

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, the season of getting ready for Easter. For thousands of years followers of Jesus have taken the six weeks before Easter as a time to pray, to turn away from any unhelpful ways they've been living, and to try and feel closer to God. This year at Reservoir Church, along with practicing those things, we're also going to be talking about prophets. So... what is a prophet?

A couple weeks ago we heard about John the Baptist, who went out to live in the desert and called for people to turn their lives towards God and keep their eyes open for Jesus. That made John a prophet! People compared him to Isaiah, another prophet who lived a thousand years earlier and who also told people they needed to change their lives to make way for God. Actually, lots of prophets have had that sort of message: Jeremiah especially is famous for telling the people of Jerusalem that turning away from God was leading them towards destruction. Around the same time Ezekiel was saying the same things to the Jewish people living in Babylon.

Going back even further, Moses, who led God's people out of slavery in Egypt, was a prophet. So was Samuel; he was the leader of Israel before the time of the kings, and then once God's people made him give them a king he still had an important and valued voice in the nation's decisions because of his connection with God.

All through Israel's history, actually, prophets worked to keep kings pointed in the right direction. The prophet Nathan helped King David make good choices, and one reason that David was such a good king was that he counted Nathan as a friend, and listened to him. Some years later the prophet Elijah had a much more uneasy relationship with his king: King Ahab hated Elijah for daring to stand up to him, and even tried to have Elijah killed; but eventually Elijah's words got through to him and before he died he repented of his bad actions.

And there are lots more: Esther, Zechariah, Jonah... We'll be hearing some of their stories over the next few weeks. All prophets are people who have a special connection with God. Some of you may remember the words from the stories in Kindergarten Kids Church: "Prophets are people who come so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know what is most important." Regular people—and even kings count as regular people—are often so wrapped up in their everyday problems that they miss the things that are important.

So can only a certain special kind of person be a prophet? Well, sort of. Obviously, it takes somebody willing to pay attention to God, to come close to God, and to let God come close to them. But beyond that there's no specialness needed! Sometimes people want to put limits on who can prophecy. But from the very beginning of the Bible we can see that's not what God wants. Way back when Moses was leading God's people through the wilderness some people who weren't in the group of leaders started to prophecy, and right away people came to Moses to tell on them. "Don't worry about it!" Moses told them. "I'm not jealous because they're also prophets—in fact, I wish that *all* of us could be prophets, and filled with God's spirit!"

Wondering Questions

I wonder whether people choose to be prophets, or is becoming one something that just happens?

I wonder if prophets are always easy people to get along with?

I wonder if you know any prophets?