

**Unit 14 Assignment**

**The Prophets**



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## Assignment Unit 14 The Prophets

### 1. Select two Old testament prophets who use differing approaches to proclaim their message:

#### Prophet 1 Isaiah

*Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities: the punishment that brought us peace was upon him; and with his wounds we are healed.*

##### a. outline the message;

Isaiah, son of Amoz an aristocrat and married to a prophetess, is known as the greatest of the prophets and his book is the first of the writings of the prophets. Although popular as a prophet in the beginning of his ministry he soon became unpopular because his messages were difficult to hear often difficult to understand and to untangle their meaning.

He called the people to turn from their lives of sin and warned them of God's judgement and punishment. The 39 chapters in the first half of Isaiah carry the message of judgement for sin. This message of judgement was for Judah, Israel and the surrounding pagan nations.

The 27 chapters in the second half of Isaiah generally bring a message of forgiveness, comfort and hope. This message of hope looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah speaks more about the Messiah than any other old testament prophet. He describes the Messiah as suffering servant and a sovereign Lord though this wasn't truly understood until new testament times and then outside of Judaism.

##### b. explain why it needed to be proclaimed;

At this time, under king Ahaz and King Manasseh Judah had a form of godliness but their hearts were corrupt. The people had reverted to idolatry and even child sacrifice. Isaiah's warnings were intended to call them to repentance and purify the people by helping them understand God's true nature and message. However, they ignored the repeated warnings that Isaiah brought.

Isaiah spoke of God around 5 main themes:

##### Holiness,

God is highly exalted above all his creation. His moral perfection stands in contrast to evil people and nations. God is perfect and sinless in all his motives and actions, so he is in perfect control of his power, judgement, love, and mercy. His holy nature is the benchmark for morality.

##### Punishment,

Because God is holy, he requires his people to treat others justly. He promised to punish Israel and Judah for faithless immorality and idolatry. True faith had degenerated into national pride and religious rituals.

##### Salvation,

Because God's judgement is coming we need a saviour. No man or nation can be saved without God's help. Christ's perfect sacrifice for our sins is foretold and portrayed in the prophesies of Isaiah.

**Messiah,**

God will send the Messiah to save his people. He will set up his own kingdom as the faithful Prince of Peace who rules with righteousness. He will come as Sovereign Lord, but he will do so as a servant who will die to take away sins.

**Hope,**

God promises comfort, deliverance and restoration in his future kingdom. The Messiah will rule over his faithful followers in the age to come. Hope is possible because Jesus is coming.

c. assess how the prophet used different ways to convey the message with telling impact.

Before his call to be a prophet Isaiah may have already been a scribe in the royal palace in Jerusalem. His call in his vision of the throne of God began and effected his ministry as a prophet. He was called to write and to speak God's word and whether we consider there to be one, two or even three authors of the book of Isaiah the messages are clearly inspired by the one, living God.

Isaiah was in no doubt that his message would not be heeded by the people then but he was encouraged to write down his message anyway as eventually they would listen. Many of the prophecies contain predictions that foretell a soon-to-occur event and a distant event at the same time.

The book contains both prose and poetry and uses personification, the attributing of personal qualities to divine beings or inanimate objects. The imagery and the wording needed to be able to stand the test of time and so the same message is often repeated in a different form or with a different analogy. There is much use of everyday objects and animals that people of all eras will recognise and ideas and concepts little different today than then.

### **Prophet 2 Amos**

*Amos 5:24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*

a. outline the message;

Amos was a minor Prophet of pre-exile era date 760-753 BC. The name Amos means burden bearer and the book of Amos is named after the farmer turned prophet who lashed out at hypocritical religious services, greed and injustice.

The Book of Amos is filled with judgement messages that went ignored. Amos' messages were aimed at the wealthy who were exploiting the poor. Leaders, nobles and merchants cheated honest people. God's concern for social issues came to the Northern Kingdom of Israel through Amos with a cry for a just society.

The book contains three significant messages:

- 1, Judgement plan revealed.
- 2, Refusal to turn to God.
- 3, Call to seek God.

Amos pronounced judgement from God on all the surrounding nations. Then he included Judah and Israel. God is in control of all nations and everyone is accountable to him. Amos speaks with brutal frankness in denouncing sin. He collided with the false religious leaders of his day and was not intimidated by priests or king. He continued to speak his

message boldly. God required truth and goodness, justice and righteousness from all people and all nations.

Amos spoke that life embraces more than physical existence, it includes a relationship with God. Believers are to be zealous and seek the things of God and reject anything that is not of Him, to understand the importance of knowing Him, His truth and holiness.

b. explain why it needed to be proclaimed;

It was a time when everyone was optimistic, business was booming and people were happy and content, except the poor and the oppressed. With all the comfort and luxury came self-sufficiency and a sense of false security. But prosperity had brought corruption and destruction. The wealthy and powerful people of Samaria, capital of Israel, had not only become prosperous but also greedy and unjust. Illegal and immoral slavery came as a result of over taxation and land grabbing. There was also cruelty and indifference to the poor.

Although many people had abandoned real faith in God, they still pretended to be religious. They were carrying on nominal religious performances instead of having spiritual integrity and practising heartfelt obedience to God.

God had sent natural events as warnings and prompts for the nation to turn back to him for help and security. These were all ignored as the people considered they could cope with the world without God. Many people were unaware that here was an alternative to judgement. God offers life and emphasises the importance of the issue to require life and seek Him, just as all require food. Seeking after the Living God prepares the heart and attitude of mind, through humbleness and repentance in prayer. God wanted the people to turn quickly to God for help.

c. assess how the prophet used different ways to convey the message with telling impact.

Amos was not the son of a prophet or even the son of a priest, he was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees. God gave Amos a vision of the future and a challenge to the people of Israel. Through preaching and poetic imagery Amos puts his message across to the divided nations of Judah and Israel. He uses his own experiences from his occupation and of the natural world to convey his message so that priests and king, workers and nobility would hear and understand the meaning.

The prophecies are in an organised form, warning the unfaithful, disobedient and covenant-breakers. There is the announcement of the judgement, the reasons for the judgement in no uncertain terms and then the visions of the judgement.

There are five visions of warning;

Of locusts; God preparing his punishment, which he delayed only because of Amos' intervention.

Of fire; God was prepared to devour the land but again God relented when Amos interceded.

The vision of a plumb line; God would see if the people were crooked, and if they were, he would punish them.

Ripe fruit; a people once beautiful were now rotten and ripe for destruction.

Smashed pillars; the altar was the centre of the nation's life where people should expect protection and sanctuary. Here is where God would go forward with His judgment.

Amos concludes with a message of hope, God's promise that a descendant of David's would occupy the throne would stand firm, that from his line would come the Messiah who would renew God's spiritual kingdom and rule for ever.

## **2. Outline two ways that you could present God's word with telling impact.**

### a. 'Stand-up'

If any impact is to be made with a congregation of today then it needs to be two things: Firstly contemporary, presented in a style with which the congregation are familiar and comfortable with and secondly memorable. How many times have you recounted to someone of hearing a great comedian with no recollection of any of their jokes? In shows, pubs and clubs entertainers will stand and 'chat' to their audience like one would between two or three friends this is relaxing and makes everyone feel 'part of a small group'. TV shows will often have the presenter in amongst the audience for the same effect.

For an All Saints day service I did a similar presentation. Encouraging feed back immediately with questions as "who would consider themselves a Saint?" and "who would consider the person next to them as a Saint?". Following my Bible dictionaries definition of a Saint and comment I then outlined the potted life of a few interesting but unknown saints and as an amusing punch line say what they are the patron saint of. The internet quotes some 4,903 saints to chose from.

As the laughter dies down I spoke of the similarity of saints is that they were mostly just ordinary folk doing extraordinary things for God, just like all of us. The other similarity is that they are/were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Just when they might have thought it was getting too serious I used a balloon to visually demonstrate that though invisible the Spirit can be seen at work in people as air fills and reshapes the balloon. Some balloons were handed out to the congregation including a few long ones to selected people who would find them difficult to inflate. This then demonstrated the struggle some have had to stay true to their cause but that its worth the perseverance when at last the balloon is inflated and we reach our spiritual goal.

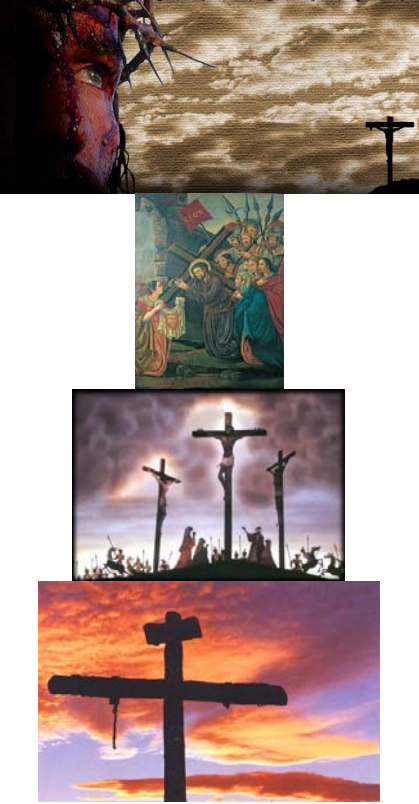
The end was a recap that all true believers are saints and have a purpose in the building of God's kingdom even though we struggle at times. Everyone went home with a balloon either inflated or not as a practical reminder of the message.

### b. Audio-Visual; Music and Images

Both the secular entertainment and the educational sphere has changed over the years so that not only have our expectations changed but also our abilities. To maintain our attention, understanding and retention of the gospel message the delivery has to be comparable to the capabilities of an audience whose information intake is from a mostly audio-visual media. People will exit the cinema humming the title tune and this will evoke memories of the movie they've just seen. It is for this reason that sequel movies have either the same or very similar title music so that advertisements will draw out the memories of the original film and encourage people to see the sequel.

A sermon based on the words of a hymn can be used to the same effect especially in conjunction with a particular image or series of images.

For example; a message of personal faith in Jesus because of his sacrifice on the cross can be preceded by an evocative hymn such as The gift along with a series of crucifixion images:

<p><b>The Gift</b></p> <p>Hung from a tree for you, Laid down His life for you, Created life from death. Love and protects you, Carries and cares for you, Created life with His breath.</p> <p>My God, My God, My God, Hold me close.</p> <p>Hears every prayer from you, Knows every depth of you, Know that His word is true. Deep in your heart for love, Answering prayers with love, Know that His word is for you.</p> <p>My God, My God, My God, Hold me close.</p> <p>Your tears He'll wipe away, Bring back the light of day, Blood that was shed for our pain. Died for our sins to pay, Washes them clean away, Blood that removes every stain.</p> <p>My God, My God, My God, Hold me close.</p> <p>Rob Newton © 2000 dpmrob music</p>	
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The lyrics of the hymn can then be expounded showing what God has done through Christ, how we can respond to that action and what it means for us. This can be illustrated with anecdotes, testimony and Scripture to reinforce the message while the image(s) remain displayed.

The sermon can then conclude with everyone singing the hymn now with the benefit of greater knowledge of what is behind the lyrics. The tune should remain with people reminding them of the message.

**3. Describe two contrasting congregations known to you and assess how far the two ways of presenting God's word might have contrasting or similar effects on each congregation.**

Congregation 1 Trinity Methodist Church – Ichthus



The 'Ichthus' service at Trinity Methodist church Loughborough is a contemporary worship service attended by 45-60 people from young adults to the retired. The congregation is made up of people from Trinity and around the circuit who benefit from this style of worship. The service is led by a worship leader and a message is given by a preacher or speaker and the format is mostly of a Welcome – Worship – Word – Witness type.

a. 'Stand-up'

The relaxed style of 'chatting' to the congregation is welcomed by this congregation as is 'audience participation'. They will easily answer questions posed by a preacher to the point where hypothetical questions will occasionally get answered. Often there is no necessity for the sound system as the preacher can get amongst the people to be heard. On the whole they are a people who 'join in' and want to be actively involved in the sermon as well as other worship and react far better to this style of presentation than being lectured remotely from a lectern or pulpit.

b. Audio-Visual; Music and Images

At Ichthus services hymn words, prayers and scripture are projected onto a large screen at the front, normally with an image or looped movie background. The congregation are used to being stimulated visually as well as orally. The music is led by a worship band and new worship songs are a regular feature of the service. For this congregation it would appear peculiar not to have the sermon illustrated visually in some way or other and not to have some form of challenge, discussion or activity during it. There is often a distinct break between the opening worship and the word/message that could be bridged by a message taken directly from, and preceded by, a particular hymn.

## Congregation 2 East Leake Methodist Church – Morning Service



The small Leicestershire village of East Leake has a relatively modern chapel building that is set up quite traditionally with altar rail, pulpit and organ at the front. The Sunday morning congregation is made up of 25-30 slightly mixed age and gender though predominantly retired and female. Their experience of worship has for the most part been the traditional hymn sandwich preaching service.

### a. 'Stand-up'

The small congregation lends itself to a more informal style of preaching though they can be slightly nervous of being directly approached or questioned. They are a friendly group though and once I'd demonstrated I wasn't too dangerous they did join in. This church was where the all Saints day service was written for and my impression was that it was well received, they laughed at the appropriate jokes and, with the exception of the frail, they all had a go blowing up a balloon. I shall return there for an advent service and I shall be able to assess the longevity of the message

### b. Audio-Visual; Music and Images

This chapel still sings hymns from the 1983 Hymns and Psalms played on the organ, it has no permanent screen and no PA system at all. For the services that normally occur there, there is little requirement for anything else. I have taken OHP transparencies with the hymn words before though there is a lack of skilled operators if I am alone and a few in the congregation have trouble seeing. Rather than using several different books and sheets of paper I tend to print one sheet with all the hymn words on for the service.

This congregation have no trouble learning new hymns and quite welcome the opportunity to sing something different. On several occasions where a new hymn is used in the service it is that tune that is being whistled on the way out.

At the advent service in two weeks I shall be taking the computer and projector and we shall use images and music as a meditation as well as using the equipment for the rest of the service. It will be interesting to gauge their reaction; after all the technology should be an aid to worship God and not a distraction.

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