



LESSON:
PROPHETS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

I don't understand what qualifies someone to be a prophet.

TAKEAWAY

A prophet speaks the word of God.

BIBLE PASSAGES

Deuteronomy 18:15-22
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Amos 5

KEY VERSE**Deuteronomy 18:22**

"If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it."

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Handbooks
- Bibles
- DVD
- Markers
- Butcher paper
- Pencils
- Tape

Background Information

In the Old Testament, prophets were appointed by God (often at a very young age) to speak on behalf of God. Prophets informed the kings about what God wanted for the people—advice the kings didn't always follow. There was no official prophet selection process, which often led to some significant skepticism about the credentials of those who claimed to speak for God.

The context for the rise of the prophets is laid out in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, which details the transition from Moses' leadership among the people to the leadership of others. Moses was so central to the development and identity of God's people that there was likely a great deal of fear and anxiety about what would become of them after he died. This passage is God's reassurance that, just as God raised up Moses, God will call others to speak to the people on God's behalf. As with Moses, the prophets' words would be a sign of God's presence in and among the people.

For the most part, prophets existed on the margins of the community, yet they were still integrally connected to the community. They weren't charismatic figures who popped up out of nowhere seeking glory or recognition. They were committed to the restoration of the people of God. Their sole purpose was to compel and shape the people of God for covenantal fidelity by speaking the word of God. That means the prophets stood within a tradition that ultimately gets picked up in the New Testament with Jesus.

Today, we think of prophets as being a little off. And they might have been. But the prophets were also people of imagination. They inspired hope and offered new ways of seeing otherwise bleak circumstances. They deconstructed narratives, and in their place offered stories of restoration and renewal. Their laments expressed the darkness of life in captivity and pointed to the light of God's voice and God's presence. Prophets imagined a new day, where God's intention for the world would be realized. Prophets had the courage to call out problems for what they were, but also the audacity to hope in the face of it all.

What Students Need to Know . . .

- As leadership of the Israelites passed from Moses to others, God provided prophets to continue to guide the people. So while they didn't lead like Moses or rule like kings, they did serve a crucial role in the history of God's people. The words of the prophets acted like a kind of prism, shifting the perception of reality ever so slightly to reveal something distinct, new, and ultimately more true.
- Another metaphor could be the prophet as gardener. Prophets till and retill the "soil" of people's hearts and lives, turning it over and over again to let what is ultimately lasting and good emerge and grow. Their disruptive presence is always motivated by the intention that something good will grow out of what they have disrupted. This is a good rule of thumb even today as we listen to people who claim to speak for God: What do their words point to—justice, mercy, and peace, or something else? Students live in a world where the church's public sway is decreasing in a number of ways. However, prophets had significant authority—it was important that the people be able to trust the words of the prophets as messages from God.
- True prophets were not necessarily easy to recognize. In fact, the only way to know if a prophet was truly from God was after the fact—if the prophet's words came true!

Where They Might Struggle . . .

- The modern view of prophets can create a bias against taking the biblical prophets seriously. The term gets used in all sorts of circles—sports, the church, politics—and it usually means very little. Help students understand that the ancient prophets had a specific role in their communities. They never worked for their own gain but always for the good of the community.
- There is some strange stuff in the prophetic books of the Bible—images of death and violence and destruction that rival the most graphic video games and movies. While this lesson won't dive into all of that, students might come across it on their own. Help them understand that the prophets intended to be intense and shocking. These were warnings that turning away from God would have devastating consequences. There was no sugarcoating that.
- There's a great opportunity here to invite students to recognize that they have a role as prophets in their communities as well. While they aren't necessarily called out to speak for God, they do have a voice and a vision for what it could mean to be the people of God in this day. Encourage them to think about the ways they can bring their ideas to life and build up their community of faith.

About the Video . . .

Being a prophet was a mixed bag. On the one hand, you had a direct pipeline to God and got to advise royalty on all things religious. On the other hand, people often didn't believe you or like what you had to say, leaving you lonely and overwhelmed. So why would anyone say yes to this job offer? What would make someone willing to risk everything to be God's voice to the people?

Lesson Notes . . .

Icebreaker

NO TALKIES!

1. Write down numbers 1–20 (or however many students you have) on individual pieces of paper, then hand one out to each student. If your group is larger than thirty people or so, put students into small groups first and give each group a number. Tell them not to reveal their numbers to anyone.
2. Tell students that without talking or holding up fingers, they need to put themselves in order, from 1 to 20 (or whatever number you ended with). They can stomp or clap or jump or use whatever non-talking, non-finger-holding-upping techniques they need in order to communicate their numbers.
3. Once they get in order, talk about what it feels like to communicate in a way that feels awkward or unconventional.

Into the Story

Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Discuss:

1. Why is it necessary for God to raise up a prophet in this situation?
2. What does God promise the people about the prophets?
3. Why would the people be frightened by a false prophet?

Now, turn to Ezekiel 37:1-14 and have a volunteer read the passage aloud.

1. What do you think “dry bones” is supposed to mean?
2. Why would God want Ezekiel to prophesy to those bones?
3. What did Ezekiel’s prophecy mean?

Questions to Get the Conversation Going

- Do prophets speak the word of God or the words of God?
- How do we know if somebody is a prophet?
- Does God still use/need prophets in the world today?

Throughout the Old Testament, God used prophets to call out rulers, nations, and communities for their disobedience and to warn them of the consequences for continuing to move away from God. These weren't exactly easy messages to proclaim. Nevertheless, the prophets courageously communicated God's word to the people.

What does it mean to tell the truth? And not only the truth, but God's truth? If the prophets are any indication, it isn't a popular practice. How do we know what God wants and how we're supposed to communicate it to the world?

Prophets

God's courageous communicators

In the Old Testament, God used prophets to call out rulers, nations, and communities for their disobedience and to warn them of the consequences of continuing to move away from God. These weren't exactly easy messages to proclaim. Nevertheless, the prophets courageously communicated God's word to the people.

Deuteronomy 18:22

"If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken in presumptuously, so not be frightened by it."

Messages on Display

INSERT
PHRASE
HERE

If you had to make one statement about God, what would it be? Write it graffiti style on the bricks.

Look at any statements that received a "1" and ask: Why do they make you uncomfortable? Have students choose a phrase they gave a "5" and write it on the sandwich board.

PROPHETS-R-US

POSITION: Prophet
SUPERVISOR: The Lord
TERMS:
• Working hours: 24/7/365
• Annual salary: \$1,000
• Vacation: Not a day
REQUIREMENTS:
• Prepared to begin at a moment's notice.
• Passion for God's word and strict adherence to it.
• Member of God's covenant community.
• Ability to handle intense situations and criticism.
 ACCEPT DECLINE

For each of the phrases below, fill in one of the boxes between 1 and 5, with 1 indicating you'd be totally uncomfortable displaying the phrase on a sign and 5 indicating you'd be totally comfortable displaying the phrase on a sign.

	No way, I'd wear that!		I'd totally wear that!		
	1	2	3	4	5
WORLD PEACE	<input type="checkbox"/>				
KETCHUP IS RED	<input type="checkbox"/>				
TURN FROM YOUR EVIL WAYS	<input type="checkbox"/>				
GOD LOVES YOU	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I AM A SINNER	<input type="checkbox"/>				
LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Why would the prophet want to do this? Do you think they had a choice?

So who were these prophets, and why would anyone believe what they had to say?

What are reasons to accept this job? What are reasons to decline it?

Have a student read the pivot statement located at the bottom of the page and gauge the group's thoughts on where the lesson might go. Remember: You want tension! Allow your students to live with the questions posed on the first page until after the video has played and you begin exploring the infographic.



The prophets of the Bible are a diverse bunch, but they do share some similarities. This infographic will help students get a sense of how someone is called to this prophetic role and get them thinking about the ways we can discern God's words for us in the midst of a lot of noise. Spend some time with each of the four prophets shown here, then move to the outside edges to push a little deeper into the history of the prophets.

How would a prophet know if it was God who was "calling"? Does God call us?

This is another opportunity to highlight the women who often get forgotten when we talk about the prophets. While none of these women got a book of her own, talk about how their voices might have brought something unique to God's messages to the people.

Do you think God still calls people in the ways depicted in these stories? How might somebody hear God's call today?

Which of these four attributes would be the easiest for you to spot in a prophet? The hardest? If you were a prophet yourself, which attribute would be the easiest for you to recognize in God's interaction with you? The hardest?

How to Spot a Prophet

The Bible contains a bunch of examples of prophets. But in general, if you can identify the four attributes listed on these pages, you just might have spotted yourself a real-life, genuine prophet.

1 CALLING

Prophets are ordinary, unremarkable people chosen or "called" by God to become God's spokespeople. This calling endowed the prophets with a special message and mission from God.

2 CONTENT

Prophets always spoke on behalf of God—never themselves. The messages they relayed were sometimes harsh—challenging injustice and warning God's covenant people of the consequences of disobedience. But they also communicated a message of grace—that is, the abiding goodness of God's promises.

Not Just a Great Club

Although the Bible has become a man's world, after a female prophet, there are references to at least six female prophets: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah, and Isaiah's wife. They are cited as prophets in the Old Testament, as is Anna in the Gospel of Luke.

ISAIAH 6:5-9

HEY, HA SHEM, I SEE THAT YOU CALLED ...

JEREMIAH 16:14-18; 29:10-14, 31:1-7

The call stories of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all follow a similar pattern. Draw a line connecting each passage from Isaiah's call story with the part of the call story it represents.

A DIVINE ENCOUNTER	ISAIAH 6:1-13
AN INTRODUCTION OR GREETING	ISAIAH 6:5
AN OBJECTION TO THE CALL	ISAIAH 6:1-2
A COMMISSIONING STATEMENT	ISAIAH 6:9-10
A SIGN OF EMPowerMENT	ISAIAH 6:3-4

What is a message you think everyone in your school would benefit from hearing? Write it on the speaker's sound lines below.

Does "benefit" always mean a message will be received willingly?



Want More?

- The prophetic books are a whole section of the Bible. Invite students to turn to the table of contents in their Bibles and bracket the prophetic books (Isaiah to Malachi). Look for familiar stories!
- Is there a public place or gathering area in your community that often draws street preachers? Using what you've discussed in today's lesson about prophets, ask students to argue for and against the idea that street preachers are modern-day prophets. (If your community doesn't have regular street preachers, print off pictures of some from the Internet.)
- If you have the time, and if other church members are in the building while you're there, send students to ask them to complete a simple task—patting their heads while rubbing their stomachs, saying a tongue twister, reciting the alphabet backward. Direct some students to act without saying this is for class or that they've been sent by their leaders. Have others explain that this is for class or that the youth leader sent them. Then get everyone back together to report their findings. How hard was

How do you think the prophets might have felt about often having to relay bad news to their people? What about when they got to see the repentance of the people?

TURN OR BURN!

3 COMMUNITY
While prophets sometimes condemned entire nations, they almost always spoke to communities to which they belonged. In other words, whatever message God wanted the people to hear was also meant for the prophet speaking on God's behalf.

4 CONSEQUENCES
Because the messages prophets conveyed on behalf of God often included colorful descriptions of the disasters that would befall the people if they didn't change their ways, prophets were regularly scorned and even rejected by their own communities.

Amos Air

Major or Minor?
Scholars often make a distinction between the Bible's "major" and "minor" prophets, based on the length of the books, not their importance. In fact, the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are each longer than the combined length of all the Minor Prophets. (Some of the "minor" prophets know you have probably heard of them.)

Major
ISAIAH JEREMIAH
EZEKIEL DANIEL

Minor
HOSEA MICAH JONAH
JOEL ZEPHANIAH
AMOS HAGGAI MALACHI
NAHUM ZEPHANIAH
OBADIAH HABAKKUK

Non-prophets
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns the people about false prophets. Thankfully, Jesus tells us how to identify false prophets. Read *Matthew 7:15-20* and write the gateway in the space below. (Hint: it's mentioned twice.)

EZEKIEL 3:1-11

DANIEL 6:3-12, 14-26

SLAM!

List three things that might happen if you told the truth all the time. Write your answers in the arrow.

IF  **THEN**

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What would it be like to prophesy a condemnation to a community you are a part of, like a sports team or school? How would that change the way you spoke?

Why does the truth sometimes cause problems? Is there a time when a lie would be better?

it to get people to listen to these "prophets"? What differences did they find when they had some "authority" to back them up?

- Cue up the old-school DC Talk song "Jesus Freak." What does it mean today? Does it resonate?

LEADER TIP

Modern-Day Prophets.

Before class, it might be helpful for you to brainstorm a list of people who are doing good work in the world. Many students will have no problem choosing for themselves, but a list might spark an interest outside of the obvious choices.

It's easy to call somebody a prophet, even though the requirements are staggeringly high. Still, there are prophets today and this activity aims to tune your students in to that fact.

LEADER TIP

Walking the Talk.

If your group is small, have students work individually instead of in pairs. If your group is large, make groups of three or four instead of just pairs. Consider having a representative of each group wear the group's sandwich board to a larger church gathering—a prophetic parade!

What is your church's message to the world? What do your students think about the faith? This activity gives them an opportunity to speak their minds in a theological way.

Prophecy in the Present
 There's no denying that God used prophets to proclaim messages of radical justice and overflowing grace. But is God still speaking through prophets today? If so, can anybody become a prophet? Can you?

Option 1: Modern-Day Prophets
 Think of someone in recent history whom you or others might consider a prophet. Fill in the blanks below with information about the person you've chosen, then decide if your modern-day prophet's experiences line up with those of the biblical prophets.

Option 2: Walking the Talk
 Supplies: butcher paper, markers, tape



- Calling:** When and how was this person called or chosen by God?

- Content:** What is this person's primary message? Does the message urge people to change their ways or remind them of God's promises?

- Community:** To what community or communities does this person belong? How does the community relate to the message?

- Consequences:** Do some people respond negatively to this person's message? How so?

1. Working in pairs, cut paper to create two giant rectangles that are 2 feet by 3 feet each. These will be the front and back of a sandwich board.

2. Together, choose a phrase a modern-day prophet would say to the world. Write the phrase on both rectangles.

3. Cut out two shoulder straps for the sandwich board, and attach them with tape.

4. As a group, pick two or three completed sandwich boards and choose volunteers to wear them outside your church's sanctuary before the next worship service.

1. Think 2. Share 3. Discuss

What qualifies someone to be a prophet?



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What qualifies someone to be a prophet?

Into the World

What does it mean to listen to a prophet? What responsibility do we have to listen for prophetic messages from God?