

June 2019

Rev John writes:

'I see a tall dark handsome stranger...'

So began the typical musings of the fairground fortune-teller sought out by a girl I much admired on a youth club outing to Blackpool – sadly it wasn't me! In the end the boy she dated was actually short, blonde and had a broken nose – so much for fortune-telling!



Prophecy is often confused with prediction. But biblical prophecy is much broader than just looking into the future – and much more dangerous! The mix of dire warnings, threats of impending punishment or judgement, calls to change direction and challenges about their conduct often upset people. The prophet was called on to deliver the message of God to kings, priests and people. If the recipient did not like what the prophet said he would be abused or ignored – and if charged with false prophecy could be stoned to death. The task of the prophet was certainly not the most appealing job description of its day! Yet prophets could not help but to obey their call – and speak out the words that God had given them, irrespective of the cost to their own personal lives.

The prophet's task depended on when and where and to whom he was called to prophesy, but several broad themes emerge. Prophets were charged with delivery of God's message:

**'calling people back to God', 'calling people to act justly',
'calling for judgement on God's people and/or on other nations',
'being outspoken', 'calling to God', 'offering hope for the future'.**

So who were these 'messengers of God'?

ISAIAH – was a prophet in Judah during the reign of four kings. His primary task was to warn them of the threat of Assyria and Babylonia, but he also gave a message of hope for the future.

JEREMIAH – prophesied in Jerusalem. He warned of the impending punishment of Judah and looked towards the time when God would make a new agreement with his people. In his ‘Lamentations’ Jeremiah predicted the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon.

EZEKIEL – a priest and prophet who was himself an exile in Babylon. Ezekiel had a series of visionary messages for both those exiled with him, and for the remnant of God’s people in Jerusalem.

DANIEL– tells the story of an exiled Jew in Babylon. This book is a mixture of narrative story and apocalyptic vision of God’s future empires.

THE MINOR PROPHETS – so called because their writings are brief (but still important and prophetic), are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Most prophesied during the decline of Israel and Judah; Haggai and Zechariah at the time of the return to Jerusalem, and Malachi a century later.

The prophets may well have seen the near future in all its awfulness, but they also saw the far future in all its glory. They knew that whilst judgement, destruction, and exile were on the way following on was salvation for all humanity. The prophets contrasted the world around them with the world to come. Most of all they pointed to the ‘Messiah’, who would usher in God’s reign of peace, justice, mercy, compassion, love, security and redemption.

Perhaps they also saw a ‘tall, dark, handsome stranger’ - though of course Jesus is no stranger to those who know and serve him! We shall pick up the story in the New Testament.

Yours in Christ, Reverend John.