Lesson 36 - What God did through the Hebrew Prophets

Last week we studied what "the Law" was and why the Law was added to the Promise given to Abraham.

After the Israelites has conquered and settled in the land of Canaan, they did what God foretold that they would do and they began every man to "do what was right in their own eyes". This led to spiritual apostasy and God ultimately punished the people by bringing in nations to oppress them until they cried out to God for help and God raised up men and women to free the people and then to rule or "judge" them. This period lasted from Othniel to Samuel where the nation rejected their theocratic government and cried for a monarchy. God first gave them Saul, then David and Solomon. Solomon was unfaithful and allowed his wives to turn his heart away so God declared in 1 Kings 11 that he would tear the kingdom under his son. The kingdom was split under Solomon's son Rehoboam with Rehoboam ruling over the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin - known as the Kingdom of Judah and Jeroboam, a man of Ephraim ruling over the 10 northern tribes. The breakaway tribes were known as the Kingdom of Israel, and was also known as Samaria, or Ephraim or the northern Kingdom.

During the period of the kings of both the united and divided kingdom, we see prophets beginning with Samuel and Nathan serving as the voice of God to the kings and to the people at large.

Under the law, there were at least five classes of speakers:

Moses, the lawgiver;
The wise men, who gave counsel
Priests, who taught the law;
Prophets, through whom God spoke His word
Psalmists, who were the singers or poets in Israel.

Jeremiah speaks of three of these classes as being important to the instruction of the people:

Jeremiah 18:18 - *"Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the **priest**, nor **counsel from the wise**, nor the **word from the prophet**."*

Thus we read in the NT:

Heb. 1:1 - *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets"*

2 Peter. 1:21 - *"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

Who were the Prophets?

The Prophets were men specifically called and enlightened by God, to reveal His communications to the Hebrew people and their rulers, particularly throughout the centuries of **religious apostasy** and **national decay**.

A prophet is a speaker of or for God. His words were not the production of his own spirit or will, but came from a higher source. In both the Old and New testaments, a prophet is one who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit **speaks the words and the thoughts of God**, whether they related to the past, to the present, or to the future.

The bible will give us a clear definition:

In Exodus 4:16 - God tells Moses that Aaron *"shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your **mouth**, and you shall be as **God** to him."*

Later in 7:1 God says "And the Lord said to Moses, *"See, I have made you like **God** to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your **prophet**."*

Therefore as a prophet, Aaron was a **spokesman**, a **mouth**. The **prophet of Jehovah** then would be the **mouth of Jehovah**. God said that when He should raise up a prophet, He would put his words in the prophet's mouth and that the prophet would speak them in His name (Deut. 18:9-22).

The Hebrew Prophets were both evangelists and reformers - ambassadors of Jehovah sent to make known the will and purpose of Jehovah to His chosen people. At other times as Jehovah's ambassador he was sent to the heathen; for example Jonah was sent to Nineveh. They were

the revealers of God's will,
historians of the nation,
instructors of the people,
counselors to their kings,
zealous upholders of true religion,
and denouncers of sin in all its forms.

Importantly, they were also foretellers of the various details of the life and work and reign of the coming Messiah.

As a spokesman for God the Prophet was more a "forth-teller" than a "fore-teller". To be sure, the prophet did **foretell** events, but this is not the basic meaning of the word.

One author writes: “There are two classes of preachers - the good preachers who have something to say, and the poor preachers who *have* to say something. But there is yet another and higher class. It consists of those who have something to say and who have to say it. **Such are the prophets**.”

Jeremiah represents this latter class as he explains his feelings: *“If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”* (20:9). **Jeremiah had something to say and he had to say it.**

In Acts 3:22-24 Peter preaches:
Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ 24 And **all the prophets who have spoken**, from **Samuel and those who came after him**, also proclaimed these days.

We will be studying **Samuel** in the Wednesday class two weeks from now. **Samuel** is recorded as being the first of the great Hebrew Prophets and **founder of the school of the prophets**.

1 Samuel 10:5-10 - After Samuel anoints Saul king he tells him: *“After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a **group of prophets** coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. 6 Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. 7 Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you. 8 Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.”*

*9 When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. And all these signs came to pass that day. 10 When they came to Gibeah, behold, a **group of prophets** met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them.”*

1 Samuel 19:20 - Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw **the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them**, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

There was a master-student relationship between the prophets.

2 Kings 2:3 - *And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take away **your master** from over you?” And he said, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”*

2 Kings 4:38 - *And Elisha came again to Gilgal when there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Set on the large pot, and boil stew for the* ***sons of the prophets****."*

There were certainly stand-out prophets in scripture. Those that achieved more, or were used by God at a critical time, but to be sure, all that a prophet of God spoke was as true and powerful as that which any prophet spoke. When we classify the scripture as "major" and "minor" prophets - that ONLY relates to the volume of their book, NOT the value of their contribution.

Along with the true prophets there arose also **false prophets**. These flourished from a very early period in the Hebrew nation's history to the time of the close of the Old Testament writings. The false prophets fall into the two general classes, mercenary and political; some prophesied for money, others for political favor (Mic. 3:5,11). Often times these false prophets were nationalistic - that is, they defended the national practices and rulers through ignorance; but whether false through ignorance or self-will, they their messages were no less severely denounced by the true prophets. When opposed by false prophets, the true prophets rise to their greatest heights of zeal and fearlessness.

The great Hebrew Prophets were:
Samuel
Elijah
Elisha
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Daniel
and John the Baptist - the greatest

The minor Hebrew Prophets were:
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Through these Hebrew prophets, God did the **special work** of delivering through them a series of predictions covering all the circumstances of the entrance of the Word into human flesh as Jesus the Christ and His dwelling and work among men as their Messiah and Redeemer.

1 Peter 1:3-12 - *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 10* ***Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look."***

The Old Testament contains over three hundred references to the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus - most of the references were predictions from the Hebrew Prophets

The Prophets foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin
(Isa. 7:13-14; Micah 5:3; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35);

The Prophets foretold that He would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David
(Mic. 5:2, Matt. 2:1-11; Luke 2:1-7, John 7:40-42);

The Prophets foretold that a forerunner would prepare the world for His arrival.
(Mal. 3:1-2, 4:5-6; Isa. 40:3; John 1:22-23; Mark 1:1-7; Matt. 3:1-3, 11:9-11);

The Prophets foretold that He would possess the Holy Spirit without measure
(Isa. 11:1-9; John 3:34);

The Prophets foretold that His ministry would be authenticated by miracles of mercy
(Isa.42:1-7, Acts 10:38);

The Prophets foretold that He would be betrayed by one of His own disciples
(Ps. 41:9; Mark 14:43-49; John 18:1-5);

The Prophets foretold the betrayer would return the thirty pieces of silver, the price of His betrayal
(Zech. 11:12-13; Matt. 27:3-10);

The Prophets foretold that another would be chosen to fill the betrayer's place
(Ps. 109:8; Acts 1:15-20);

The Prophets foretold that His followers would forsake Him in His hour of peril and suffering
(Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31-56);

The Prophets foretold that He would be scourged, mocked and abused
(Isa. 50:6; John 19:1; Mark 14:65; Matt. 27:27-31);

The Prophets foretold that He would suffer in silence, as the sacrificial Lamb of God
(Isa. 53:4-7; John 1:29; Mark 15:2-5; Acts 8:32-35);

The Prophets foretold that He would be crucified, and His hands and feet pierced
(Ps. 22:16; Luke 23:33; Zech. 12:10, 13:6; Acts 2:22, 23,27);

The Prophets foretold that vinegar and gall would be given Him to drink
(Ps. 69:20-21; Matt. 27:33-34) ;

The Prophets foretold that His executioners would divide His garments
(Ps. 22:18; John 19:23-24);

The Prophets foretold that He would endure the Cross even unto death
(Ps. 22:1-21; Matt. 27:46; Luke 24:25-27; Acts 26:22-23);

The Prophets foretold that He would die
(Isa. 53:8; Luke 23:46);

The Prophets foretold that He would make His grave with both the wicked and the rich
(Isa.53:9; Matt. 27:38, 27:57-60);

The Prophets foretold that not a bone of His body would be broken
(Ps. 34:20; John 19:32-36);

The Prophets foretold that He would be raised up from the dead
(Ps. 16:10; Ps. 17:15; Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:39-40; John 2:19-22; Luke 24:1-7; Acts 13:34-37, 2:23-27; 1 Cor. 15:1-4);

The Prophets foretold that He would ascend to the Father in heaven
(Ps. 8:5-6; 110:1; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 12:2);

The Prophets foretold that He would be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords
(Psa.249.10; Psa. 2:6; Acts 2:33; Phil. 2:9411; 1 Tim. 6:15);

The Prophets foretold that He would send the Holy Spirit, according to promise, to carry on His work in the world

(Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-33, 4:31; John 15:26-37, 14:16-17).

What was the purpose of these Messianic predictions?

They were for the purpose of identifying the true Messiah when He should appear among men.

These predictions were made over a period extending from some one thousand years to three hundred years **before** Christ - a 700 year span. It follows, therefore, that the One in whose life and ministry and work these predictions were all fulfilled, was, beyond all reasonable doubt, the true Messiah. **This One was Jesus of Nazareth, our Redeemer, our High Priest, and our King**.

(see p. 192-194, the New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by McDowell)

Prophecy and its **fulfilment** is another incontrovertible proof of the **Divine origin** of the Scriptures.

2 Pet. 1:21 *"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

1 Pet. 1:10-11 *“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories."*

Many of the predictions were completely beyond the human control of Jesus:
Place of birth
Time of birth
Manner of birth
Betrayal
Manner of death
People’s reactions
Piercing
Burial

Who was the last of the great Hebrew Prophets?

John the Baptizer.

There is a period of 400 years of silence from the close of the book of Malachi until the first century. God reveals through Malachi at the close of his book:

> Mal. 4:5-6 *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."*
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> Luke 1:13-17 - *But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16* ***And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared****."*
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> Matt. 3:1-6 - *"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet* ***Isaiah*** *when he said,*
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> *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*
> *'Prepare the way of the Lord;*
> *make his paths straight.'"*
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> *4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*
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> Matt. 11:11-14 - *"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13* ***For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John****, 14* ***and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come."***

What was the specific work of John the Baptizer?

He was sent to call the Jewish nation to repentance, and to herald the appearance of the Messiah. He was a “harbinger” of Christ. A “harbinger” is “one who goes before”

Mark 1:4-8 - *“John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and **proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, “**After me comes he who is mightier than I**, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 **I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**”*

Luke 1:15-17 - “for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And **he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God**, 17 and **he will go before him** in the spirit and power of Elijah, to **turn the hearts of the fathers to the children**, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, **to make ready for the Lord** a people prepared.”

We read in the book of Esther how the women who were to marry the king went through a period of 12 months of beautifying and preparation before they were to meet and marry the king. For 12 months, these women were taught six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women - the customs and practices of women of royalty. These women were put under the king’s servant Hegai. In the same, way, the children of Israel were put under the care of John for a period of “beautifying” where they learned before they were to meet their king and be wed. the customs and practices necessary to be a “royal priesthood and a holy nation” - repentance, discipleship, baptism, forgiveness, etc.

John 1:29-34 - *“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”*

Next week: “What God did through the Hebrew People”