

## *Exploring the Prophets*

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Every year, the Bat Kol Tri- Diocesan Committee organizes two activities meant to help promote the Christian-Jewish dialogue. This year was a very special occasion because 2015 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican II declaration on *The Relation of the Church and Non-Christian Religions* by published on October 28, 1965. This spring, Rabbi Alan Green from Shaarey Zedek Synagogue in Winnipeg accepted to give a three session series, at St. Mary's Academy, *Exploring the Prophets*, which provided a brief overview of the phenomenon of prophecy in Hebrew Scripture.



To relate better to this perspective it might help to be conscious that the books we refer to as the *Historical Books* in the Christian Bibles, (the books of Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Sam., 1&2 Kings) are referred to as the *Former Prophets* in the Hebrew text and those that will come much later, some after the Exile, are called the *Latter Prophets*.

On the first evening, we were presented with three of the *Former* prophets, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. God's calling to Samuel as a child in the Temple of Shiloh is a clear manifestation of God's intervention in his vocation. As an adult, God will call on him to anoint both King Saul and King David. Elijah and Elishah are called as adults. At some point, discouraged, Elijah feels his task is beyond him and tells God, *Enough! Now, O Lord take my life, for I am no better than my fathers*. It is amazing on the part of one to

whom God gave the power to perform miracles, Rabbi Alan Green pointed out. It is not uncommon for prophets to become deeply discouraged by the task. Jeremiah will deplore the day he was born, *A curse on the day when I was born... For me the Lord's word has been the cause of insult and derision...*

A passage read from Jewish literature tells of an incident where Rabbi Eliezer, a great master, performed miracles to prove his point yet, the masters debating with him did not accept miracles as signs of divine intervention since it is written in the Torah given at Sinai, once and for all, that *After the majority must one incline*, and so Eliezer should incline in front of the majority that opposes him. According to Rabbi Green this might explain why the Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus did not accept his miracles as signs of a divine role on his part.

On the second evening we touched on some of the Minor Prophets, because their writings are brief, who often speak harshly to the people of Israel who are turning to idolatry, worshipping the gods of the Canaanites, where they have settled upon entering the Promised Land. Amos wants the people of Israel to become aware that God *Has singled you out of all the families of the earth – That is why He will call you to account for all your iniquities*. This explains the harsh language often used by the prophets as if saying: *Don't you see? Don't you understand? Don't you care?*

The third evening touched upon the three prophets of the Exile, when Israel was taken to Babylon where normally they should never have come back. To Jeremiah, God had declared; *Before I created you in the womb, I selected you...* And God sends him to *that nation of rebels* and says, *Do not be afraid of them...speak my words to them*.

Being called by the Spirit can be daunting because the expectations are beyond our frailty. For example, God brings Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones and tells Ezekiel to *prophesy* so as to bring the bones back to life. It is an indication that the prophet needs to get involved. *God needs our human role otherwise his decision cannot materialize*, reminded Rabbi Green. Of course this valley filled with bones is imagery, for God declares to Ezekiel, *These bones are the whole house of Israel*, understood, desperate in exile. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah were the prophets who kept Israel's faith in their God, who *prophesied* and made possible the return of Israel to its homeland. They believed so strongly in God, that their dream of a return home came true.

On each evening the packed audiences from the Dioceses of St. Boniface, Winnipeg and the Ukrainian Archeparchy were left to ponder important questions of our Faith: Did this teaching reach us? Reach us in a practical way or was it just another story or even history or another series? Do we truly believe that we must prophesy in our own milieu so that *God's decisions may materialize*.

