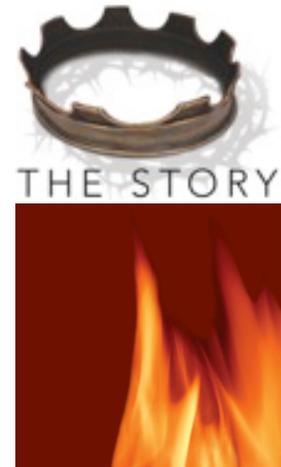


THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

Synopsis & Context – Session #15 – God's Messengers

For me to best understand this period that is described here in this section of the Old Testament is to return to the scholarship of my seminary days, where a fuller picture required not only biblical criticism, but history, form analysis and classical theology. But these days were far from being an exercise in reading comprehension, one needed to employ all of these recourses to engage their own argument with the text – to develop their own “talk about God” as He is revealed here in scripture, in other words cultivate one’s own theology. While this may sound dangerous to some, when you think about it, the work and ‘journey’ of cultivating theological is rather fundamental: there is a reason *this* book or this section was agreed as containing part of the revelation of God, was already judged to be important enough to be part of the collection of sacred texts or “canon,” so what do we walk away with when we engage these same texts? More than history alone, God’s story is *our* story.



If there is a phrase that best captures what this period of *The Story* (from the monarchy through the Exile) represents it would be what Biblical historian, John Bright referred to as “The Period of National Self-Determination,” as a nation, Israel seems to keep crying out (in both word and action), we want to be what *we want* to be and forget anything that gets in the way! So much so that Bright goes on to describe the next section as “Crisis and Downfall.” If one is reading the Old Testament looking for examples of men (and women) who are blameless and upright, righteous and without blemish, they will not only be disappointed, but most likely misguided (yet people continue to do this). This part of the Old Testament is so powerful and example that the work is not how we may find God in our story, but ours within God’s. While we may get swept-up in the details and descriptions, there is an affect, a theology that is to emerge which is how faithful God is; much more than how faithful we are. After all, this is not just history, but the story of God and our story emerges in response. So what is our response? This is the matter at hand that we are reading and exploring.

Well, life in the period of “National Self-Determination” becomes unsettled, chaotic and in short, a mess! What’s more, despite our God-given capacity for reason cannot seem to learn from our experience and perpetuate destructive patterns of behavior. And yet God is faithful to the promise, to the Covenant, to the oath and so God’s Word comes along in addition to our experience through “messengers,” the prophets, who in essence say, “Excuse me...haven’t you noticed...?! If this continues, here’s what will happen.” The prophets are an appeal to change the Peoples’ heart and the direction of their ways – their worship, their obedience to the Covenant, their trust in God. When people seem open to listen, they quickly ask, so what must I *do*, what is the action(s) taken so we can get back on track (with our self-determination). All too often, people are clearly not interested, they repeat those patterns, as we read on.

But ask yourself, what has changed in the way so many people approach God? Do people want a change of heart and new direction or simply a magic pill, miracle diet, wonder tool or the solution self-help?

Fundamentally, the heart of the matter lies with to what degree or place do we stick God, YHWH – *I am*—in life? Is this relationship “exclusive” or do we say it really does not matter *where, when, how or even what we call ‘God’*? To the fundamental issue (and subject of the 1st Commandment), lies the basis to which all our other actions and relationships seem to be connected to as we continue to read. Along the way, God’s messengers enter preaching a message of reform: indictment, prophecy and fulfillment. This section describes some incredible examples of horrible actions and inability/unwillingness to change as well as incredible revelation of divine vision, action and faith. It is written to also remind us as God’s People just what happened that made life change so radically. Today’s reading focuses on warnings and the plea to return to God.

Chapter #15 *God's Messengers* is 'woven' from selections from *The First and Second Book of Kings, and the Books of the Prophets Hosea and Amos.*

1 Kings 17—19; 2 Kings 2, 4, 6; Hosea 4—5, 8—9, 14; Amos 1, 3—5, 9

Plot Points for Chapter 15: God's Messengers

Under the leadership of Ahab and Jezebel, Israel is gripped by idolatry and greed. God sends prophets to call Israel to repent, but they are largely ignored.

The northern kingdom, Israel, had suffered under six evil kings. Jeroboam started them off on the wrong foot, erecting golden calf idols to replace temple worship. But each king after him had done his best to make things worse. Tragically, the people were going along for the ride. Archaeological evidence paints a troubling picture: Even as the Israelites ran from the Lord, they were experiencing amazing prosperity. People lived in vast homes and drank expensive wine. For those living in Israel, things felt just fine. Life was good, and few worried about the consequences of their idolatry and the abandonment of God's law.

In reality, however, Israel was on the brink of destruction. The Lord had withheld his judgment for a time to allow the people an opportunity to repent, but he could not allow their rebellion and sin to continue. Nevertheless, before the ax would finally fall, God gave his people several warnings through his prophets.

Elijah came with the message that Baal and Asherah were no match for the Lord. Baal, with all his supposed power over the storm, could not open the heavens if the Lord had closed them. Elisha demonstrated that the Lord alone could bring healing, not sorcerers who sold their charms. Amos was even more straightforward, providing detailed descriptions of the pain that was approaching if Israel did not turn away from idolatry.

Hosea had one of the most distinctive prophetic ministries in the Old Testament. Many prophets would dramatically embody their message by wearing sackcloth or buying a field in the middle of a siege. But Hosea was instructed to marry a woman who was continuously unfaithful and prostituted herself. His faithfulness to his adulterous wife was a real-life portrayal of God's faithful, love for his people.

The prophets God sent to his adulterous people brought a message that cut. Their words often carried a stinging rebuke and warnings of impending judgment and doom. But they were also a message offering a way out—a word of hope and salvation. The problem then, as it still is today, is that many people would rather have their feelings stroked and their selfish comforts satisfied than their souls saved!

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

God's Story – YOUR story!

- **What is it about Ahab and Jezebel that provoked unprecedented anger from The LORD? How does this relate to the first two commandments? Are there still lessons for us (God's People today)? How important are those first two Commandments today? Why?**
- **What is the role of the prophets in this chapter? Was their role predicting the future or calling the people to repentance? Does God still send prophets today?**
- **Evaluate the prophets' ministries. On what basis would you judge whether they were successful (or not)?**
- **Given the examples of the Prophets, how do you think we should we evaluate success in our work for God (on a personal basis)? As a parish?**