

## **“Hear O’ Israel**

### *An Introduction to the Prophets of Israel*

Did you ever say to your children: **“Listen!”** “I want you to hear what I’m telling you.” So, **“Listen!”** “Why would you say that to them?” “For what reason?” (You want them to hear, to internalize, and to follow through with what you are saying) In the New Testament, Jesus said: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” This also has to do with the role of the Prophet.

Since we are beginning a study of the “Minor Prophets”—the last 12 books in the Old Testament, I want to give some background of the role of the prophets and *show how their role is the most significant role in the history of Israel in the Old Testament.*

## **Background of Prophets**

***The Prophets in the Old Testament are associated with the Mosaic Covenant.*** This was the covenant God made with the Israelites through Moses. It was a “conditional covenant” in which God committed to love, protect and bless the Israelites. They in turn covenanted to *live* in the Promised Land *based* on the Covenant stipulations.

God had rescued them from their bondage in Egypt to *form them into a Nation*. He then revealed His plan for them to Moses and had him convey this to the people. We find what God said in Exodus :

### **God’s Plan Revealed to Moses**

*“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey (listen) to me and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole world is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Read Exodus (19:4-6))*

“They said: *“We will do everything the Lord has said.”* So, the people prepared to meet God to establish this covenant. They stood at the base of Mt. Sinai; and God’s presence was at the top of the mountain. They heard thunder and the sound of a trumpet; they saw lightening, and fire and smoke. God’s presence was awesome. Recalling their response, Moses wrote:

## The Peoples Response to God's Voice

*“When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders, came to me. And you said, ‘The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen a man can live even if God speaks with him. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. . . Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey (do). (Deut. 5:23-25, 27)*

God had spoken the Ten Commandments; but they were afraid and rejected hearing more. Then God called Moses up Mt. Sinai to explain how to live in the Land He was giving them to possess. They were to live based on the Ten Commandments and God began to explain to Moses what that meant. Here's some of what God taught Moses.

## How to Live in the Land

### 1<sup>st</sup>—The Ten Commandments meaning amplified.

#### Example: The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment

God took each of the Ten Commandments and amplified its meaning. A simple example: the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, “Honor your father and mother.” This is only a “word” or a “thesis statement” for explaining authority figures. *As the commandment was expanded to show a fuller meaning for the Israelites going into the Promised Land, instruction was given for a variety of authorities, such as: Judges, Kings, Priests, Prophets. He gave an explanation of how those authorities were to function and the response the Israelites were to have to the authorities.*

### 2<sup>nd</sup>—God's Character

The Israelites had been living in a pagan culture; surrounded by pagan cultures—and they were going to a land full of pagan nations: Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites. They needed to know how to live in the Land based on God's character as He described Himself to Moses.

*“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. . .”  
(Exodus 34:6)*

This description of God's true character is repeated over and over in the Old Testament and proven by His actions.

That means, God is showing them what it's like to live in the Land and be compassionate, gracious, loving, and forgiving. He was guiding them to be a distinct nation—that could represent Him to the world.

### 3<sup>rd</sup>—Blessings and Cursings

Not only did God give them guidance for understanding how to live, He gave them the “blessing and cursings”—sounds threatening but, He was showing them signs of how to *know* they were “*doing well*” and how to *know* they were “*not doing well*.”

#### “Doing well”

##### Prosperity

Abundance—womb, livestock, crops  
Rain

##### Peace

Peace with surrounding countries  
Defeat enemies

##### Progeny

Long life  
Live long in the land

#### “Not doing well”

##### Drought

No rain  
Famine

##### Defeat

Defeated by enemies  
Exiled

##### Diseases

Plagues

Understanding this concept influenced the messages of the minor prophets and became the heart of their messages to show covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness..

Collectively, the people at Sinai had chosen to have a mediator (Moses) to *listen* to God's voice and to speak to them for God. “You go and **listen to God** and then tell us what God said.” What an opportunity they missed, because when Moses spent time with God, we read that his face reflected the glory of God so much he had to cover his face—it shone so much. Moses was God's first prophet to Israel.

### 4<sup>th</sup>—More prophets to come. . .

God also told Moses there would be a need for more prophets when Moses is no longer with them and they are living in the land. Here's how this is explained:

*“The nations you will dispossess **listen** to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must **listen** to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Sinai on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not **hear** the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die.” . . . I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command Him.” (Deut. 18:14-19)*

**Listening** and **hearing** God was (and is) an issue. God, in His grace, made a provision for prophets to help the Israelites live successfully in the Land and to help them get back on track when they strayed from hearing, internalizing, and following through on His Word.

## The Prophetic Office in Israel Developed in Three Stages

### 1. “Leader prophets” – pre-monarchic prophecy

There were a few “leader prophets”—beginning with Moses to the beginning of the United Monarchy.\* Moses is the best example of a “leader prophet.” “Deborah”, a Judge, (Judges 4:4) provided leadership during the time of the Judges. Samuel was a prophet but also provided essential leadership during the transition to the United Monarchy. This period was from the time of Moses to King Saul. \*(Explain United Monarchy and Divided Monarchy on Timeline.)

### 2. “Advisor prophets” --pre-classical prophecy

This type of prophecy was much like that of prophets in other ancient near eastern countries. These prophets acted as an *advisor* to the king. But in Israel, they would be held to a standard of *100% accuracy* in their prophecy.

The message of these “advisor prophets” dealt with the circumstances of the king rather than the circumstances of the people of the nation. For example, after Samuel anointed Saul as king, *his role* changes from a “leader prophet” to become an “advisor prophet” to Saul.:

**An example--1 Samuel 15:22-23.** Samuel had said to Saul, “*I am the one the Lord saent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them. . . . But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.’*” Saul was successful in the battle, but he had not acted faithfully. On his way to meet Samuel at Gilgal (a prearranged location), Saul was so full of himself that he built a monument to himself and began sacrificing the spared animals—when Samuel arrived and said the following:

*“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in **obeying** the voice of the LORD?  
To **obey** is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.  
For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
He has rejected you as king.”* 1 Samuel 15:22-2

Sacrificing was not the issue. Samuel was concerned Saul had not acted faithfully. God had already spoken to Samuel about this and Samuel was grieved about what he knew must be done.

The word translated “obey” in Hebrew is **Shma** to “hear,” or “listen.” To “hear” (**Shma**) in Hebrew doesn’t have a comparable word in English. It really means—to hear, to internalize, and to follow through. “Obey” has been used by every translation I know for “**Shma**”, but it does not always include the attitude of “**Shma**.”

*This was a turning point in Israel—from this event forward, the prophets are clearly above all others—even above the King.* The prophet was God’s voice—and the king was to listen to the prophet! When kings refused to submit to God’s prophets, *the king had a problem!* Think of what happened to Saul—his kingdom was given to “a man after God’s own heart.” (Saul never saw Samuel again.)

*Nathan also was an “advisor prophet” to David—Remember Nathan’s confrontation with David concerning Bathsheba.*

### 3. “Writing prophets” – Classical prophecy

The most familiar phase of Israelite prophecy is known as “classical prophecy”—the writing prophets. The pre-classical prophets announced God’s agenda for the king, but the classical prophets announced God’s agenda for the people.

The writing prophets began around 900 BC during the Divided Kingdom. Both Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) were involved in all kinds of violations of the Mosaic Covenant—especially idolatry. The prophets spoke for God calling the people back to covenant faithfulness and reminding them of God’s ultimate plan—that only *He* could bring about.

**What ancient Near Eastern prophet could write what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 46:9-11:**

*Remember the former things, those of long ago;  
I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like me.  
I make known the end from the beginning,  
from ancient times, what is still to come.  
I say: My purpose will stand,  
and I will do all that I please.  
From the east I summon a bird of prey;  
from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose.  
What I have said, that will I bring about;  
What I have planned, that I will do.*

Therefore, there were *no* counterparts to classical prophets in other ancient cultures. No other ancient Near Eastern culture had a *Sovereign God*. So, there would be *no point* to prophesying their intentions. They could not bring them to pass.

## The Wisdom of the Prophets

The wisdom of the prophets was not new! Their wisdom primarily came from the *blessings and cursings* passages in the book of Deuteronomy.

- The prophets reminded the people what “blessings” (doing well) they would receive if they were faithful to the Covenant. *What were some of these blessings? Deut.28*  
*Prosperity                      Peace                      Progeny*
- When the prophets are encouraging faithfulness—or to return to faithfulness—these are the things they refer to as the results of faithfulness.

*An example: Amos 9:13-15*

*“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman  
and the planter by the one treading grapes.  
New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from the hills.  
I will bring back my exiled people Israel;  
They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.  
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;  
They will make gardens and eat their fruit.  
I will plant Israel in their own land,  
Never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.”*

- The prophets reminded the people what “cursings” (not doing well) they would have if they continued in a pattern of unfaithfulness to the Covenant. *What are some of the cursings?*  
*Drought                      Defeat                      Diseases*

*An example:*

*Amos 4:6: “I gave you empty stomach in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me.*

*4:7 “I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away.  
I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another.  
one field had rain; another had none and dried up.*

4:8 *People staggered from town to town for water  
but did not get enough to drink,  
yet you have not returned to me.*

4:9 *“Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards,  
I struck them with blight and mildew.  
Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees,  
Yet you did not return to me.*

4:10 *“I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt,  
I killed your young men with the sword,  
along with your captured horses.  
I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps,  
Yet you have not returned to me. . . . .*

**The Prophets were extremely important!**

The prophets led the way in understanding the *mind of God*. **Their role was the most significant role in the history of Israel**

Jesus came and said: *“He who has ears to hear. . .let him hear!”*

## ***Flow of History in Israel During the Time of the Prophets***

### *1. Time of "leader prophets" – pre-monarchic prophets*

<b>1440 BC</b>	<b>Moses</b>
<b>1400 BC</b>	<b>Joshua</b>
<b>300 years</b>	<b>Judges</b>

### *2. Time of "advisor prophets" – pre-classical prophets*

#### **United Monarchy (1050-930 BC)**

**Saul**  
**David**  
**Solomon**

### *3. Time of "writing prophets" – classical prophets*

#### **Divided Kingdom (930-586 BC)**

<b>930-722 BC</b>	<b>Northern Kingdom (Israel)</b>
<b>930-586 BC</b>	<b>Southern Kingdom (Judah)</b>