

The Ancient Prophets

by Samuel Logan Brengle

The ancient prophets' messages are timeless and provide guidance and light on every problem, revealing God's character, holiness, and love.

Scripture: Isaiah 8:19

Topics: "The Role of Prophets", "Timeless Truths of Scripture"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle reflects on his lifelong engagement with the Bible, emphasizing its timeless relevance and the profound lessons drawn from the lives of ancient prophets. He shares the struggles and triumphs of these prophets, highlighting their unwavering commitment to God despite facing immense challenges and societal opposition. Brengle illustrates how their messages resonate with contemporary issues, urging believers to seek divine guidance and strength in their own lives. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the character of God through the prophets, who reveal His holiness, love, and justice. Ultimately, Brengle finds companionship and inspiration in the prophets, encouraging others to do the same.

Transcript

For about sixty years I have been reading the Bible, and for nearly fifty I have been reading it through regularly, steadily, consecutively, year after year. When I have finished Revelation, I turn back to Genesis and begin over again, and day by day read my chapter or chapters with close and prayerful attention and never without blessing. In this way the Book has become very familiar, but not stale. It is ever new, fresh, illuminating, just as bread and water and sunshine, and the flowers and birds and mountains and seas, and starry heavens are ever new and fresh and inspiring.

The sweet stories (and there are no stories so sweet as Bible stories), the sordid stories (and there are none more sordid), the nobilities and the brutalities, the saintliness and the sin, the chastity of Joseph and the shameful, cruel rape by Amnon; the drunkenness of Noah and the sobriety of the Rechabites; the slaughter of innocent birds and beasts for the sins of men, and the slaughter of Canaanites for their own sins; the drunkenness and incest of Lot, the chaste restraint of Boaz; the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah; the deliverance of Samaria; the cleansing of Naaman of his leprosy, and the smiting of Gehazi with the dread disease; the dastardly wickedness of David followed by his deep penitence as expressed in the fifty-first Psalm, and the dog-like fidelity and devotion of Uriah rewarded only by the seduction of his wife and his pitiful murder; the duplicity and treachery of Absalom, the devoted love of Jonathan; the

flaming zeal and despondency and trembling and the triumphant finish of Elijah; the horrid doom and death of Ahab, and painted, powdered Jezebel; the afflictions and dialogues and deliverance of Job; the fall of plotting, rapacious Haman, and the exaltation of Mordecai; the single-eyed devotion of Nehemiah outwitting the wiles of relentless foes and treacherous brethren; the faith and courage of Daniel and his three friends; the swift, sure blow that humbled proud, despotic Nebuchadnezzar, and the overthrow and death of drunken Belshazzar; the storm, the fish, the gourd, the worm, the blistering sun and hot wind With which God gave kindergarten lessons to bigoted, angry Jonah, and His tender mercy to the little children and cattle of Nineveh; the jealousies and envies and contentions of the disciples who each desired to be greatest in the Kingdom of Jesus as they, in their carnal childishness, pictured what that Kingdom would be; the love of Thomas who proposed to go to Jerusalem and die with Jesus, and his stubborn refusal to believe in the resurrection of Jesus unless he could put his fingers into the print of the nails and thrust his hand into his riven side, and the kindly, sure way in which Jesus met the distracted, honest, loving doubter; the swearing and lying of Peter, and his bitter tears of sorrow; the penitent plea of the dying thief on the cross, his death and the glad wonderment of his awakening in Paradise to find Jesus awaiting him there with tender welcome; the awful fate of false Ananias and Sapphira dropping into Hell from the greatest holiness campaign the world has ever known; the stoning of Stephen; the conversion of Paul; the strange apocalyptic mysteries and imageries of Revelation -- all these speak to me in a divine voice with comfort, reproof, correction, admonition, instruction.

Line upon line, precept upon precept, in picture, in parable, in story, in history, biography, drama, tragedy, poetry, song, and prophecy, I hear God in tender entreaty, in patient instruction, in wise rebuke, in faithful Warning, in sweetest promise, in sharp, insistent command, in stern judgment and final sentence, making known to us men His mind, His heart, His holiness, His wisdom, love, and grace. I see God uplifting the oppressed, the fallen, the lowly, the penitent, and setting them on high and casting down from their thrones and seats of pomp and power the proud, the rich, the arrogant, the mighty.

My daily reading has again brought me into company with the great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, Malachi, and others, and I live again with them in the midst of the throbbing, tumultuous, teeming life of old Jerusalem, Samaria, Egypt, and Babylon. These prophets are old friends of mine. I have lived with them before, and they have blessed me a thousand times, kindled in me some of their flaming zeal for righteousness, their scorn of meanness, duplicity, pride, and worldliness, their jealousy for the living God; their fear for those who forget God and live as though He were not; their pity for the ignorant, the erring, the penitent; their anxiety for the future of their people; their courage in denouncing sin and calling men back to the old paths of righteousness.

I stand in awe as I note their intrepidity, their forgetfulness of self in denouncing sin and facing the contempt, the scorn, and then the wrath of princes, priests, and kings. Tradition tells us Isaiah was finally thrust into a hollow log and 'sawn asunder.' They counted not their lives dear unto themselves. They were 'moved by the Holy Ghost.' They yielded themselves up for service, suffering, or sacrifice as His instruments. They were surrendered men, selfless men, devoted as soldiers unto death, if needs be, that they might save the nation, and if not the nation, then a remnant who clung to the old paths, who would not bow the knee to Baal, who would not yield to the seductions of fashion and the spirit of the times. They were men of the age, but they lived and wrought mightily for the Ages. They were men of the times, and their message was meant for their times; but it had timeless value because they lived in God and wrought for God and spoke only 'as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' They were not party men. They could not be used by ambitious or designing men for partisan purposes.

They were diffident men by nature. They shrank from the prophetic office. They did not seek it. It was thrust upon them. God called them, and they went forward under divine constraint.

Listen to Jeremiah's story of his call: 'Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.' But he shrank from the great task and its fearful responsibility and pleaded: 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.' 'Say not I am a child,' said the Lord in reply, 'for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee.' But God did not send him forth at his own charges and in his own strength. He never does so send forth His prophets. He equips them. He humbles them until there is no conceit or strength left in them, like Daniel in Babylon and John on Patmos, and they cry out, as did Isaiah: 'Woe is me! for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips. . . . Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,' and then He empowers them. And as the Lord touched the lips of Isaiah with living fire, so He touched Jeremiah: 'The Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth.' That was his equipment for his great and solemn and dangerous office.

Then the vastness of this man's mission was unfolded to him: 'See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms' -- this lad, who never left the little land of his birth, except when dragged down to Egypt against his prophetic protest by murderous, fugitive Jews! Set over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out the rank growth of evil, 'to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down,' every high and vicious thing 'that exalted itself against the knowledge of God: to build and to plant.' 'Thou therefore gird up thy loins, . . . and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.' It is a fearful thing to shrink in fear from the face of man and fall before the frown of God, but that was the alternative set before this young prophet. Speak boldly and feel the strength of the everlasting arms girding you about. Slink away from the face of man and be confounded by the Almighty!

It was not a joyous, rose-strewn path the prophets trod. It was perilous, lonely, blood-stained, ambushed by malignant foes, by entrenched monopolies of vested interests, confronted by established custom and the unquestioned practice of kings and princes, priests and people. He was to set himself in opposition to the nation and the nations. Oh, the loneliness of it! The danger! The thankless task! 'For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee.'

What a spectacle -- a lone man, a child, against the world! 'And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.'

Ah, I see! He is not alone. They that be with him are more than all that are against him. 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' 'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them.' Hallelujah The prophets were lone, diffident men, but they had access to God; the key to secret resources of exhaustless power and wisdom and grace was given them. They were equipped with God -- God the Holy Ghost. He moved them and they spoke, and their message reverberates through all time, judges all men and nations, and illuminates all history.

Many students of prophecy think the prophets have put into our hands a God-given telescope, through which we can peer into the future and foresee the course of all coming history to the utmost bounds of time, and they prepare elaborate charts and write no end of books and make learned mathematical calculations, and often fix dates for the end of all things, but I have never been helped, but rather confused, in trying so to interpret the great prophets. Their value to me ever since God sanctified me has appeared to consist not in the light they throw upon generations yet unborn, but the light they throw upon my own generation. I want help to interpret my own times. It is just because their messages came from God and are timeless that they are so timely. Their prophecies are meant to enable me to understand the present, to recognize my own duty, to interpret the will and ways of God to the men of my own generation, and to guide the steps of the youth of the next generation to fitness for their solemn, unknown tasks. Beyond that, if I see at all, it is but dimly.

There is an element of foretelling in the messages of the prophets, but the infinitely greater element was that of forthtelling, revealing God Himself, His character, His holiness; speaking for God and His everlasting righteousness that is in eternal and deadly antagonism to all unrighteousness and sin; His benevolence, His everlasting love that yearns and woos and waits and seeks the erring and the sinful, and forgives the penitent soul: the restoring, the redeeming God, who is also a God of judgment, 'a consuming Fire.' And it is in the light of this revelation of God's character, His nature, His mind and heart, His will and ways, that I see my duty, that I interpret the meaning of my own day, and the problems of my own generation, and am in some measure enabled to forecast the future. And this view of the supreme meaning and value of the prophets for our day seems to me to harmonize with Paul's statement of the great purpose of Scripture: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' he writes, 'and is profitable,' not for the gratification of curiosity concerning the distant future, but 'for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works' in this his day and generation.

I fell into a nest of Spiritualists once, and the most timely answer I could make to their pretensions I found in the ancient prophecy of Isaiah and in the words of Jesus. Listen to Isaiah replying to the Spiritualists of Jerusalem twenty-five hundred years ago: 'And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards (mediums) that peep and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? Should the living seek unto the dead? To the law and to the testimony (to the Bible): If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them ' (Isaiah viii. 19, 20). And this is matched by the words of Jesus in relating the conversation between Abraham in Heaven and Dives in Hell. Dives wanted Lazarus sent to his brethren upon earth to warn them to so live that they would not come to him in Hell; Abraham replied, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead ' (Luke xvi. 31).

My soul is shocked and shamed often by the immodesty of fashionable women, but I find that Isaiah was confronted by the same lack of modesty in his day. In Isaiah iii. i6 to 23 he gives a description of the fashionably dressed girls and women of old Jerusalem that reads as though h had just come from Paris, London, or New York.

There was an entrenched liquor traffic in their day, and those faithful prophets, messengers of God, watchful shepherds of the souls of men, flamed in indignation against the drunkard and the bootlegger. 'Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink: that continue until night, till wine inflame them And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe (orchestra) and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord. . . . Therefore my people are gone into captivity,

because they have no knowledge. . . . Therefore Hell hath enlarged her self, and opened her mouth without measure and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth (in such self-indulgence and wickedness) shall descend into it.' So wrote Isaiah.

'Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness.' So wrote the old prophet, Habakkuk, of the ancient bootlegger.

Have we problems in The Salvation Army? Are we confronted by vice and sin in our city? Is evil triumphant and injustice and wickedness entrenched in high places in the State? We shall find light on every problem in the messages of the prophets, and we shall find help and strength in company with them, for they walked with God and lived and spoke and suffered and died for Him. Listen to Habakkuk's prayer: 'O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid; O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years . . . remember mercy.' His heart was nearly broken by the sin and injustice and wickedness he saw all around him, and he longed for a revival. And then faith in the almightiness, the goodness of God, and the final triumph of holiness kindles in him, and he shouts out:

'The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' His faith enables him to triumph in God.

And when the cup of the wickedness of the people is full, and the judgment of God falls upon them, and the desolating scourge of the Assyrian invasion sweeps over the land and leaves it wasted and bare, he sings: 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my Salvation. The Lord God is my strength.'

They lived in a day when light was dim. They had no completed Bible. Jesus had not yet come. The cross had not yet been uplifted with its bleeding, redeeming Victim. The bars of the tomb had not yet been broken, and the iron doors of death had not swung open that the light of the resurrection might stream through. Pentecost had not yet come. But they believed in the 'Mighty God, the everlasting Father,' and they believed Him to be 'the Prince of Peace,' and that upon His shoulders rested all government, and that 'of His government and peace there shall be no end'; that however high sin might vault it should be cast down, it should not finally triumph; that however deeply entrenched and strongly garrisoned about injustice and arrogance and pride might be, yet they should be rooted out, pulled down, and trampled in the dust.

But though they flamed like fire heated sevenfold against sin, they had hearts as tender as a little child, and they wept for sinners, and breathed out promises as gentle as light falling on the eyes of sleeping babes. It was God, the Holy One, in these devoted, yielded men that flamed against iniquity, that sobbed and wept over the desolations sin wrought, and gave promises that still fall into our hearts with Heaven's own benediction.

O Jeremiah, brother of mine, friend and comrade in this ministry of judgment and mercy, this proclamation of the 'goodness and the severity of God,' how I thank thee, and thank God for thee, as across centuries and millenniums thou dost still whisper into my listening ears and my longing heart those sweet words: 'The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.'

I am a lonely man, and yet I am not lonely. With my open Bible I live with prophets, priests, and kings; I walk and hold communion with apostles, saints and martyrs, and with Jesus, and mine eyes see the King

in His beauty and the land that is afar off.

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