PROPHETS

KAI: Hey, Libby.

LIBBY: The Lord has spoken. This land will become a desolate wasteland, a place for owls and swamp land. Give me all your money so I can keep it safe.

KAI: Wait, do I have time to run home and go get my limited-edition “Lord of the Rings” chess set?

LIBBY: That's the one thing you'd save?

KAI: It's the one chess set to rule them all.

LIBBY: I'm just going to go.

KAI: Is that a yes?

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: Today we'll be talking about the prophets of the Old Testament and how they can help you get through another excruciating Thanksgiving dinner with your Aunt Rhonda.

KAI: But first, who were they?

LIBBY: They lived in ancient Israel from about 8th Century B.C. to the 1st Century A.D.

KAI: Since the situation back then was, shall we say, unstable, prophets proclaimed messages from God and often served as advisors to kings, literally speaking truth to power.

LIBBY: The books of the prophets in the Old Testament are divided into Major and Minor. We say Minor because those books are shorter, not because they were less important or underage. The historical books of Judges, Kings and Samuel contain prophets as well.

KAI: And what characterizes these prophets? Well, first off, the Biblical prophets didn't really choose to be prophets, but, rather, received their prophecies as a gift from God.

LIBBY: Or in some cases, a curse, literally. Since God had established a covenant relationship with Israel, many prophecies were curses that describe the consequences for turning away from God. To draw attention to that not-so-cheery message, the prophets used puns, humor and illustrative language.

PROPHET KAI: So what is up with the house of Israel? They say to a piece of wood, "You are my father,” And to a stone, "You gave me birth." They turned their backs to me, not their faces, yet, in their time of trouble, they cry out, "Rise up and save us." Where are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them rise up. Will they save you in your time of trouble?

LIBBY: Yikes. A little on the judgy side.

KAI: Well, judge not, as Christ taught, didn't mean that a Jew or a Christian should never judge, just that they should never judge wrongly based on personal preference, taste or gossip. And really what's a little judgment compared to the destruction of your civilization?

LIBBY: True. Unfortunately for everyone, many of the calamities the prophets warned about ended up coming true, if their calls to trust God were ignored.

KAI: And this job did not win anyone any popularity contest or VIP treatment, not even from God. The reward for being a prophet could be anything from being scorned, to being mocked, or thrown into a pit.

LIBBY: Being asked to walk around naked for three years.

KAI: Being asked to marry the most promiscuous woman you can find, and then getting cheated on.

LIBBY: Being swallowed by a whale.

KAI: Or being told by God to bake your bread over human feces.

LIBBY: Which, I think, we are all grateful doesn't apply to us today.

KAI: To see some prophecy in action, let's look at Isaiah.

LIBBY: God sent the prophet Isaiah at a crucial moment in Israel's history.

KAI: After only a couple of generations of the united kingdom of Israel … not that United Kingdom. In 922 B.C., the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, making the Southern Kingdom vulnerable to its neighbors.

LIBBY: The prophet Isaiah was appointed as advisor to Ahaz, king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He exhorted Ahaz to put his trust in God, and reminded him that his main task was encouraging God's chosen people to keep the commandments. In return, God would protect them.

KAI: But Ahaz didn't follow Isaiah's warning, and sold out his people. Instead of leading them in faith in God's providence, he asked for help from their enemy, Assyria.

LIBBY: Bad idea. The Assyrians took over and oppressed the people of Judah, set up pagan altars everywhere, and took almost all of their accumulated wealth. When he died, the people thought Ahaz was such a failure at being a king, they refused to bury him with the other kings.

KAI: Most of Israel's history was a painful political back and forth like this.

LIBBY: So it was natural for the Israelites to want an immediate savior to deliver them from their neighbors, invaders and oppressors.

KAI: And once again, the prophets' task was always to remind the Israelites not to place their ultimate hope in whomever ruled their kingdom. That hope is reserved for God alone.

LIBBY: Which is a good reminder for those of us who might have any hope left in our political system.

KAI: That's why the Church's readings during Advent are full of passages from Isaiah, warning us, even today, not to make the same mistake with worldly leaders, and to put our hope in Christ.

LIBBY: Rather than getting cynical, though, we can take these stories as a sign of hope. At the end of the day, Christ is still King, no matter who's in charge on Earth.

KAI: The prophets remind us of our need to listen to what God might be telling us and to always turn back to Him when we go astray.

LIBBY: But it's because the Old Testament prophets show us how we should all act in relationship with God who loves us.

KAI: In other words, not because a self-proclaimed modern prophet is convinced that the apocalypse is scheduled for next Tuesday.

LIBBY: So if your Aunt Rhonda starts talking end-times prophecies after one too many dips in the punchbowl at Thanksgiving, remember that the Old Testament prophets had a role in a specific time and place in history.

KAI: And according to Jesus Himself, no one knows exactly when the end of our history will be. So anyone who claims to is wrong.

LIBBY: I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Thanks for watching Catholic Central.

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