LESSON 2 *October 3–9

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The Call *of a* Prophet



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:6, Gal. 3:6–9, 1 Kings 18:19–39, Isaiah 53, Dan. 2:46–48, Mark 1:2–5, Matt. 11:1–6.*

Memory Text: **"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me' "** *(Isaiah 6:8, NKJV).*

In biblical times, prophets often played key roles in the history of God's people. Sometimes they were center stage, taking powerful, if not crucial, positions in the life of the community.

However, being a prophet was a difficult calling. Their lives were often not easy but filled with sorrow, rejection, misunderstanding, and frustration.

Often God's prophets did not readily accept their call to the prophetic office. And no wonder. Many prophets were strongly opposed by those who should have welcomed their messages. God's prophets were ignored, ridiculed, beaten, or jailed. Others were stoned or hunted like wild animals. Several were martyred.

Today, in a generation flooded with violence, greed, immorality, exploitation, and all manner of satanic influences, the prophetic voice is often rejected or simply ignored. We are called to heed the voice of God's prophets and to be messengers of the hope given to us through the prophets.

Last week we learned that, after the Fall in Eden, God worked to reestablish communication with human beings. This week we will examine some monumental times in history when God called prophets to realign His people with His messages for a fallen world.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 10.*

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Abraham, Defender of the Covenant

From Genesis to Revelation, God has had a faithful remnant who have accepted the call to obedience in response to His grace *(see Jer. 31:7, 31–34)*. For example, years after the dispersion from Babel, God chose Abram (later Abraham) to be an example of covenant faith, not just to his family but for all future generations. Surrounded by apostasy and moral ambivalence, Abram proved faithful to God's call. *(See Gen. 12:1–9.)*

God communicated the terms of the covenant to Abraham and showed him how humanity's salvation would be accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ *(Gen. 15:6–17)*. To test Abraham's faith and to illustrate the future sacrifice of God's Son, Abraham was called upon to offer Isaac, his son, as a sacrifice to God *(Gen. 22:1–17)*. What an excruciating test for the father of the faithful. Think of all the reasons Abraham could have used to disregard God's explicit command, yet he faithfully obeyed. God stayed the hand of Abraham from killing Isaac and provided a ram in his stead.

Not all prophets were called by God to warn of impending doom. All were called, however, to restore the people to faithfulness and often to warn against apostasy, against oppression of those who were poor and needy, and against violation of the covenant and its stipulations.

Most important of all, however, the prophets were to reveal the promise of salvation found in the Messiah. The enduring testimony of the biblical prophets and of His Spirit in our post-apostolic era calls us to recognize and to warn others of the impending crisis that will come upon the world. Yet central to that warning is the good news of redemption for Jesus' faithful people, those who have remained in covenantal relationship with Him *(Rev. 12:17)*.

Read Genesis 15:6, Galatians 3:6–9, and Hebrews 11:8. What about Abraham's life and character qualified him for God's service, even though he was, clearly, a flawed man?

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There are many parallels between Abraham's day and ours. As paganism and idolatry ran rampant in Abraham's day, so today many of the world's competing ideologies aim to eliminate or marginalize Christianity. In contrast with much of the prevailing culture, God's people today are called to reflect His image faithfully in their daily interactions with others, including their proclamation of the three angels' messages *(Rev. 14:6–12)*.

Scripture says that Abram "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" *(Gen. 15:6)*. How do you see the promise of the gospel powerfully revealed in this text? What hope can you take from this for yourself?

The Elijah Message

Read 1 Kings 18:19–39. What can we see from this story about how the prophetic office can work?

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Elijah's calling and manner of speech reflected his role as God's messenger. To stop Israel's apostasy, God sent Elijah to King Ahab in order to announce a multiyear drought. God used this affliction to turn His people away from idolatry and back to obedience. King and country blamed the prophet Elijah for their woe and sought his death.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and Asherah. God's messenger made a Spirit-filled appeal to idolatrous Israel to denounce their false gods and return to the Lord. The people knew that their choices had led them into national apostasy. They were now ready to embrace the God of Elijah again, who had proved to be superior to their false gods, which, in reality, didn't even exist.

Just prior to Christ's second coming, God commands His church to proclaim the Elijah message again, and for people to turn away from their "idols" and be ready to stand in the great day of the Lord. God still communicates with His people through channels that He has selected. His Word and the gift of prophecy provide admonition, warning, counsel, and encouragement.

"A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121.

Read Malachi 4:5, 6. How does the Elijah message impact the homes of those who follow God?

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True revival starts in the heart and the home. The family is the cornerstone of the church and an indispensable building block of community. Revival in the home spreads a heavenly love to the church, the community, and the nation. This is God's purpose for the Christian home. Revival also motivates God's people for mission.

What kinds of idols, if any, exist in our homes, hearts, and churches today?

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Isaiah, the Gospel Prophet

Isaiah, a major prophet of the Old Testament, received His call to prophetic ministry directly from God *(see Isa. 6:1–8)*. Overwhelmed by God's holiness and majesty, Isaiah realized his unworthiness. In that moment, a seraph flew to Isaiah with a live coal from the heavenly altar and "purged" his sins. God then asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah's response should be ours: "Here am I; send me" *(Isa. 6:8)*.

Isaiah's call came at a pivotal point in Israel's history. Despite his own failings, the task of warning Israel and its leaders of their sins was very important. Isaiah's prophecies are key Scripture passages, providing profound insight on God's nature, the nature of humanity, and the unfolding plan of salvation. In fact, what is unquestionably the most powerful prophecy depicting not only the death of Jesus but what His death did for the world is found in Isaiah 53.

Read Isaiah 53. How did this amazing prophecy, written more than half a millennium before the Cross, so powerfully reveal Christ's death for us? What should this prophecy teach us about the prophetic gift?

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Isaiah's prophecies foretold the Messiah's purpose and mission *(Isa. 53:3–5)*. They explained why Christ was "led like a lamb to the slaughter" *(Isa. 53:7, NIV)* and how His atoning sacrifice saved His people from their sins. The substitutionary aspect of Christ's death is so explicitly depicted there, showing the foundation of the atonement made on behalf of all humanity.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" *(Isa. 53:6)*. The universal nature of sin is depicted here; the universal nature of the Cross, the solution to sin, is depicted here as well. This chapter, perhaps more than any other in both the Old and New Testaments, shows the plan of salvation in such clear and unambiguous terms.

Yet, Isaiah's prophetic calling was not easy. People found his dire predictions of their destruction preposterous, as many do today when warned about the consequences of sin *(Rom. 6:23)*. Isaiah's prophetic voice for his time and ours is clear *(see Isa. 2:4, Isa. 5:20)*. It was the refusal of the nation to practice justice and reform that led to Jerusalem's destruction. The same sin will mark the destruction of earth's wicked inhabitants when Christ returns.

Go back through Isaiah 53 and write down everything that Jesus does for us, as depicted in those verses. What great hope can you take for yourself from what the prophet has revealed about what Christ's death has done for us?

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Daniel, the Faithful Seer

Most Christians know the story of Daniel 1, in which he stood for the health principles that he had learned as a child. Daniel was a model of faithfulness *(Dan. 1:8)*. When presented with royal delicacies, he insisted on eating a plant-based diet and drinking only water instead of partaking of the diet offered him from the king's table *(Dan. 1:12–16)*. This was a small test in contrast to what would come later, such as in Daniel 6, when his faithfulness could have easily meant death for him.

Read Daniel 2:46–48; Daniel 4:18; Daniel 5:13, 14; and Daniel 6:25–27. What do these verses tell us about the kind of witness Daniel was to the pagans around him?

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Look at the testimony from these pagans to the power of Daniel's God. However unique these stories, they all reveal a crucial principle: by our lives, by our faithfulness, and by the power of God working in and through us, others can and should learn about the God of heaven, and know that He is "a God of gods, and a Lord of kings."

Also, because the recurring theme of Daniel's prophecies is judgment, culminating in Christ's second coming (God's ultimate victory), the meaning of Daniel's name, "God is my judge," is quite appropriate. His writings deserve careful study and attention as they are relevant today. Daniel's prophecies serve as a reminder always to remain vigilant and keep God's commandments, even in the "little" things of life.

Also, as a prophet, Daniel foretold the rise and fall of nations and the consequences of their disobedience to God. Through his prophetic visions, Daniel revealed God's plan and the ultimate victory of God's kingdom *(Dan. 7:13, 14)*.

Think, for example, about Daniel 2, written half a millennium before Christ. Daniel so accurately depicted the rise and fall of these four great world empires, even coming up to our time (that of the feet and the toes of the statue), clearly referring to nations of modern Europe, which, as the prophecy so clearly teaches, "shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay" *(Dan. 2:43)*. What an amazing prediction about Europe, even to this day, in which, despite intermarriage and all attempts at unity, the continent would remain as separate nations with separate laws, customs, and traditions. When even a few years before the fall of the Soviet Union, no intelligence agency saw that fall coming, Daniel's prediction gives us powerful reasons to trust God's prophets.

All the kingdoms in Daniel 2 came and went as predicted. What should this tell us about trusting the prophecy, which talks about God's eternal kingdom coming next *(Dan. 2:44)***?**

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John the Baptist, Preparing a People

Read Mark 1:2–5. What was the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry?

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The Gospel of Mark informs us that the arrival of John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy *(Isa. 40:3)*. John's development from childhood to manhood was marked by faithfulness to God. Satan feared losing his dominion over humanity after hearing John's voice in the wilderness (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 224). The wickedness of John's listeners was unmasked in a manner that caused Satan to quake. Satan's grip over Israel was being threatened. He repeatedly tried and failed to dissuade John the Baptist from his faithful lifestyle and trust in the Messiah.

Read Matthew 11:1–6. How did Jesus reaffirm John's faith while the preacher was in prison?

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Satan was unable to tempt Jesus into sin, and his defeat in the wilderness enraged him. He then changed tactics by having John, Jesus' cousin, thrown into prison. John's imprisonment hurt Jesus, even though Satan could not entice Him to sin. This was Satan's way of breaking John, while emotionally burdening the heart of the Savior. But John received a word of encouragement from Jesus. And despite his terrible conditions, and certainly not understanding why he remained in prison when Jesus was so powerful, John nevertheless stayed faithful, even unto death.

Like the prophets of old, we, too, are called to proclaim a message of repentance and faith and the totality of Christ's righteousness *(Rev. 14:6–12)*. As he did with John the Baptist, Satan may use uncertainty to make us doubt God's mission for our lives. We need not become despondent if we remember God's leading in our lives, especially when things don't go well for us, as happened with John, who was imprisoned and then killed by the actions of an evil woman and a weak-willed man. Whatever humans may do to us, we can reach out to God in faith, and He will answer us. He has promised us power to do His will *(Acts 1:8)*. In the post-Christian and non-Christian world, it is imperative that we be faithful witnesses for Christ, whatever our circumstances.

Have you ever been in a position, as John was while in jail, where you just could not understand why such bad things were happening to you? How did you maintain your faith and trust in God?

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Called to Prophetic Ministry

God calls prophets at specific times for special purposes. They were there with the messages needed for that time. In this context, Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White was one such person who demonstrated a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift, functioning much like a noncanonical prophet *(more on this in the lessons to come)*. Ellen Harmon (White) received her first call in December 1844, a few weeks after Millerite Adventists had expected Jesus to return based on Daniel 8:14: *"Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."*

Although William Miller never set an exact date, his followers eventually looked to October 22, 1844, based on the biblical time reckoning for the Day of Atonement as the date Christ would return to the earth. This belief brought tremendous anticipation to thousands upon thousands in North America and other regions of the world. Soon they would be united with their Savior in heaven. Miller, too, became filled with excitement and enthusiasm as the expected Advent approached.

But Christ did not appear, and the Millerite believers experienced one of the most devastating historical events, the Great Disappointment.

This is the setting in which God gave Ellen Harmon (White) her first vision. Its primary message was to encourage both her and the disappointed believers that God was still with them in spite of their mistaken interpretation. The vision pointed to a path heading from this earth to the heavenly Jerusalem. On this path were Advent believers traveling to the Holy City. And "if they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the city, they were safe."—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 31.

This vision was good news. God was beginning to create a new movement out of the confusion of the disappointment. Jesus was still with them. He was still returning. He was still leading them on the path of salvation. They just had to keep their eyes "fixed on" Him. They had great reasons not to give up hope, even amid so much turmoil and disappointment.

Thus, Ellen G. Harmon (White), a 17-year-old teenager, was called to her prophetic ministry. Hers was not an easy path, especially in the beginning.

Although this gift was gradually accepted as genuine, Ellen G. White was fearful to be God's messenger. Being a prophet of God had never been easy or prestigious. So, how would she submit to God's call?

Next week we will take a closer look at the special work and challenges faced by Old Testament prophets, some of which are also echoed in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White, as we will learn next Friday.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/2.

From Drug Dealer . . .

By Mission Editor

Matthew and Martin were Marek's best friends. If a fight broke out at school, the same three teens were always to blame: Matthew, Martin, and Marek. Today, Matthew is dead; Martin spent seven years in prison; and Marek is a former drug dealer who serves as one of the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Poland. What happened?

Marek grew up in a Christian family in southern Poland. His life fell apart at the age of 18 when his girlfriend left him. He decided to pray: "God, I want her back." Nothing happened. Then he prayed, "God, I don't want to wake up anymore." Still nothing happened.

Marek stopped praying and became an atheist. He started using drugs. Then his friend Martin decided to sell drugs and invited Marek to join him. Marek quickly became successful at selling and using drugs.

Two years passed, and Marek couldn't find anyone to join him at a big party on New Year's Eve. Disappointed, Marek decided to visit his grandmother.

That night, he found himself staring at a picture of Jesus in his grandmother's home. He thought, *Even if I don't believe in God, Jesus was real*. He remembered reading the Bible as a boy.

Several days later, Marek visited a woman who promised to reveal his future. She shuffled cards and warned about the end of the world. Astonished, Marek asked when the world would end. She said in exactly one year.

Marek started reading the book of Revelation, hoping to learn how the world would end, but understood nothing. Turning to the gospels, he was amazed to learn that Jesus had a kingdom where people would be happy and live forever.

One night, after a party, he was sitting in a car, eating takeout food with friends. Out the window he saw a bookstore called Signs of the Times.

The next day, he went to the bookstore and asked, "Do you have some books about Nostradamus?"

The woman behind the counter said, "No, but if you are interested in prophecy, we have *The Great Controversy*."

Marek bought the thick book by Ellen White and was stunned as he read. He double-checked everything in the Bible and online. It all seemed to match.

One night, as he read *The Great Controversy* in bed, he asked himself, "Am I gaining light from reading this book?"

At that moment, the light bulb in the lamp above his head began to blink. That was unusual, and Marek grew nervous. Suddenly, he noticed a reflection of himself in a window. All he could see was his head and the light bulb right above it. The bulb stopped sputtering and shone brightly again.

The answer was clear. It was the first time in his life that he sensed God's presence and love. He knelt and said, "God, if You are like this, I want to serve You."

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