

Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

Lesson 6 – The Prophets

Isaiah 1:18 - "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool."

As we continue in this series, we turn our attention to the prophetic era. We will build on the foundation of the Law from Lesson 5, where we saw how the Mosaic code set standards for Israel's conduct as a reflection of God's character and their identity as God's chosen nation. Throughout the years, Israel was exposed for their inability to keep that code. The prophets emerged as God's messengers to enforce, explain, and expand on those principles. They did not introduce new laws but called the people back to covenant faithfulness, to act in accordance with their identity as revealed by God.

Through warnings, visions, and direct confrontations, God used the prophets to shape behavior, addressing not just actions but the heart behind them. This period shows how divine influence often came through rebuke and promise, aiming to turn a rebellious nation toward belief and obedience. We see patterns of idolatry, immorality, and violence recurring, much like the peaks of judgment in earlier lessons, but now with prophetic voices urging change before consequences fall.

The prophets operated in a time when Israel and Judah had divided, kings rose and fell, and foreign threats loomed. Their messages were tailored to these contexts, yet the core remained consistent: behavior matters because it reflects one's relationship with God. Obedience brings blessing; rebellion invites curse, as outlined in Deuteronomy 28. But the prophets went deeper, revealing that behavior and the heart (mind), through belief and love, are both required for the covenant. As Jeremiah 17:9 notes, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" God, through His prophets, sought to heal that sickness by exposing sin and offering restoration.

I. The Role of Prophets in Shaping Behavior

God raised up prophets to act as His spokesmen, influencing behavior by declaring His will. The Hebrew term for *prophet*, נָבִיא (navi), implies one who speaks forth or calls out, often under divine compulsion. They were not mere predictors of the future; their primary task was to confront current conduct and call for return. This influence came in several ways.

First, prophets reminded the people of God's character and past actions. In Amos 2:9-11, the LORD recounts destroying the Amorites and delivering Israel from Egypt, then raising up prophets and Nazirites among them. Yet the people corrupted these gifts, leading Amos to declare judgment. This historical recap served to influence behavior by stirring gratitude and fear of the LORD, prompting a return to faithfulness.

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Second, they exposed hidden sins and hypocrisies. External rituals meant nothing without heart alignment. Micah 6:6-8 captures this: "With what shall I come to the LORD And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" Here, Micah strips away superficial adherence to the Law, influencing listeners to pursue justice and humility instead.

Third, prophets used vivid imagery and object lessons to drive points home. Ezekiel, for instance, was commanded to act out Jerusalem's siege by lying on his side for 390 days (Ezekiel 4:1-8), symbolizing the years of iniquity. Such acts were meant for shock and influence, for making abstract warnings tangible. Hosea went further, marrying a harlot as a living parable of Israel's unfaithfulness (Hosea 1:2-3), illustrating how idolatry broke God's heart and calling the nation to return.

Through these methods, God shaped behavior not by force but by revelation, appealing to reason and emotion. Isaiah's invitation in our key verse exemplifies this: God reasons with His people, offering cleansing if they return. This approach highlights volition; people could choose adherence or face consequences.

II. Addressing Heart Issues and Behavioral Patterns

The prophets emphasized that behavior flows from the heart (inner recesses of the mind), echoing principles from earlier Scriptures. They confronted idolatry, immorality, and violence as symptoms of deeper rebellion. Jeremiah 2:13 declares, "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water." Idolatry here is not just worshiping statues but abandoning God for worthless substitutes, leading to immoral and violent acts.

Heart issues were central. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God promises a future restoration: "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." This prophecy acknowledges that external laws are not enough; spiritual rebirth is also necessary. Until then, prophets like Joel called for heartfelt repentance: "'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments.'" (Joel 2:12-13).

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Specific behavioral patterns drew sharp rebuke. Amos thundered against injustices: exploiting the poor, perverting justice, and indulging in luxury while ignoring the needy (Amos 5:11-12, 8:4-6). These acts of violence and immorality stemmed from covetous hearts. Similarly, Isaiah condemned empty worship amid oppression: "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly" (Isaiah 1:13). The influence was clear: believe in the Lord and return to the covenant.

In Judah's case, Jeremiah warned of deception in trusting the temple while living sinfully: "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'-that you may do all these abominations?" (Jeremiah 7:8-10). This idolatry, while saying they honor the Lord, will destroy that generation.

III. National Outcomes and Divine Consequences

The prophets tied individual and corporate behavior to national fates, reinforcing the conditional aspects of the Mosaic covenant. Obedience would bring prosperity and peace; disobedience would bring exile and ruin. This influence extended beyond words to fulfilled prophecies, proving God's reliability.

For Israel (the Northern Kingdom), Hosea and Amos predicted Assyrian conquest due to their idolatry and immorality. Hosea 4:1-2 laments, "Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed." The outcome? Assyria overran them in 722 B.C., scattering the people as warned.

Judah faced similar warnings from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. Jeremiah's temple sermon (Jeremiah 26) led to threats against his life, yet he persisted, influencing a remnant to heed. Ultimately, Babylon exiled Judah in 586 B.C., fulfilling prophecies like Micah 3:12—"Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest." These events shaped behavior post-exile, as seen in the reforms under Ezra and Nehemiah.

Yet hope permeated even the darkest messages. Prophets like Isaiah foretold of a righteous remnant and ultimate restoration, influencing long-term faithfulness. Isaiah 55:6-7 urges, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And

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He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." This promise of mercy encouraged behavioral change, pointing to a future where God's influence would culminate in the Messiah.

Conclusion

The prophetic era reveals God's persistent effort to reach out to Israel and humanity, to reveal Himself to the people, to have them believe that He is the Lord, and to honor Him by reflecting God's character through their behavior. By addressing not just behavior but belief issues, exposing sinful patterns, and linking actions to national outcomes, the prophets called Israel to live out their covenant role. Idolatry, immorality, and violence brought judgment, but belief and honoring God and His covenant brought blessing (under Law).

These accounts instruct us today, showing that true influence comes from aligning with God's character inwardly. As we move to Lesson 7 on wisdom literature, we will see how practical principles build on these truths, guiding daily choices in a fallen world.