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The Gift of Prophecy



Neuroscientists have begun to understand the marvelous facility of human infants for language acquisition. At six months, a baby can understand the sounds that comprise English words, or words from any of the other 7,000-plus spoken languages. If exposed to a second language, they can acquire that language, as well. During this period a mysterious mental door opens, allowing infants to distinguish the forty or so sounds that generally make up a native language from the 800 different sounds that they can perceive at birth. But there is one catch: babies must be spoken to. You might call it voice lessons for newborns.

Why would God create us with this wonderful capacity for speech recognition and language acquisition if He never intended to speak to us? The question is rhetorical, of course—for the Bible declares, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" *(Heb. 1:1, 2, NKJV).*

When sin shattered Adam and Eve's communion with God, He did not wash His hands of them and leave the fallen pair to self-destruct. He came looking for them both, asking Adam, " 'Where are you?' " *(Gen. 3:9, NKJV)*. He went on to prophesy about the birth of One who would save the world from sin *(Gen. 3:15)*. From its inception, right there in Eden after the Fall, prophecy has uplifted Jesus and pointed sinners to Him, their only hope.

This quarter we will study the gift of prophecy, God's ingenious innovation for communicating His will and way to fallen human beings, who can no longer commune face-to-face with Him. This special gift of the Holy Spirit is mentioned prominently in 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Corinthians 14, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12. The Holy Spirit is the great dispenser of this and all other spiritual gifts, "distributing to each one individually as He wills" *(1 Cor. 12:11, NKJV).* Throughout time, spiritually gifted spokespersons have delivered divine messages to restore and renew our relationship with God, just as God did in Eden after the Fall.

This quarter we will study the gift of prophecy, God's ingenious innovation for communicating His will and way to fallen human beings, who can no longer commune face-to-face with Him.

We will learn how God calls prophets and how we can test their authenticity. We will see the similarities and differences between Old and New Testament prophets, as well as gain a working understanding of how revelation and inspiration function in their lives. While some prophets spoke, others wrote; some did both. We will examine these and other modes of divine discourse, their implications, and the blessings of obeying the messages that these prophets delivered.

God uses the gift of prophecy for five crucial purposes: (1) to reveal Himself, His truth, and His will for fallen humanity; (2) to give insight and counsel regarding important events and happenings; (3) to equip the body of Christ—the church—for mission; (4) to provide spiritual encouragement to His followers; (5) to awaken sinners and call them to repentance. In addition, "the spirit of prophecy" is one of two distinguishing marks of God's end-time remnant church *(Rev. 12:17, Rev. 19:10)*.

So invested is God in guiding the lost safely home that the gift of prophecy is provided for the last days, as well *(Joel 2:28–31)*. Seventh-day Adventists believe—with very good reasons—that Ellen G. White, cofounder of the church, exercised a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift.

This is why, along with our study of the gift of prophecy in Scripture, each Friday we will explore the dynamics of Ellen G. White's call to prophetic ministry. We, as a church, have been given this wonderful gift. How do we best use it?

Yes, from infancy onward, we have been wired to be spoken to. How important, then, that we listen to what God's prophets tell us!

This Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide *was produced by the ministry team of the White Estate office, in Silver Spring, Maryland. By sharing Ellen White's prophetic ministry and writings throughout the world, the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc., supports the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in uplifting Jesus Christ and His Word.*