

LESSON 18: THE PROPHETS

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 8	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Intermediate Level / Age 11	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Advanced Level / Age 14	:	Cover points 1 to 11

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned about how God sent prophets to the nation of Israel before and during the exile. These prophets communicated the desire of God for the people of Israel to repent from their idolatrous sins, and to promise the coming of a Saviour who would rescue them from their sins. In this lesson, we learn more about these prophets and how they communicated the mind of God to Israel.

Current lesson:

1. The prophets always came with one single message for the Israelites, that was, for Israel to repent because they had sinned against God and that God would send someone (a Saviour) to save them from their sins.
2. In the Bible, there are four major prophets and twelve minor prophets. They all lived in different periods of time, some before the exile, others during the exile, and yet others after the exile.

Four major prophets:

- Isaiah (pre-exilic, Judah)
- Jeremiah (pre-exilic, Judah)
- Ezekiel (exilic)
- Daniel (exilic)

Note to faith educators:

Introduce the students to any of these prophets and tell them some stories from the Bible about these prophets.

Twelve minor prophets:

- Hosea (pre-exilic, Israel)
- Amos (pre-exilic, Israel)
- Jonah (pre-exilic, Israel)
- Micah (pre-exilic, Judah)
- Nahum (pre-exilic, Judah)
- Habakkuk (pre-exilic, Judah)
- Zephaniah (pre-exilic, Judah)
- Joel (post-exilic)
- Obadiah (post-exilic)
- Haggai (post-exilic)
- Zechariah (post-exilic)
- Malachi (post-exilic)

3. The only difference between the major prophets and the minor prophets is the length of their books in the bible! Old Testament books of the major prophets are much longer than those of the minor prophets.
4. Whenever the prophets in the Old Testament spoke, they were speaking in the name of God. This means that their words were the very words of the Lord Himself. Because they were speaking the word of God, a lot of what these prophets said pricked people's consciences and made them dislike these prophets. Consequently, speaking the words of God constantly endangered the lives of the prophets and made them unpopular people. This is why prophets were often reluctant to accept such a calling. They did not choose to be prophets themselves, but were called to the role by God. Some of them have written in the Old Testament about how dramatic their call was.
5. Every prophet had his own interesting way of communicating God's warnings and rebuke to Israel. Here are three interesting examples:

Amos: For example, while a prophet like Isaiah spent his lifetime in this vocation, the prophet Amos was given only one mission. Amos was called to leave his shepherding work in the kingdom of Judah and travel north to Bethel in the kingdom of Israel to deliver God's stern warning to the people. Amos had an interesting way of delivering this warning. He prepared his audience by shouting out in the town square all kinds of condemnations and future punishments for neighbouring enemies of Israel. He had the crowd cheering and listening for the next victim of God's wrath as the tension increased. After the sixth nation was called out, people were straining to hear who the seventh would be because seven was the symbolic number of fullness and completion. This would be the most condemning judgment of all, and Amos turned it on Bethel. Naturally he was chased out of town, and he returned to his flock.

Hosea: As a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea discovered through his own life story a way to share his prophetic message with God's people. Hosea's wife, Gomer, was unfaithful to him, but he still loved her. Through his pain he came to understand how God could still love an unfaithful people. He used the comparison of adultery and idolatry to challenge the Israelites when they worshipped the Canaanite god Baal in fertility rites. He called them to return to fidelity, reminded them of their original covenant with God in the desert, and promised that God was still faithful.

Jeremiah: This prophet was the master of drama. He acted out his message in ways that people would clearly understand just by watching him. In Jeremiah 18:1-6 and 19:1-12, the prophet uses pottery to drive home his message. In Jeremiah 28, the prophet wears an oxen's yoke to signify how Jerusalem must submit to Babylon or be destroyed. Jeremiah's message caused him to be terribly persecuted.

6. Most of the time, the words of the prophets were meant to rebuke people for their sins and call them to repentance. At times, those who were being rebuked would listen and repent, and at other times, they did not. Sometimes their messages would sound really angry, which indicated God's anger with the recipients of the message; but even when God seemed to be

angry, the prophetic messages always reflected God's love for His people and His desire for them to love Him back.

7. The way God allowed Israel to be conquered and humiliated by foreign pagan powers reflects His disappointment and pain at the state of Israel's disobedience and rebellion. But despite disciplining them by allowing them to go through such a painful punishment, He did not abandon them during this time of exile. He continued sending His prophets to minister to them, to persuade them to repent, and to assure them that help was coming soon.
8. Just because God loves us, it does not mean that He is willing to abandon His standards of holiness and righteousness for our sakes. His intention is to raise us up to His perfection, not to reduce Himself to our standards of sinfulness and immorality. He is loving, but He is holy and perfect as well. He is gracious and merciful when we repent, but He is also just.
9. At times in our lives when we fail to live our Catholic lives the way we should, God may send some people along to chastise and rebuke us the way the prophets did for the nation of Israel. These people are like "prophets" in our lives, and we would do well to heed their warnings.
10. We should not be surprised when God disciplines us. Hebrews 12:7 reminds us that God disciplines us the way a father disciplines his children.
11. The gift of prophecy continues to exist in the Holy Catholic Church today, and "[t]he holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name" (*Lumen Gentium*, 12).

However, this prophetic office that is being described above refers to prophecy as witnessing to one's faith. This is rather different from prophecy as a specific charism, which is given to some members of the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ. In addition to that, there is also prophecy as a specific vocation or calling to be a prophet. A person who has the specific charism of prophecy is not necessarily called to be a prophet.

The term "prophecy" can therefore refer to three different aspects:

- A) All believers sharing in the prophetic office of Jesus Christ, which flows from their baptism, thereby being called to witness to their faith in the world;
- B) The specific charism of prophecy, which is given to some members of the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ;
- C) The vocation to be a prophet who is called by God to speak in His name.



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