

Warnings From God's Special Messengers



SABBATH—JULY 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Samuel 8:10–18; Amos 3:9–11; Micah 2:8–11; Ezekiel 34:2–4, 7–16; Isaiah 1:15–23.

MEMORY VERSE: “Human, the LORD has told you what goodness [being good] is. This is what he wants from you: Be fair to other people. Love kindness [being kind] and loyalty, and humbly [with no pride] obey your God” (Micah 6:8, ERV).

SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING PEOPLE in the Bible are the Old Testament prophets. Prophets are God's special messengers. They told the truth. God's prophets got mad about all the evil things that Israel did. They felt deeply sad when God's people turned away from Him again and again. The Old Testament prophets were brave. They were not afraid to show God's people their sins.

God sends His prophets mostly to Israel and Judah. God gives His prophets a special job. The Lord wants His prophets to tell His people to come back to Him. But the people and the leaders worship false gods more and more. They follow the same way of life as the people around them. So, the prophets tell God's people to turn away from sin. The prophets help Israel remember God's love for them. The prophets also warn God's people about the bad things that will happen if they continue to walk away from God.

What was one of the biggest sins that the prophets warned Israel about? The prophets told Israel to be fair to the poor and helpless people around them. False gods and false religions are bad. But so is our cheating the poor.



The prophets are not afraid to tell God's people to turn away from sin.

GOD TELLS HIS PEOPLE TO BE FAIR (1 Samuel 8:10–18)

God gave Israel His plan for how He wanted them to live. But Israel hardly ever followed it. Not long after God’s people started living in the Promised Land, they told Samuel to give them a king. Samuel was a judge and a prophet. A prophet is God’s special messenger. Why did Israel ask Samuel for a king when they already had God as their King? Because the people wanted to be “like [the same as] all the other nations [countries]” (1 Samuel 8:5, ERV).

Samuel tells the people what will happen when they get a king. What things does Samuel warn them about? For the answer, read 1 Samuel 8:10–18.

Samuel sees that Israel will become the same as the countries around them if they get a king. Samuel tried to give Israel’s first king good advice. But soon, God’s warning to Israel came true. God’s warning came true even when Israel was a strong kingdom under David and Solomon. These kings sinned and did evil. They also stole things that belonged to other people. Or they took too much.

So, God sent His prophets to the kings of Israel and Judah. He told His prophets to help His people remember that they were responsible for the poor and needy people in their land. The Hebrew prophets often talk about being fair. The prophets often showed the leaders and people that they were not being fair or loyal to God. The prophets were the “voices” for people in the land that had little or no power. The prophets helped defend the people who were hurt by Israel’s leaders when they were not fair.

Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “The prophets got angry about the same bad things that happen every day on this earth. . . . We may think that the prophets got a little too upset. But did they really? We see people acting in ways that are not fair. They lie. They do evil things to other people. But when that happens, do we get upset or angry as the prophets did? The prophets saw that every small act of evil caused awful things to happen in big ways.”—*The Prophets* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), pages 3, 4, adapted. The prophets show us what is in God’s heart and mind. The prophets help us see this earth as God sees it. God’s eyes are full of tears because of the evil on this earth. But God asks us to work with Him to end the suffering and pain around us.



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AMOS (Amos 3:9–11)

Amos told King Amaziah, “ ‘I was not a prophet [God’s special messenger]. I wasn’t [was not] even the son of a prophet. I was a shepherd. I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me away from taking care of the flock. He said to me. “Go. Prophecy [give special messages from God] to my people Israel” ’ ” (Amos 7:14, 15, NIV).

Amos does not try to hide the truth about who he is from anyone. He is no one special. Even so, God gives him the skill to grab the attention of the people with his message.

Amos starts his message by naming all the countries around Israel: Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Then Amos lists all their sins. Amos warns that God will punish these people for their crimes (read Amos 1:3–2:3). It is easy to believe that Israel was happy that God was going to punish these people. Many of the crimes that these countries did were against Israel.

Next, Amos announces Judah’s sins. Judah was the Southern Kingdom. Israel was the Northern Kingdom. Amos says that Judah is guilty of turning away from God. Then Amos announces the punishments that God will give Judah (read Amos 2:4, 5). Again, it is easy to believe that the people in the Northern Kingdom were glad that Amos was showing the people in the Southern Kingdom their sins.

But then Amos tells the people in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, their sins. Amos tells Israel that they are doing all the things God hates. They do evil. They are not fair. They do not show mercy. Again and again, Israel fails to live up to God’s plan.

What sins does Amos warn Israel against? To find the answer, read Amos 3:9–11; Amos 4:1, 2; Amos 5:10–15; and Amos 8:4–6.

Amos’ message warns Israel about their end. But he tells God’s people to turn back to God. How should they do that? By showing that they care for the poor. “But let what is fair roll [flow] down like [the same as] waters. Let what is right and good flow forever like a river” (Amos 5:24, NIV). Look at Amos’ final verses (read Amos 9:11–15). These verses are a promise of hope at a time when Israel’s sins against God were deep. Amos’ message shows that God will forgive His people and make them His again.



“ ‘Let what is right and good flow forever like [the same as] a river’ ” (Amos 5:24, NIV).

MICAHA (Micah 2:8–11)

“Human, the LORD has told you what goodness [being good] is. This is what he wants from you: Be fair to other people. Love kindness [being kind] and loyalty, and humbly [with no pride] obey your God” (Micah 6:8, ERV). What are ways that you can follow this rule right now?

Micah 6:8 is one of the best known verses in the Bible. Even so, we may not understand what it fully means.

Read Micah 2:8–11 and Micah 3:8–12. What were the people doing that Micah said was wrong?

King Ahaz was a very evil king. God’s people sinned deeply during this time. They worshiped false gods. They did a lot of evil. God’s people also did not care about the poor. They cheated the poor and used them to get rich.

Micah warns God’s people of the awful things that will happen because of their sins. In the first three chapters of his book, Micah tells God’s people that God is very sad. God is angry at the evil they have done. Micah warns the people about the danger they are in. Micah also warns them about the punishments God soon will send their way.

But God does not give up on His people. The warnings from God’s special messengers show us that God never stops caring about His people. God gave His people warnings because He loved and cared for them. He deeply wanted to forgive His people. He wanted to make them new. He will not stay angry forever (read Micah 7:18–20).

This information helps us understand the famous words in Micah 6:8. Now we understand better why God wants His people to be fair, to love mercy, and to live with no pride in their hearts. These rules may seem simple. But living them is a lot harder than we think. Why? Because many people on earth do not follow these rules. They are busy getting rich by not being fair. So, they laugh at people who show mercy. Truly, we can say that it takes a brave person to show that he or she loves mercy and does not have a proud heart. Yes, it is hard and takes courage to live this way. But remember, we have God’s help. When we live this way, we show we are not alone. God walks with us.

What is the connection between our loving mercy, being fair, and having hearts with no pride?



When we show mercy, God walks with us.

EZEKIEL (Ezekiel 34:2–4, 7–16)

What do you think Sodom's worst sins were? Most people will say sex sins. Genesis 19 shows us the things that the people in Sodom did that made God destroy them.

But Sodom's worst sins go deeper than sex sins. Look at what Ezekiel says about Sodom's sins: "Here is the sin your sister Sodom committed [did]. She and her daughters were proud [full of pride]. They ate too much. They were not concerned [did not care] about others [people]. They did not help those [people] who were poor and in need" (Ezekiel 16:49, NIV). Let us be clear about something. This verse does not mean that God did not care about the sex sins going on in Sodom. God cared. But Ezekiel wants us to know about the other sins in Sodom too. The people in Sodom did not care for people who were in need. They cheated the poor. In God's eyes, are these sins in Sodom just as bad as their sex sins?

Ezekiel wrote after the time that Amos, Micah, and Isaiah lived. But his words give the same warnings to Israel. God will destroy their country because of their sins. After Babylon takes the city of Jerusalem by force, Ezekiel's message to God's people changes. Now Ezekiel starts to talk about God's promises to people. He will make His people new again and bring them back to their own country to live.

Read Ezekiel 34:2–4, 7–16. What does God think about the evil leaders in Israel? How does God lead His people? What is the difference between the way God and the rulers lead the people? What do the leaders do to the poor? How is this behavior different from what God does?

God's people are so evil that God compares them to the people of Sodom. But does God stop trying to save His people? No. He keeps trying to get them to turn away from their evil ways. God has a new plan for His people. In this new plan, God will bring His people back to their land. God will help them rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Then the people will celebrate the special feast days God gave them. Everyone will have land to live on (read Ezekiel 47:13–48:29). God gives His people the same plan that He gave to Moses after God took them out of Egypt. God planned to start this plan again as soon as His people came back from Babylon. God's plan for His people also included their taking care of the poor and strangers too.



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ISAIAH (Isaiah 1:15–23)

Read Isaiah 1:15–23; Isaiah 3:13–15; and Isaiah 5:7, 8. How did Isaiah feel about what he saw going on in the land around him?

Isaiah starts his book with a sermon. Isaiah's sermon is five chapters long (Isaiah 1–5). Isaiah tells God's people what they are doing is wrong. Then he warns them about the troubles that will soon come. The people have turned away from God. They keep doing wrong. Now God will judge His people. But Isaiah offers hope to God's people if they will turn back to God. They must change their lives. They must change how they do business. Isaiah is sad. Why? He knows who God is. He knows God expects His people to obey. Isaiah cries about what God's people have lost. He also is upset about the many people that God's people hurt and cheat every day. He cries because God will soon punish His people for their sins.

Isaiah continues to give this same message his whole life. He asks the people to remember everything God does for them. Isaiah also offers the people hope. He tells them what God wants to do for them in the future. That is why, Isaiah tells them, they should come back to God now. Their new friendship with God will include two things. (1) They must feel sorry for their sins. And (2) they must change the way they act with other people. They must be kind and fair. They must show the poor they care about them.

In Isaiah 58 and 59, Isaiah again talks about being fair. He tells about the evil in his country. " 'People stop others [people] from doing what is fair. They keep them from doing what is right [good]. No one tells the truth in court anymore. No one is honest there' " (Isaiah 59:14, Nlrv). But Isaiah also says that God knows everything that happens. God will come save His people. " 'Then a Redeemer [a Savior] will come' " (Isaiah 59:20, ERV). In many parts of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah talks about the coming Savior. The Savior will do what is fair and good. He will bring mercy and healing to the people on the earth.

Read Isaiah 9:6, 7; Isaiah 11:1–5; Isaiah 42:1–7; and Isaiah 53:4–6. What do these special messages teach us about Jesus' life, work, and death? What do these verses show us about why Jesus came to this earth?



The Savior will bring mercy and healing to the people on the earth.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Read Ellen G. White, “The Assyrian Captivity,” pages 279–292; “The Call of Isaiah,” pages 303–310; in *Prophets and Kings*.”

“The prophets scolded God’s people for not being fair. They told them it was wrong to waste money, time, and to buy expensive things. The prophets also scolded God’s people for their sex sins. But the people did not listen.” —Ellen G. White, *Prophets [special messengers] and Kings*, page 282, adapted.

Isaiah believed that “the future did not look good for God’s people. They wanted to get rich. They kept building more and more houses. They bought more and more land. . . . God’s people were not fair. They showed no pity to the poor. . . . God told the judges to take care of the poor. But the judges did not listen to the cries of the poor and the needy, the widows and the orphans. . . .

“In the last year that Uzziah is king, God sends Isaiah to give His people a warning. It is no surprise that Isaiah does not want to do the job. He knows that the people are stubborn. He knows that they will not pay attention to his warning. They will turn away from it.”—Pages 306, 307, adapted.

“Today, we should accept the messages of the prophets as the words of God to every person on earth. We should not waste any chance we get to do acts of mercy. We should show people how much we care about them. We should show Christian love. We should be very polite and kind. We should do all these things for the poor and the needy and for people who were hurt or cheated by other people in power.”—Page 327, adapted.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We often think that prophets only tell the future. But the Old Testament prophets did much more. How does their care for the poor change your ideas about what a prophet is and the work that he or she does?
- ② The prophets show us that it is hard work to stand up for the truth. Why is that so?
- ③ The writings of the prophets show us both God’s love for His people and His anger at their sins. What do these different things show us about who God is?