

Prophet

The English word “*prophet*” is a transliteration of the Greek word **προφήτης** which means “*an interpreter of oracles or of other hidden things.*” The Greek meaning is the one many people attach to the word “*prophet*” in their Bibles. But it is very different from the Hebrew meaning -- *which is the one that the Jewish Jesus and his first generation of followers had.*

In ancient Hebrew the word for ‘*prophet*’ is ‘Navi’ (נביא), which means “*to declare*” or “*to announce.*” The Hebrew word is also linked to a Hebrew term translated “*fruit of the lips.*” The idea of “*humans as trees that bear fruit through their words and actions*” is repeated in a number of places in Jewish Scriptures.

While many people today think of a prophet as “*a person who sees and predicts the future*” -- *that is secondary to what the ancient prophets of the Jewish Scriptures actually did.* They were basically spokesmen (and women) for God -- *a person chosen by God to speak to people on God's behalf and convey a message or teaching.*

The role of Aaron as a prophet is seen in Exodus 7:1: “*And Yahweh said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.”*”

During biblical times “*dreams*” and “*prophecies*” were strongly connected. One very famous example appears in the *Book of Genesis* when Jacob had a dream of angels going down and coming up a ladder.

In the time of Samuel there were “*gilds of prophets,*” prototypes of the professional prophets found all through the later history. They seem to have been most active at times of great national or religious peril. But they were not merely seers and diviners; *they were also ministers, companions of leading reformers, and national deliverers.*

After the establishment of the United Kingdom under David, no prophet was officially a political leader. Yet, all prophets were active statesmen who were above all *interested in securing the well-being of the people of Yahweh – and they watched the actions of kings the most closely of all.* The king's decisions affected the nation most of all. The Hebrew prophets did not engage in abstractions – *they talked about laws and principles that God expected kings to follow in order to govern.* The foundation stones of God’s laws and principles are *justice, tzedaqah and faithfulness.*

Prophets were expected to be role models of holiness, scholarship and closeness to God. They set the standards for the entire community. And, contrary to popular beliefs, prophecy was not simply a gift that was arbitrarily conferred upon a person -- *it was the culmination of a person's spiritual and ethical development*. When a person reached a sufficient level of spiritual and ethical achievement, the *Shechinah (Holy Spirit)* came to rest upon him or her -- *that's right "her."* Women were also *prophetesses*. By the way, there were even some Gentile prophets.

As I said at the beginning, many people today only think of a prophet as a person who can see and predict the future. I was in a meeting many years ago with some very well-known scholars from Israel. One of them made a remark that caught everyone's attention – *if a biblical prophet's predictions about the future turned out to be right more than about 33% of the time – it would have been a miracle!* One out of three was considered to be very good.

Summary:

The primary role of a prophet throughout the Jewish Scriptures was that of spokesperson for God – *a person chosen to convey a message or teaching to people on God's behalf.*

So, what did God want to talk to people about? It was the same “*old stuff*” – “*Laws and Instructions*” recorded in the Jewish Scriptures!”