

The Prophets

It is interesting at this point to note that the Hebrew Old Testament, used by the Jews, has a somewhat different layout to the English Bible. Broadly, the Hebrew Bible is split into three sections, identified by Jesus when he said *“everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* Luke 24:44.

We have now reached the section called **the Prophets**, comprising the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel plus 12 shorter or “minor” prophets (in the Jewish Bible Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are included as well).

What was a “**prophet**”? The answer is that through Old Testament history God raised up individuals, men and sometimes women, who would speak and write His messages to mankind. These people were driven by the power of God (“the Holy Spirit”). They spoke or wrote in their own words, but the result was what God wanted them to say. As we have seen, the prophets often made predictions that are outside the ability of unaided human brains, so that the speaker was authenticated as being inspired by God. Here is what Peter the Apostle writes about them –

“... no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

Sometimes the prophets were loath to continue with their work because of the hostile reception they got when they condemned the evil ways of their countrymen. **Jeremiah** at one point says

“... the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.”

He wants to go away and hide. But, he continues,

“If I say, ‘I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” Jeremiah 20:8, 9

He was simply compelled to speak the word of the Lord. Sadly, many of the prophets of the Lord met their death because of their unpopularity, and false prophets speaking smooth things took their place.

The long line of prophets came to an end after the Second Temple was built by **Zerubbabel** in the restoration from Babylon, and for three hundred years before Christ *“the sun went down on the prophets”*, as **Micah** predicted. There was no more direct word from the Lord. Then, dramatically, everything changed. With the birth of Jesus a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit began. He came not only speaking but also living out in full the ideals set out in the Law of Moses and the Old Testament prophets. This is how the Letter to the Hebrews puts it –

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son ...” Hebrews 1:1

Jesus was the greatest of the prophets. After he ascended to heaven he passed on to the early church the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, there was a whole class of gifted men and women in the First Century who are called prophets or prophetesses. The New Testament writers are among them, with the same divine inspiration as Isaiah and Jeremiah.

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