

SCHOOL OF THE WORD
PROPHETS
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Prophets 1

Programme

- ▶ Prophets *now* and prophets *then* (February 27)
- ▶ Reading a prophet for living today (March 6)
- ▶ Hosea: justice and love (March 13)
- ▶ Jeremiah: the great spiritual master (March 27)
- ▶ Isaiah: The Suffering Servant Songs (April 3)

Sequence

- ▶ Importance of prophetic voices
- ▶ Examples from our time
- ▶ Use in the Lectionary
- ▶ Who are the prophets in the Bible?
- ▶ Where do we find them?
- ▶ Royal “system” v. Prophetic “system”
- ▶ Cultural and historical contexts: Amos
- ▶ Conversation

Importance of prophetic voices

- ▶ In society
- ▶ In politics
- ▶ In faith communities

Examples from our time

- ▶ The church established by Jesus “was to be a community of brothers and sisters, free of all domination”, he said. Jesus warned against “replicating the relationships of power that existed in the wider society”.
- ▶ “Whatever little theology I have, I learnt from homeless people,” he said. Listening to them had “changed my understanding of who God is and what God wants”.
- ▶ He said the wealth, power and status of the church, and its “fear of losing them”, may have filtered “understanding of the message of Jesus”. Such fear was seen recently in the church authorities’ response to child sexual abuse.
- ▶ He recalled that “for the religious authorities at the time of Jesus, God was a God of the law” and that “the church, too, has often proclaimed a God of the law”.
- ▶ It meant “anyone, like Jesus, dissident priests, organisations like the ACP who challenge this understanding of God, is seen therefore as a threat . . . to be got rid of”.
- ▶ “Jesus . . . was just ‘the carpenter’s son,’ one of the laity no less” who “was moved by the suffering of his people. And Jesus proclaimed a different God, a God of compassion”.
- ▶ Also: Jorge Bergoglio

Use in the Lectionary

- ▶ Genesis: Lent 1, Lent 2, Easter Vigil 1, Easter Vigil 2, Pentecost Vigil,
- ▶ Exodus: Lent 3, Holy Thursday, Easter Vigil 3, Pentecost Vigil, Trinity, 11A, 30A
- ▶ Leviticus: 7A
- ▶ Numbers: Jan 1
- ▶ Deuteronomy: Corpus Christi, 9A
- ▶ 1 Samuel: Lent 4,

- ▶ 1 Kings: 17A, 19A,
- ▶ 2 Kings: 13A
- ▶ Proverbs: 33A
- ▶ Wisdom: 16A, 32A
- ▶ Sirach: Christmas 2, Holy Family, 6A, 24A

- ▶ Isaiah: Advent 1, Advent 2, Advent 3, Advent 4, Xmas Vigil, Xmas Midnight, Xmas Dawn, Xmas Day, Epiphany, Baptism, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil 4, Easter Vigil 5, 2A, 3A, 5A, 8A, 15A, 18A, 20A, 21A, 25A, 27A, 28A, 29A
- ▶ Jeremiah: 12A, 22A
- ▶ Baruch: Easter Vigil 6
- ▶ Ezekiel: Lent 5, Easter Vigil 7, Pentecost Vigil, 26A, 23A, 34A
- ▶ Hosea: 10A
- ▶ Joel: Pentecost Vigil
- ▶ Zephaniah: 4A
- ▶ Zechariah: 14A
- ▶ Malachi: 31A

- ▶ Pentateuch: 17
- ▶ Historical books: 3
- ▶ Prophets: 40
(*Isaiah*: 26)
- ▶ Wisdom: 7
- ▶ Total: 67 readings from the Old Testament

Who are the prophets in the Bible?

- ▶ Canon: 2 Kings, affirms that God had “warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer” (2 Kgs 17:13).
- ▶ Author: the actual written books which have come down to us. “Thus says the Lord...”
- ▶ Redaction: who wrote down, edited and represented the words of the prophets?

- ▶ “Prophet” — A Greek word = to speak on behalf of
- ▶ Nabi - etc (see next slide)
- ▶ Samuel, Elijah, Elisha - eventually David, Moses, Abraham
- ▶ Also women prophets: Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Isaiah’s anonymous wife (Isa 8:3), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14), and Noadiah (Neh 6:14)
- ▶ Finally, “our” writing prophets (overleaf)

- ▶ הֹזֵה (hōzeh, “seer”) E.g. Amos
- ▶ רֹאֵה (rō’eh, “diviner”) E.g. chiefly Samuel
- ▶ הָאֱלֹהִים שְׂאִי (’is ha’ēlōhīm, “man of God”) E.g. Elijah and Elisha
- ▶ נָבִיא (nābî’, “prophet”) Unclear in root meaning, but seems to function as someone called. E.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel.
- ▶ cf. Now it used to be in Israel that whenever someone went to inquire of God he would say, “Come on, let’s go to the seer.” For today’s prophet used to be called a seer. (1 Sam 9:9)

- ▶ The four “major”: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, (Daniel)
- ▶ The twelve minor: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- ▶ But what about... Daniel, Baruch and Lamentations?

Where do we find them?

Different canons: Jewish, Protestant and Catholic (download charts from bibleidiagrams.com)

Royal “system” v. Prophetic “system” (Walter Brueggemann)

- ▶ Prophets emerge at critical moments

- ▶ Royal system v. the prophetic system
- ▶ Royal system: reassurance (power, taxes, soldiers)
- ▶ Prophetic system: unconventional wisdom (freedom of thought, integrity, truth-telling)
- ▶ Prophets are called to ministry
- ▶ Prophets use speech and gesture

Cultural and historical contexts: Amos

(download charts from bibleidiagrams.com)

- ▶ Amos: first writing prophet
- ▶ From Tekoa (near Bethlehem)
- ▶ Had a secular career
- ▶ 7: 14 “not a prophet; not (even) a son of a prophet.”
- ▶ The reigns of Jeroboam II (786–746 BCE) in Israel and Uzziah (783–742) in Judah.
- ▶ Great economic growth plus exploitation / injustice

- a. The growth of urban centres.
- b. Militarisation.
- c. Extraction of surplus.
- d. Life-style of the upper class
- e. Trade and commerce.
- f. Market condition.
- g. Indebtedness of the peasants.
- h. Role of the creditors.
- i. Role of judicial courts.

Amos 7:7 This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. **8** And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said,

“See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
9 the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Amos 7:10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. **11** For thus Amos has said,

‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.’”

12 And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; **13** but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Amos 7:14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, **15** and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

16 “Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.
You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’”

17 Therefore thus says the Lord:
‘Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parcelled out by line;

you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.”

Conversation