

Goals

The Old Testament prophets were ordinary men and women handpicked by God to declare His messages to a stubborn and rebellious nation. In this unit, students will learn about the qualities, the mission and the messages of these prophets. Among the messages preached was the coming of the Messiah, the perfect servant of God. The Lord Jesus Christ will come to be the light of the world and liberate the captives. Our students will learn that we are the prophets of today. God has called us to be His spokesmen to an unbelieving and corrupt generation and to shine the light of the gospel in this dark world.

unit 1

Teacher Devotional

This is a story about four people named, Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it. Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody. Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Sounds familiar doesn't it? Sadly, this is the attitude of many Christians today when called upon to do the work of God. However, God has not given us a spirit that shrinks away, but one of courage and initiative. May God open our eyes to recognize the times that we live in and move us to venture into the fields of harvest.

And Let It Begin With Me

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" (Is 6:8)

Lesson 1

Overview of the Prophetic Books

Listed Scriptures

Deut 18:9-22

Lesson Aim

- 1) To enable students to have an overview of the role and mission of the Old Testament prophets.
- 2) To enable students to develop awareness that they are the prophets of this generation.
- 3) To enable students to learn that God will bestow upon us the necessary gifts and talents to accomplish His work.

Memory Verse

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." (Deut 18:15)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Jer 1-5

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



History of the Prophets

In the beginning, prophets were called and trained individually. Later, schools for prophets were established. Most of the schools seem to have been located in Ramaah, Gilgal, Jericho and Bethel (2 Kgs 2:3). Those who attended these schools were being trained to be spokesmen of God. These schools were not like schools today, but were a gathering of disciples around a certain leader (1 Sam 19:20).

Prophets Before Entering Canaan

Abraham (Gen 20:7)

Moses (Deut 18:15, 18)

Miriam (Ex 15:20)

Balaam (Num 22:9,11)

Prophets in the time of the Judges

Deborah (Judge 4:4)

Samuel (1 Sam 3:20)

Prophets in the time of the United Kingdom

David (Acts 2:30)

Gad (1 Sam 22:5)

Nathan (2 Sam 7:2)

Prophets during the Divided Kingdom (Israel)

Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs 11:29)

Ido the seer (2 Chron 9:29)

Jehu the son of Hanani (1 Kgs 6:1,7)

Elijah (1 Kgs 17:2)

Micaiah the son of Imlah (1 Kgs 22:7,8)

Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16)

Oded (2 Chron 28:9)

Prophets during the Divided Kingdom (Judah)

Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chron 12:5, 15)

Azariah the son of Oded (2 Chron 15:1,8)

Hanani the seer (2 Chron 16:7, 10)

Jahaziel the son of Zechariah (2 Chron 20:14)

Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs 22:14)

Urijah the son of Shemaiah (Jer 26:20)

Asaph the seer (2 Chron 29:30)

Table 1: Chronology of the Prophets Before the Fall of Samaria 722/1 B.C.

Prophet	Approximate Dates	Prophet of....	Kings of Judah	Related Verses	Kings of Israel	Related Verses
Obadiah	845		Joram	2 Kgs 8 2 Chron 21	Jehoram	2 Kgs 8-9 2 Chron 22
Joel	840-830	Judah	Joash	2 Kgs 11-13 2 Chron 22-24	Jehu	2 Kgs 9-10 2 Chron 22
Jonah	790-770	Israel	Amaziah and Uzziah (coregency Assyrian king: Shalmaneser IV)	2 Kgs 14 2 Chron 25-26	Jeroboam II	2 Kgs 14-15
Hosea	760-720	Israel	Uzziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah	2 Kgs 15-16 2 Chron 27-32	Jeroboam II Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea	2 Kgs 15-17
Amos	780-740	Israel	Uzziah	2 Chron 26	Jeroboam II	2 Kgs 14-15
Isaiah	745-695	Judah	Uzziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah Manasseh	2 Kgs 18-21 2 Chron 27-32	Pekah Hoshea	2 Kgs 15-17
Micah	740-700	Judah	Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah	2 Kgs 18-20 2 Chron 27-32	Pekah Hoshea	2 Kgs 15-17

Table 2: Chronology of the Prophets After the Fall of Samaria 722/1 B.C.

Prophet	Approximate Dates	Prophet of....	Kings of Judah	Foreign Kings	Related Verses
Nahum	630-610	Judah	Manasseh	Assyria: Ashurbanipal	2 Kgs 21 2 Chron 33
Zephaniah	739-608	Judah	Josiah		2 Kgs 22-23 2 Chron 34-36
Jeremiah	626-586	Judah	Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiachin Zedekiah Exile governor: Gedaliah	Babylon: Nabopolassar Nebuchadnezzar	2 Kgs 22-25 2 Chron 34-36
Habakkuk	606-596	Judah	Jehoiakim	Babylon: Nabopolassar	2 Kgs 24 2 Chron 36
Daniel	606-534	Judah	Jehoiakim Jehoiachin Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar Neriglissar, Labashi-marduk Evil-Merodach Nabonidas Medo-Persia: Cyrus	2 Kgs 24-26 2 Chron 36
Ezekiel	592-570	Judah	Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar	2 Kgs 25 2 Chron 36
Haggai	520-516	Judah	Governor: Zerubbabel	Medo-Persia: Darius I	Book of Ezra
Zechariah	520-516	Judah	Governor: Zerubbabel	Medo-Persia: Darius I	Book of Ezra
Malachi	450-400	Judah	Governor: Nehemiah	Medo-Persia: Darius II	Book of Nehemiah



Along the Path

A water bearer in India had two large pots, hung on each end of a pole that he carried across his neck. One pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house. The other pot had a crack in it and arrived only half full. For two years, this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments – perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor, cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am shamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old, cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old, cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again, the pot, apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took

advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house."

Each of us has our own unique makeup – flaws and all. But if we will allow it, the Lord will use us to grace His Father's table. Don't be afraid of our flaws, weaknesses, or inadequacies. Through the power of God, we find strength to fulfill the purpose and mission that God has for each of our lives.

BIBLE STUDY



Part 1

The Period of the Prophets



A. The Prophets

The future – that vast uncharted sea of unknown, holding joy or terror, comfort or pain, love or loneliness. Some people fear the days to come; others consult fortune tellers or mediums. But tomorrow's story is known only to God and to those special messengers, called prophets. The prophets and prophetesses were handpicked by God, men and women just like us.

The prophets played a very important role in Israelite society. The prophetic period started during the time of the Judges and lasted till the end of the Old Testament. This time frame was over 1000 years. However, the prophets were mostly active for 400 years between 800 B.C. and 400 B.C., around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 589 B.C. The chart below shows the prophets who worked before, during and after the exile. It also shows the audience that the prophets declared their messages to. These prophecies and messages have been recorded and compiled into what is known as the prophetic books. The Bible consists of sixteen books written by the prophets. These are divided into two main categories known as the major and minor prophetic books. These books are categorized based on the length of the book and not on the importance of the work. The major prophetic books consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The 12 minor prophetic books comprise of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Prophets Before the Exile				Exile Prophets		Post-Exilic Prophets
To Israel	To Nineveh	To Edom	To Judah	To Jews in Babylon	To the Babylonians	To the returned remnants
Amos Hosea	Jonah Nahum	Obadiah	Joel Isaiah Micah Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk	Ezekiel	Daniel	Haggai Zechariah Malachi



B. The Names for the Prophets

a. Prophet

The term "prophet" was first applied to Abraham (Gen 20:7). Moses (Deut 34:10), Aaron (Ex 7:1), and Deborah (Judg 4:4) were also known as prophets of God. The Hebrew word for prophet is nabi, which comes from a root meaning "to bubble forth, as from a fountain," hence "to utter." Thus the Hebrew word for prophet means "to announce, declarer." A prophet was therefore a spokesman of God. They were responsible for delivering the messages that they received from God and communicated God's mind and will to men (Ex 7:1; 4:12; Jer 1:7, 9; Deut 18:18-20).

b. Seer

In the time of Samuel two other Hebrew words, ro'eh and hozeh were used to designate the prophet, both meaning "one who sees" or "seer." The word ro'eh is first found in 1 Samuel 9:9 and occurs seven times in reference to Samuel. Prophets such as Zadok (2 Sam 15:27), Gath (2 Sam 24:11), Samuel (1 Chron 26:28), Iddo (2 Sam 12:15), Jehu (2 Chron 19:2) and Amos (Amos 7:12) were also known as seers. This was a name sometimes applied to the prophets because of the visions granted to them and their ability to perceive spiritual matters. In 1 Chronicles 29:29 all these three words are used: "Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi), Gad the seer" (hozeh).

c. Watchman

The Hebrew word zophim meaning "watchman" applied also to a prophet (Ezek 3:17; 33:7). A watchman's duty was to stand guard on the city wall and

blow the trumpet whenever danger approached. By the same token, the prophets were the spiritual watchmen of Israel who were responsible for declaring God's word, warning and judgment to the people.

d. Man of God

Moses (Deut 33:1; 18:18), Shemaiah (1 Kgs 12:22), Samuel, (1 Sam 9:6), Elijah (2 Kgs 1:9), Elisha (2 Kgs 6:6), and David (2 Chron 8:14) were all men of God. A person who was a man of God was a servant of God with godly qualities.



C. The Responsibilities of a Prophet

Prophets were the ambassadors of God. Their functions were as follows:

- a. Show the people of God "their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa 58:1; Ezek 22:2; 43:10; Mic 3:8).
- b. Call the people to repentance and obedience to God.
- c. Warn the people of impending divine judgment and disasters (2 Sam 24:11-13; Jer 25:8-12).
- d. Prophecy about the future of individuals and nations (1 Kgs 11:29-31; Jer 29:10; 1 Kgs 17:1).
- e. Convey the message of consolation and pardon (Isa 40:1-2).
- f. Bless (2 Kgs 4:8-16).
- g. Anoint and advise kings and guide state affairs (1 Kgs 19:15; 2 Kgs 9:1-3; 2 Kgs 3).
- h. Prophecy concerning the birth, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension.



D. How God Reveals His Will to His Prophet

A prophecy is a divine message inspired by God and conveyed to men. It concerns the things that shall take place in the future and the end time. Prophecies came to the prophets through the following ways:

- a. The prophets spoke through the movement of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20,21).
- b. God spoke face to face with the prophets (Ex 33:11).
- c. God conveyed His message verbally (1 Sam 3:4; Jer 1:4; 2:1; Hos 1:2; Joel 1:1).
- d. God conveyed His will and plan through dreams and visions (Num 12:6; Job 3:15-17; Ps 89:19; Ezek 1:1; Dan 7:1).



Part 2

The Qualities of a Prophet



A. Loved and Obeyed God

The prophets magnified the Lord in all things, and completely obeyed the will of God even at the risk of losing their lives. John 14:21 reminds us that those who love the Lord will keep His commands. This is easy when things are smooth sailing. But when challenges and difficulties arise, our obedience and love for the Lord is challenged. Prophets such as Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Hosea were among those who completely denied their own will and desires to accomplish God's work. They spoke what God wanted them to speak and went wherever God wanted them to go. Nevertheless, there were prophets who were not wholly obedient to God. Jonah, Balaam, Gehazi and the false prophets are examples of workers of God who could not decide which master to follow. Because they followed their own desires, they were ultimately punished by God (2 Pet 2:15; 2 Kgs 5:20-27). In these last days, we are all prophets of God, entrusted with the mission of proclaiming the good news to the unsaved. Let us value our noble status and carry out our mission faithfully.



B. Carried Out Their Mission Courageously

The prophets worked in some of the darkest times of the history of Israel. God describes Israel as a rebellious house whose hearts were hardened (Ezek 2). They had forsaken God and had turned to idols and all kinds of evil practices. Under such a chaotic and sinful environment, the prophets were sent to speak words of judgment, warning and doom to kings, religious leaders and the masses. The prophets criticized the policies and practices of evil kings, making them appear like traitors, and the people hated them for accusing them of their idolatrous lifestyles. Even if their message resulted in execution, punishment or alienation, the prophets did not beat around the bush, nor did they try to soften the truth. They conveyed God's words faithfully, clearly and boldly. Sometimes, we are afraid of certain consequences and so we disguise the truth or keep silent. But to be faithful workers of God, we need to imitate the courage of these prophets in standing up for righteousness and declaring the truth. Oftentimes, because of the prophet's timely warning, an entire nation returned to God and avoided God's full wrath (1 Kgs 18:1-46; Dan 4:27; 5:17ff; Jer 28).



C. Cautious in Word and Deed

The prophets were chosen to be the watchmen of their generation. They had to rebuke the people of their sins, warn them of judgment and turn the hearts of the people back to God. To do this, the prophets had to lead holy lives and have close communion with God. In Isaiah 56:10, God rebuked the leaders who were the watchmen of the nation as being blind and without knowledge. They were dumb dogs who didn't bark, who laid around and loved to sleep. God also rejected the false prophets who prophesied out of their own minds and filled the people with vain hopes. Such prophets led ungodly and corrupt lives and their purpose was to seek their own benefits (Jer 23:9-22). Consequently, they received no revelations from God and were rejected by Him. To be effective prophets of God, we need to be holy in word and deed, leading lives that are in line with the message we preach.



D. Served With True Sincerity and Love

Although the prophets often brought stern and harsh messages to the rebellious nation, the prophets were men full of emotion and love for their country. In the same way that the Lord wept while He rebuked the people of Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44), the prophets often declared God's messages with feelings of grief and compassion. Jeremiah is widely known as the "weeping prophet" who for 40 years wept for the sins of the people and the suffering that they were very soon to encounter. Habakkuk was a prophet whose heart was filled with doubt and sadness at the injustice that was to befall his people. It was these feelings of love and compassion for their countrymen that carried these prophets through some of the most formidable moments of their ministry.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



- 1 Who are the present day prophets?
- 2 What kind of responsibilities did Old Testament prophets have?
- 3 Does the church today bear similar responsibilities?
- 4 What are some of the merits the prophets possessed?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Here I Am! Send Me!

In Alexander Irvine's novel *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*, an old woman went to comfort a neighbor whose boy lay dead. She laid her hand on her friend's head and said, "Ah woman. God isn't a printed book to be carried aroun' by a man in fine clothes, nor a cross danglin' at the watch chain of a priest. God takes a hand wherever He can find it. Sometimes He takes a bishop's hand and lays it on a child's hand in benediction, the hand of a doctor to relieve pain, the hand of a mother to guide a child, and sometimes He takes the hand of a poor woman like me to give comfort to a neighbor. But they're all hands touched by His Spirit, and His Spirit is everywhere lookin' for His hands to use."

In each generation, God looks for hands, bodies and minds with which to make a difference and fulfill His divine mission. He looks for people just like you and me. The men and women that God chose were not perfect in any sense of the word. In fact they had their doubts, fears, inadequacies and weaknesses. But for the most part, each rose to meet God's challenge. God can use anyone no matter how insignificant s/he feels. God uses ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary work.

In the following exercise, look up the Bible references and write in your own words the different responses of those whom God chose to carry out His important missions. Consider how their responses relate us today.

a. Moses

Bible Reference: Exodus 3:7-4:16

Mission: To lead Israel out of bondage to the Promised Land

Reaction to God's calling:

1. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh ...?" (Ex 3:11) – "God, I'm a nobody."
2. "They will not believe me or listen to my voice" (Ex 4:1) – "My words have no power."
3. "I am not eloquent. I never have been and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me ..." (Ex 4:10) – "I'm a lousy speaker. See, even You can't change me."
4. "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person" (Ex 4:13) – "I suggest You send someone else."

God's response:

With each question that Moses asked, God gave an answer.

1. "I will be a sign for you that I have sent you."
2. "God said to Moses, "I am who I am. Say to Israel, 'I Am has sent me to you.'"
3. God gave Moses 3 signs to be used to convince the Israelites: the rod becomes a snake, the hand becomes leprous, and the water changes to blood. "Who has made man's mouth? Now go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."
4. God's anger was kindled against Moses.
5. God finally sent Aaron to be Moses' spokesman.

Application:

Sometimes the job that God has asked us to do seems too difficult. Like Moses, we try our best to excuse ourselves because we feel totally inadequate. These feelings become so strong that we can't even trust God's ability to help us. Moses had to deal with his deep sense of inadequacy many times. When we face such situations remember that God doesn't expect us to do it alone. With every doubt or query, God has the answer. He will offer us assurance and resources to complete the work. And if the job involves some of our weak areas, we can trust that God will provide words, strength, courage and ability where it is needed.

b. Isaiah

Bible reference: Is 1:1; 6:1-8

Mission: To call the nation of Judah back to God

Reaction to God's calling:

1. "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is 6:4)– The vision of God in His glory and power caused Isaiah to see his own sinfulness.
2. "Here am I! Send me" (Is 6:8).

God's response:

With Isaiah's response, God immediately sent Isaiah to speak to the rebellious people.

Application:

Before we accept God's call to speak for Him, we need to purify ourselves for His work, so that we can truly represent God. When the Lord calls us, He doesn't twist our arms to make us do something we don't want to do. The choice is ours. Isaiah took the initiative and responded actively to God's call.

c. Jeremiah

Bible reference: Jeremiah 1:1-10; 17-19

Mission: To warn the kings, false prophets and people of Judah before the captivity.

Reaction to God's calling:

1. "I don't know how to speak, for I am only a youth" – Jeremiah thought he was too young and inexperienced to be God's spokesman for the world.
2. Jeremiah was afraid because he knew the kind of people the Israelites were.

God's response:

1. "Whoever God sends, we must go, whatever God commands, we should speak" (Jer 1:6) – we need to be obedient to God's commands.
2. "I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls. Even though the kings, princes and priests, and people come against you, they will not prevail because I am with you to deliver you" (Jer 1:8).

Application:

Often we struggle to take on new challenges because we feel we are too young for the job and have inadequate ability, training or experience. The task may seem overwhelming and we consequently develop a sense of fear. We must never allow feelings of inadequacy to keep us from obeying God's call. God will be with us just as He promised to be with Jeremiah. If God gives us a job to do, He will provide all that we need to do it.

d. Jonah

Bible Reference: Jonah 1:1-3,4,17; 3:1-3

Mission: To go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire and call its people to repentance

Reaction to God's calling:

1. Jonah knew God had a specific job for him but he didn't want to do it.
2. Jonah fled to Tarshish instead.

God's response:

To accomplish the mission and to correct Jonah's erroneous attitude, God caused several miracles to happen: He caused a great wind to blow upon the sea, a great fish to swallow up Jonah, a plant to give Jonah shade, a worm to attack the plant and a sultry east wind to blow.

Application:

1. As a prophet Jonah was obligated to obey God's word, but he had tried to escape his responsibilities. What God requires of His servants is obedience

and faithfulness.

2. Jonah's personal reasons prevented him from obeying God's call. Don't let our personal prejudices or agenda hinder us from doing God's work. To fulfill God's will we need to deny ourselves.

e. Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus

Bible Reference: Luke 1:26-38

Mission: To be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ

Reaction to God's calling:

1. Mary was greatly troubled at the saying and considered what sort of greeting this might be (Lk 1:29).
2. "How shall this be for I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34)
3. "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).
4. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:46-48).

Application:

In a Jewish marriage, a couple became engaged when two families agreed to their union. When a public announcement was made, the couple became "betrothed." Betrothal was considered binding and could be broken only by death or divorce. Because Mary and Joseph were betrothed, Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had the right to divorce her and the Jewish authorities could have her stoned to death (Deut 22:23,24). Mary must have been aware of these implications. She would have thought about being rejected by Joseph, considered an outcast by society or stoned to death. The task that she was called to do would not bring success, fame or favor: rather, it would lead to much pain. And yet, Mary rejoiced in God and gave of herself completely. Because of her obedience, the world was to be blessed with the Messiah and she would receive tremendous blessing.

f. What do you think might be your response if God asked you to be a prophet for this generation? (Check those that apply)

1. Shock and disbelief
2. Honored
3. Feel totally incapable
4. Reject the work
5. Unwilling, but compelled
6. Give all kinds of excuses to get out of it

7. Suggest someone else

8. Others: please specify _____

If God asked you to serve Him, what things would prevent you from saying, "Here am I. Send me!" (Check those that apply)

1. Hard to deny own will
2. Less pay
3. Hardship
4. Being away from the family
5. Can't enjoy the things of the world
6. Less freedom to do what I enjoy doing
7. Too much responsibility
8. Having to pray and read the Bible too often
9. Others: please specify _____

g. How can we prepare ourselves for God's calling?

h. God wants us to serve Him where we are and with what we have. What simple things can we do to make a difference in the lives of those around us?

Suggested Reading:

The Spirit of the Minor Prophets, Holy Spirit Times, December 1999.

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



Everyone is born and made differently, but in the beautiful plan of God, all of us can become good workers of God. May God help us be sensitive to His will and give us the courage to say, "Here I am, Lord. Send me!"