

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

THE PROPHETS

A STUDY OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
PART FIFTY NINE OF SIXTY FOUR

When James sought to encourage brethren facing difficulties he urged, "Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord" (James 5:10). His reference was to the prophets of the Old Testament. They were God's mouth. We learn this from God's use of the word "prophet". God told Moses, "Aaron, thy brother shall be thy prophet" (Exod. 7:1). Earlier, when Moses complained that he had a "slow tongue" (Exod. 4:10), God said of Aaron, "I know that he can speak well...and he shall be thy spokesman unto the people...he shall be to thee a mouth" (Exod. 4:14,16). As Aaron was a mouth for God, the prophets were mouths for God. What they said was what God told them to say. They did not hesitate to claim the source of their messages. Amos will serve for an example. No less than eight times in the first two chapters, Amos claims, "Thus saith Jehovah..." (Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13; 2:1,4,6).

When the prophets spoke, they were not under the control of men. Men might question their claims to be a prophet, but once a prophet was established as God's spokesman, anyone who disobeyed the message was certain to be punished. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:19). Such a work would always be unwelcome by those in error and sin. Thus the prophets were many times bitterly opposed. Jeremiah "spoke unto the people" (Jer. 38:1). "Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son...and in the dungeon there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank in the mire" (Jer.

38:6). His crime was speaking to them what God said.

Christ knew His disciples would often be persecuted, and he used the prophets as examples. "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you" (Mt. 5:11,12). When Stephen sought to convert his Jewish brethren, he reminded them of their past. "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). Within the hour of his words, Stephen was stoned to death by his audience, another in a long line of men who died for telling people the truth.

The prophets were, along with others, great heroes of the faith. "Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens" (Heb. 11:32-34). They were men "of like passions with us" (Jas. 5:17), but they were triumphant because they were men of faith. What we need to overcome with patience the difficulties and sufferings we face is the faith that God's word will produce fruit in receptive hearts (Rom. 10:17).

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