11).
- God's discipline isn't about punishment; it's about bringing people back to Him, a life of blessing, peace and joy.

God Sends a Prophet

- When God's people are not following Him, He sends a prophet.
- 1 Kings 16:29-34
- At this point in Israel's history, the nation had been divided more than 50 years – into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

God Sends a Prophet

- When God's people first entered the land, they didn't have a human king; God Himself was their king.
- Instead, God used judges, a blend of prophets and military leaders. During the period of the judges, Israel went through a repeating cycle:
- They worshipped other gods; things didn't go well; they cried out to God.

God Sends a Prophet

- God sent a judge who delivered them from their enemies.
- They lived in peace until that judge died and the cycle began again.
- This went on for almost 400 years until the people asked for a human king (1 Samuel 8).

God Sends a Prophet

- Once the monarchy began, they had Saul, then David, then Solomon.
- Then the kingdom split (1 Kings 12).
- The Southern Kingdom of Judah continued the line of David on their throne in Jerusalem, while Israel had a series of dynasties, often with violent takeovers.

The Two Kingdoms

Mt. Carmel

Sea of Galilee

Kingdom of Israel

Jerusalem

Kingdom of Judah



God Sends a Prophet

- From the beginning of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam led the people in idolatry.
- To keep them from going to Jerusalem (in Judah) to worship, he built golden calves and said they were their gods who had brought them out of Egypt.
- Each king continued this false worship.

God Sends a Prophet

- But when Ahab came to the throne, Scripture says he did more evil than any who had come before him.
- He built a temple to Baal and a sacred pole for Asherah.
- Now not only were the people worshipping a false version of God, they were also worshipping Canaanite gods.
- This is why God sent the prophet Elijah.

God Sends a Prophet

- During Jeroboam's reign, the "man of God" from Judah prophesied against the altar at Bethel and foretold Josiah's future destruction of it, which wouldn't happen for almost 300 years (1 Kings 13:1–5).
- The prophet Ahijah condemned King Jeroboam's idolatry and foretold the destruction of his house (1 Kings 14:1–16).

God Sends a Prophet

- During Baasha's reign, Jehu pronounced judgment on him for continuing Jeroboam's sins (1 Kings 16:1–4).
- The kings of Israel had already received clear prophetic warnings from God about their idolatry.
- At this point in 1 Kings, the prophets took center stage over the kings.

God Sends a Prophet

- There were prophets preaching to the kings of Judah (Southern Kingdom), because they were also committing idolatry.
- But Elijah and Elisha's ministry was just to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- At Mt. Carmel, Elijah confronted King Ahab and the 450 prophets of Baal.



God Sends a Prophet

- At the time of Ahab, it had been almost 600 years since God had rescued His people from slavery in Egypt.
- Throughout that time, they had been unfaithful to God much more often than they had been faithful.
- Even during Israel's "golden age," David committed grievous sins, and Solomon's reign ended in idolatry (1 Kings 11:1–8).

God Sends a Prophet

- The overwhelming message of the Old Testament is that God's people could not keep His covenant.
- They could not stay faithful.
- Through another prophet, God would explain what they really needed was a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26).

God Sends a Prophet

- Yet God remained faithful to Israel. He continued to pursue them and send prophets to call them back to Himself.
- Through another prophet, Hosea, God illustrated this with the metaphor of marriage: God was the faithful husband; Israel was the adulterous wife.
- Israel deserved divorce, yet God continued to pursue her, forgive her, and take her back.

God Sends a Prophet

- When we think of Elijah, most of us think of his miracles, but miracles were not just a show of power, they were part of the message.
- Performing miracles authenticated the prophets' message; it proved they were really sent from God.
- But the miracles also contributed to the message themselves.

God Sends a Prophet

- Elijah's miracles weren't random.
- They each said something significant about God's sovereignty, His faithfulness, His provision, His care for the vulnerable, and His love for the whole world.
- The message was the ministry. Both their words and deeds were part of the message.

- The Old Testament prophets point ahead to our need for Jesus.
- Acts 3:17-26
- Peter explained in this sermon in Acts 3 that all the prophets foretold Christ. Peter echoed the same message of the Old Testament prophets – repent and turn to God.

Prophets Point to Jesus

- Elijah and Elisha were “prophets like Moses” in that they confronted kings.
- They called the people back to the covenant; and they revealed God’s power through miracles.
- Like every prophet, Elijah and Elisha pointed ahead to Jesus as the ultimate prophet, not only in their words but also in their deeds.

Prophets Point to Jesus

- They foreshadowed Christ in what they said and did:
- Elijah raised a widow's son (1 Kings 17:17–24) as Jesus did (Luke 7:11–17).
- Elisha fed multitudes (2 Kings 4:42–44) as Jesus did (John 6).

Prophets Point to Jesus

- Elisha healed a leper (2 Kings 5:1–14) as Jesus did (Luke 17:11–19).
- Elijah and Elisha ministered to Gentiles (1 Kings 17:8–24; 2 Kings 5) as Jesus did (Matthew 8:5–13; 15:21–28).
- Jesus referred to Elijah and Elisha helping Gentiles (Luke 4:24–27) to explain God's mission to the whole world.

Prophets Point to Jesus

- In the last verses of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi promised Elijah would come before the Messiah to prepare the way (Malachi 4:5–6).
- John the Baptist was an Elijah-like figure, coming in the power and spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17).
- Elijah and Elisha pointed ahead to Jesus, but Jesus was greater.

Prophets Point to Jesus

- They spoke God's Word, but Jesus was God's Word made flesh.
- Elijah and Elisha were signposts, not the destination. They showed what God's kingdom looked like – but Jesus was the full reality.
- Jesus was the one who would finally give His people the new heart they needed to be able to follow God.

Resources

