

## Gordon Chapel Windows

The stained-glass windows of the Gordon Chapel appear to be one continuous flow of color. Like so many beautiful things, they must be taken apart and understood bit by bit to fully grasp their meaning. Each of the windows is based upon the teachings of one of the Prophets of the Jewish Bible. The teachings of the Prophets are significantly linked to the history of the Reform Movement, which is deeply committed to the prophetic wisdom contained in these sacred texts.



The twelve windows represent twelve books of the Hebrew Bible. Beginning on the left side of the room, the first window is a collage of color. But if you look carefully, it is possible to see a middle panel depicting three white cherubs or angels. These angels remind us of the threefold instruction of the prophet Micah. His words are so familiar: "...do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God."



The second window communicates a different mood entirely. It symbolizes the words of the prophet Hosea who reminds us that if we follow the customs and traditions of Jewish life, our own lives will be enriched. Hosea says that if we follow the traditions, the people of Israel shall blossom like a lily, the flower we see in the middle.



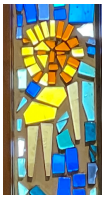
The third window represents the struggle of the prophet Jonah. Jonah knew he had a responsibility to teach others about God and what God demands of us. Jonah ran from his obligations, afraid he would be laughed at and misunderstood. Once aboard a ship, Jonah was thrown into the ocean by his shipmates who knew that he was running away from the work God intended. The middle panel represents the fish that swallowed Jonah; the hopeful splash of red symbolizes Jonah himself who comes to understand there is no running away from our responsibilities.



The figure of a human being, represented in the fourth window, depicts the melancholy and sense of tragedy from the prophet Job. Job struggles with the never-ending problem of understanding why evil and suffering exist, which are unavoidable parts of humanity. Even though we cannot fully understand it, Job teaches us that we must not let our experience of evil make us cynical about God or rejecting the goodness God does create. The colors above the tragic figure represent Job's willingness to affirm life in the face of evil.



The fifth window contains symbols derived from the book of Ruth. A Moabite woman who married into a Jewish family, Ruth chooses to remain a member of the Jewish people after her husband's death. Ruth says these words to her mother-in-law, Naomi: "...wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." The sincerity of Ruth's conversion was so complete that her descendant, King David, was worthy to become king of the Israelites. The musical instrument and the crown in the window are symbolic of David's life. The sheaf of wheat is the main symbol of the Book of Ruth, which takes place during the wheat harvest and holiday of Shavuot.



In the sixth window is a lion's head, symbolic of the struggle of the prophet Daniel in the lion's den. It reminds us that in the face of death, Daniel was able to maintain his courage. He survived his struggle and the Book of Daniel is a song of praise to God, who creates in us the potential to strive towards our goals in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.



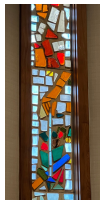
At the far right side of the chapel, the seventh window represents the symbols of the prophet Isaiah; the scales of justice, the plow, and the sword. His message is pure, his words clear: "You shall beat your swords into plowshares; and your spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they make war anymore."



The eighth window pictures the tablets of the Ten Commandments above the figures of two human beings holding hands. These are symbolic of the words of Malachi who pleaded for world peace and justice with these words: "Did not one God create us? Why must we deal treacherously, brother against brother, profaning our covenant with God?"



The ninth window depicts the prophet Ezekiel's abstract vision of God, a celestial hand reaching down from the heavens. Ezekiel rebukes Israel, saying that they have left their Godliness behind and have become spiritually dead. They are nothing but dry bones lying in a parched desert. Yet, Ezekiel asks: "Shall these dry bones live? Can we not rejuvenate ourselves?" Ezekiel pleads with the people to come back to tradition, and by their individual actions, to make the dry bones of Israel into a living, breathing, vital people once again.



The tenth window depicts a hand using a plumb line, an instrument of measure. It is symbolic of the words of Amos who reminds us that our acts are constantly being measured against an image of perfection. Amos says: "Hate evil and love what is good. Seek justice and pursue it, that the Lord your God may truly be with you."



The bolt of lightning in the eleventh window is striking the city of Jerusalem. It is symbolic of the words of Jeremiah who repeatedly chastises the people of Israel. He says: "My people are ...foolish children. They are clever at doing wrong, but unable to do right." Jeremiah begs the people to change, to lead just and moral lives. He dramatically prophesied that if the people do not change, they and the city of Jerusalem, would surely be destroyed.



In the twelfth window, you see a familiar symbol, the seven branched menorah. This menorah is described by the prophet Zechariah as a reminder that the seven eyes of God are ranging over the earth continually, to see that the words of Torah are being fulfilled. And what is the message of Torah, according to Zechariah? He says: "Not by might, not by power, but by spirit alone, shall peace be created on this earth."



Directly behind the ark, we come to the last of the beautiful windows in the Gordon Chapel. This, the center window, has no symbol. The abstract imagery functions only as a backdrop for the most important symbol in any Jewish worship space, the Holy Ark. In it, we store our Torah scrolls, the most sacred object in Jewish life. Proverbs teaches that "it is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it, and all who cling to it find happiness. Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace."