LESSON 10 *November 28–December 4

(page 80 of Standard Edition)

Prophetic Authority *and* Relevance



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 4:10–16, Luke 8:22–25, John 3:1–10, Acts 16:25–34, 1 Cor. 5:1–5, Luke 7:28.*

Memory Text: **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"** *(Hebrews 4:12, NKJV).*

On November 9, 1989, Günter Schabowski's statement on live TV in Communist East Germany set in motion the fall of the Berlin Wall. Speaking as East Germany's press spokesperson, Schabowski botched a statement during the televised press conference. Instead of announcing that East Germans *may* be allowed to visit Western Europe after the lengthy and difficult process of obtaining the proper visas, he simply said that East Germans *would* be permitted to visit Western Europe. When a reporter asked when the policy change would take effect, Schabowski said, "As far as I know, this enters into force . . . immediately, without delay." Within minutes people began pouring toward border checkpoints, demanding to be let through, as the government had announced.

People have often been delegated authority to speak for a company or even a country. But what about those who speak for God? This week we will examine what authority biblical prophets possess, and what, if any, authority is held by prophets who never wrote a book of the Bible, such as Nathan the prophet, John the Baptist, and, yes, even Ellen G. White.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 5.*

Mediating God's Authority

Before giving a person permission to speak for you, would you not be sure to choose someone you trusted? It would be important that he or she knew your position and faithfully expressed it.

Read Exodus 2:11–15 and Exodus 3:1–3, 10–13. How did Moses' time as a shepherd prepare him to be a spokesperson for God?

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Moses had spent the first 40 years of his life getting the best education that Egypt had to offer, but this would not prepare him to become God's messenger. He had to spend the next 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd, without the distractions of the world. In many ways he had to undo much of what he had learned as a prince. Before he could cooperate in freeing Israel, Moses had to get to know the God on whose behalf he would be speaking.

Read Exodus 4:10–16. What can we learn from this discussion between God and Moses about how prophets are called and how they work?

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Moses was asked to play the role of God, with Aaron assuming the role of Moses' mouthpiece *(Exod. 4:16; see also Exod. 7:1)*. As He did with Moses and Aaron, God helps His prophets find the best way to deliver the message that He gives them.

Moses knew that he had previously failed. He remembered his last encounter with fellow Israelites, when his authority had been questioned *(Exod. 2:14)*. God understood Moses' apprehension. He dealt patiently with his fears. All grounds for excuse had been removed, but, even then, Moses resisted the call. His fears had crossed over into unbelief. By his reluctance, he was questioning God's ability to use him. It was then that God issued an unqualified command to get the reluctant prophet moving *(Exod. 3:14–17)*.

You may not be a prophet, but what has God called you to do for Him during your lifetime? What is the best way to prepare yourself for this calling?

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The Authority of Jesus

What was the basis of Jesus' authority? What was the evidence of this authority? *See Matt. 21:23–27 and John 17:2.*

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While Jesus was teaching, the priests came to Him and demanded to know who had given Him the authority to do this ministry. After all, Jesus had not graduated from any of the local schools, nor had He received training in the traditional schools of the rabbis. Rather than answering their questions, Jesus pointed the way to the answer, asking His interrogators about the unmistakable authority exhibited by John the Baptist. By refusing to answer, they not only rejected the power of God that crowned the ministry of John but also the authority of Jesus who, like John, was also sent by God.

What do the following verses also tell us about Jesus' authority? *Matt. 7:28, 29; Mark 1:21–27; Luke 8:22–25; Luke 9:1; John 5:25–27; and John 7:38.*

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All authority belongs to Jesus as humanity's Creator *(John 1:3)* and Savior *(Rom. 3:24)*. He is the Word of God. The divine authority possessed by Jesus during His earthly life and ministry could not be imitated or self-generated by anyone. Jesus' teaching astonished listeners because He taught as One having authority *(Matt. 7:29)*.

All the Gospels record Jesus' otherworldly prophetic authority. Jesus forgave sins *(Mark 2:10, 11)*, drove out demons *(Mark 3:15),* and knew what people were thinking *(John 2:24, 25)*. He raised the dead and offered eternal life *(John 10:28)*. While on earth as our Redeemer, Jesus exercised authority given to Him by God the Father *(John 17:2)*, and He depended on and cooperated with the Father *(John 5:19)* at all times, often referring back to the Scriptures, which, He claimed, testified about Him. Jesus also possessed absolute authority and could delegate that authority to His disciples *(Mark 6:7)*. As the Word of God, His testimony also came to the prophets through whom He spoke *(Rev. 19:10)*.

Even with all the evidence Jesus gave, some people still rejected Him. How can we be careful not to fall into the same trap of unbelief, given all the reasons we have to believe?

Biblical Authority

The Bible is the product of prophetic, inspired revelation from God. It answers life's big questions and is God's unique means of revealing Himself to the human race. Through Scripture, we learn the meaning of human existence, the character and will of God, and God's purpose for our lives. The Bible is the gold standard of truth, the authority by which we must make life choices. It is the foundation of the Christian's worldview and the basis of all revealed truth. It is the Christian's rule of faith and practice.

We can either accept or reject God's Word, and we need not go to the extreme of burning our Bibles, as King Jehoiakim did *(see Jer. 36:22–27)* in rejecting it. Ignoring it, even while professing to believe in it, can be just as problematic. When we discover and accept God's Word, we can, like King Josiah, be transformed and lead others to God *(see 2 Kings 22:10–13)*.

Today, people often approach Scripture by looking for its faults or ridiculing it. Some see the Bible as out of step with contemporary mores (it usually is, and ought to be, too). Many deride it because it contradicts "scientific" or cultural trends.

In Christianity, the Bible is often used only to support a particular theological position rather than as a means for personal spiritual growth and reformation. Others interpret the Bible in such a way that it is denied any historical or practical authority over their daily lives.

One of the easiest, and perhaps most common, ways of rejecting biblical authority is to ignore the Bible and not take the time to read and then apply Scripture to our lives.

What effect did the spoken Word of God have in the following situations? *See Jer. 38:1–4, John 3:1–10, and Acts 16:25–34.*

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In ancient times, writing material was scarce and expensive. Furthermore, many people could not read, so the spoken Word of God through His prophets was essential.

Under the power of the Holy Spirit, God's Word, whether spoken or written, can penetrate the heart to reveal sin and bring reformation and restoration. The Word calls us to repentance and obedience *(Acts 5:29; see also Heb. 4:12)*. And that's often the reason many people who should know better reject it. They don't like its claims on their lives.

Organizational Authority

Hosea 12:13 makes clear that "by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved" *(NKJV)*. Protecting and guiding God's people was a formative and essential part of the work of the biblical prophets.

If we read such texts as Judges 4:4–8, 2 Chronicles 20:14–17, Exodus 12:1–3, and Deuteronomy 1:9–16, we can see that prophets were crucial in revealing God's leadership strategy for His people. In times of war and crisis, prophets were the means by which God offered direction, encouragement, and hope to His people and their leaders, as He did through Jehaziel and Deborah. Prophets also gave guidance concerning festivals and worship *(Exod. 12:1–3)*. At other times, God spoke to prophets concerning the governance of the nation. In short, no area of Israelite life was beyond the direction and guidance of God through His chosen messengers.

What are some of the specific areas in which the prophetic gift assisted the organization and leadership of the early Christian church? *Acts 6:1-7, 1 Cor. 5:1–5, 1 Cor. 7:10–16, Titus 1:5.*

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Imagine beginning a new organization without an operational manual and no visible leader. Such an organization is sure to experience serious challenges. In a certain sense, this was the situation in the early Christian church. Jesus had ascended and was no longer with His disciples. They had a clear directive from Him: " 'Go into all the world and preach' " *(Mark 16:15, NKJV)*. Although the Twelve Apostles had been chosen, there was no clear organizational structure to help them get started.

The early church faced many challenges, such as church organization, structure for mission, and the need to identify and condemn heresy and immorality among them. In a real sense, the prophetic gift operating in the early church played a critical role in its preservation and protection *(Acts 13:1, 2)*. It is hard, in fact, to envision how the early church could have even gotten started without the aid of the prophetic gift in helping organize it and move it forward for mission.

Some people seem skeptical about "organized religion." Whatever the challenges, what are the advantages of being part of an organized church structure? What can you give, and get, from being part of something much larger than yourself?

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Canonical and Noncanonical Prophets

Read 1 Chronicles 29:29 and 2 Chronicles 9:29. What do you notice about some of the prophets mentioned in these two passages?

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There were many prophets such as Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, and Iddo who were recognized prophets but whose books did not become part of the Bible.

Read 1 Kings 11:29–39 and Luke 7:28. What do these texts teach about the authority of noncanonical prophets?

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Although we do not know why God permitted some prophets' messages to be included in the Bible while others were left out, we do know that the noncanonical prophets who were not included in Scripture were equally inspired by God. The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, will continue until the end of time. The Bible predicts that there will be postbiblical, noncanonical prophets "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith" *(Eph. 4:12, 13, NKJV),* and they will exist " 'before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD' " *(Joel 2:31, NKJV)*.

After David committed adultery and murder, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him *(2 Sam. 12:7–14)*. Although Nathan had not written a biblical book, David did not question Nathan's authority, and that's because the authority of the prophets' writings is based on their inspiration, and not on whether or not they were included in the biblical canon. Nevertheless, all true noncanonical prophets, particularly prophets after the time of the Bible—and especially a modern prophet such as Ellen G. White—saw themselves as subject to biblical authority. Their messages had to be tested by the Bible and do not replace the Bible as a source for faith and doctrine.

Ellen G. White wrote, "The Lord desires you to study your Bibles. He has not given any additional light to take the place of His Word. This light is to bring confused minds to His Word, which, if eaten and digested, is as the lifeblood of the soul."—*Selected Messages,* book 3, p. 29. How well do we as a church heed these words of hers?

(page 86 of Standard Edition)

Speaking With Authority

The prophets speak to us with authority and relevance because God has chosen them as His messengers. There are canonical prophets (those whose writings became part of the Bible), noncanonical prophets (those who did not write a book included in the Bible), and postbiblical, noncanonical prophets (those prophets who appear after New Testament times). All were equally inspired, and their messages bore the stamp of divine authority.

Ellen G. White belongs to the postbiblical, noncanonical group of prophets. Yet, Seventh-day Adventists do not consider her writings an addition to the Bible, nor equal to it. Her writings are, however, relevant and speak with authority, a point stated by Ellen G. White herself: " 'In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.' "—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 29.

Consistent with the Bible, Ellen G. White points out the reality of sin and our need of Jesus, the only hope of eternal life, which is given by grace to all who by faith claim it for themselves, another powerful theme in her messages.

Through her messages (or rather, God's messages through her) we see the battle between good and evil, starting with the fall of Lucifer in heaven and going right through to the end of time, when sin and evil, along with Satan and his fallen angels, will be forever eradicated. Ellen G. White's writings provide insight into biblical principles within the end-time context. She speaks, for example, of the danger of merging church with state and the importance of religious liberty; she warns about the decay of morality; she uplifts God's law and its significance; and though our understanding of, for example, the "mark of the beast" is certainly not based on her writings, her words do give us wonderful insights on final events.

She also emphasizes the practical application of Christian living. Her messages about spirituality, health, education, family relations, parenting, moral life, and more have helped many change their lifestyle and thus experience better lives on a number of levels.

Ellen G. White's writings are not in the Bible, but God has used her to guide believers who are living in the final days of earth's history. Her writings still speak with prophetic authority and relevance.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/10.

INSIDE *Story*

To Finland With Love: The Mission of Elsa Luukkanen

Born on May 20, 1916, in Sortavala, Finland, Elsa Luukkanen grew up in poverty. At 16, after attending Adventist revival meetings, she was baptized—a decision that cost her, for a time, her home and job because of her Sabbath observance. Yet, despite rejection and hardship, she stood firm, and her journey as a soul winner began.

At 17, Elsa led her first person to Christ. By 19, she was preaching. Her first major speaking assignment came during an Easter visit to Laukaa, where locals announced her as the Good Friday speaker.

With support from a church member, Elsa studied at the Toivonlinna Adventist mission school. She then worked as a literature evangelist before becoming a Bible worker. When World War II broke out and men were drafted, Elsa and fellow Bible worker Aino Varma Lehtoluoto carried the gospel across Finland, holding evangelistic meetings in towns such as Joensuu, Pieksämäki, and Varkaus.

Despite wartime scarcity and opposition, sometimes even being denied access to public halls, Elsa pressed on. Her meetings drew large crowds, and her heartfelt preaching, often accompanied by singing and guitar music, stirred many hearts. In Joensuu, the Adventist presence grew from five to 150 members in just two years, forming a new church. More congregations soon followed in other cities. One colleague described her as "a spirit-filled evangelist, an eloquent speaker who moved hearts and minds toward God."

After the war, her impact only expanded. In Helsinki in 1957, she preached up to three times a day to overflowing crowds, resulting in 80 baptisms. So tireless was her work that the conference requested her to take a vacation. But for Elsa, rest meant more mission. Alongside Aino, she toured Finnish immigrant communities in North America, preaching, singing, and supporting themselves through dressmaking. She called it "vacation evangelism."

Elsa returned to Finland, and, in the late 1960s, she launched the Adventist Welfare Society, distributing tens of thousands of blankets and garments across poor regions of Eastern Europe. She and Aino even raised funds and sewed items to build a new church and welfare center in Kajaani. "I could not just preach," she once said. "As a spiritual mother, I had to find homes for my children." Elsa Luukkanen found and built those homes across Finland, leaving behind a legacy of compassion and unstoppable evangelistic zeal.

By the time of her death in 1996, Elsa had led more than 700 people to Christ and helped establish multiple churches. Honored in 1975 during International Women's Year, she remained a bold, tireless voice for mission, undeterred by hardship, war, or poverty.

Adapted from the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists, *available at encyclopedia.adventist.org*