

DEEPER

Daily Bible Study

Adult Sabbath School Lesson
Podcast, Study Notes, and Teacher Helps

The Cry of the Prophets

2019, Quarter 3, Lesson 5

Sabbath (July 27): The Purpose of Prophecy

In this week's lesson we look at several of the Old Testament prophets and investigate a central element of their message: warning God's people against the dangers of oppressing the needy, helpless, and poor. Today we begin our study by taking a slightly broader look at the purpose of Bible prophecy, and why God sends prophetic messages through His prophets.

Discussion Questions:

- Read the following verses and discuss what each reveals about God's purpose for prophecy:
 - Amos 3:7 (To reveal what God is doing now and will do in the future.)
 - John 14:29 (So that we might believe God's Word is true.)
 - John 13:19 (So that we might believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah.)
 - Isaiah 58:1 (To identify sin.)
 - 1 Corinthians 14:3 (To provide edification, exhortation, and comfort.)
 - 2 Chronicles 36:15,16 (To reveal the remedy for sin.)

Closing Thought

We may often be tempted to view certain prophecies—such as the apocalyptic time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation—as pertaining only to past and future world events. However, properly understood, all prophecies can teach us important lessons about God's intent and purposes for our lives, and provide practical counsel on living a godly life even in a sinful world. Consider this statement from the book *Prophets and Kings*:

From the rise and fall of nations as made plain in the books of Daniel and the Revelation, we need to learn how worthless is mere outward and worldly glory....Only that which is bound up with His purpose, and expresses His character, can endure. His principles are the only steadfast things our world knows. {PK 548.1}

A careful study of the working out of God's purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come, will help us to estimate at their true value things seen and things unseen, and to learn what is the true aim of life. Thus, viewing the things of time in the light of eternity, we may, like Daniel and his fellows, live for that which is true and noble and enduring. And learning in this life the principles of the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, that blessed kingdom which is to endure for ever and ever, we may be prepared at His coming to enter with Him into its possession. {PK 548.2}

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Sunday (July 28): The Recurring Call to Justice

One of the recurring subjects addressed by the Old Testament prophets is the call to justice. Much of God's instruction to Israel at Mt. Sinai dealt with the fair and just society that Israel was to demonstrate. When God's people repeatedly failed to achieve—or often even to strive for—this ideal, God sent prophets in an attempt to remind and reform the nation of their holy calling to treat each other, and strangers, with the principles of heaven. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the prophets dwelt on this subject so frequently. One study that summarized and surveyed the primary topic of every Bible chapter listed the top five subjects in this order: judgment (45 passages), character (36 passages), prophecy (34 passages), faith and trust (31 passages), and sin (29 passages). Clearly, justice and judgment are important issues with God.

Discussion Questions:

- Read 1 Samuel 8:10-18. Given God's warning to Israel, for what reasons do you think the people still wanted a king? (Answers will vary. One possible answer is given in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*: "It was with the full assent of the nation that Samuel had appointed his sons to office, but they did not prove themselves worthy of their father's choice. The Lord had, through Moses, given special directions to His people that the rulers of Israel should judge righteously, deal justly with the widow and the fatherless, and receive no bribes. But the sons of Samuel 'turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.' The sons of the prophet had not heeded the precepts which he had sought to impress upon their minds. They had not copied the pure, unselfish life of their father. The warning given to Eli had not exerted the influence upon the mind of Samuel that it should have done. He had been to some extent too indulgent with his sons, and the result was apparent in their character and life. The injustice of these judges caused much dissatisfaction, and a pretext was thus furnished for urging the change that had long been secretly desired. 'All the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations'" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 604).
- Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17. Considering the influence of Samuel's sons, and Eli's sons, is it surprising that the people wanted a king? (Perhaps not.) What warning and lesson can we draw from this history for us today, especially those in positions of spiritual leadership? (The spiritual leadership of a nation, church, or family is critically important. While each person ultimately has the right to exercise freedom of choice, the religious and spiritual leaders surrounding that person can dramatically influence this choice.)

Closing Thought

The Creator wrote the desire for justice on the heart of all intelligent beings. Tragically, Lucifer in heaven used this innate desire and twisted it to accomplish his own purposes, claiming that, under his leadership, true justice would be achieved in heaven and the universe:

He left the immediate presence of the Father, dissatisfied and filled with envy against Jesus Christ. Concealing his real purposes, he assembled the angelic host. He introduced his subject, which was himself. As one aggrieved, he related the preference God had given Jesus to the neglect of himself. He told them that henceforth all the sweet liberty the angels had enjoyed was at an end. For had

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not a ruler been appointed over them, to whom they from henceforth must yield servile honor? He stated to them that he had called them together to assure them that he no longer would submit to this invasion of his rights and theirs; that never would he again bow down to Christ; that he would take the honor upon himself which should have been conferred upon him, and would be the commander of all who would submit to follow him and obey his voice. {SR 14.2}

He promised them a new and better government than they then had, in which all would be freedom. {SR 16.1}

Monday (July 29): Amos

Amos, whose name literally means “burden-bearer,” was a prophet from Judah whom God sent to the northern ten kingdoms of Israel. Before being called as a prophet, Amos watched sheep and cared for sycamore trees in the small town of Tekoa at the edge of the Wilderness of Judah near the Dead Sea. Amos, though apparently part of the regular working class, was a gifted man:

“Although from one of the humbler walks of life, Amos was a man of natural intelligence, of a deeply religious bent, and with shrewd powers of observance. He was unassuming, but bold and fearless when called to bear witness against the evils of his day. The message he bore was graphic and power. Some have concluded from his mention of 5 of the neighboring nations that he may have traveled as far as Damascus and Egypt” (SDA Bible Dictionary [Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C, 1960], p. 39).

Amos bore his message during the prosperous yet morally backslidden reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah. His brief ministry, therefore, lasted from about 767 to 753 BC, a mere 40 years before the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom and the nation would cease to exist. His messages of warning formed part of God’s final plea to the doomed nation: “With the severest reproofs, God sought to arouse the impenitent nation to a realization of its imminent danger of utter destruction. Through Hosea and Amos He sent the ten tribes message after message, urging full and complete repentance, and threatening disaster as the result of continued transgression” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 279-280).

Discussion Questions

- Read the following passage, and then Romans 1:18-25. Are we in danger today of making similar mistakes as the Romans did and Israel did in its final year? (The world today has largely forgotten or ignored that God created it, and us. This mindset has also entered Christianity and is certainly contributing to moral decline within the church.)

The iniquity in Israel during the last half century before the Assyrian captivity was like that of the days of Noah, and of every other age when men have rejected God and have given themselves wholly to evil-doing. The exaltation of nature above the God of nature, the worship of the creature instead of the Creator, has always resulted in the grossest of evils. Thus when the people of Israel, in their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, paid supreme homage to the forces of nature, they severed their connection with all that is uplifting and ennobling, and fell an easy prey to temptation. With the defenses of the soul broken down, the misguided worshipers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart. {PK 281.4}

- Read Amos 5:21-23. What elements of “false worship” was Amos protesting against? (The forms of worship—sacrifices, feasts, music, etc.—were still practiced by Israel, but they were not accompanied by true godliness, nor by a desire to be like God in character. Compare 2 Timothy 3:1-5.)

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- Read Amos 5:24. What is the “cure” for this moral depravity? (To let judgment and righteousness run like “water.”) What does this imagery suggest in regards to God’s desire for the people individually and as a nation? (Answers will vary.)

Closing Thought

The challenge to keep the worship of God genuine and true was not confined to God’s people in the Old Testament. We today also have a duty and responsibility to keep our worship of God authentic and life-changing, for ourselves and for others:

True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree.—The Review and Herald, August 16, 1881. {ChS 96.5}

Tuesday (July 30): Micah

Micah is the sixth of the so-called minor prophets, and his message was directed largely at the southern kingdom of Judah. He was a contemporary with Isaiah and Hosea, and his ministry lasted from approximately 739 to 686 BC, about a century or a little more before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Like the other prophets, Micah bore a message calling the people back to God, to true worship, and to healthy and responsible relationships with each other.

“Whereas Isaiah reflects the culture of the capital city, Micah is more a man of the common people and sympathizes with them in their suffering at the hand of oppressive landlords and judges. He has been called the prophet of social justice, since he attacks the wrongs to which the poor were exposed at the hands of heartless aristocrats” (SDA Bible Dictionary [Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C., 1960], p. 713).

Discussion Questions:

- Read Micah 2:1, 2 and compare them to Proverbs 4:14-17. Discuss how the “wicked” (who are part of the professed people of God) act and work to oppress others. What words of warning in regards to these “wicked” can prevent us from becoming like them? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Micah 2:8-11. What specific types of sins are the professed people of God doing in Samaria and Jerusalem that brought condemnation from the Lord? Are the sins from that time related to sins in our time? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Micah 3:8-12. To whom are these verses directed? What types of sin are mentioned that couldn’t be applied to the whole nation but to a specific group? Do you think that today there are similar situations happening in God’s church? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Micah 4:1,2. What type of solution is the Lord giving to the evils of his people? Why are these verses so important in assuring the solution and the outcome of God’s people?
- Read Micah 4:6, 8. What message is given here in regards to God’s people and the end time church? (Answers will vary.)

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Micah 6:8 is both a declaration and a question: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what [is] good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Ask yourself, what type of walk do I have with the Lord? Is my walk in humility, realizing that I of myself cannot do anything? Do you believe that the Lord is able to give you the power to do justly, to have the ability to live in victory over the enemy and to obey the Lord through his enabling grace? Is your experience one of love and mercy to those around you, do you truly love mercy, and are you putting all your efforts to have the love of the Lord in your life, so others may see Jesus in you?

Wednesday (July 31): Ezekiel

Ezekiel was called to the prophetic office following his removal from Judah to Babylon with the second contingent of captives in 597 BC. Whereas Jeremiah served as a prophet for the Jews remaining in Jerusalem at this time, and God sent Daniel to witness in the king’s court, Ezekiel bore the prophetic message to those Jews who were living in exile in Babylon, and he identifies himself as “among the captives by the river of Chebar” (Ezekiel 1:1). His ministry, which lasted around 15 years, was centered on two primary purposes: explaining why God allowed the Jews’ captivity, and delivering promises of restoration following the prophesied 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Ezekiel 16:49. What is the iniquity of Sodom here described? How similar or how different is that to the condition in our society today? What warnings should God’s last day church take from this? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Ezekiel 34:2–10. What type of warning is here given to the shepherds or pastors of God’s people? What does God say are coming consequences of their spiritual neglect? Is this something that is happening again in our days? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Ezekiel 34:10-16. What does the Lord promise He will do for His sheep? How are the promises here described assure us that God is in control? Is this something that needs to happen now or can it wait until the future? (Answers will vary.)

Closing Thought

When looking at our present day condition, we could get discouraged at some of the mistakes and sins made by certain human leaders of God’s church. Yet we are to remember that the Lord is the one who has the control of His work and that He will take the reins in His own hands.

Consider this statement from the book *Testimonies to Ministers*:

“Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning.... God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness.” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 299)

Thursday (August 1): Isaiah

Isaiah, often called the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, worked during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, from approximately 739 to 701 BC. During his ministry the

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ten northern tribes went into captivity, and the southern kingdom of Judah continued to face severe spiritual challenges. Isaiah's name, which means "Yahweh saves," describes well the central theme of his book—deliverance. And the beauty of Isaiah's message is reflected in the beauty of his writing:

"Isaiah's unsurpassed beauty of style and expression make his book the literary masterpiece of all Hebrew literature. Isaiah was a gifted orator and poet as well as the prince of prophets, and in proclaiming his inspired message he employed a richer vocabulary than that found in any other OT book. A glossary of Isaiah would list more than 2,000 individual words. His exalted concept of the majesty, power, and character of God surpasses that reflected in the writings of the other prophets. Isaiah's understanding of the Messianic role of Israel, of the coming Messiah, and of the Messianic kingdom has earned him the honored title of Messianic prophet and gospel prophet" (SDA Bible Dictionary [Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C., 1960], p. 508).

Discussion Questions:

- Read Isaiah 1:11–26. Discuss the three conditions of God's people described in verses 11-18, verses 19-20, and verses 21-26. Why are not all three conditions the same? What differences do you see in the Lord's solution for each condition? What, in your own life, or your own church or community, might fall into one of these conditions? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Isaiah 3:12–15. What does it mean for children to be the oppressors and women to rule, and how does this leadership cause the people to err? Are there any lessons for us today in regards to leadership in God's church? Why is judgment the action that the Lord takes to bring a solution to this error? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Isaiah 5:1-7. What does this passage tell us in regards to the way the Lord worked for his vineyard (Israel), and yet they still produced wild grapes? What dangers are there for a similar outcome to the people of God today? Compare how the Lord expected good grapes which are judgment and righteousness, but instead He found oppression and a cry. What do you think that means? (Answers will vary.)

Closing Thought

The Lord desires to change us from a life of sin to a life of unity with him. But the only thing He cannot do is to force us to yield to Him. Thus we must "come and let us reason together" with the Lord and realize we must choose to yield to Him. Consider this statement from the book *Steps to Christ*:

The whole heart must be yielded to God, or the change can never be wrought in us by which we are to be restored to His likeness. By nature we are alienated from God.... God desires to heal us, to set us free. But since this requires an entire transformation, a renewing of our whole nature, we must yield ourselves wholly to Him. (*Steps to Christ*, p. 43)

Friday (July 26): The Cry of the Prophets

The cry of God's prophets has always been twofold—to live a life that blesses and helps others, and to shun and avoid evil. As James writes, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). This week we have focused on the prophets' call to live out the

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first of these purposes, or “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Today we will look briefly at the second half of the prophetic call, “to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Discussion Questions:

- Read the following passages from Old Testament prophets and discuss the focus of God’s message in each:
 - 1 Samuel 15:22 (God desires obedience more than sacrifice.)
 - Isaiah 1:11-17 (God desires to wash us, make us clean, and to live justly.)
 - Amos 5:21-24 (God desires us to live in righteousness.)
 - Malachi 2:1,7-9 (We should live in obedience to God’s commandments.)
- Read John 5:14 and John 8:11. How was the message of the Old Testament prophets echoed and exemplified in Christ’s life? (Jesus helped those in need, ministered to the sick, and uplifted the downtrodden. He also called those He healed to live a life of victory over sin through God’s power.)
- Read the following passages from New Testament prophets and discuss the focus of God’s message in each:
 - 1 Corinthians 15:34 (Awake to righteousness and sin not.)
 - 1 John 2:1 (God’s desire for us is to sin not.)
 - 1 Peter 4:1 (We should have the mind of Christ and cease from sin.)
 - Jude 24 (God is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before His presence.)

Closing Thought

Sin expresses itself in many ways—selfishness, unconcern, and oppression toward others—and also in the thoughts, words, actions, and habits of our personal lives. God’s prophetic message has always been directed to exposing and destroying the power of sin in both the public and private parts of our lives. To experience God’s cleansing power in our lives for the accomplishing of this purpose should be a priority in our lives. Consider this statement from the book *Steps to Christ*:

Do not put off the work of forsaking your sins and seeking purity of heart through Jesus. Here is where thousands upon thousands have erred to their eternal loss...Sin, however small it may be esteemed, can be indulged in only at the peril of infinite loss. What we do not overcome, will overcome us and work out our destruction. (*Steps to Christ*, p. 32)