LESSON 4 *October 17–23

*(page 30 of Standard Edition)*

# New Testament Prophets



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 16:13–16, Eph. 2:20, Rev. 22:6, Luke 2:36–38, Acts 21:9, Eph. 6:10–18.*

**Memory Text:** **"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all"** *(1 Corinthians 12:4–6, NKJV).*

As a father was driving, his son scanned the cars passing by in order to spot those that were the same as his dad's. The father then pointed to a car and exclaimed, "Son, that was the same as my first car!" When they got home, the father pulled out the owner's manual to his first car, along with the manual to the current car. He carefully showed his son the features of each vehicle, highlighting things that were alike and what had been changed. However, when the father compared the two engines, everything was identical. Much had changed, but not the engine.

God spoke through prophets in the Old and New Testaments, and the continuity and harmony in their messages is because the Holy Spirit—the Source, or "Engine," of divine inspiration—has remained the same. The Holy Spirit always empowers true prophets through the gift of prophecy. He also places Christ at the center of the prophets' messages, as Hebrews makes clear *(Heb. 1:1–3)*.

This week we will examine the gift of prophecy in the New Testament, looking at who functioned as prophets, what prophets did, how prophets compared to apostles, and the danger of false prophets, as well.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 24.*

# Jesus as Prophet

Moses predicted that " 'the LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear' " *(Deut. 18:15, NKJV)*. Who was the prophet? Scripture itself makes it clear: it was pointing to Jesus Himself. " 'For Moses truly said to the fathers, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you" ' " *(Acts 3:22, NKJV; see also John 6:14)*.

**What is the prophetic role of Jesus? How was this question answered in Jesus' time?** *(Matt. 16:13–16, Mark 8:27–29, Luke 9:18–20)***.**

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Jesus, as the Christ, the Messiah, is the One to whom all the Old Testament prophets pointed. In the New Testament, Jesus is recognized as the fulfillment of their Messianic prophecies. In Luke 24:13–35, He presents Himself as the One to whom the Messianic prophecies pointed.

In fact, in John 1:1–5, the description given of the Word here does not fit any human being or mere human prophet. The Word is identified as the Creator, for "all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" *(John 1:3, NKJV)*. That is, He created all that was created, which is the entire cosmos, now estimated to be 93 billion light-years wide.

In every "and God said" of Genesis 1, we hear Jesus speaking. He who said, "Let there be light" *(Gen. 1:3)* is also the "light of men" *(John 1:4)*, and through the plan of salvation *(John 1:4, 5)*, He was dispelling earth's darkness.

God's prophetic words are certain and confirmed. When heeded, they are "a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" *(2 Pet. 1:19, NKJV)*. Prophecy will continue to bring light to our sinful world until Jesus, "the Morning Star," and Source of that prophetic light, will usher in His eternal kingdom.

Until then, through His life, death, and resurrection, Christ offers us all eternal life. The only question is whether or not we will accept it.

**Dwell on the fact that Jesus, the Creator** *(John 1:1–3)***, is also the One who died on the cross for your sins. What does this amazing truth teach about the reality of God's love for us?**

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# Apostles and Prophets

The New Testament mentions the work of prophets and apostles. The apostles were "messengers," or "ones sent forth" from God, as defined by the Greek word *apostolos*. Throughout the Gospels, the word "apostle" refers to the 12 disciples. The rest of the New Testament supports this idea and includes other individuals who were not among Christ's original disciples.

Paul calls himself an apostle 12 times in his epistles. In Romans 1:1, 2, he connects his apostolic calling, and the content of his preaching, with the message of the Old Testament prophets. Paul presents himself as an apostle to the Gentiles *(Rom. 11:13)*. He was appointed "through the will of God" *(1 Cor. 1:1)*.

Unlike the priests who followed a familial line from fathers to sons, God appointed prophets and apostles according to His will. When Paul's apostleship was in dispute, he defended his calling *(1 Cor. 9:1, 2)*. Paul saw his apostleship as building upon the work of Christ, the Foundation of the church *(Eph. 2:20)*. As recipients of God's revelation, the apostles therefore possess the same level of inspiration as the prophets *(Eph. 3:1–5)*.

In 2 Peter 3:1, 2, Peter makes reference to prophets as those who came before and whose words were important, but now the apostles are presented as carrying the same authority. In these verses, reference is made to Old and New Testament times. While prophets may seem to be God's messengers of the Old Testament era and apostles God's messengers of the New Testament era, there were also people who prophesied or exercised the prophetic gift but who were not apostles. The gift of prophecy was not limited to the apostles in New Testament times. And not all prophets were apostles *(Acts 15:32)*.

**Read Ephesians 2:20 and Ephesians 3:5. How do apostles and prophets function in relation to Christ and the church?**

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And as we also know from reading what the apostles in the New Testament wrote, Jesus was the center of almost all that they wrote. In one way or another, His life, death, resurrection, high-priestly ministry, and return were their central focus.

**The Bible is the only official record we have of the words of the apostles and prophets about Jesus, His life, and works. What should this tell us about why the Bible must have final authority for what we believe about Jesus and His death for us?**

# Functions of New Testament Prophets

**What do 1 Corinthians 14:3, Ephesians 4:11–13, and Revelation 22:6 tell us about the role of New Testament prophets?**

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These verses above, however helpful, do not present a comprehensive view of all that New Testament prophets did. Nevertheless, much of what they did reflects what prophets in the Old Testament also had done, thus providing continuity with the prophetic gift.

In 1 Corinthians 12:10, prophecy is mentioned among other spiritual gifts. In the body of Christ metaphor *(1 Cor. 12:27, 28)*, prophets are mentioned after apostles, who also received revelations from God. According to 1 Corinthians 14:3: "He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" *(NKJV)*.

Ephesians 4:11–13 lists a similar cluster of spiritual gifts, as does 1 Corinthians 12. Prophets are mentioned among apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers *(Eph. 4:11)*. These persons exist 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 and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" *(Eph. 4:12, 13, NKJV)*. As seen here and elsewhere, Jesus is the central focus of their message.

The book of Acts talked about two prophets, Judas and Silas (neither one having written a book in the Bible), who "exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words" *(Acts 15:32, NKJV)*. Though, yes, at times prophets do have to utter warnings, even stern warnings at times, they also—depending upon the circumstance—do offer words of encouragement, especially in trying times, words that were no doubt greatly appreciated by those who needed to hear them and the hope and promise that they contained.

The work of encouragement also is mentioned in the context of prophesying *(1 Cor. 14:31, NKJV)*. In times of tribulation and persecution, the gift of prophecy has been a source of encouragement and hope.

In Revelation 22:6, Jesus is presented as "Lord God of the holy prophets" and whose " 'words are faithful and true' " *(NKJV)*. Of course, anything that comes from God's servants, when they are speaking for God, is going to be "faithful and true," too. In a world in which we can trust so little, we can indeed trust what the prophets of the Lord say, especially in His Word, our final and ultimate authority.

# Female Prophets and Young Pastoral Associates

**Read Luke 2:36–38 and Acts 21:9. What do these passages tell us about female prophets?**

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In Old Testament times, God called both men and women to be His messengers. In New Testament times, there is clear evidence of female prophets. Anna was the first one called a "prophetess" in the New Testament. She is someone who, in her full-time ministry, "served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And . . . she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him" *(Luke 2:37, 38, NKJV)*.

Acts 21:9 says that Philip had "four virgin daughters who prophesied" *(NKJV)*. New Testament historians, such as Eusebius, have found later texts that mention where they possibly lived, and then were buried. Either way, what we do see are women, most likely young women, who have the prophetic gift. We don't know exactly what they prophesied or the extent of their ministry. One thing, however, that we do know about these young women with the prophetic gift: none of their prophetic words made it into the canon, the Bible. That is, like many others, they were noncanonical prophets, true prophets whose words, writings, whatever, were not made into biblical books.

In addition to women prophets, young pastors worked in close association with apostles. Apostles mentored young leaders for ministry. Paul, for instance, addressed Timothy as "a true son in the faith" *(1 Tim. 1:2, NKJV; see also 1 Tim. 4:12)*. Paul taught Timothy the basics of pastoral ministry. He states concerning his calling: "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare" *(1 Tim. 1:18, NKJV)*.

In Titus 1:4, Paul introduced Titus as "a true son in our common faith" *(NKJV)*. Paul gave Titus the task of appointing leaders for the believers in Crete, a challenging congregation. He offered young Titus spiritual counsel on how to approach this important responsibility, then concluded: "Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you" *(Titus 2:15, NKJV)*.

**Young, old, male, female—we all can have a role to play in God's work. What is your role, and how can you do even more?**

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# False Prophets in the New Testament

**Read Matthew 24:23, 24. What does Jesus warn us about here? Why should we take this warning so seriously?**

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Jesus Himself couldn't have been clearer: " 'For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect' " *(Matt. 24:24, NKJV)*.

The deceptions that He warns about must be quite persuasive, if, indeed, "great signs and wonders" will be part of it. Supernatural events, in and of themselves, are not evidence of God's working, however persuasive they can appear. We have supernatural enemies. As Paul has warned us: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" *(Eph 6:12, NKJV)*. And these powers work through false prophets.

In fact, false prophets are nothing new. The New Testament refers to the false prophets in Old Testament times *(Luke 6:26)*. In the New Testament, false prophets are likened to " 'ravenous wolves' " who are " 'in sheep's clothing' " *(Matt. 7:15, NKJV)*, and we are told that we will " 'know them by their fruits' " *(Matt. 7:16, NKJV)*.

Their main work is deception *(Matt. 7:17–20)*. Jesus Himself declared that " 'many false prophets will rise up and deceive many' " *(Matt. 24:11, NKJV)*, and " 'if possible, even the elect' " *(Matt. 24:24, NKJV; see also Mark 13:22, 1 John 4:1)*.

**According to Ephesians 6:10–18, how can we shield ourselves from any kind of deception?**

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Living by faith, putting on the "breastplate of righteousness," being girded in the "truth," along with surrendering to the Holy Spirit through prayer, and being grounded in His Word—these are the ways we can be protected from all that would otherwise lead us spiritually and theologically astray.

**What can you do to arm yourself better against all the deceptions sweeping our world?**

*(page 36 of Standard Edition)*

# Keeping Jesus and His Word at the Center

As we have learned, God called prophets at specific times and gave them important tasks. Their primary function was to bring people to a knowledge of God and a faithful relationship with Him. This was Ellen G. White's guiding orientation. Her ministry had two primary functions: to lead people to Jesus and to point them to His Word—the Bible.

Ellen G. White had a lifelong passion for Jesus and a desire to share the love of God with others. Her famous five-book series, The Conflict of the Ages, begins and ends with the words "God is love." In *Steps to Christ*, perhaps her most popular book, she wrote: "Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly—by abiding in Him—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 69.

During the 1890s, when she was working on *The Desire of Ages*, she wrote in her diary: "In writing upon the life of Christ I am deeply wrought upon. I forget to breathe as I should. I cannot endure the intensity of feeling that comes over me as I think of what Christ has suffered in our world."—Manuscript 70, 1897. Ellen G. White loved to speak about Jesus.

The Bible was the second focus of Ellen White's ministry. She saw her writings as a "lesser light" leading people to the "greater light"—the Bible (*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 29). She always encouraged people to go to Scripture, where God has revealed His loving character and plan of salvation. As she put it early in her ministry: "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 30.

Years later she would write: "The Lord desires you to study your Bibles. He has not given any additional light to take the place of His Word. . . . If eaten and digested, [His Word] is as the life-blood of the soul. Then good works will be seen as light shining in darkness."—Letter 130, 1901.

Ellen G. White also believed that all who claim the prophetic mantle of Christ must teach "what Christ had taught. That which He had spoken, not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is here included. Human teaching is shut out."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 826.

Ellen G. White kept Jesus and Scripture at the center of her Christian experience. Next Friday, we will explore her views on revelation and inspiration.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/4.

# "A School for Berta"

*By* Mission Editor

Berta was excited when she heard that the first Seventh-day Adventist church school had opened in Poland. She was a highly qualified teacher and was looking for work. But there was a problem. The Adventist school was located near Poland's capital, Warsaw, far away from her home in Krakow.

*This is not the job for me*, Berta thought, sadly.

Then a friend unexpectedly started talking to her about the Seventh-day Adventist school, but Berta felt it was too far away.

It seemed more realistic to look for work in Krakow. Then another friend told her about the Adventist school.

"I heard about this Adventist school," the friend said. "Maybe you would like to apply to be a teacher there."

After the second friend mentioned the school, Berta wondered whether God might be trying to tell her something about becoming a teacher there.

She prayed, "God, what should I do?"

Berta decided to apply for two teaching jobs—at the public school in Krakow and at the Seventh-day Adventist school outside Warsaw.

"I will go to the first school that replies to my job application," she prayed.

The Adventist school was the first to write back, inviting Berta to an interview.

Then Berta got worried. She had a 16-year-old son named Jacob. His school and friends were in Krakow. Would he be willing to move to another place?

Berta prayed again. She decided to give Jacob the option of staying with a relative in Krakow or going with her to the new school.

Jacob didn't hesitate. "Mother, let's make the move together," the boy said. "I want to be with you."

Berta was surprised and pleased. For her, his words seemed like the latest indication that God was guiding her path.

She took the job. Today, Berta is the principal of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary school, which is located on the grounds of the Adventist Church's seminary outside Warsaw. She has no doubt that God led her to the school. And her son affirmed she had made the right decision. He said he had not had any Adventist friends in Krakow and had not been interested in church activities. But now he has many Adventist friends and is active in the church.

"Mom, you made a good decision in coming here," he said. "I'm so glad that we are here."

Berta said she wouldn't have it any other way. God brought her to the school, and she is happy.

"That's why I am here," she says.

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