

Message of the Prophets

A couple months ago I did a sermon on Unity's general view of the Bible and at the end asked what people wanted to talk about related to the Bible. Someone said they wanted to know more about the prophets. I suspect we have a somewhat romanticized view of prophets, maybe influenced by old paintings. Probably not influenced by actually reading the Bible stories. We think it might be cool to be a prophet. A prophet is sort of a "course correction". How many of us **want** to be told we're doing life wrong? The sayings of the prophet are not so much, "I see romance and wealth in your future." That's a fortune teller. A prophet's message is more like, "You are on the road to hell and here's what it's going to be like when you get there." We want a fortune teller, not a prophet.

So who are the prophets in the Bible? Depends on who you ask. Often we learn there are 4 Major prophets and 12 Minor prophets, but that's just based on who got a book in the Bible named after them and how long is their book. The Major prophets are generally Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The Minor prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The first thing you might notice is that there are no women—although the names might be a little tricky figuring out gender. Most scholars add multiple prophets to the list including Moses, Abraham, Elijah and Elisha. The Jewish Talmud adds Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, Esther, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Most scholars also agree that Daniel was entirely fictional. The book of Daniel was written to encourage the enslaved Israelites during a difficult time and to extol what was possible with obedience to God. So I guess a fictional prophet is not too hard to consider given how we interpret the whole Bible metaphysically.

In the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary, Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore says that a prophet represents a "teacher, one who receives the inspiration of Spirit and an understanding of spiritual law and imparts it to others. A prophet, in individual consciousness is a thought that is in contact with Spirit, that receives revelations directly from the Holy Spirit; it knows and understands divine law and its working, therefore it warns and instructs other thoughts."

So a prophet represents divine inspiration that includes an understanding of spiritual law and applies that understanding to take corrective action within our own thoughts. Or also to take that understanding of spiritual law and share with others how to work in harmony with spiritual law.

So out of all the prophets there are, I'm going to talk about just two prophets today: Jonah and Ezekiel. We'll start with Ezekiel, because I want to talk about a good prophet before I talk about the bad prophet. Bet you didn't know there were **bad** prophets! OK, stay awake!

We'll start with Ezekiel. Maybe you know the old song, "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel". The Bible is full of some odd visual representations that rival any science-fiction movies and Ezekiel is no exception. Chapter one begins: "In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." Four headed creatures with wings and fire and wheels within wheels. The four heads were a lion, an ox, an eagle and a human.

Fillmore doesn't get too caught up in trying to interpret **all** of this but says "Ezekiel means "God Strengthens" and represents that in us which relies on Spirit and encourages us to place our full trust in Jehovah that the spiritual I AM in us may become the keeper of our sheep, or our spiritual thoughts." Now prophets need strengthening because as I mentioned in the beginning, they usually are "course correctors" and people are not thrilled to receive their message. Fillmore says, "The power of God's presence threw him down upon his face, where he remained for a time. But God called him to stand up and commanded him to go to Israel and carry a message to the people there. God encouraged him not to be afraid when trials came." In the second chapter of Ezekiel, this is the conversation with God: "The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house." Briers, thorns and scorpions does not sound like an ideal situation. Prophets have to be made of sturdy stuff.

Fillmore says that Ezekiel's experience, weird hallucinations notwithstanding, represents our spiritual growth. In the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary Fillmore describes the process this way: "When we touch the God consciousness we realize the presence of a mighty power and we fall down. We feel insignificant and only able to worship. But we must go forth. We become living messages that will be more eloquent."

Let me explain that part of Ezekiel's story involves being told that Ezekiel would personally experience God's rebuke to the people and they would see that suffering in Ezekiel. So Fillmore goes on to suggest: "God strengthens the one who seeks Spirit in the inner chamber and finds it. God fills that one with an urge that cannot be suppressed." Fillmore then talks about the work to be done. I interpret this to mean there is great work to be done in the world and within the individual: for each of us to know the reality of spiritual life and to live in harmony with divine law is both a process unfolding within us and in how we show up in the world. Of course in Ezekiel and in the Old Testament in general this harmony with divine law is spoken about as obedience to God. And in Unity we understand metaphysically, all the vengeance attributed to God and God's wrath is really just the consequences of our choices.

But what about the part about getting up and going forth as living messages? The Fillmores referred to Unity as "practical Christianity". Everyday living spirituality. Maybe you can relate to moments when you had an AHA that stunned you with insight, reverence and awe. The revelation of the idea of divinity within us and the power we have available through our connection to spirit can stop us in our tracks. It seems safer to stay bowed in worship, quiet in meditation and safely withdrawn into this spirituality. Ezekiel stands for the idea that we must put this spiritual connection into practice. Maybe some of us come to spirituality thinking it will make everything easy and the world will stop presenting us with briars and thorns and scorpions. Maybe we think the briars and thorns in our own internal, mind chatter will cease. It doesn't work that way. Rather spirituality strengthens us, guides us, and feeds our soul as we make our way through the scorpions. We have those prophetic ideas that arise and advise us, "Hey, you are out of spiritual harmony there" and it is up to us to implement the course correction, no matter how much resistance we encounter within ourselves or outside us.

So how can there be a bad prophet? It's not an easy job but it appears that Jonah messed it up just after committing himself to Spirit. His first assignment was Nineveh and Jonah says, "You have **got** to be kidding". Sometimes it happens that we commit ourselves to something and the very first thing we have to do sort of convinces us did not think this through. We commit to giving up sweets and *that very Sunday* fellowship is all sweets—and some of your favorites. This is going to be harder than you thought! So we step back. Jonah could not get out of his assignment that easily. He tries to flee in a boat but gets tossed overboard in a storm and swallowed by a big fish. Doesn't say whale. That was someone's interpretation of a big fish.

The fish spits him out—where?—right there on the shores of Nineveh. Shaking the fish spit off, Jonah buckles down and preaches hell fire and damnation to everyone sinning and carrying on. And guess what? It worked! Nineveh shaped up, turned their lives around and were spared the damnation. Jonah should be happy, right? Nope. God finds Jonah off pouting and angry about the lack of damnation and fiery endings. What?!!

Metaphysically Fillmore says Jonah represents the “prophetic state of mind, which, if used without divine love, fixes one in bondage to belief in a law of cause and effect wherein error sowing cannot be redeemed by forgiveness. Jonah signifies an error sense of justice and right in individual consciousness that prophesies evil to the evildoer and condemns him without mercy or saving grace because love and mercy do not enter into that one’s idea of justice and Truth.” One final problem is Jonah’s ego. Fillmore calls Jonah’s tantrum a “shortcoming” of “those who seek to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit yet are ambitious for the fulfilling of the prophecies.” I find Jonah fascinating and a tale of caution. First, try not to resist the calling of Spirit. When Fillmore says there is an urging placed within us, you ignore it at your own peril. Secondly, the idea that course correction involves mercy, grace and forgiveness. The course correction in our consciousness plays out in two distinct ways for me. First, in my individual consciousness and how I view myself and the truth I hold in my beliefs about the ultimate reality. Secondly, in my consciousness that directs how I show up in the world and interact with others. Jonah’s story invites me to ask two different questions: What cannot I forgive myself for; and who around me has done something I cannot forgive? This attitude of not forgiving also refuses to see positive changes or positive behavior. A huge piece of Myrtle Fillmore’s healing was **forgiving herself** for years of condemning her body, believing in inherited sickness and not taking action. I wonder if that forgiveness work was missing and she continued to berate herself for the past, if the nightly meditations and affirmations would have been fully successful. We’ll never know because that’s not what happened.

So what might be the take-away’s about prophets?

1. We all have a prophetic faculty in our minds. As we make connection with Divine Mind, we receive insight and guidance for course corrections we might need to make.

2. When we have the courage to overcome the challenges presented by voices in our heads and outside us and take action to shift our thoughts and beliefs, we find ourselves more aligned and in harmony with peace and prosperity.

3. The action we take calls us to not only shift our thoughts but grounded in that new awareness, move our hands and feet and let our voices be heard. There is a time to be still and silent and there is a time to a living message out in the world.

4. A prophetic message is for our unfolding consciousness. We cannot condemn ourselves or others for failing to know better sooner or failing to do the good we know in every moment. We see with the eyes of our heart. We are not prideful or arrogant about any insight that comes to our awareness. We keep love and grace as companions to every spiritual faculty and power.

Do not fear the prophet in you. Accept the call to be more of who you were created to be and accept the course correction.