

Five Things the Prophets Teach Us About Emphasizing Our Message

Sometimes when we are trying to communicate it is necessary to say things in a certain way in order to emphasize it. If the content of your message is important, so is the way you deliver it. That is why we need to know how to deliver stuff like this in the best way. God sent various prophets to His people to relay His message. And since His message was and is the most important message of all, it is very fortunate that these prophets had some great emphasis techniques at their disposal. Here are five great emphasis techniques we can learn from the prophets:

1. Repetition of a word or phrase

You can probably think of some examples of books or famous speeches or some other type of communication where this has been used. You can see its effective use everywhere from Dr. Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech to Dr. Seuss's Green Eggs and Ham. In Zephaniah 1: 14-16 the prophet Zephaniah utilized repetition:

Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly;

Listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A

day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, and day

of destruction and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the

corner towers.

Not long after Solomon died Israel split into the kingdom of

Israel in the north and kingdom of Judah in the south. After these kingdoms fell into spiritual decline, God sent various prophets to these kingdoms to announce His anger and judgment. The prophets wanted the people to feel fear, expectancy, and urgency when they heard them. Zephaniah used repetition of a word to get this feeling here. It would have worked for him to say, "The Day of the Lord is coming and it's going to be really bad," but the repetition emphasized the message.

2. Use of synonymic words and phrases

Sometimes the prophets showed emphasis by using all manner of synonyms for words instead of the words themselves. This is the technique Amos used to relay his divine message in Amos 5:20: "Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?" Throughout the book, Amos called out the nation for foolishly looking forward to the day of the Lord without even being ready. For them it will be a dark day. Amos emphasizes this by using synonyms of the word dark: There is "darkness," "instead of light," "gloom," and "no brightness." Amos could have said, "Shall not the day of the Lord be dark?" But the prophets were trying to be thorough; I don't think they cared so much about economy of words. They wanted to emphasize their message no matter how many words it took.

3. Adding lots of adjectives

Sometimes emphasis was as simple as adding more adjectives than actually necessary. This was a handy tool for God's prophets. In Malachi 4:5 we read the following: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Malachi here describes the day of the Lord as "great and dreadful." Technically only one of these adjectives is really needed. Back in the Zephaniah passage, we saw how he chose to simply call it "great," but then scattered lots of other adjectives throughout the rest of the passage. Many of the prophets

tended to use this same technique to emphasize their point. And this wasn't a technique limited to the prophets; many writers of the Bible did this same thing. In fact, adjectives have been a close friend and ally of all writers of all times. Used wisely, adjectives help writers paint a vivid mental picture. In this fashion they painted a portrait of the Day of the Lord. But while adjectives can be helpful, don't overuse them. Use them strategically but not haphazard.

4. The Use of very strong imagery

In talking about the Day of the Lord, the prophets were not always referring to the very end of time. They were always referring to a future judgment of God. In discussing the Day of the Lord, the prophet Joel was referring to end time judgment. Joel 2:30, 31 says:

I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth with blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Wow! That's got some startling imagery. He is talking about miraculous wonders, fire, smoke, a dark sun, and a bloody moon. These descriptive phrases build an image in your mind so that you will not only pay attention to it, you will remember it.

5. The use of metaphors

This may be the most commonly used emphasis technique in Scripture. The examples of this technique used throughout the Bible are legion. And the prophetic books definitely use it plenty of times. Sometimes God even commanded the prophets to perform literal actions to accentuate their message. Hosea is the perfect example. God commanded him to do a drastic thing as a lifestyle metaphor: He told him to marry a prostitute.

Hosea 1:2 says "When the Lord spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.'" That's hard stuff. But Hosea was God's chosen human instrument of communication. His horrible lifestyle metaphor paved the way for a message full of marriage metaphor. Israel was God's Gomer, His adulterous bride. But the metaphor is really about how much He loves us. We learn that God is so incredibly longsuffering with us because we are His. Not just His bride, but Hosea also likens us to His child. Hosea 11:1 says, "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Israel I called my child." And He loves us, His child, His bride, even when we stray. Even in our darkest and most shameful of moments when we have prostituted ourselves with the world, He is always willing to take us back even as Hosea longed to take back his adulteress wife. And He is a Father who hones and sharpens His children. He is a Father of complete love and joy. This is the Father these metaphors emphasized.

What I have named here is not an exhaustive list of the techniques the prophets used to emphasize their message. Nor were these techniques limited to the prophetic books of Scripture. In varying ways and degrees, you will find them throughout the Bible. These are just a few examples to show you that the prophets did everything they could to effectively emphasize the concept. It was a message they wanted people to hear. And there is more that we can learn about communication from the prophets. We would do well to study both their messages and their effective techniques.