LESSON 9 *November 21–27

(page 72 of Standard Edition)

Testing *the* Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 10:7–19; Deut. 13:1–5; Isa. 8:20; John 11:25; Acts 15:36–39; Jer. 28:9, 15–17.*

Memory Text: **"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world"** *(1 John 4:1, NKJV).*

A real diamond is one of the most valuable gems on earth. Of course, many other things can be made to look nearly identical to diamonds but are worthless. So, how can one know if a diamond is real or fake? The best way is to test it. Some tests can be done at home with a few simple tools. Others need professional expertise. Most of the tests are not conclusive on their own, but if a diamond passes several tests, one can be confident that the diamond is real.

A diamond is one of the strongest materials on earth. Part of a diamond's strength is its ability to withstand very high temperatures and dramatic temperature changes. To test a diamond, you could heat it with a lighter or torch and then drop it into cold water. Although a real diamond will not be damaged, a fake diamond is likely to shatter!

The gift of prophecy is more valuable than any diamond, yet someone claiming this gift cannot simply be taken at face value. That claim must be tested. This week we will examine biblical prophets to uncover the biblical principles used to test their authenticity.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 28.*

Role of the Supernatural

During the Exodus, the Lord spoke to His people about the prophetic gift among them, saying, " 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream' " *(Num. 12:6, NKJV)*.

A prophetic message and calling often involves the supernatural; it definitely goes beyond a mere impression or idea that a person may have. A prophet receives direct communication from God, often through prophetic dreams or visions *(Dan. 8:1, Isa. 1:1, Acts 9:10, etc.)* that may be accompanied by marked physical phenomena.

List some of the physical phenomena that the prophet Daniel experienced when in vision. *See Dan. 10:7–19.*

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Daniel lost his strength as he went into vision. He was then dependent on God for the duration of the experience. Although those who were with him did not go into vision, the presence of the Divine was so strong that they ran away and hid in terror. Nevertheless, God uses physical phenomena to draw attention to a prophet so that the prophetic message can be noted.

What does Deuteronomy 13:1–5 teach us about the prophetic gift?

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Though visible phenomena show that a supernatural power is at work, this does not automatically mean that the person experiencing the phenomena is inspired by God. Satan can also demonstrate the supernatural. No single piece of evidence confirms a prophetic ministry. Apart from physical phenomena, prophets must be tested. Supernatural manifestations are not a test of the true prophetic gift. All the biblical tests of a prophet must be present for us to validate someone as God's messenger. History, unfortunately, has been full of false prophets *(see Matt. 7:15)*.

In some cultures, supernatural occurrences are more common than in others. Why, though, must we be very careful when seeking to know if something supernatural really is of God?

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Harmony With the Bible

Though we humans often contradict ourselves and are deceitful, God does not lie *(see Num. 23:19).* The prophetic messages He gives through the prophets will also reveal this consistency. His unchangeable truthfulness will be seen in the prophetic messages that He gives.

Read Isaiah 8:20. What crucial point is He making?

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The Bible is always the final standard of any claim to inspiration. Prophets must be tested by comparing what they say with what the Bible says. A true prophet will never contradict, minimize, or draw attention away from biblical truth. That is why a knowledge of the Scriptures is so crucial for those who want to follow the Lord and not be deceived by false teachers or false prophets.

In the Old and New Testaments, successive prophets often highlighted and pointed back to previous prophetic writings as the standard for their own prophetic ministry. Later biblical prophets reveal additional insights into God's plans and the way of salvation, but they never contradict basic principles and concepts already given by God.

What do 2 Peter 1:19–21, Romans 15:4, and James 1:17 teach us about God and the prophetic messages that He has given over the centuries?

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The Old Testament foundation for understanding the plan of salvation was set in the first prophecy that God Himself gave, in Genesis 3:15. The sacrificial system exemplified this plan, but the details of how God's Lamb, Jesus Christ, would come, live, and die for humanity were clarified step by step in later prophecies. The biblical record shows that God unfolds truth when His people are able to understand it. This allows the understanding of truth to deepen with each new generation. This is what is meant by the idea of "unfolding truth" or "progressive truth." That is, a later generation will often have a deeper understanding of God's truth than did an earlier one.

There is, however, a crucial point that cannot be overemphasized: new revelations of truth will never contradict the truth that God earlier had given.

The Incarnation of Christ

According to 1 John 4:1–3, the test of belief in Jesus' incarnation would quickly rule out people who claim to be prophets from other major world religions, or from those who claim to connect to the spiritual realm without subscribing to a particular religion. If a person "does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," that person "is not of God" *(1 John 4:3, NKJV)*.

When John wrote these verses, he was thinking of false teachers who were teaching that Jesus was not a human being, but merely appeared to be human. This test, however, goes further. It is not saying only that a prophet should agree that Jesus was a real person who lived on earth. Most Christians believe this about Jesus. John was dealing with a very specific issue at the time; however, John's prophetic words, though needed for a particular circumstance, still contain important truths for later generations, as well.

What do the following verses tell us about Jesus? *John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21; John 11:25; Heb. 4:14, 15; John 14:1–3.*

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True prophets must believe that Jesus was God incarnate yet truly a human being. They must also embrace the complete truth about Jesus—His mission, sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry in heaven, as well as His second coming. This is more than an intellectual agreement that Jesus lived on earth. Jesus must be the center of a prophet's teachings and not just something added on. His or her messages should lead people to a saving relationship with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit–inspired prophetic word is God's spotlight, dispelling the darkness in us until Jesus, the Morning Star, dawns in our hearts, and the prophetic gift unites us with Him and continually points us to Him.

Prophets who are uplifting Jesus will not try to create their own following or promote themselves *(Acts 4:12)*. They will be ready to serve and not to take advantage of those to whom they have been sent. At the same time, as we will see tomorrow, God's prophets were human beings and, like the rest of us, sinners who needed the gospel.

Jesus, fully God, died as our Substitute, bearing the penalty for our sins. Why is understanding this so central to our faith? What do we lose if we lose that teaching?

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Positive Fruits

In the Sermon on the Mount *(Matthew 5–7)*, Jesus outlined the foundations of the Christian church. It would seem that prophetic ministry would be a part of that foundation. After all, Jesus warned against false prophets, saying, " 'By their fruits you will know them' " *(Matt. 7:20, NKJV)*.

The quality of a fruit can be judged only over a period of time. By seeing a prophet's character and watching what results come from his or her messages, we can see whether that prophet is drawing others to God or leading them away from Him.

Read Jonah 1:1–3, Acts 15:36–39, and Galatians 2:11–14. What do these verses teach us about prophets?

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Being a prophet, however, does not make a person sinless or personally infallible. We see in the biblical examples of Jonah, Paul, and even Peter mistakes or character flaws. God alone is flawless; His messengers never are. Prophets, like all of us, have weaknesses, but the trend of their lives must clearly be toward God, and the prophets must not negate their ministry by a lifestyle that is contrary to the message they share.

No prophet completely models the example of Jesus, but a true prophet is committed to the principles and lifestyle of God's kingdom *(Matt. 7:16–20)*. Anyone who claims to be God's messenger and yet whose lifestyle blatantly contradicts the message he or she carries should be regarded with suspicion.

Although the prophetic call is difficult, many prophets showed "good fruit" during their ministry. For example, Moses successfully led the children of Israel through the wilderness *(Deut. 34:10–12)*. Haggai's faithfulness encouraged the inhabitants of Judah to start the rebuilding of the second temple, which had been paused for 19 years *(Hag. 1:12)*. Isaiah's unflinching ministry served four Judean kings, guiding them through a tumultuous period and pointing to the Messiah *(Isa. 39:5, 6; Isa. 53:4–6)*. We cannot forget Daniel's heartfelt confession *(Dan. 9:15)* or Jeremiah's tear-filled commitment *(Jer. 9:1)*. Notwithstanding the way that they often were persecuted and mistreated, God's prophets always showed a genuine love for Him and His people, the hallmark of a fruitful ministry.

How often have men or women of God disappointed you by their actions or character flaws? What important lesson can you learn from that experience?

Fulfilled Prophecies

People often think of a prophet as someone who predicts the future, but this is only one aspect of a prophet's work. A prophet's work encompasses much more. Prophets lead people back to God's Word and provide counsel, warning, and encouragement.

Besides **helping people know about and prepare for future events, why do prophets predict the future?** *See Jer. 28:9, 15–17.*

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Fulfilled predictions are another way to test a prophet. The predictions of a true prophet should happen as prophesied: " 'When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him' " *(Deut. 18:22, NKJV)*. This test can be challenging to apply because some prophecies are conditional; that is, they might not come to pass as predicted by the prophet if the conditions are met.

We see this principle with Jonah and his warning against Nineveh. Jonah's sermon seems fairly short and pointed: " 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' " *(Jon. 3:4, NKJV)*. Yet, that did not happen as he predicted. Why?

Read **Jeremiah 18:7–10. What does this teach us, too, about conditional prophecy?**

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Conditional prophecies are prophecies that depend on how people respond to God's messages. If the people change their attitude and behavior, the predicted event may not happen. The people of Nineveh took Jonah's prediction to heart and changed their ways, so God did not destroy them *(Jon. 3:10)*. When later generations forgot this prophetic warning, and Nineveh again became an evil, cruel place, God destroyed it. God knows the future, but we don't. Our choices greatly determine our future realities.

Why is it important to understand the concept of conditional prophecy? How could this understanding greatly help us better grasp biblical truth?

(page 78 of Standard Edition)

"Taste and See"

Seventh-day Adventist acceptance of Ellen G. White's prophetic gift, from its inception until the present time, has faced similar challenges to those of many biblical prophets. After Ellen G. White's first vision in December 1844, some questioned her prophetic claims. This led Sabbath-keeping Adventists (later Seventh-day Adventists) to develop arguments in support of Ellen G. White's prophetic gift.

First, they offered theological justification for the perpetuity of the gift of prophecy until the end of time. The Bible supports the modern display of the gift of prophecy, they argued. Based on Joel 2, Revelation 12:17, and other scriptures, the prophetic gift would be visible in the "last days" and become an "identifying mark" of God's end-time people. (See Gerhard Pfandl, "The Gift of Prophecy and God's Remnant Church," in *The Gift of Prophecy*, chapter 4.)

Second, early Adventists noted that Ellen G. White's gift had a positive influence on believers. For example, her prophetic insights helped to unify believers attending the Sabbath Conferences in the late 1840s when they disagreed on biblical doctrines. Her gift continued to bear "good fruit" in the decades since, and her writings remain influential within the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith.

A third argument in defense of Ellen G. White relates to the supernatural elements of her visionary experiences. While in vision, as we have noted previously, Ellen G. White exhibited supernatural manifestations—reporting facts and circumstances unknown to her, revealing future events, exhibiting greater-than-natural strength, and being unable to control or influence the timing of her visionary experiences, among others.

Seventh-day Adventists today continue to highlight these supports for the validity of Ellen G. White's gift. While these arguments are sound, a powerful "proof" of Ellen G. White's gift is a personal experience with her writings. As the psalmist David urged: "Taste and see that the LORD is good" *(Ps. 34:8)*. It is only when we prayerfully read Ellen G. White's writings that we can evaluate her prophetic claims.

One place to begin is with her small but most popular volume, *Steps to Christ*. Follow this with the five-volume Conflict of the Ages series, which traces the great controversy theme from Genesis to Revelation. Her writings are widely available in paper and electronic versions (see EGWWritings.org) and have been translated into many languages.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/9.

INSIDE *Story*

A Missionary at Last!

By Grace Nkeshimana

I started looking for opportunities to serve abroad, as a volunteer, when I was only sixteen.

I was so excited by the idea of serving abroad but realized that probably wouldn't be the case for a few years. Nevertheless, I enjoyed looking at the call descriptions on the Adventist Volunteers Service (AVS) website and imagining what it would be like to teach abroad as a missionary.

When I started university, however, I forgot all about that. My mind quickly turned to what I would do after graduating, and mission endeavors were not a priority. However, I took a break from my final-year studies to do mission work in India for a month. Although I had a wonderful experience, I was still certain a long-term opportunity wasn't part of the plan.

At the age of 22, as I looked for graduate jobs, I realized my ideal job would be one that left me enough free time to be active in ministry outside of work. I was keen to be more involved in my local community. As I reflected on this, I realized that I was basically describing an AVS call!

I looked for opportunities on the AVS website and applied for a teaching position at Malang Adventist Academy. My application was approved, and I left Manchester, England, for Indonesia exactly one day after my twenty-third birthday. Without question, this is the best "gift" I've ever given myself!

My experience in Indonesia was challenging in the best of ways. Though there were many ups and downs, my time at Malang Adventist Academy was absolutely the best year of my life.

The school welcomes students from all denominations and faiths and is truly making a difference in the lives of its students. For example, one of my students, who came from a Sunday-keeping background, is now a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of his experience at the school. Moreover, I was happily surprised when a Muslim student signed up for a Pathfinder camping trip, even though he knew it would include many worship services over the three-day event. He gladly participated and enjoyed it! I enjoyed contributing to the spiritual lives of all my students by sharing my testimony, leading devotions, and encouraging them to pray.

Through it all, I learned so much about myself and God. I'm grateful for awesome colleagues and a church community that were incredibly loving and caring from the beginning. Malang will always feel like a second home to me.

If mission work is something you are interested in, then I would highly recommend applying through AVS. The mandatory Preparation for Mission course is an excellent resource to ensure that all potential missionaries are ready for what lies ahead.

Adapted from the TED News website, https://ted.adventist.org/news/a-missionary-at-last/.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.