LESSON 12 *December 12–18

(page 96 of Standard Edition)

End-Time Prophetic Revelations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Joel 2:28–32, Acts 2:1–21, Eph. 4:11–14, Rev. 12:17, Rev. 19:10, Acts 2:36–42.*

Memory Text: **" 'And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days' "** *(Joel 2:28, 29, NKJV).*

In some government legislation, there is a "sunset provision." This legal term has nothing to do with the setting of the sun. Rather, it is a clause that provides for the automatic expiration of a statute on a specific date. Governments place such clauses in legislation for a variety of reasons. For instance, they may enact certain laws abridging the rights of citizens during times of national peril. Governments will sometimes include sunset provisions to void these laws on a certain date in order to restore to their citizens the rights that were temporarily taken away.

Did God include a sunset provision when the Holy Spirit gave the gift of prophecy in ancient times? Is there a time before the return of Jesus when this gift will cease to be operational? Last week we learned that God spoke through prophets to His people at crucial moments. This week we will examine the prophetic gift at the end of time—its special function and perpetuity—as well as the role of Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry as the second coming of Jesus draws closer.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 19.*

The Promise of Joel

Read Joel 2:28–32. What does God promise to do in the last days?

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Joel, a seventh-century B.C. prophet, gives important insight into future events. When we read this passage, we wonder if he is speaking of his own ancient time or of things in the far future.

Theologians tend to distinguish between two forms of prophecy—classical and apocalyptic. Classical prophecy speaks of concrete nations and uses real numbers and names *(see, for example, Jer. 25:1–11)*. Apocalyptic prophecy, on the other hand, uses highly symbolic language, employs symbolic numbers for times, and often mentions cosmic signs *(see Daniel 7)*. Sometimes we find an overlap of these two types of prophecy *(see, for example, Matthew 24)*.

What about Joel 2:28–31? It seems that this passage falls into this latter category. This means that we should not expect a fulfillment within the lifespan of the prophet or even in the years immediately following his ministry. On the contrary, we should look for the fulfillment of this prophecy in the future. Notice that the context and time frame in which God will give the gift of prophecy—" 'before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD' " *(Joel 2:31, NKJV)*. Which day is that? First coming of Jesus? Or second? Or both?

When we consider the mention of signs in the sun and moon in Joel's prophecy, we are immediately struck by the fact that we can find this idea in several other biblical passages as well. Jesus told His disciples about signs in the sun, moon, and stars in His famous end-time discourse *(Matt. 24:29)*. Similarly, John the revelator mentions the same signs *(Rev. 6:12, 13)*. Both Jesus and John target the very last cosmic signs before the second coming of our Lord.

So, we can assume that Joel's prophecy, which points to similar signs, should have some impact on the end times: " 'And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD' " *(Joel 2:30, 31, NKJV)*.

Think of all the prophecies that have come to pass as predicted. Why should this help us trust God on the ones yet to come—such as the second coming of Jesus?

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Pentecost

Read Acts 2:1–21. Why did Peter quote Joel in the context of Christ's first coming? What role does prophecy play in this passage?

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In these New Testament verses, we find one of the longest quotations from the Old. When reading the reasoning of Peter, we might ask, "Peter, what about the signs? We can't see them in your situation." Peter would probably answer, *There was a fulfillment of the signs. When Jesus was hanging on the cross a few days ago, the sun was darkened for three hours (Mark 15:33)*.

What was a convincing argument for Peter is, perhaps, less persuasive for us today. We are still expecting a more complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. The key lies in the text of Joel itself. In Joel 2:23, Joel mentions the early and latter rains. Acts 2 is the first fulfillment of this prophecy—the early rain. The final fulfillment will be the outpouring of the Spirit just before the end of time through the latter rain.

Often people define prophecy as "predicting the future." This is not wrong, but Bible prophets also called people to repentance. After all, later as Peter was speaking, some in the crowd were convicted.

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' " *(Acts 2:37, NKJV)*.

And what did Peter answer?

" 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call' " *(Acts 2:38, 39, NKJV)*.

John the Baptist, as a prophet, also called people to repentence. Although proclaiming the first coming of Jesus, he also preached repentance for their sins. " 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' " *(Matt. 3:2, NKJV)*.

Thus, Joel 2 will find its final fulfillment in the future. As Joel and Peter did, the prophets of the end times will call for repentance, point to Jesus, and provide guidance for God's end-time church.

Upon seeing these supernatural manifestations, the crowd initially thought it to be some kind of natural event. In this case, they thought that the men were drunk! (Drunk men suddenly speaking in foreign languages?) However irrational their response, what is it about people that causes them, even in the face of the supernatural, to try to find a natural explanation?

Gifts of the Spirit

For the church of Christ to function well, God has given it gifts to facilitate its ministry. In the New Testament, we find several lists of spiritual gifts.

Romans 12:6–8	1 Corinthians 12:8–10	1 Corinthians 12:28	Ephesians 4:11
prophecy	word of wisdom	apostles	apostles
ministry/service	word of knowledge	**prophets**	**prophets**
teaching	faith	teachers	evangelists
exhortation	gifts of healing	workers of miracles	pastors
ruling/contributing	working of miracles	healers	teachers
giving aid	**prophecy**	helpers	
showing mercy	discerning of spirits	administrators	
	tongues	speakers in tongues	
	interpretation of tongues		

Read Ephesians 4:11–14. Why does God give these gifts to His church? How does the gift of prophecy help accomplish God's plans for the church?

The purpose of all spiritual gifts is to build up the church, as well as to proclaim the gospel. Paul included the gift of prophecy (implied from the word "prophets") in all four lists. Other gifts occur only once. Thus, we can conclude that prophecy is one of the most important spiritual gifts.

Let us consider some general features about prophets:

1. Prophets are called by God *(see 1 Kings 19:16, 19–21 and Isaiah 6)*. Often they feel unworthy and are reluctant to assume their responsibility, but they obey.

2. God speaks to prophets by visions, dreams, or audible utterances. Sometimes God reveals future events. At other times, He informs them about current affairs of nations or people *(Daniel 2)*.

3. The Scriptures describe physical phenomena: prophets may lose physical strength or even stop breathing, but they may also be filled with new power *(Dan. 10:8–10, 18, 19)*.

4. Prophets communicate their messages in various ways—orally *(Acts 21:10–12)*, through acting out *(Ezekiel 4)*, or by letters *(Revelation 2, 3)*. Certain prophets used literary assistants *(see Jer. 36:1–4)*.

5. The message of a prophet must be in accordance with former prophets, because God does not contradict Himself *(Isa. 8:20)*.

6. The content of a prophet's message, as well as the effect of a prophet's personal life, will testify to its divine origin *(Matt. 7:15–20)*.

7. Satan always attempts to counterfeit the divine. This also holds true for the prophetic gift. In the end time, there will be false prophets *(Matt. 24:24, 2 Pet. 2:1)*.

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The End-Time Remnant

Revelation 12 features the wide sweep of the history of the great controversy, from its inception in heaven until the last days.

Read Revelation 12:17. What is the "testimony of Jesus"? Compare Revelation 19:10 with Revelation 22:8, 9.

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In Revelation 12:17, two identifying characteristics of the end-time church are mentioned. The church holds to and keeps the Ten Commandments (which includes the Sabbath commandment) and has the "testimony of Jesus." What is this testimony?

Some Bible translations interpret the "testimony of Jesus" to mean that we as believers confess Jesus and make Him known through our mission and evangelism *(see Rev. 19:10, NIV:* "hold to the testimony of Jesus," Jesus being the object of Christian witnessing). Other Bible versions give a different meaning, stating that Jesus Himself gives a testimony to His church *(Rev. 19:10, GNT:* "the truth that Jesus revealed"—Jesus is the subject who bears the testimony). In fact, the original Greek text can be rendered either way. So, what did John mean?

If we compare the two marks of identification, we see a great similarity in the way they are worded (even more evident in the original Greek than in our Bibles). Just as the "commandments of God" come obviously from God, so the "testimony of Jesus" originates from Jesus. So, it is Jesus who bears witness. He identifies the true church. How does He do this? He does it through the gift of prophecy.

Answers are found in Revelation 19:10 and Revelation 22:9. Here it is clear that the "testimony of Jesus" is identified with the "spirit of prophecy." John himself is a prophet and represents in his person the "testimony of Jesus." A prophet is a person with a special calling as God's messenger to His people, whether to exhort and call to repentance, to encourage, or to reveal the future.

Revelation 12:17 shows that Jesus makes His church recognizable through this gift of prophecy. This means that just as God sent prophets to the Old Testament people of Israel and Judah, or the apostle John to the early Christian church, prophets will also arise in the last days of earth's history.

What evidence have you seen to show that the ministry of Ellen G. White can be justly identified as an example of the working of "the spirit of prophecy" *(Rev. 19:10)?*

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Modern Manifestations

Most people of faith today may grant the legitimacy of ancient biblical prophets, but do they believe the same thing is possible in our day? If the Joel 2:28–31 promise of a glorious end-time manifestation of the prophetic gift is to be believed, what might it look like?

Read Acts 2:36–42. What was the core message of Peter's sermon at Pentecost? How did Peter's audience react?

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The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in A.D. 31 is an excellent picture of what will happen during the end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit, though in much greater magnitude. Pentecost was characterized by uplifting Jesus, widespread repentance, and the creation of a people ready and equipped for God's mission. Peter's Christ-centered message was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and this led 3,000 souls to repent and be baptized. This "former rain" blessing of the Holy Spirit also planted a precious seed, the church—a unified body of believers who exemplify and share the love of Jesus Christ while heralding His return.

As the former rain was given "to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the 'latter rain' will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 611. In other words, modern manifestations of the prophetic gift—the latter rain—will look a lot like previous manifestations of the former rain at Pentecost.

As we have already seen in Joel 2:28–31, the prophetic gift at the end of time will be open to young and old, male and female. God will speak through those whom the Holy Spirit selects. Whenever the Holy Spirit chooses an end-time messenger, his or her message will uplift Jesus, call people to repentance, and prepare people to fulfill God's mission. These three characteristics are hallmarks of Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry. Throughout her life, she uplifted Jesus and Scripture in her speaking and writing. She called Seventh-day Adventists and others to heartfelt repentance, and she urged all to enlist in God's mission for the lost.

How much have you taken advantage of the wonderful gift we have been given through the ministry of Ellen G. White?

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All About Mission

In Ephesians 4, Paul indicates that the main purpose of spiritual gifts is to help believers advance God's mission. Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry had the same purpose. Her inspired messages have helped believers to develop a deeper relationship with God and prompted them to share that love with others.

"Of all professing Christians," she penned, "Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out. It is at the cross of Christ that mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other. The sinner must be led to look to Calvary; with the simple faith of a little child he must trust in the merits of the Savior, accepting His righteousness, believing in His mercy."—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 156, 157.

Moreover, each believer, she insisted, has been called to be part of God's mission. "The Lord requires that far greater personal effort shall be put forth by the members of our churches."—*Evangelism*, p. 113.

"In the Lord's work there are to be no idlers. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love." —*Evangelism*, p. 115. Ellen G. White herself was a missionary to Europe in the 1880s, and in Australia during the 1890s.

It is because of God's prophetic call to personal commitment and mission that Satan is "enraged" *(Rev. 12:17, NKJV)* with God's people at the end of time. These are the followers of Jesus who have an end-time message, prophetic guidance, and insight: "The Lord has revealed the perils that are around and before us. Through the agency of the Spirit of prophecy, He has unveiled the delusions that will take the world captive, and has spoken to His people, saying, 'This is the way; walk ye in it.' [Isaiah 30:21.] . . . *The Great Controversy* unmasks the deceptions of Satan."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 31, 1890.

Satan is furious when people give their lives to Jesus, and he does everything to discredit God's prophetic voice. Some of his methods aim to discredit Ellen G. White's prophetic gift as "irrelevant." After all, she wrote at a time much different than ours. Another attempt is to bring doubt by questioning her prophetic claims and pointing to her as a false prophet. But the most effective way of making Ellen G. White irrelevant is to disconnect the present generation from reading her writings for themselves.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/12.

Demons and Death: Part 2

By Mission Editor

The story thus far: Timo and his friends, Leena and Anneli, experienced a frightening supernatural encounter during a Bible study in Leena's apartment. Anneli later explained that she had once practiced spiritism and at times was still harassed by evil spirits. However, when she was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the demonic attacks stopped. Timo was an engineering student also preparing to be baptized. One night he was awakened by an eerie presence telling him, "Don't get baptized."

The nighttime warning didn't prevent Timo from being baptized, and he went on to become an Adventist pastor. But his experiences with the supernatural and suicide didn't stop.

One day, he and several other Adventist pastors boarded a ferry for an overnight trip to a pastors' conference in Sweden.

That night, he was restless. After unsuccessfully trying to fall sleep, he felt a sudden urgency to pray.

Almost as soon as he started to pray, he heard demonic laughter. The dreadful sound was indescribable, something like a maniac laughing. Timo sensed something bad was happening, but he didn't know what. He prayed for two hours.

At breakfast, an older pastor approached Timo.

"What was going on with you during the night?" he asked. "The Holy Spirit told me to pray for you."

He had been woken in the middle of the night and had prayed for Timo.

Then another pastor came to the breakfast table.

"You don't know what happened to me last night," he said. "I woke up and felt a huge urgency to go outside for some fresh air. When I reached the deck, I saw a man about to jump into the sea."

The pastor coaxed the man back onto the deck and counseled him for an hour afterward not to kill himself.

When the three pastors compared the timing of their nighttime experiences, they realized that all three had occurred simultaneously.

Timo, now 45 and the Communication director for the Adventist Church in Finland, sees the three encounters with suicide and the supernatural as evidence that the great controversy between Christ and Satan is very real.

"It is taking place all around us," he said. "The encouraging thing is Jesus has already won. We have nothing to fear. Even with these supernatural and terrifying events, Jesus still protects us. There is nothing the other side can do."