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The Gift of Prophecy



Neuroscientists have begun to understand the marvelous facility of human infants for language acquisition. At six months, a baby can understand the sounds that comprise English words, or words from any of the other 7,000-plus spoken languages. If exposed to a second language, they can acquire that language, as well. During this period a mysterious mental door opens, allowing infants to distinguish the forty or so sounds that generally make up a native language from the 800 different sounds that they can perceive at birth. But there is one catch: babies must be spoken to. You might call it voice lessons for newborns.

Why would God create us with this wonderful capacity for speech recognition and language acquisition if He never intended to speak to us? The question is rhetorical, of course—for the Bible declares, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" *(Heb. 1:1, 2, NKJV).*

When sin shattered Adam and Eve's communion with God, He did not wash His hands of them and leave the fallen pair to self-destruct. He came looking for them both, asking Adam, " 'Where are you?' " *(Gen. 3:9, NKJV)*. He went on to prophesy about the birth of One who would save the world from sin *(Gen. 3:15)*. From its inception, right there in Eden after the Fall, prophecy has uplifted Jesus and pointed sinners to Him, their only hope.

This quarter we will study the gift of prophecy, God's ingenious innovation for communicating His will and way to fallen human beings, who can no longer commune face-to-face with Him. This special gift of the Holy Spirit is mentioned prominently in 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Corinthians 14, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12. The Holy Spirit is the great dispenser of this and all other spiritual gifts, "distributing to each one individually as He wills" *(1 Cor. 12:11, NKJV).* Throughout time, spiritually gifted spokespersons have delivered divine messages to restore and renew our relationship with God, just as God did in Eden after the Fall.

This quarter we will study the gift of prophecy, God's ingenious innovation for communicating His will and way to fallen human beings, who can no longer commune face-to-face with Him.

We will learn how God calls prophets and how we can test their authenticity. We will see the similarities and differences between Old and New Testament prophets, as well as gain a working understanding of how revelation and inspiration function in their lives. While some prophets spoke, others wrote; some did both. We will examine these and other modes of divine discourse, their implications, and the blessings of obeying the messages that these prophets delivered.

God uses the gift of prophecy for five crucial purposes: (1) to reveal Himself, His truth, and His will for fallen humanity; (2) to give insight and counsel regarding important events and happenings; (3) to equip the body of Christ—the church—for mission; (4) to provide spiritual encouragement to His followers; (5) to awaken sinners and call them to repentance. In addition, "the spirit of prophecy" is one of two distinguishing marks of God's end-time remnant church *(Rev. 12:17, Rev. 19:10)*.

So invested is God in guiding the lost safely home that the gift of prophecy is provided for the last days, as well *(Joel 2:28–31)*. Seventh-day Adventists believe—with very good reasons—that Ellen G. White, cofounder of the church, exercised a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift.

This is why, along with our study of the gift of prophecy in Scripture, each Friday we will explore the dynamics of Ellen G. White's call to prophetic ministry. We, as a church, have been given this wonderful gift. How do we best use it?

Yes, from infancy onward, we have been wired to be spoken to. How important, then, that we listen to what God's prophets tell us!

This Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide *was produced by the ministry team of the White Estate office, in Silver Spring, Maryland. By sharing Ellen White's prophetic ministry and writings throughout the world, the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc., supports the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in uplifting Jesus Christ and His Word.*

LESSON 1

*September 26—October 2

(page 6 of Standard Edition)

The Creator Speaks



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:27, 28; Gen. 3:1–8; Luke 15:11–32; Gen. 3:14–24; Exod. 19:16–22; John 10:27–30.*

Memory Text: **"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds"** *(Hebrews 1:1, 2, NKJV).*

Digital technology allows many of us to see friends and relatives in faraway places. This is fine. But, still, how much better to meet in person! There is something special that happens when we get together, exchange hugs, and talk face-to-face.

This week we will be reminded that human beings were created for a face-to-face relationship with their Creator. Sin, however, destroyed this intimate connection long ago. To restore that communication with His beloved creatures, God has provided ways to speak to us. His most recognized form of divine interaction with humankind is carefully chosen spokespersons, known as prophets, who reveal His messages to us. These prophets often have writings in the Bible, but not always.

God's ultimate plan is to restore His image in us, the image that sin has shattered. This is what the plan of salvation is about: restoration, a restoration that will be complete when God creates "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" *(2 Pet. 3:13, NKJV).*

Until then, God still talks to us, and He still uses His prophets to do just that.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 3.*

Communication in Eden

Genesis 1 and 2 tell the Creation story. God created a beautiful world, and in it He put Adam and Eve, the crowning act of Creation. Humans differed from every other creature on earth because they were made "in the image of God" *(Gen. 1:27, NKJV)*, something said only about them and not, for example, about the birds or about other animals. As such, they were to live wholistically abundant lives, experience love in all its forms, and walk in communion with God Himself.

Also, we read in Genesis 2:18–23 that God created Eve for Adam because, God said, it was " 'not good that man should be alone' " *(Gen. 2:18, NKJV)*. Right from the beginning, then, humans were created as social beings. Sociologists today teach that human interaction provides numerous benefits to our physical and mental well-being, while loneliness is a killer.

It is no wonder, then, that after the creation of Eve, Adam exclaimed, " 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man' " *(Gen. 2:23, NKJV)*. The familial structure established by one male and one female joined in matrimony is the first social institution God provided for humans, in order for them to experience wholistic relationship and communion. It is no wonder that one of Satan's main goals always has been to destroy the fundamental dynamics of the original family.

Read Genesis 1:27, 28; Genesis 2:15–17; and Genesis 3:9. What kind of communication existed between God and humans in the Garden of Eden?

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Adam and Eve enjoyed face-to-face communion with God. As intelligent beings, they were able to meet with God and to listen to His instructions. As stewards of God's wonderful garden, they grew in knowledge and skill as they cared for the living flora and fauna. Each day they also had special time with God "in the cool of the day" *(Gen. 3:8)*. The Sabbath day in particular, an essential part of God's creative act, was to be a specially dedicated time of communion between God and His children *(Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:8–11)*. On that day, our first parents experienced God's love and care for them in a special way.

It's hard for us today, thousands of years from Eden, to imagine what it must have been like before sin. Yet, even now, how does the natural world point back to God's original creation?

Hiding From God

Because God is love *(1 John 4:8)*, He would not create human "robots." Love embraces choice. To be able to love, Adam and Eve had to be created with free will; otherwise, love, true love, would be impossible for them to give.

Thus, Adam and Eve had the freedom to obey or disobey their Creator. The reality of this free choice was depicted in the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *(see Gen. 2:15–17)*. Why warn them against eating from it unless they had the freedom to do so in the first place?

"Our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. God made them free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience. They were to enjoy communion with God and with holy angels. . . . Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 48, 49.

Why did Adam and Eve attempt to hide from their Creator after they disobeyed Him? See Genesis 3:1–8 *(compare with Jer. 23:24 and Heb. 4:13)***.**

Genesis 3 depicts an awful scene—the fall of Adam and Eve. After the epic conversation between the serpent (Satan) and Eve, our first parents were tempted to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they were forbidden to do. Satan used the power of words, emotions, and pleasurable enticements to convince Eve, who then convinced Adam, to go against God's command. Eve noted that the tree was "good for food," "pleasant to the eyes," and "desirable to make one wise" *(Gen. 3:6, NKJV)*. The promise of Satan that they would be " 'like God, knowing good and evil' " *(Gen. 3:5, NKJV),* sounded irresistible.

In reality, Satan's discourse was riddled with error. Satan hid from them the consequences of their disobedience. After they disobeyed God, their eyes were immediately "opened," and they saw that they were "naked." God's "garment" of light and glory *(Ps. 104:1, 2)*, which reflected the divine "image," was gone. They were no longer covered by that which God had provided for them. No wonder Adam and Eve hid themselves from their Creator (as if it were really possible to hide from God). They attempted to hide because sin makes us feel guilty and, in our guilt, we want to flee from the presence of God.

What has been your own experience with shame and seeking to hide from God after you have sinned?

God Seeks Humanity

We can see from Genesis 3:9, 10 that God took the initiative to seek His fallen children. The question "Where are you?" was rhetorical, because God knew what Adam and Eve had done and where they were. Sin, nevertheless, cut off the usual communication that existed between Him and the first human couple. God's immediate concern was to restore communication with His children, to meet with them, and to give them hope in their despair. In fact, the Hebrew verb *qara'*, "call," in Genesis 3:9, is often used to describe God's call to establish communication with His people.

Read Luke 15:11–32. How does this parable reflect what happened in Genesis 3:9, 10?

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God's seeking Adam and Eve reveals His unconditional love for His children. God never gives up on us *(see Luke 15)*. He goes to great lengths to reestablish His communion with us, even when we go into hiding. Before Jesus' crucifixion, when Peter denied Jesus three times, Christ "turned and looked" *(Luke 22:61, NKJV)* at him. Even without words, He "spoke" to Peter and sought to reach His erring friend.

Notice, in Genesis 3:11–13, how sin suddenly changed Adam's and Eve's relationship. Instead of confessing their individual sin, they began to blame others. Adam blamed Eve and, indirectly, God, because He gave him Eve. " 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate,' " he said *(Gen. 3:12, NKJV)*. Eve, meanwhile, blamed the serpent for her disobedience. " 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate' " *(Gen. 3:13)* was her excuse. Neither one of them, at least when first confronted for their sin, would own up to their own guilt. How little has changed in six thousand years.

The reality is that sin has affected all human beings. The apostle Paul describes our condition well in Romans 7:15–24, when he detailed the pain of desiring to do what is right, only to find himself doing the opposite: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" *(Rom. 7:15, NKJV)*.

Who cannot relate?

What Paul says is profound. We are all broken people who keep on doing things we know we should not do. Who hasn't experienced this reality?

Our only hope, says Paul, is deliverance "through Jesus Christ our Lord" *(Rom. 7:25)*. This is why God continues to seek us to lead us to Jesus, who alone can mold us into His image and save us from the devastation caused by sin.

Expelled From the Garden

One of the most devastating consequences of Adam's and Eve's sin was separation from God. They were expelled from the Garden and could no longer speak with God face-to-face. The prophet Isaiah memorably wrote about this challenging human condition: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you" *(Isa. 59:2, NKJV)*.

In truth, Adam and Eve were still God's children. However, the result of sin could not be avoided, and they had to leave Eden. Nothing was the same after their disobedience.

Sin has changed humanity in many ways *(see Gen. 3:14–24)***. But how has sin specifically changed our communication with God?** *(See also Exod. 19:16–22.)*

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Sin entirely changed human life in ways we cannot imagine, and that is because all we know is a world of sin. Because of sin, the land was "cursed" and was to produce "thorns and thistles." Humans would now experience pain, and they would have to "sweat" in order to provide food for themselves, only finally to die and return to the ground. Of all the reminders of sin, death remains the most powerful. At the same time, too, we lost our face-to-face communication with God because of sin.

However, Adam and Eve were promised a solution to counteract the ravages of sin. Although our first parents were not to see and talk to God directly, they left Eden with hope for the present and future. God took the initiative and explained to them His rescue plan.

Genesis 3:15, what has been called "the first gospel promise," was filled with hope for them (and us), despite what had happened. The promise of a coming Redeemer would provide present enmity against sin and hope for the future salvation of humanity. In fact, God's provision of clothing for Adam and Eve before they left the Garden was a symbolic act depicting their future redemption. Through the future death and resurrection of Jesus, communion with God was to be restored *(John 14:1–3)*.

That is, right there in Eden, right after the entrance of sin, humanity was given the hope and promise that the sin problem ultimately would be solved. As soon as there was sin, there was the promise of a Savior.

How have you felt after doing something that was not right? Guilt? Shame? Self-loathing? What were the consequences? How did your faith in God, and the promise of the gospel, keep you from giving up on faith entirely?

(page 11 of Standard Edition)

God's Spokespeople

What do the following texts reveal about how God has spoken to humanity after the entrance of sin? *(Read Heb. 1:1, 2; Rom. 1:19, 20; Num. 12:6; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; John 14:7–9; John 10:27–30.)*

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In spite of sin, God found many ways to communicate with fallen human beings. One way God reveals Himself to us is through creation. Nature is a powerful revelation of His wonderful acts. Scientists are amazed by the wonders of our universe and at the complexity of even the "simplest" life. Yet, nature also displays the consequences of the Fall, with the death of every living thing the most powerful example.

Another way in which God has spoken to humanity is through the prophets—individuals whom He has chosen as His spokespersons. For example, God spoke to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Daniel, revealing His will for His people. At their core, God's prophetic messages are a reminder that He has not forgotten His children and is still with them. And though some of the prophets wrote what has come to us as Scripture, others never wrote any books of the Bible.

However, many of the prophets' words were communicated through Scripture *(2 Tim. 3:16, 17)*. The Bible is a revelation of God Himself. It is through His words that we learn who He is, see His relentless love, and discover His guidance for how we are to live.

Moreover, it is through the Bible that we understand who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. There we find God's purpose for our lives.

But the most effective way in which God has spoken to us is through Jesus Christ, who, of course, is revealed to us in the Bible. As God sought Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, so Christ came to "seek and to save that which was lost" *(Luke 19:10)*. " 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father,' " Jesus declared *(John 14:9, NKJV)*. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Christ fulfilled the promise given to Adam and Eve in Eden. He came and died in our place so that we may have eternal life through Him.

After Jesus' ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit has continued to guide us " 'into all the truth' " and to speak to us of " 'what is yet to come' " *(John 16:13, NIV)*.

How much comfort do you get from knowing that Jesus, His love, His character, and His self-sacrifice reveal to us what God the Father is really like?

(page 12 of Standard Edition)

Ellen G. White

God's communication is not limited to biblical times. As we will see in coming weeks, God speaks to human beings in perpetuity, and His words will be manifested in modern ways until Christ returns.

Ellen Gould Harmon (White) and her twin sister, Elizabeth, were born on November 26, 1827, in Gorham, Maine. They were the youngest of eight children born to Robert and Eunice Harmon. In a few years, the family moved to the city of Portland, Maine, where Robert Harmon hoped to expand his hat-making business. At age nine, Ellen suffered an injury that affected her physically, emotionally, and socially. While she was in a park near her home, an angry classmate threw a stone that struck her in the face, leaving Ellen in a semiconscious state for several weeks. This accident abruptly ended her formal education and left her with lifelong health challenges. The facial injuries also left Ellen self-conscious about her appearance, limiting her social interactions.

It is in this context of uncertainty that the young Ellen Harmon began to think about her spiritual destiny. She was afraid of God and felt unworthy of heaven. Such fearful feelings intensified when the Harmon family accepted the Millerite doctrine of the soon second coming of Jesus. Even after her baptism by immersion into the Methodist Church in 1842, Ellen did not feel worthy of God's love. She believed she was "forever lost" (*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 29; also see pp. 20–31).

Amid these agonizing thoughts, young Ellen had two dreams that began to change her mind about God. But it was not until she met Levi Stockman, a Methodist preacher, that she understood and felt God's love and grace. It was as if God spoke to her in her despair. "Faith now took possession of my heart," she wrote later. "I felt an inexpressible love for God and had the witness of His Spirit that my sins were pardoned. My views of the Father were changed. I now looked upon Him as a kind and tender parent, rather than a stern tyrant compelling men to a blind obedience. My heart went out toward Him in a deep and fervent love."—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 39. At the same time, Ellen White also understood the doctrine of the "state of the dead" and gradually grasped the idea that there was no forever-burning hell. Her new understanding of God and His love completely changed her attitude. As we will learn each Friday in the weeks to come, Ellen White fell deeply in love with Jesus and served Him for the rest of her life.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/1.

INSIDE *Story*

Hearts Awakened: The Beginnings of Adventism in Poland

In 1888, as Poland remained partitioned and its people struggled under foreign rule, a flicker of new spiritual light appeared—small, quiet, and full of promise. That year, Herman Szkubowiec, the first Pole to become a Seventh-day Adventist, moved from the Crimea to Zarnówka in Volhynia, establishing what would become the first Adventist church in Polish territory.

From these humble beginnings, the Adventist message began spreading. In 1893, two early Polish converts, Karol Fendel and Jozef Szlodzinski, traveled from Zarnówka to Łódź. There, they shared their faith with a Baptist family named Lach. The Lachs embraced the Adventist message, opening their home for Sabbath worship. It was not an easy time to share new religious ideas. Poland's political and religious environment was dominated by tradition and suspicion of outsiders. Yet in the heart of Łódź, amid adversity and uncertainty, the Adventist message took root in prayerful home gatherings. By 1895, a new congregation had formed in Łódź, nurtured by public meetings held by Russian Pastor Henrich Loebsack, who baptized the first Adventist members in the city.

A inspirational moment came when Pastor Herbert Schmitz, a German who spoke no Polish, felt called to preach in Warsaw. Undeterred by the language barrier, he went door to door, searching for German names. When welcomed in, he explained the Adventist faith. Though his audience was small and mostly German-speaking, this seed of faith grew. In a few months, a church was organized in the capital, eventually conducting services in Polish as well.

By 1912, the growing work in Poland led to the formation of the Polish Mission, with Schmitz as its first leader. That same year, the Moravian-Silesian Mission was also organized, reaching southern Polish territories such as Bielsko-Biała, Cieszyn, and Skoczów. This mission laid the groundwork for generations of Polish Adventist ministers.

Despite the devastation of World War I, the Adventist message continued to spread. In 1921, the Seventh-day Adventist Union in Poland was officially organized. With 1,080 members at the time, the newly unified conferences set out to rebuild and expand. Evangelistic meetings, literature ministry, and schools followed.

But perhaps the most remarkable story remains that of those early missionaries—humble pioneers knocking on doors, preaching in private homes, and baptizing new believers in secret.

When Poland celebrated the centennial of Adventist work in 1988, the small group meeting in the Lach family home had become a vibrant national church. Their courage and conviction remind us that the gospel's light shines brightest in dark places, kindled by faith, fanned by love, and carried by those willing to go.

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

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.

LESSON 2 *October 3–9

(page 14 of Standard Edition)

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.*

(page 15 of Standard Edition)

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?

(page 17 of Standard Edition)

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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LESSON 3 *October 10–16

(page 22 of Standard Edition)

Old Testament Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *James 5:17, 18; 1 Kings 19:1–16; 1 Kings 22:1–14; Exod. 15:20; 2 Kings 22:11–14; Jer. 14:1–15.*

Memory Text: **"Jehoshaphat stood and said, 'Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper' "** *(2 Chronicles 20:20, NKJV).*

The Global Positioning System (GPS) helps travelers know where they are, where they are going, and even provides warnings against hazards. Spiritual travelers journeying to heaven also need guidance now and in the future from a heavenly "positioning system." One way that God did this in times past was through the ministry of Old Testament prophets. In their narratives, counsels, prophecies, poetry, and songs, we discover a lot about the dozens of prophets who presented God's messages to the people.

This week's lesson explores Old Testament descriptions of prophets, descriptions that help us understand the gift of prophecy as it had been manifested by some of these servants of God.

As we will see, these were people like us, in that they were frail human beings subject to fear, anger, and discouragement. Life for them was not easy but filled with challenges and hardships, as it is for all of us.

What, then, can we learn from looking at a few of these specially called servants of God?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 17.*

The Humanity of Prophets

As we saw last week, the Lord used Elijah the prophet to do a tremendous work in Israel, despite fervent opposition. What the Lord had accomplished through him was incredible. And yet . . . what?

Reflect on how James presents Elijah the prophet in James 5:17, 18. What might he mean by saying that Elijah had "a nature like ours" *(NKJV)*?

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Elijah had a stunning success on Mount Carmel *(1 Kings 18)*; God had worked in a mighty way through him, and one of the most astonishing miracles depicted in Old Testament history occurred: at the sound of Elijah's own words, fire literally came down from heaven *(1 Kings 18:38)*! You would have thought that this man of God would have been exceedingly happy after something like that.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–16. What does this tell us about the emotional state of God's prophet?

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" 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!' " *(1 Kings 19:4, NKJV)*. This sounds like a man suffering from some form of depression. Why? What happened on Mount Carmel would not be an easy act to follow, for sure, but, still, something else is going on here.

Perhaps the key could be found in his words, " 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life' " *(1 Kings 19:10, NKJV)*. This sounds as though he's lamenting what he believes to be his failures in ministry. Apostasy remains, despite his best efforts, as if he alone could have stemmed the tide. Whatever ultimately is going on here, we can see the humanity and fragility of this man of God. In other words, Elijah was a man who had "a nature like ours."

Why might it be easy at times to have a sense of "failure" in your own life or endeavors? What Bible promises can you claim to help you work through discouragement?

(page 24 of Standard Edition)

Identifying True Prophets

In the early history of Israel, there is evidence of false prophets *(Deut. 18:20)*. God, therefore, did not leave His people without guidance on who His true prophets were.

As recipients of God's revelation and inspiration, true prophets faithfully, accurately, and honestly transmitted God's messages, even if, at times, this made them unpopular with the people in power.

Read 1 Kings 22:1–14. What does it tell us about how faithful prophets operate?

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To have a king say of a prophet that " 'I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil' " *(1 Kings 22:8, NKJV)* says a lot about the king, but more about the prophet. He was, obviously, a man not afraid to speak the truth, even to the king himself—not a way to win royal favor, to say the least.

Micaiah stood alone against 400 false prophets as he presented the truth revealed to him. In the face of coercion to alter negative messages from the Lord to placate evil King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel *(1 Kings 22:13, 14)*, Micaiah presented God's truth, regardless of how it might be received.

Read 1 Samuel 9:3–14. What do these verses tell us about how others viewed faithful prophets of God?

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There are numerous examples of the quality of life lived by prophets in the Bible. In this case, Saul was sent by his father, Kish, to look for his lost donkeys. The servant traveling with Saul suggested that he not abandon the search, because there was " 'in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man' " *(1 Sam. 9:6, NKJV)*. The description given here of Samuel the prophet depicts the qualities expected of God's prophets. True prophets in Scripture are identified as "men of God," chosen in part to exemplify His character. At the same time, just because some among the "men of God" may be prophets, this doesn't make them flawless human beings.

Who, even among the most esteemed "men of God," have you known to be flawless?

Functions of Prophets

Read 1 Samuel 8:4–22 and Leviticus 8:10–13. How did prophets function in relation to kings and priests?

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Prophets interacted with kings in both pleasant and unpleasant situations. When the Israelites demanded a king *(1 Sam. 8:4–22)*, they said we want "a king to judge us like all the nations" *(1 Sam. 8:5)*. What a sad but powerful example of the danger that God's people have faced in every age: the desire to be like those around them. In this case, they had no idea what this request would bring, even though they were forewarned *(1 Sam. 8:11–18)* by God through His prophet. Based on their desires, and despite his warning to them, Samuel soon anointed Israel's first king, known in biblical history as King Saul.

The Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles record the kind and quality of rulership exhibited by the kings of Israel and Judah. Sacred history shows that the kings who did evil far outnumbered those who did good in the sight of God. One of the core functions of the prophets was to help lead unfaithful kings back to obedience to God's law. As a result, these prophets faced threats, with some even harmed and killed by kings who led God's people away from Him *(1 Kings 18:4–19, 2 Chron. 24:20–22)*.

Prophets also interacted with priests. Moses, a prophet of God, anointed Aaron and his sons as the first Israelite priests *(Lev. 8:10–13)*. There were times priests received words of rebuke from God through the prophets *(Hos. 6:9, Mal. 2:1–3)*. One striking example of this is the entire household of Eli, who were confronted for their corrupt practices *(1 Sam. 2:27–36)*. These were some very strong rebukes against rampant corruption among people given special privileges.

Prophets were teachers of the people *(2 Chronicles 34)*. They presented messages from God to the priests, kings, and the nation *(Jer. 5:31, Ezek. 22:26)*. Prophets also spoke to surrounding nations outlining God's plan for them, a theme repeated several times in the messages of the Old Testament prophets *(Isa. 60:1–3; Isa. 62:1, 2)*. Prophets were expected not only to pass on faithfully the messages God gave them but were sometimes instructed to write them down and preserve them *(2 Chron. 13:22)*. Again, no matter how human the prophets were (and with all the attending frailties that go with that), they were men and women of prayer, the Word, and service to God and His people *(Jer. 42:4; 2 Kings 22:15–17)*.

Women Prophets

Read Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, 2 Kings 22:14, and Nehemiah 6:14. What do these texts also teach about the prophetic role?

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There is abundant evidence in Scripture that God called women to be prophets. (See the use of the Hebrew word *nevi'ah [Exod. 15:20]* and the Greek word *prophētis [Luke 2:36]*.) In Micah 6:4, Miriam is listed with Moses and Aaron as those sent to the people. Miriam is presented as a prophetess who sang a song of victory when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea *(Exod. 15:20, 21)*. Yet, this prophetess, like her male counterparts, was not without fault, as her shameful attitude toward Moses and his Ethiopian wife reveal, actions for which the prophetess had been duly punished *(see Num. 12:1–10)*.

We can see the work of another prophet in the story of Deborah, who served as a judge in Israel *(Judg. 4:1–4)*.

In fact, there is clear evidence that Deborah *(Judg. 4:4)* received revelation from God *(Judg. 4:4–9, 14–22)*. Her song of victory *(Judg. 5:2–31)* is an acknowledgment of God's intervention and had deep theological significance for the nation at that time in history.

Read 2 Kings 22:11–14. Why did King Josiah's men go to Huldah? What should this tell us about her important role in the nation?

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Huldah "the prophetess" was consulted by the top men of King Josiah's council *(2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chron. 34:22)* after they read the words of the "Book of the Law" *(2 Kings 22:8, NKJV)* (believed to be Deuteronomy) to the king, who, in response, "tore his clothes" *(2 Kings 22:11, NKJV)*. This was obviously a very serious matter, and the king took it that way, which is why his men went right to Huldah. She had received a message from God regarding the impending judgment of Judah. Josiah's reforms resulted from Huldah's prophetic messages and averted God's judgment on His people.

Men prophets and women prophets, though called of God, were also sinners in need of grace. What hope can you take from their stories?

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False Prophets

No matter what God does, Satan has his counterfeits. It's the same with prophets. Israel faced true and false prophets. The key was to know the difference.

Read Jeremiah 14:1–15. What was happening here, and how did the Lord regard those who spoke falsely as "prophets" in His name?

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In Jeremiah 14, God gave Jeremiah a message of judgment for Judah, a judgment that would come in the form of a sword (war), famine, and pestilence. False prophets at the time contradicted Jeremiah's message. Jeremiah describes them in very clear terms: "And the LORD said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart' " *(Jer. 14:14, NKJV)*.

False prophets are corrupt because their source of prophetic claims is often the false "gods" whom they worship *(Jer. 23:13, 14)*. God warns, " 'I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them' " *(Jer. 14:14, NKJV)*. They are " 'prophets of the deceit of their own heart' " *(Jer. 23:26, NKJV)*. Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy against " 'the prophets . . . who prophesy out of their own heart' " *(Ezek. 13:2, NKJV)*.

False prophets often follow popular views. This was the case in 1 Kings 22, when a group of 400 "prophets" gathered at the command of King Ahab *(1 Kings 22:6)*. With one voice they advised the king to fight against Ramoth-Gilead. Ahab counseled with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, after they heard the prophetic counsel from the prophets of Asherah. Jehoshaphat urged Ahab to consult the prophet Micaiah as to whether they should go to battle or not. "Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, 'Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Please, let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement' " *(1 Kings 22:13, NKJV)*.

The pressure Micaiah experienced to lie was likely the same pressure felt by the false prophets of Asherah, but Micaiah did not follow this popular view; instead, he waited for God to tell him what to say *(1 Kings 22:14)*.

Whether or not you are a prophet, it's always easy to follow the popular thing. Considering how corrupt culture can be, why is this never a good idea?

(page 28 of Standard Edition)

Not Perfect but Willing

As we have seen, the lives of Old Testament prophets make clear that it has never been easy to be God's messenger. Ellen G. White experienced the same anxieties that biblical prophets felt. As we learned last Friday, she was young, shy, and in poor health when she received God's call. While a second vision confirmed her call, Ellen Harmon (White) remained apprehensive about God's call, writing:

> "About one week after this the Lord gave me another view, and showed me the trials I must pass through; that I must go and relate to others what he had revealed to me; that I should meet with great opposition, and suffer anguish of spirit. . . .
>
> This vision troubled me exceedingly. My health was very poor, and I was only seventeen years old. . . . I earnestly prayed that the burden might be laid on some other one. But all the light I could get was, 'Make known to others what I have revealed to you.' I was unreconciled to go out into the world. I had naturally but little confidence. . . . I looked with desire into the grave. Death appeared to me preferable to the responsibilities I should have to bear."—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, pp. 35, 36.

Did you notice that Ellen Harmon (White) would rather die than to accept her call? After much prayer and encouragement by fellow believers, she acquiesced and devoted the remainder of her life to following "[H]is bidding."—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 38.

She would become the most influential voice to—and even of—the future Seventh-day Adventist Church. Nevertheless, Ellen Harmon (White) was human and had her own personal faults and physical trials, family challenges, and interpersonal struggles. Yet amid her humanity, we see a great lesson: God chooses imperfect people who are willing to serve Him.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry would encourage believers and connect them to Bible truths. By 1860, she had played a leading role in the development of the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist denomination and its mission to proclaim the three angels' messages to the world. God would lead these believers to organize the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. In later decades, Ellen G. White's prophetic voice was influential in establishing the global Adventist health and educational systems. However, the most important contribution of her ministry is her writings, totaling approximately 100,000 pages. Ellen G. White's inspired writings continue to speak throughout the world today.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/3.

INSIDE *Story*

. . . To Adventist Leader

By Mission Editor

Marek's life began to change as he read *The Great Controversy* in Poland. He decided to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. He wanted to quit smoking but couldn't.

One Saturday, he passed a street poster offering a five-day, stop-smoking class at a Seventh-day Adventist church. Marek had never heard of the denomination, even after reading *The Great Controversy* and visiting the Adventist bookstore where he had bought the book.

Marek went straight to the church. It was two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, and the church normally would have been empty after worship services, but a group of literature evangelists was there, and they invited Marek to return the next Sabbath morning.

Marek returned the next Sabbath and enjoyed the sermon. He was amazed at the kindness of the churchgoers. They told him that a large group of young people would meet in a nearby city the next Sabbath and invited him to go with them.

The next Sabbath morning, as Marek waited for the Adventists to pick him up, he sensed two voices speaking to him. One said, "Stay outside, and enjoy the nice weather." The other urged, "Wait here because it's really important that you go to this meeting."

The Adventists arrived and took him to the meeting. The worship service amazed Marek. Every word was meaningful to him. The preacher, a British pastor from London, spoke until noon. Then he said, "I know I am supposed to end now, but I know there is somebody here who needs Jesus."

Marek thought, *Who told him about me?*

The pastor then shared his personal story. He was born into a religious family but had left the church. He had used drugs and drank. His church and even his mother had stopped praying for him.

"Then I met Jesus," he said. "He took me up from the bottom where I was, and now I'm here to tell you about His power. And He can change your life. If you want Jesus to change your life, just come here to the front."

Marek saw 1,000 people in the crowd and cringed. With the very next sentence, the pastor addressed his doubts.

"Don't think about others looking at you," he said. "Just come to the front. It's between you and God."

Marek stood up. He couldn't sit anymore. His heart beat wildly as he went to the front. As the pastor prayed, Marek understood the plan of salvation for the first time. He began to cry, and nothing could stop him. The tears flowed freely. But Marek also was excited and joyful.

Today, Marek has no regrets. He serves as a church leader in Poland, and continues to share his faith.

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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.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help support Seventh-day Adventist education in Poland and around the world.

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.

LESSON 5 *October 24–30

(page 38 of Standard Edition)

Revelation *and* Inspiration



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 2 Pet. 1:18–21; Exod. 17:14; Rev. 1:19; Ezek. 4:1–8.*

Memory Text: **"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things he saw"** *(Revelation 1:1, 2, NKJV).*

The apostle John had been part of the inner circle of the Twelve Apostles *(Luke 8:51; Matt. 17:1; Matt. 26:36, 37)*. After Christ's ascension, he continued his ministry, in Jerusalem. Yet, before the fall of the city (A.D. 70), he moved to Ephesus in order to oversee churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor. During the Christian persecution under the Roman emperor Domitian, the apostle was exiled to Patmos, an island in the Aegean Sea.

On Patmos, John received special prophetic messages that were addressed not only to the seven churches of Asia Minor but also to Christians throughout the ages *(Rev. 1:1–3, 9–11)*. The prophetic message delivery chain, of which John was a part, looked something like this: God the Father, to Jesus Christ, to the angel, to the apostle John, and to the readers and hearers. This is a classic example of the revelation-inspiration process in which God uses prophets to communicate His messages to humanity.

This week's lesson specifically examines the multiform revelation-inspiration process, with special focus on the oral, written, and dramatized ways the divine message has been communicated to human beings.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 31.*

General and Special Revelation

Read Hebrews 1:1, 2. Why is God so interested in speaking to us? What is He telling us through Jesus and the prophets?

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What would the Creator of the cosmos have to say to us? Why does He communicate with us? It is because we are fallen human beings in a sinful world and face death, suffering, and trials; God, therefore, speaks to us because He wants us to know why we are here, why things are so bad, and why, despite it all, we can hope in His love for us.

God's *general* revelation, as seen in the natural world, speaks eloquently of His infinite power and caring love. King David exclaimed, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" *(Ps. 19:1, NKJV)*. The apostle Paul added, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse" *(Rom. 1:20, NASB)*.

It is also amazing to reflect on God's restoring power manifested in the mysterious healing processes in our world. Indeed, "God's healing power runs all through nature. If a tree is cut, if a human being is wounded or breaks a bone, nature begins at once to repair the injury. Even before the need exists, the healing agencies are in readiness; and as soon as a part is wounded, every energy is bent to the work of restoration."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 113.

As beautiful and instructive as the natural world can be, it reveals not only God's power and love but also the presence of evil *(see Gen. 3:14–19, Matt. 13:24–30)*. This ambiguous message can be properly understood only in light of God's special revelation—in both Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and in the Bible, the Written Word of God that testifies of Him *(John 5:39)*.

The Scriptures are the inspired record of God's messages to all human beings throughout the ages. They tell us about the Creation of the world and its tragic fall, and about God's amazing plan of redemption and the final restoration of planet Earth. As brief and selective as some biblical narratives can be, they are always reliable, because it's God speaking to us *(see 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21)*.

Though nature surely points to the reality of the Creator's power and love, why do we still so desperately need the Written Word, as well? What does the Word tell us that nature, in and of itself, doesn't?

(page 40 of Standard Edition)

The Process of Inspiration

Many books and writings, not just the Bible, have come down to us through the ages. And yet, we deem the Bible as the Word of God. What separates it from other writings?

Read 2 Timothy 3:15–17 and James 1:17. What important message should we take from these verses?

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There is some discussion about the best translation of 2 Timothy 3:16, but most Bible translations render this passage in a similar way, emphasizing that the whole Bible is of divine origin *(2 Pet. 1:20, 21)*.

One Bible commentator explains that "it seems more likely that Paul is contemplating scripture as a whole here and that he would say that the whole of scripture is 'profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness,' than that every scripture passage is profitable in these ways."—G. W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 445.

But how should we understand the inspiration process that originated in the Bible? We should recognize that prophetic inspiration is the Holy Spirit assisting true prophets for the reliable communication of divine messages. That assistance is provided not only in the process of *receiving* the messages but also in *communicating* the messages clearly to their recipients.

God's messages came through visions and dreams *(Num. 12:6; Isa. 6:1, 8)*. God also used eyewitnesses *(1 John 1:1–3)*, Spirit-inspired historical research *(Luke 1:1–3)*, and divine impressions on the mind *(2 Pet. 1:21)*. Regardless of the means used by the Holy Spirit, the prophets and biblical authors were given objective, rather than subjective, messages of truth to be shared. That is, God's messages were not to be tampered with or in any way distorted by His messengers, even if they used their own words to express those messages.

The task of communicating prophetic messages to their original audiences could be done orally *(2 Pet. 1:19–21)*, in written form *(John 20:30, 31)*, or even through dramatization *(Ezek. 4:1–8)*.

Though many questions remain about how the Bible was inspired, or how inspiration works in general, why is it so important to trust the Bible as God's inspired Word, regardless of what we may not fully understand about how it was written?

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Oral Messages

Read 2 Peter 1:18–21. What assurance do we have that the oral messages delivered by God's prophets were as inspired and reliable as the written ones?

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God spoke to Adam and Eve before the Fall *(Gen. 2:16, 17)* and after *(Gen. 3:9–19)*. In both cases, they perfectly understood His words. His voice was heard in clear terms also at Sinai *(Exod. 20:1–20)*, as well as at the baptism and the transfiguration of Jesus *(Matt. 3:17, Matt. 17:5)*. We might misinterpret when other people talk to us. But, surely, when God talks to anyone, there will be no miscommunication or deception.

The Bible affirms that "God spoke to Moses and said to him: 'I am the LORD' " *(Exod. 6:2, NKJV)*. Many Bible writers acknowledged hearing the voice of God as He spoke to them. This was the case, for example, with Isaiah *(Isa. 8:1, 11)*, Jeremiah *(Jer. 1:4, 9, 11)*, and Ezekiel *(Ezek. 3:16, Ezek. 6:1)*. Any attempt to deny these and other similar claims ends up questioning the honesty of the prophets and the reliability of the Bible itself.

As God spoke to the prophets in an intelligible human language, so did the prophets to their respective audiences. For instance, Noah was a true prophet of God and a faithful "preacher of righteousness" *(2 Pet. 2:5)*. He did not write any portion of the Bible, but he delivered God's message orally to his contemporaries, and his message was no less inspired than the writings of the canonical prophets.

Several other prophets, including Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist, never wrote any portion of the Bible; instead, they delivered their message orally.

And what about Jesus Christ Himself? The Gospel record mentions that, during His earthly ministry, He "wrote on the ground with His finger" *(John 8:6, NKJV)*. That's it. We have no record of Jesus' writing anything else. But He taught and preached orally "as one having authority" *(Matt. 7:29, NKJV)*. Some of His listeners even confessed, "No man ever spoke like this Man" *(John 7:40, 46, NKJV)*. Jesus was primarily an oral communicator of God's messages. His messages were no less authoritative or binding simply because He Himself did not write any books of the Bible.

How fascinating that God has prophets who had no writings in the Bible. Why do these noncanonical prophets also carry authority?

Written Messages

Some famous speeches have deeply impacted people's lives and even changed the course of history. If these speeches were not recorded, the words would have faded or become distorted with the passage of time. Thus, writing gives permanence to the spoken word, and that permanence allows the message to be transmitted through time.

Shortly after the Israelites left Egypt and defeated the Amalekites, God instructed Moses to "write this for a memorial in the book" *(Exod. 17:14, NKJV)*. Beginning with Moses, who authored the first five books of the Bible, Psalm 90, and Job, the Holy Spirit guided the canonical prophets to produce the writings that now comprise the 66 books of the Bible.

Read Exodus 17:14; John 20:30, 31; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Revelation 1:19. What are some of the reasons God asked His prophets to write down the messages that He gave them?

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The various books of the Bible reflect the literary style and skills of their respective writers. As we will discuss in next week's study, the personal nuances and various styles of each author don't take away from their messages, because there are no "degrees" of inspiration. Some parts of the Bible are obviously more relevant and applicable to our lives and faith today than are other parts. But this truth doesn't make one part of the Bible more inspired than another part.

Sometimes Bible writers recorded the inspired messages that they first delivered orally, by themselves, or by a trusted associate. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses recorded the last speeches that he made to the Israelites before his death. The four Gospels register many of the sermons and teachings of Jesus during His earthly ministry.

But there are instances in which prophets quoted non-inspired sources *(Acts 17:28, 1 Cor. 15:33, Titus 1:12)* and even the words of Satan *(Gen. 3:1–5, Matt. 4:1–11)*.

We should remember that as the prophets recorded the feelings and desires of other people, they also expressed their own human reactions *(see Dan. 8:27; Rev. 22:8, 9)*. Furthermore, the Bible describes many good examples to be imitated but also many bad ones to be avoided *(1 Cor. 10:1–11)*.

While reading the Bible, we should keep in mind that, while not written in perfect language, it carries an infallible message that will stand the test of time.

Drama, Symbols, Parables

The Bible has a rich variety of word pictures and metaphors. For example, the whole Old Testament sacrificial system of patriarchal altars, the Mosaic tabernacle, and the temple in Jerusalem was a pictographic representation of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and His heavenly priesthood *(Heb. 8:1–6)*.

In the prophecies of Daniel, the kingdoms and powers in the world were represented by the different parts of a great image *(Dan. 2:31–45)*, various animals and horns *(Daniel 7 and 8)*, and two kings *(Daniel 11)*. Similar representations appear also in the book of Revelation, as in the case of the two beasts of chapter 13.

In His teachings, Jesus spoke of Himself, for instance, as the Bread of Life *(John 6:35, 41–58)*, the Light of the world *(John 8:12, John 9:5)*, and the True Vine *(John 15:1–8)*. And through the parable of the sower *(Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23)* and several other ones *(Matt. 13:24–52, etc.)*, Jesus illustrated the nature and growth of His kingdom.

Read Ezekiel 4:1–8. Why do you think God not only spoke verbally but also dramatized some of His messages?

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A vivid dramatization appears in Ezekiel 4:1–8, where God asked the prophet to make a miniature model of Jerusalem and to lay himself down, first on his left side for 390 days, representing the house of Israel, and then on his right side for 40 days, representing the house of Judah. Another visual experience was Hosea's divinely ordained marriage to Gomer, a prostitute, representing Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness to God *(Hos. 1:2–9)*.

The dramatic experiences of Ezekiel and Hosea seem quite shocking today. But that was the point: they were supposed to be shocking, not just to us but also to the people back then. At a time when the warnings of the prophets were openly rejected *(see 2 Chron. 36:15–21)*, the last act of divine mercy was to dramatically alert the people to their true condition in order to lead them to genuine repentance. Such a dramatic presentation certainly should have shown them how seriously they should have taken God's warning to them.

What kind of dramatization might someone do today to warn us about, say, being Laodicean? *(See Rev. 3:14–18.)*

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(page 44 of Standard Edition)

Ellen G. White on Revelation and Inspiration

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White was divinely inspired. Her writings, life, and ministry meet the criteria of a true prophet. She possessed the same quality of inspiration as Bible prophets, though she never considered her writings to be the same as Scripture. On the contrary, Ellen G. White always uplifted the Bible. But how did she herself understand God's prophetic revelations to her and the process of her inspiration?

First, Ellen G. White always considered the Bible as the authoritative and infallible revelation of God. The Bible reveals God's truth and His plan of salvation for the fallen human race. In that process, as we are learning, He uses prophets to communicate His messages.

Second, Ellen G. White recognized that the process of inspiration involved divine-human interaction. God communicated His messages, but then the prophet would convey the divine instruction using his or her own words. As Ellen G. White put it: "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. . . . The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

In relation to visions and prophetic dreams, Ellen G. White understood "thought inspiration" as a union of divine revelation and human experience. She wrote, " 'The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human.' "—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 25. God used many ways to produce an understanding of His message in the mind of His messenger. These included picture representations, words, and thoughts that engaged all the prophet's senses. Ellen G. White's experience was similar to that of Bible writers.

Third, Ellen G. White noted that not all of her human experiences and communications were inspired. "There are times when common things must be stated," she advised, "common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 39. It is important to realize this distinction as we read and relate to her writings and experiences, particularly her correspondence and diaries.

Knowing Ellen G. White's understanding of revelation and inspiration helps us avoid extremes and read her counsels prudently with understanding.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/5.

INSIDE *Story*

From Despair to Destiny

In the bitter cold of January 1906, a young Slovenian named Albin Močnik stood on a bridge in Bremerhaven, Germany, contemplating suicide. But just as he teetered on the edge of despair, a stranger intervened, directing him to a pair of Adventist shoemaking families who would unknowingly change the course of history for the Balkans.

Močnik moved in with the Schiefers and Banas families. Their quiet witness stirred his heart, and, by March 1906, he was baptized. This marked the beginning of a lifelong mission that would shape the Adventist Church in the former Yugoslavia.

Soon after his baptism, Močnik attended a German Union conference that was held in Friedensau, unaware he was the first Slovene Adventist. Encouraged by John F. Huenergardt to serve his own people, he enrolled in the Friedensau school, where his passion for mission grew. He began translating and distributing Sabbath School materials in Serbo-Croatian.

In 1908, Albin's dream took form. Upon completing his studies, he went to Croatia with Pastor Robert Schillinger. Though hindered by language barriers and legal obstacles, Močnik shared the gospel in Zagreb and Split. He moved into Srem, then part of Croatia, and ventured into Serbia, preaching and baptizing new believers, often at the cost of imprisonment.

Despite recurring illness and political opposition, Močnik never abandoned his mission. During World War I, he endured army service, severe health conditions, and the grief of separation from his growing family. Yet even in convalescence, he produced the first Adventist hymnal in Serbo-Croatian, composing 120 songs himself.

After the war, Močnik led efforts to counter the divisive Reform Movement and rebuild the Adventist Church. This movement started before World War I, when differing opinions on military service arose among German Adventists. Eventually, Albin's ministry bore fruit: he revitalized the church, raised up new leaders, and, by 1925, was elected the first president of the Yugoslav Union Conference.

As president, Močnik gave the Adventist faith a public voice in a hostile political climate. His 1925 book *Adventism* clarified church beliefs to the government and helped secure legal recognition for the denomination. He spearheaded translation work and edited the church paper *Glasnik*. He also founded a school for pastors in 1931.

Močnik's legacy was carved through hardship and relentless faith. From the moment he chose life on a bridge in Bremerhaven to his bold witness across Croatia and beyond, Albin Močnik became a pioneer of hope. His story is a testimony to the transformative power of the gospel and the courage of those who carry it to new frontiers.

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

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LESSON 6 *October 31–November 6

(page 46 of Standard Edition)

The Prophetic Writings



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 17:14; Isa. 13:1; Jer. 36:17, 18; Rom. 16:22; Luke 1:1–4; Jude 14, 15; 2 Cor. 4:7.*

Memory Text: **"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"** *(Romans 15:4, NKJV).*

How would you like to be taught a song that God Himself composed? In Deuteronomy 32, the lyrics were written down by Moses at God's direction *(Deut. 31:19–22)*. We don't usually think of songs when we think of prophetic writings, though many of the psalms are, indeed, inspired songs, even if the lyrics themselves were not dictated directly by the Lord Himself.

The Bible describes three major ways that prophets communicated God's messages: (1) orally, (2) through writing, and (3) through symbolic actions or dramatizations. This week we will focus on the writings in the Scriptures. The Bible records the Word of God, as expressed through the words of His messengers, including sermons and speeches of the prophets.

Think of the variety of writing styles and genres in the prophetic writings: narrative, history, poetry, lament, and letters, just to name a few. Chosen men and women put into human language what they were led by the Holy Spirit to communicate. This week we will look at their writing, the use of literary assistants (secretaries), and at things to keep in mind when studying challenging passages.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 7.*

The Call to Write

The earliest method that God used to convey messages to humanity was through direct oral communication, such as audible voices, or dreams, or angels. It was not until the time of Moses that Scripture records the first divine instruction regarding these experiences, which was to write in a "book" what God had spoken.

What is the first mention of writing in the Bible? Read Exodus 17:14.

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In the Old Testament we find multiple examples of God's giving directions to His messengers to preserve His words for His people. Like Moses, Jeremiah was told, " 'Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day' " *(Jer. 36:2, NKJV)*.

He was also given the reason he was to write out the prophecies: " 'It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin' " *(Jer. 36:3, NKJV)*. The predictions were given to lead the people to salvation, rather than for the sake of curiosity about the future.

God's messengers wrote under a great variety of circumstances. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible while in the desert. David composed several of his psalms while being hunted by Saul *(see Psalms 52, 54, 57, 59)*. Daniel wrote his visions while serving in the courts of Babylon and Medo-Persia. In contrast, Paul wrote his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon while he was in prison, and John wrote Revelation while exiled on Patmos. It is evident that when God's messengers were impressed to write, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit regardless of their circumstances.

Interestingly, all the preserved teachings of Jesus come to us in written form through persons God chose to entrust with those treasured truths. This shows us the confidence God has that divine messages would be faithfully recorded and preserved by His messengers.

How would you answer someone who says that we cannot trust the Bible because we do not have the original manuscripts? Why is that, really, a weak argument?

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Literary Genres and Styles

The Bible contains a variety of writing styles used by God's inspired messengers. Some resemble the writing of a diary *(see Num. 33:1–49)*. On the other hand, the books of Daniel, Zechariah, and John contain examples of apocalyptic writing, which is marked by grand symbolism, cosmic themes, and descriptions of heavenly beings, among other characteristics.

Read Isaiah 13:1. How does the Bible here refer to the message Isaiah is giving?

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Visions received by the prophets are sometimes called "oracles"—meaning that they are communications or revelations from God (some versions translate the word as "burden"). Newer translations of the Bible show that many were written out in poetic form, often using parallelism. Parallelism is when subsequent lines repeat or sometimes contrast with earlier lines. For example: "In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel" *(Isa. 17:7, NKJV)*. "Maker" and "Holy One" are in parallel to each other, each image giving us more information about the other.

The prophets also used common literary devices such as metaphors (symbols) and hyperbole (exaggeration). For us to understand better and apply their messages, it is important to recognize the kind of writing that they used.

Another literary style frequently found in Scripture is the "covenant lawsuit." For example, in Jeremiah 2:4–9, Jeremiah presents God's legal complaint against His people for violating their covenantal obligations. Using courtroom imagery, the author portrays God as the prosecutor laying out the reasons for His judgment.

Scripture also contains prophetic writing, history, song, and parables. Jeremiah was told to compose a book of all his messages *(Jer. 36:2)*, while much of the New Testament writings consist of letters addressed to individuals or communities. No distinction is made in the authority of one style of communication over another. Paul's letters were to be regarded as carrying the same weight as the prophets of old, because Paul gives clear evidence in his letters that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit *(see 1 Cor. 7:10, 12, 40)*.

Some scholarship emphasizes the human element in Scripture at the expense of the divine. Why is that a sure path to spiritual ruin?

Literary Assistants

Read Jeremiah 36:17, 18 and Romans 16:22. What do these verses tell us about the Bible writers' use of literary assistants?

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Presumably, Jeremiah could have written his messages, but instead he relied on a trusted scribe to record his prophecies faithfully and to share them with the nation's leaders. Jeremiah is not the only example in the Bible where prophets used the services of a literary assistant to communicate the divine message.

In the New Testament, even though Tertius says that he "wrote this epistle" *(Rom. 16:22)*, it is evident from the beginning of the book of Romans that he was writing only what Paul wished to say. Tertius was his amanuensis, or secretary—a literary assistant who put Paul's words into written form.

This practice was not unusual for Paul. At the conclusion of his letters to the Colossians and Thessalonians, Paul makes a point of adding his salutation with "my own hand" *(Col. 4:18, 2 Thess. 3:17, NKJV)* as a way of authenticating the entire letter. This suggests that he relied upon someone else to pen the letters for him. Because this reality might raise doubts as to whether the letter correctly represented him—or worse, that it wasn't from him at all—Paul provided his own handwritten note at the end so that there would be no doubt about the genuineness of his epistle.

Many commentators attribute the variation in literary styles found among Paul's letters to his use of literary assistants. The same is suspected regarding Peter's two letters: "Although it is a fact that the style of language of 2 Peter is different from that of the first epistle, this may reasonably be accounted for by the probability that Peter . . . employed secretarial aid in phrasing an epistle he was writing in Greek. If Paul, who was fully at home in Greek, used secretaries, as he quite evidently did, it is even more logical to think that Peter, whose native language was Aramaic, would have done so, and that these secretaries would have exerted a definite influence on the wording of his letters in Greek."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 186.

This suggests that, while remaining faithful to the thoughts and meaning of God's messengers, the vocabulary and sentence construction might reflect the varying literary abilities of the assistants they employed. It's the thoughts that are inspired, not necessarily the specific words used to express those inspired thoughts.

Literary Sources

"And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yet, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth" *(Eccles. 12:9, 10, NKJV)*.

This passage can be read to show that Solomon did not originate all the proverbs that he recorded. Under the inspiration of God, he "sought out" many sayings and searched to find "acceptable words." In fact, the oft-quoted description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is attributed to the mother of an otherwise unknown King Lemuel, not Solomon *(Prov. 31:1)*. Evidence points to the influence of Egyptian literature on Proverbs as well.

Similarly, the inspired historians of the Old Testament tell us that they referenced archives and other historical annals to narrate faithfully the story of God's people.

Read 1 Kings 11:41; Luke 1:1–4; and Jude 14, 15. What do these verses tell us about how the inspired writers at times used non-biblical sources?

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Ezra and Nehemiah are other examples of Bible writers who relied upon historical records to document their accounts. Ezra includes copies of letters and royal decrees regarding Jerusalem and Persia *(see Ezra 4–7)*, and Nehemiah tells us about genealogical registries that he found and incorporated into his narrative *(see Neh. 7:5–72)*.

This principle appears in the New Testament as well. "It is clear from Luke's experience that Inspiration functions in a manner consistent with the natural operation of the mental faculties and does not set them aside. Here is an inspired writer who was led by the Holy Spirit to give diligent study to the available oral and written source materials on the life of Christ, and then to combine into a connected narrative the information thus gathered."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 669.

Jude seems to be quoting from 1 Enoch 1:9—a noncanonical, intertestamental Jewish work. Without mentioning their names, Paul also quoted from Greek philosophers *(see Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12)*.

Though the biblical writers were often guided by direct revelation through visions and dreams, this did not exclude the Holy Spirit from also inspiring these messengers to select material from other sources. Why is this an important concept for us to remember?

Divine Message and Human Imperfections

What does Paul say about God's treasure in 2 Corinthians 4:7?

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Paul writes of God's treasure as being entrusted to "earthen vessels" (human beings), so that God's power might be shown in contrast to our own weaknesses. Scripture reveals that just as God's messengers were not supernaturally preserved from failings in their personal lives (Moses, Elijah, David, Jonah, and Peter, for example), so their writings were not exempt from the imperfections of human understanding and communication.

"The union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God;' yet they are expressed in the words of men and are adapted to human needs."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 747.

The humanity of God's messengers is not overridden by their divine calling to communicate the treasures of truth, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Nor does it appear that the Holy Spirit saw fit to prevent His messengers from making statements and writing words that we today find hard to harmonize or to explain. However few these verses are, it takes a very narrow mind to stumble over them. As Bible-believing Christians, we are to surrender to the Word of God to the degree that we understand it and trust the Lord, despite what we don't understand.

Some discrepancies may be attributed to inconsequential mistakes by later copyists or to conflicting sources (records) that the inspired authors relied upon. When considering problematic passages, we need to ask ourselves if we fully understand the meaning of the writer's words and whether further study might solve the difficulty.

Even if we are not able to resolve every seeming mistake or discrepancy, we find that they are inconsequential to the essence of the message being presented. We can have confidence that the divine truths of Scripture are faithfully revealed despite the imperfections of God's messengers.

Why do you think God chose to use fallible human beings rather than sinless angels as His primary messengers?

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(page 52 of Standard Edition)

Ellen G. White's Writings

Ellen G. White's experience and writings parallel much of what we have studied this week regarding God's messengers in the Bible. She, too, received a divine commission to write out what had been revealed to her.

Reflecting in 1909, Ellen G. White wrote, "Because of the accident which had nearly cost me my life, I had been feeble in health and unable to write. . . . But one night the angel of the Lord came to my bedside and said to me, 'You must write out the things that I give you.' I said, 'I can not write.' Again the command was given, 'Write out the things I give you.' I thought I would try, and taking up a lapboard from the table, I began to write, and found that I could trace the words easily."—*The General Conference Bulletin*, May 31, 1909.

Like the inspired writers of Scripture, Ellen G. White also employed literary assistants. Her secretaries did the work that editors are expected to do—assist authors in expressing their messages clearly while not inserting thoughts of their own. They were not ghostwriters or coauthors. Their work was dependent upon the material that Ellen G. White herself produced, whether written out by hand or delivered orally.

Ellen G. White also quoted and adapted material from other literary sources in her writing to aid in the presentation of her messages. By recommending to her readers some of the very books she used, it is evident that she was not intending to be deceitful or unfair to those authors, but she found in their language apt expressions to convey the truths that she wished to express.

What about discrepancies or inaccuracies?

"In regard to infallibility," she wrote, "I never claimed it; God alone is infallible."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 37.

One may encounter certain statements in her writings that are difficult to understand or harmonize with others. Ellen G. White's humanity was not overridden by her divine calling. Like all of us, Ellen White would grow and mature as well, a growth and maturity that is revealed in her writings.

As already stated, but worth repeating, she also corrected those who believed that every word she wrote came directly from heaven. "There are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 58.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/6.

"God Is First": Part 1

By Gina Wahlen

Naum had to stand up for his faith at the tender age of seven. In Yugoslavia, school was obligatory every Saturday. Although young, Naum determined not to attend school on Sabbath. After missing two Saturdays in a row, the first-grader was confronted by a special commission set up to interrogate him.

Coming to his classroom, the group of five officials dismissed everyone in the class except for Naum.

Standing alone, the seven-year-old bravely faced the school director, two teachers, and two uniformed police officers—one of whom was the regional director of the secret police.

"Why aren't you attending school on Saturday?" the interrogator began.

"Because I believe in God, and according to the fourth commandment of His law, I'm not to be in school on His Sabbath. This is why I'll be in church every Sabbath, not in school," Naum replied.

"You'll be expelled from school, and will have no further opportunities to receive an education!" the man glared.

Naum's response came quickly. "I'll be in church anyway, because God is first in my life."

"So, what do you do at your church?" the interrogator continued.

"We read the Bible, sing songs, and pray."

"Sing us a song!" the group demanded. So, Naum sang a hymn and prayed a simple prayer, thanking the Lord for opportunities given, for health, for the government, and to direct the commission properly and honestly.

Following his prayer, Naum was asked if his father had told him not to go to school.

"No," Naum answered honestly.

If the answer had been "yes," his father would have gone immediately to prison. Knowing his son could be interrogated, Naum's father had never told him not to attend school.

The commission was silent for a few moments. Then abruptly Naum was told, "You will be informed whether or not you will stay in school."

Naum hurried home to tell his parents what had happened. Not surprised, "they knew what my decision would be," he recalls.

No directive came from the commission, so Naum continued attending school, except on Sabbaths.

Upon completing primary school, Naum was not allowed to continue his education because of his firm decision to keep the Sabbath. So, at age 15 he started working full-time with his father on their farm.

But God had other plans for Naum.

Thank you for supporting the mission outreach in Maruševec, Croatia.

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LESSON 7 *November 7–13

(page 56 of Standard Edition)

Now Hear This!



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Num. 13:26–30; Jer. 36:20–26; 2 Chron. 36:15, 16; Matt. 23:30–35; 1 Cor. 10:6–12.*

Memory Text: **"Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come"** *(1 Corinthians 10:11, NASB).*

Some people today are encouraged to speak "their truth"—their experiences, their ideas, their needs, their boundaries, their convictions—whatever these may be. Every "truth" is valid (the thinking goes) and should not be silenced. What happens, however, when some of these deeply held "truths" conflict with the Truth, Jesus Christ, and His Written Word?

What happens is that some people will accept biblical truths and turn away from their errors; others, however, will cling to their lies. Some change their behavior in response to truth; others rebel against it. Such has been the history of humanity.

Biblical prophets were often called to deliver messages that people did not want to hear. As a result, many were criticized, ostracized, even threatened with death or indeed killed *(Heb. 11:32–38)*. Despite all this, God's prophets faithfully proclaimed their messages because divine prophetic guidance was not optional for them. It was lifesaving instruction for the people of God. Hence the messages had to be delivered, no matter the personal cost to the prophet.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 14.*

Anger at God's Messenger

Moses, God's chosen leader, knew the joys and pains of guiding a mixed multitude through a wilderness in search of the Promised Land.

Read Numbers 14:4–11. What is happening in these verses? Why are the people upset with Moses and Aaron?

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A close reading of these verses reveals that the children of Israel were angry at God because they did not trust Him. Moses and Aaron, the human representatives of God's ultimate Lordship, were easy targets for the nation's anger. The need for physical and mental safety is a core motivation that all human beings possess. When either is threatened, or we perceive something as a threat to our physical or mental well-being, we can become irate or even irrational.

Read Numbers 13:26–30. Why were the Israelites so afraid? What word of encouragement did Caleb share with them?

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The Israelites harbored legitimate fears about the challenges that lay ahead in possessing the Promised Land, "but when men yield their hearts to unbelief they place themselves under the control of Satan, and none can tell to what lengths he will lead them."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 389. Moses faced an almost insurmountable leadership challenge in this moment. The fears of the people soon mushroomed into anger against Aaron and Moses and into open rebellion against God. When the people sought new leaders to replace the prophet/leader chosen by God *(Deut. 34:10–12, Num. 14:4)*, Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and pleaded with the people to trust in God despite their fears: " 'If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, "a land which flows with milk and honey." Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land' " *(Num. 14:8, 9, NKJV)*.

It's easy to trust in God when things are going well, isn't it? How about when disaster strikes? How about when trusting God means discomfort or inconvenience? How well do you do then?

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(page 58 of Standard Edition)

Destroying the Message: Part 1

Read Jeremiah 36:20–26. What was going on in the court, and how did the leaders respond to the prophetic warning?

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Jeremiah was God's prophetic voice to the nation of Judah during a time of impending doom. For many years, God through Jeremiah had been warning Judah of His displeasure with them and that Babylon would conquer them and take them captive into exile *(Jer. 6:8–19, Jeremiah 26)*. The Lord was seeking to save them, but they had to obey.

Judah's sins were many, open, and unchanging. Idolatry, child sacrifice, adultery, and tyranny were the norm during Jeremiah's time, yet the prophet's warnings and appeals were not heeded. As Jeremiah's prophetic ministry neared its end, God's appeals to His wayward children grew more intense, yet His efforts always remained redemptive. In Jeremiah 32, for instance, God tells Jeremiah to buy a piece of land and hold on to the deed, " 'for thus says the LORD of hosts . . . : "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" ' " *(Jer. 32:15, NKJV)*.

It was love that moved God to have Jeremiah write a kind of final appeal for repentance and reformation. Jehoiakim's response to this message was one of disdain for God, His message, and His messenger.

Read Jeremiah 36:27–31. How did God respond to Jehoiakim's act of defiance?

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Sometimes there is a tendency to believe that if we dismiss or destroy God's messages or His messengers, the message itself will vanish. Our unwillingness to heed God's prophetic Word does not erase the message God has for us. Our disdain only intensifies the harm that will befall us and our families because of our willful ignorance or rebellion. Jeremiah's prophecy about King Jehoiakim's end holds a grave warning for every human being *(Jer. 36:30, 31)*: we ignore God's warnings to us at our own peril, for we will reap the consequences of our sin and evil.

What does it tell us about God's loving character that He persisted in trying to reach His people despite their defiance?

Destroying the Message: Part 2

Human responses to the gift of prophecy can take many forms. In the case of Moses, the children of Israel fell into open rebellion against Moses and Aaron, driven by fear of the foes whom they would encounter when trying to enter the Promised Land. Years later, King Jehoiakim burned God's message in hopes of destroying God's prophetic Word.

These, however, were not isolated cases by any means. The history of ancient Israel and Judah was, with rare exceptions, one of rejecting the prophets.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16. How did the nation of Judah respond to messages sent by God to them through His prophets? How did God eventually react to Judah's behavior?

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Jeremiah's prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. The kingdom of Babylon, led by Nebuchadnezzar, was now at Judah's door. The prophecies of Jeremiah were all but fulfilled when a 21-year-old named Zedekiah came to the throne *(2 Chron. 36:11)*. The Bible says, "He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD" *(2 Chron. 36:12, NKJV)*.

Notice how Jeremiah's prophetic gift is described. He is seen as speaking out of the very mouth of God. Nevertheless, Zedekiah did not humble himself before the prophet. And yet Jeremiah, who was only a man, a sinner like all the rest of us, was a representative of the Lord, on whose behalf he spoke.

Jeremiah was one among many in that role. For centuries, God had been sending prophets to His people *(Exod. 3:15, Ps. 105:26, Mal. 3:1, Isa. 6:8, Jer. 25:4, Matt. 11:13, Luke 11:49, etc.)*, not willing "that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" *(2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV)*. This history of ancient Israel and Judah is the story of God's ceaseless attempts to reach His backsliding people with His promises of salvation, if only they would repent.

But at this late hour in Judah's history, the grace extended by God to Judah through the guidance and comfort of Jeremiah's prophetic voice was met not with humility, faith, and repentance but with laughter, mockery, and derision.

They mocked the messengers of God, despised God's words, and scoffed at His prophets. Surely, we today would never do anything like that—or would we?

Hypocrisy

Have you ever looked at things that others have done in the past and thought to yourself, *If that were me, I never would have done what those people did!* However, if we are honest with ourselves, we may not do the exact things that others do, but we often behave in similar ways, repeating the same mistakes while, perhaps, blinding ourselves willfully to what we are really doing. This is the principle Jesus Himself addressed when He said: " 'Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye' " *(Matt. 7:5, NKJV)*.

Read Matthew 23:30–35. What important but painful point is Jesus making here? What warning might we need to take from His words?

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There is a sense in these verses that Jesus hated the behavior of the Pharisees because their hypocrisy was made even worse by a determined refusal to change. Jesus had had enough of the religion of the Pharisees. He was finished with spiritual elites in long flowing robes who were little more than whitewashed tombs filled with the bones of the dead *(Matt. 23:27, 28)*. They would not confess or forsake their sins, even when the sins were pointed out to them, even when Jesus again and again gave them a chance to repent and be saved.

In His dealing with these men, no wonder Jesus would call them "hypocrites"! The line often went like this: " 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!' " *(see Matt. 23:14, 15, 23, 25, 27)*.

Their lives were, indeed, characterized by saying one thing while doing another. Such was their approach to the prophets. They thought, for instance, that by beautifying the tombs of the prophets, they were honoring the faith; but in the important things, such as repenting at the words of the prophets, they refused to do so. Instead, they wanted to be associated with the power and pathos of the prophets but not the content of their messages. In burnishing the tombs and sepulchres of God's servants, they reasoned to themselves that they would never have shed the blood of God's messengers. Yet, at that very time they were planning the murder of Someone much more than a prophet—the Messiah Himself.

How do we make sure that in principle, we don't do the same thing: outwardly acting religious while inside being full of rebellion and greed and hate?

For Our Admonition

All these accounts in the Old Testament, however sordid and sad, were given for a good reason: ideally, so that we should learn lessons from them about what happens when we rebel against God.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6–12. According to the apostle Paul, why did God inspire prophets to write what they wrote in the Bible?

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In these verses, Paul draws a straight line connecting the past and the present, connecting ancient Israel and the church, of which we who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior are now a part *(Gal. 6:14–16)*.

Paul makes clear that the past record of humanity's experiences with God—be they good or bad—are not to be overlooked or discounted. In fact, God thought it so important that He codified it as examples "to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they [our forebears] also lusted" *(1 Cor. 10:6, NKJV)*. In other words, the past is often prologue to the future. The past often sets the context for what is presently happening and what will happen in the future.

In effect, God is saying that we are not doomed to repeat the mistakes of past generations, if only we heed the admonitions of Scripture and the prophetic messages sent by Him to us through His prophets. If we listen, learn, and obey, our lives will be established, and we will prosper *(2 Chron. 20:20)*. For some, even spiritual prosperity has been defined by having nice homes, cars, clothing, and other material possessions. While God promises to take care of our needs, He also wants our souls to prosper, even as we prosper in other ways *(3 John 2)*. But true lasting spiritual fullness in the Christian life requires obedience to God's messages.

God does not waste words. When He speaks, His Words are eternal. Their power and efficacy never end *(Isa. 40:8)*. They are given for our admonition, "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" *(1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV)*. If that were true back then, how much more should those words apply to us today?

When you read accounts in the Bible of rebellion and disbelief, what lessons can you draw from them that could help you avoid doing something similar?

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(page 62 of Standard Edition)

Receiving and Delivering Her Messages

Arthur White, Ellen G. White's grandson and a former director of the Ellen G. White Estate, estimated that during her lifetime his grandmother received hundreds of visions and prophetic dreams. The visions lasted from a few minutes to several hours and at times were witnessed by large groups of people. On some occasions, even her skeptics had the chance to examine her during such public manifestations.

Like biblical prophets, Ellen G. White experienced supernatural phenomena while in vision. In 1868, James White gave a detailed description of Ellen White's state during a vision. She was "utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her"; she did not breathe; her muscles became "rigid" and her "joints fixed"; her movements and gestures were "free and graceful"; and her eyes were open. After coming out of vision she would temporarily lose sight, yet her eyesight was not impaired. No one could control when or how long she would be in vision, as the visions were usually unexpected by Ellen White herself. (See James White, *Life Incidents*, pp. 271–274.)

As in Bible times, the reaction of people to the messages varied. Some accepted God's counsels; others rejected them. As Ellen G. White put it: "God has set me as a reprover of His people; and . . . as He has laid upon me the heavy burden, He will make those to whom this message is given responsible for the manner in which they treat it. . . . I have not chosen this unpleasant labor for myself. It is not a work which will bring to me the favor or praise of men. . . . In the name and strength of my Redeemer I shall do what I can. I shall warn and counsel and reprove and encourage as the Spirit of God dictates, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. My duty is not to please myself, but to do the will of my heavenly Father, who has given me my work."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 231, 232.

Interestingly, many of those who rejected her prophetic messages did so based on their own unbelief or personal disagreements with Ellen G. White, rather than on theological grounds. Ellen G. White was very gracious to those who expressed skepticism about her prophetic gift. In fact, she made it clear that such people should be treated with "long patience and brotherly love . . . until they find their position and become established for or against."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 328.

Ellen G. White was convinced that the real proof of her prophetic gift was the messages that God gave to her. If people were honestly searching for the truth, she believed they would come to see that her gift was genuine and authentic. She trusted God to lead them on their quest to better understanding, yet she also wrote that God has given us sufficient evidence "to balance our faith on the side of truth."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 231.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/7.

INSIDE *Story*

"God Is First": Part 2

By GINA WAHLEN

Naum remembers well the day he learned that there would be a Seventh-day Adventist secondary school and college in his own country.

"A brother from the Yugoslavian Union came to visit my church and told us about an Adventist school that was going to be opening. We were delighted!"

The school in Maruševec opened in 1969 with 45 students.

"It was like a miracle to have this school!" exclaims Naum. "We were the first generation, the experimental generation. The staff read the book *Education* by Ellen G. White, and the education we received was the best!"

Since the school was not then accredited, the students had to pass all 17 subject exams given by the government at the end of every school year.

"It was a severe drill," Naum recalls, "but at the end of the fourth year, we were scoring higher than the students from the State schools! We were considered to be the best school in what was then Yugoslavia."

After graduating, Naum attended university in the city of Zagreb, where he studied French and Latin. Upon completion, Naum had two job offers—one from the Communist government, offering him a highly desired political position; the other a teaching position at the Adventist school in Maruševec.

In speaking with the government officials, Naum said, "You know I'm an Adventist. I'll go to church every Sabbath. Why are you inviting me for this position?"

"Because we need honest people in politics; they are rare!" came the surprising response. "We need people with principles!"

"Thank you," Naum replied, "but I've accepted a job at the school in Maruševec."

For many years, Naum faithfully served the students at Maruševec, not only by teaching them French and Latin, but eternal values.

"God and salvation—these were the first things I wanted my students to learn," said Naum. "After that comes knowledge, and accepting the obligations in life—to take life seriously. We're not playing at life; times are serious."

In 2017, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped build a much-needed dormitory at the Maruševec Adventist Secondary School in Croatia. This quarter, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help construct a new Seventh-day Adventist church in the capital city of Zagreb, replacing one of the largest and oldest Adventist churches in Zagreb, which was destroyed by a series of severe earthquakes in 2020. This new church building will enable members to meet for worship and other church activities and become a center of influence for the citizens of Zagreb. A classroom for the "Prilaz School" will be included, along with a kitchen and large dining room. The center will open its doors to visitors via various projects that fulfill the needs of the surrounding community.

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.

LESSON 8 *November 14–20

(page 64 of Standard Edition)

Interpreting Prophetic Writings



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:17–48; 1 Cor. 16:20; Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 10:25–28; Luke 24:25–27, 44–49.*

Memory Text: **"Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He explained to them the things written about Himself in all the Scriptures"** *(Luke 24:27, NASB).*

In the aftermath of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Christ appeared to two downcast disciples, both of whom confessed, " 'We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel' " *(Luke 24:21, NKJV)*. The disciples expected a Messiah who would deliver the Jews from Roman occupation. This false expectation and consequent disappointment derived from a biased, one-sided interpretation of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

Christ solved the misunderstanding of these two disciples by explaining the Scriptures to them from a broader perspective *(Luke 24:25–27)*. Christ's interpretation of Scripture opened their eyes and made their hearts burn within them *(Luke 24:31, 32)*. Later, Jesus appeared also to a larger group of disciples in Jerusalem, and "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" *(Luke 24:45, NKJV; see also Luke 24:33, 36, 44–49)*.

These experiences highlight the positive results of correctly understanding prophetic writings. A false understanding of prophecy can lead to spiritual disaster.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 21.*

The Bible, Its Own Interpreter

Our interpretation of Scripture is largely influenced by our assumptions. Those who consider the Bible as a mere collection of ancient documents are unable to see any unity among its various books. But by taking into consideration the basic principle that "all Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial" *(2 Tim. 3:16, NASB)*, we can appreciate its underlying unity and allow the Bible to be its own interpreter.

Read Matthew 5:17–48. How did Jesus explain the teachings of the Old Testament mentioned in this passage?

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A superficial reading of Matthew 5:17–48 can give the impression that Jesus was replacing the teachings of the Old Testament with new ones of His own. But a more careful reading makes clear that Jesus was unfolding the deep, spiritual dimensions of the Old Testament. In this sense, He was fulfilling the promise of Jeremiah 31:31–33 that, under the new covenant, God's law would be put in the minds and written on the hearts of His people *(compare with Heb. 8:8–10, Heb. 10:16)*.

Sometimes the interpretation of a given passage is provided within the same book in which the passage appears. For example, in Daniel 2, we find the description of the mysterious dream of King Nebuchadnezzar *(Dan. 2:31–35),* followed by the interpretation of the dream *(Dan. 2:36–45)*. Likewise, in Matthew 13, we have the parable of the sower *(Matt. 13:1–9)* and then its interpretation *(Matt. 13:18–23).*

Sometimes the interpretation of a message is provided by a later prophet. For instance, 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23 confirms the fulfillment of the prophecy of the 70 years, as predicted in Jeremiah 25:11, 12 and Jeremiah 29:10. However, many Old Testament types were fulfilled in Christ, and many Old Testament passages are interpreted in the New Testament.

"The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 104. Indeed, the New Testament is the inspired interpreter of the Old Testament.

Why is it crucial to be aware of our assumptions as we study the Bible? Why must our most important assumption be that we trust it as the Word of God and that it is to pass judgment on us, not we on it?

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The Historical-Cultural Context

Read Isaiah 65:17–20. What does it mean that in the new heavens and earth a child shall "die one hundred years old"? *(Isa. 65:20, NKJV).*

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Taking Isaiah 65:20 out of its historical setting, one could easily assume the existence of death and sinners in the new heavens and the new earth. But that idea contradicts the promises in Isaiah that the righteous dead will be resurrected *(Isa. 26:19)* and that death and sorrow will finally cease to exist *(Isa. 25:8, Isa. 65:19)*.

Isaiah 65:20 is, obviously, symbolic language. What child is 100 years old? Instead, when reading Isaiah 65:17–20 in its historical setting, we can recognize that the verse was poetically pointing to the blessing that the nation of Israel would receive, but only if they remained faithful to the covenant stipulations *(compare with Deuteronomy 28)*. As Jesus did in Matthew 24, linking more imminent events with later ones, Isaiah does the same here, showing that what would happen now would be a precursor to the new heavens and new earth.

In Isaiah, the new creation is not totally in the future. It has entered suddenly into the present through God's glorious work of redemption and forgiveness. The verse announces that even now, in the present existence of Israel, God is already defeating death. This idea is expressed through the promise of longevity and the elimination of infant mortality *(Isa. 65:20)*. All this only foreshadowed what will eventually come.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:20. How do we apply this text to our time and culture now?

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In the Greek culture of New Testament times, a greeting among relatives and close friends was accompanied by a kiss. Paul gives instructions for this warm affectionate greeting among the Christian believers in Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:26. From the context, we can extract the biblical principle of greeting believers warmly and making them feel part of the family of God. In some cultures, kissing would be inappropriate, and a handshake, hug, or bow would be more culturally acceptable. Regardless of the cultural expression, however, Paul encourages us to make people feel accepted and loved in church gatherings.

The Literary Context

A popular preacher's anecdote tells of a man who was facing serious problems and wanted to know God's will for him. He opened his Bible and pointed his finger randomly to Matthew 27:5, which reads, "And [Judas] went and hanged himself" *(NKJV)*. Taken aback by the verse, he repeated the same procedure, attempting to find a more uplifting message, only to have his finger rest on Luke 10:37: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise' " *(NKJV)*. Both are true verses of Scripture, but they need to be understood in context.

Indeed, many distortions of Bible messages derive from the common practice of isolating passages from their literary context. This approach opens the Scriptures to all kinds of artificial interpretations.

Read Genesis 3:1–5 and Matthew 4:1–11. How did Satan distort God's words by applying them out of context?

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Some people distort the Bible message sincerely because of their own lack of knowledge. But others do so intentionally, as Satan did on the two occasions mentioned in the scriptures above. Regardless of the motivation, the result is always detrimental.

In the Garden of Eden *(Gen. 3:1–5; compare with Rev. 12:9)*, Satan appeared to Eve as an attractive and curious serpent able to speak human language. Wresting God's words from their original context, Satan first generalized them and then offered his own deceitful interpretation.

When Jesus was taken by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness *(Matt. 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13)*, "Satan came as an angel of light in the wilderness of temptation to deceive Christ."—Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 18, 1888. In his dialogue with Christ, Satan misquoted Psalm 91:11, 12 in order to imply that God would protect even those who expose themselves intentionally to dangerous situations.

The Garden of Eden and the wilderness experiences of temptation confirm the existence of the great controversy, which includes the interpretation of God's Word, spoken and written. They should help us to recognize the importance of keeping our understanding of Bible passages faithful to their contexts.

Why must we avoid the temptation to pull texts out of context in order to try to prove our points, no matter how correct our points are?

The Meaning of the Text

All Christians should understand the Bible for themselves. The Bible is clear enough for all people to understand the way of salvation, yet complex enough to consistently challenge the brightest minds. Scripture is an endless treasure of saving knowledge that can never be fully exhausted.

Read **Luke 10:25–28. Some people claim that the Bible does not need to be interpreted. If this is the case, why then did Jesus ask this lawyer, " 'What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it' " *(Luke 10:26, Message)*?**

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To grasp the meaning of a text, we should first understand the words used. Then we should consider to whatever degree we can how they are used within the associated literary context and the overall biblical context, and also the historical-cultural setting. Finally, our conclusions should be in full harmony with the wider teachings of Scripture. Comparing parallel scriptures—as is often done in the four Gospels—can enrich our understanding.

Compare **Matthew 5:43–48 with Luke 6:27–36. How does the context of Matthew 5:43–48 and the parallel text, Luke 6:36, help us better understand the meaning of "perfect" in Matthew 5:48?**

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One of the most important characteristics of a faithful interpreter of Scripture is a combination of thoroughness and humility. Remember, none of us owns truth; we all see through a glass darkly.

We should always strive for sound doctrine *(2 Tim. 4:1–5)*. A crucial principle to follow is to focus on what we do understand, on what is clear, and to build off of that, which in many cases, over time, will help us understand things that now might not be clear. Short of eternity, there will always be unanswered questions.

Think of a time you didn't understand something that greatly bothered you, only to get it explained later. How should that experience help you trust God on the things in His Word that, for now, you still don't understand?

Biblical Exposition

Our study of the Bible should be focused on two main purposes: personal spiritual growth and leading others into a saving relationship with Jesus. Christ defined the true Christian as one who is guided by the Holy Spirit "into all truth" *(John 16:13)*, who lives " 'by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' " *(Matt. 4:4, NKJV)*, and who teaches others "all things" that He has commanded us *(Matt. 28:20)*.

Read Luke 4:16–30 and Luke 24:25–27, 44–49. What can we learn from the way Christ explained the Scriptures here?

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Jesus Christ was, still is, and always will be "the way, the truth, and the life" *(John 14:6, NKJV)*. Even so, His preaching was strongly anchored in the Scriptures. For instance, Mark 1:14, 15 says, "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' " *(NKJV)*. The time was clearly pointing to Daniel 9:24–27. In the Sermon on the Mount *(Matthew 5–7)*, He quoted Exodus 20:13, 14 *(Matt. 5:21, 27)*. In Luke 4, He quoted Isaiah 61:1, 2. Jesus was a thoroughly biblical preacher.

In another example, Acts 8 tells us that the Ethiopian eunuch "had come to Jerusalem to worship" *(Acts 8:27, NKJV)*, which means that he was familiar with the Jewish religion and at least with some of its ceremonies. He even owned a copy of the book of Isaiah, which he was avidly reading during the trip home. Yet he could not understand the prophecy of the sin-bearing Servant, so he sought someone to explain it to him.

This experience teaches us a few important lessons. First, the simple reading of a passage of Scripture does not always lead to a deeper understanding of the passage. Second, in the study of Scripture we can, and should, learn from each other. Third, we have a personal obligation to share sound Bible messages with others.

Philip's exposition of the book of Isaiah and other Old Testament passages led the eunuch to baptism *(Acts 8:35–39; compare with Ps. 51:12)*. Our expositions of Scripture should have the same purpose *(see John 17:17)*.

Even though at times we might need help in understanding texts, why must we always be convinced in our own minds of what we believe?

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(page 70 of Standard Edition)

Reading Ellen G. White

How do we read Ellen G. White? Here are a few guidelines to correctly understand and apply to Ellen G. White's writings.

First, begin with a prayerful, positive attitude and an open mind, rather than a spirit of doubt. Our mindset is a lens that colors all we hear, read, and see. We need the Holy Spirit to guide our thinking. As Ellen G. White herself noted: "If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 112. The same is true regarding her writings.

Second, consider the context of what you read. People have often based their understanding of Ellen G. White's writings on an isolated statement or paragraph fragment removed from its original historical or literary context. Ellen G. White wrote that "time and place must be considered."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 57. This unfortunate practice of ignoring context has caused, and still continues to cause, no end of trouble for some church members.

Third, focus on principles. What is the main point (or points) that Ellen G. White is emphasizing in a particular passage? For example, in 1894, Ellen White wrote to church members in Battle Creek, Michigan, condemning the purchase of bicycles (see *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 50–53). The principle that Ellen White was seeking to encourage was proper stewardship of God-given resources, such as money (back then, bicycles were very expensive).

Fourth, study everything Ellen G. White wrote on a particular topic. Examine obscure statements in the context of her general teaching on a subject. During her lifetime, Ellen G. White lamented the misuse of her writings: "Much that purports to be a message from Sister White, serves the purpose of misrepresenting Sister White, making her testify in favor of things that are not in accordance with her mind or judgment."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 44.

Finally, make sure that Ellen G. White said it. There are numerous statements falsely attributed to Ellen G. White. The safest way to be sure that what we read is from Ellen White is to look for a reference to its source. Once we have verified where it is found, we can examine it using the correct principles.

We have been given a wonderful gift in the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White. It's so important that we properly read those writings, which can be—and are—such a blessing to millions. It is tragic when they are misused and misapplied.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/8.

Lighting the Flame

At the close of the nineteenth century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church faced tremendous losses: early pioneers had passed away, doctrinal rifts threatened unity, and institutional buildings were lost to fire. Yet, out of this tumult arose a new generation of leaders who would carry the message forward with renewed passion. Among them was Elmer Ellsworth Andross.

Born in 1868 in Minnesota, Andross had dreamed of wealth and political fame, even preparing for a career in law. But his plans were interrupted by a divine calling to join the gospel ministry. Surrendering worldly ambition, he chose the life of a missionary and accepted a bold invitation in 1899: to take the Adventist message to England. It was a financial risk. The Foreign Mission Board could not guarantee support, but Andross and his wife, Sophie, stepped out in faith and arrived in Liverpool full of hope.

That hope soon bore fruit. In Liverpool, Andross helped organize a vibrant new church of about 40 members. By spring 1900, he was preaching in the Midlands, and soon after, in Birmingham. By the end of July, they had 16 new Sabbath keepers, and interest was increasing. In October, despite unrelenting British weather and primitive conditions, Andross reported with joy, "About thirty persons have promised to keep the Sabbath. . . . I never saw people who seemed to enjoy the truth more. . . . Truly the angels have prepared the way before us."

In 1902, Andross was appointed president of the North England Conference. Under his leadership, membership in North England nearly doubled, and the number of churches grew from six to seventeen.

In 1905, he was appointed to lead the British Union Conference. As union president, Andross vastly improved the organization's financial standing to the point that he could announce that, if the rate of progress continued, they would soon not need financial support from the General Conference. He established the Stanborough Park headquarters in 1907 and supported the creation of publishing, education, and health-work institutions, all essential to a sustainable mission presence. During his three-year presidency, the British Union saw a membership increase of 42 percent, and the number of organized churches also grew, from 31 to 52.

In 1908, illness forced his family's return to the United States, but Andross's legacy in England endured. What began in tents and borrowed halls matured into a structured, vibrant movement and the establishment of a mission-minded church ready to face the twentieth century.

Elmer E. Andross was more than an administrator. He was a pioneer with a pastor's heart. His years in England testify to the power of faith, sacrifice, and vision to shape history. Through him, the Adventist flame burned bright across Britain's shores, and it continues to shine to this day.

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

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.

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*

LESSON 11 *December 5–11

(page 88 of Standard Edition)

Prophetic Manifestation *in* Crucial Moments



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Pet. 2:5; Judg. 4:4–16; 1 Kings 18:21, 38, 39; Isa. 59:1–4; Neh. 9:30; Rev. 1:1–3.*

Memory Text: **"Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets"** *(Amos 3:7, NKJV).*

Since the Fall, human beings have been predisposed to choose the pleasures of sin for a season, as opposed to eternal life in Jesus. God knows this sad truth, and, despite it, He loves us and works for our salvation anyway.

This is why, at crucial junctures in history, God has acted in remarkable ways through the prophetic office in behalf of His people. However, when His efforts have been repeatedly refused, He has warned of judgment.

Through His prophets, the Lord always communicates His actions before He does them *(Amos 3:7)*. If people repent, He is quick to forgive.

He continues to communicate with us in the same way today. It is reasonable, therefore, that God should speak to His people in earth's last days, just as He spoke to His people in centuries past.

This week's study will look back at crucial times in salvation history when God used prophets to make His will clear to His people and to the wider world. We will also explore the role of Ellen G. White's inspired ministry at pivotal times in the growth of the Adventist movement.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 12.*

Disaster Warning

God wants to rescue humanity. Even after the Fall, He sought a relationship with Adam and Eve, and, for a time, the inhabitants of earth called "on the name of the LORD" *(Gen. 4:26)*. As generations passed, the number of those who walked with God decreased. Those who continued to follow God testified to His goodness, condemned the sins of those around them, and warned of the consequences of their actions.

By the time of Noah, however, the inhabitants of the earth were so wicked that God chose to destroy them *(Gen. 6:5–7)*. Noah, a preacher of righteousness *(2 Pet. 2:5)*, no doubt warned all who would listen about the destruction to come. God also gave Noah instructions for building a lifeboat (the ark) for the saving of all who would listen to his warnings and repent.

Read Hebrews 11:7, 2 Peter 2:5, and Genesis 6:9. In what ways was Noah a "preacher of righteousness"?

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The Flood was a pivotal moment in human history, and the account appears repeatedly throughout both the Old and New Testaments as an example of the depths of human depravity and the height of God's amazing grace. God's righteousness is manifested in His judgment against a sinful creation and in His deliverance of all who would accept salvation.

"Amid the prevailing corruption, Methuselah, Noah, and many others labored to keep alive the knowledge of the true God and to stay the tide of moral evil. A hundred and twenty years before the Flood, the Lord by a holy angel declared to Noah His purpose, and directed him to build an ark. While building the ark he was to preach that God would bring a flood of water upon the earth to destroy the wicked. Those who would believe the message, and would prepare for that event by repentance and reformation, should find pardon and be saved."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 92.

God not only told Noah about the Flood and rescued the occupants of the ark, He also established a covenant with Noah and all creation, promising never to destroy the world again with water *(Gen. 9:8–17)*. Every rainbow contains the promise, and the hope, of redemption.

Next time you see a rainbow, think about the promise found there. Why should it give you comfort, knowing that God keeps His promises?

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A Mother in Israel

After delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God gave them the land of Canaan. He promised to bless them abundantly if they followed His laws and commandments. He also warned that breaking their covenant with Him would result in suffering and destruction *(Deuteronomy 27–30)*. Following the death of Joshua, the Israelites turned away from keeping the covenant. They were then oppressed by the neighboring peoples and cried out to God. In response, "the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them" *(Judg. 2:16, NKJV)*. He also sent prophets to encourage the Israelites to renew their covenant with God and to empower them against their oppressors.

Read Judges 4:4–16 and Judges 5:1–5. What did Deborah do for Israel?

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Deborah played a pivotal prophetic part in relaying God's message to Israel and Barak, the nation's commander, as he rallied the troops. It was Deborah who gave Barak the signal to begin the battle, stating, " 'Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?' " *(Judg. 4:14, NKJV)*.

As a judge in Israel, Deborah was key. Her leadership and her faith in God's promise of victory strengthened the Israelites in their fight against their enemies. Barak's skill as a war commander and his willingness, however reluctant, to lead the army of Israel also was important, but that was not what won the battle.

This is perhaps the most important message of the story of the prophet Deborah and of soldier Barak. In the middle of celebrating a stunning victory, the most powerful people in Israel—a judge and a victorious commander—led the community to glorify God. This is the nature of true spiritual leadership.

The prophetic ministry of Deborah testifies to the faithfulness of God in times of distress and oppression. When God gave her the message for Barak, she did not question the feasibility of summoning enough troops, nor did she argue that the Israelites were too weak to win. Instead, she relayed her message with conviction and encouraged Barak to set aside his doubts and to trust the providence of God.

How can we learn to trust God when, at the present moment, things do not look very hopeful?

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A Call for Repentance

Read Judges 2:16–19. What pattern, or motif, is seen here?

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With the crucial transition to kingship, and with Israel's request for a king *(1 Samuel 8)*, the time of the judges ended. But this change brought an even greater need for prophets to advise, to correct, and to rebuke the king, the nation's leaders, and the people.

During the reign of Ahab, God sent Elijah with a message of judgment: there would be no rain because Israel had " 'forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals' " *(1 Kings 18:18, NKJV)*. Rather than repent, Ahab tried to hunt down Elijah and kill him, but God protected him *(1 Kings 18:10–12)*. When, in the third year of the famine, Elijah finally approached the king, Ahab blamed him for the lack of rain *(1 Kings 18:17)*!

Elijah then summoned all Israel for a final showdown between God and the prophets of Baal *(1 Kings 18:19*).

Read Elijah's proclamation to Israel and the response in 1 Kings 18:21, 38, 39. What happened?

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The divine act of fire falling from heaven, coupled with Elijah's prophetic message, dramatically affected God's people and led them to repent. Just as the Israelites were reluctant to make a full commitment to God, we live in cultures that do not acknowledge God as Creator and Redeemer. Rather than serve as God's witnesses to urge others to be faithful to Him, we often shirk our calling by following our own desires, as Israel had done.

God warns that following our own desires will lead to brokenness, pain, and, eventually, death. But if we follow His voice, then the " 'LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail' " *(Isa. 58:11, NKJV)*.

Our carnal natures push us to rebel, even subconsciously, against God. What choices do we need to make in order not to succumb to that nature?

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Hope in Exile

"And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place" *(2 Chron. 36:15, NKJV)*.

God sent numerous prophets after Elijah to comfort, warn, and instruct His people, but the kingdoms of Israel and Judah fell into such depravity that God compared them to Sodom and Gomorrah *(Isa. 1:9, 10)*. The people of God had become proud, greedy, and idolatrous. They oppressed their workers, widows, orphans, and the strangers who came to them for help. (See Isaiah 58 for God's response to Israel's failings.) Finally, God's judgment brought Israel into Assyrian captivity *(2 Kings 17:1–6)* and exiled Judah to the land of Babylon *(2 Kings 24, 25)*.

While God punished His people, He did not leave them alone in exile. He still sent them prophets, such as Ezekiel and Daniel, to give them hope for the future.

Read Isaiah 59:1–4 and Nehemiah 9:30. What is being said here that applies all though the ages?

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Throughout their history, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah suffered the consequences of sin. In turning away from God, they had left the safety of His care and elicited His judgment. God does not tolerate oppression and idolatry, but He did not send them into exile the first time they had sinned. God labored with His people, pleading through His prophets for them to repent and return to Him. The people refused to listen. In fact, it is amazing, actually, how long the Lord sought to turn His people away from their sins. For long centuries, through prophet after prophet, issuing warning after warning, God sought to reach them.

Jesus Himself said it best: " 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!' " *(Matt. 23:37, NKJV)*.

Yet, even while they were in exile, God never left His people without hope. Despite their perpetual failures, God promised, " 'The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob' " *(Isa. 59:20, NKJV)*.

Think about God's faithfulness even when Israel turned away from Him. How have you seen the reality of this aspect of God's loving character in your own life? Where would you be if He weren't so patient and loving?

A Prophet for the Time of Waiting

Read Revelation 1:1–3. What was John called to do?

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Early Christians lived in a state of anticipation for the promised return of Jesus. The apostle John had seen Christ rise into the clouds and heard the angel explain that He would return in the same way *(Acts 1:10, 11)*. Now the early church faced the unknown. Yes, Jesus said He would return. But when?

While he was exiled on the island of Patmos, John wrote about the promise of Jesus' second coming: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him" *(Rev. 1:7, NKJV)*. John also received an expansive revelation of the events that would signal the end of time. Besides encouragement and rebuke for the seven churches *(Revelation 2, 3)*, the revelations included visions of judgment *(Rev. 14:6–12)*, of the end of the world *(Revelation 20)*, of the second coming of Christ *(Rev. 14:14–16)*, and of the re-creation of the world *(Revelation 21, 22)*.

John identified himself as a "brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" *(Rev. 1:9, NKJV)*. He knew what it was to suffer, not just from the agony of waiting, but from the persecution that came with proclaiming the Word of God and having the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the book of Revelation, John was invited to see and was commanded to write what he saw. In the last chapter, he wrote, "Now I, John, saw and heard these things" *(Rev. 22:8, NKJV)*. John was a prophetic witness to the events of the last days, commissioned to share with the churches of his day what had been shown him in vision *(Rev. 22:16)*. He is reminiscent of John the Baptist, who heralded the first advent of Jesus Christ *(John 1:6–8)* at a crucial moment in earth's history.

We also are called to testify as John did. We also must keep the testimony of Jesus *(Rev. 19:10)*—the testimony He gave about Himself through the prophets. We may not receive visions as John did, but we can wait patiently for Christ's return while giving witness to His work in our lives and watching for signs of our deliverance.

Think about all the light we have been given. What responsibilities rest upon us simply because we have been given so much?

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The Prophetic Voice

God always has communicated with people through His prophets. This was particularly true at crucial moments in history. Is it not reasonable to expect, then, that God would speak to His people at the end of time?

When Millerite Adventists experienced the "Great Disappointment" on October 22, 1844, God called Ellen Harmon (White) to prophetic ministry and gave her a message for the disappointed believers. Her first vision was to comfort them in their despair.

Another critical juncture was the beginning of Adventist publications and the official organization of Sabbath-keeping Adventists into a denomination. Through their publications and evangelism, these Sabbatarians, by the 1860s, had grown to several thousand members. They needed to organize to proclaim the three angels' messages *(Rev. 14:6–12)* more effectively. While some objected to the idea of organization, God used Ellen G. White to encourage this step. On May 21, 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially born.

That same year, God used the gift of prophecy to encourage health reform among believers. Most Seventh-day Adventists did not possess good health or live healthy lives. Through Ellen G. White's two comprehensive health visions in 1863 and 1865, this trajectory was changed. Seventh-day Adventists became promoters of health and healthful living.

From the 1870s to 1890s, Ellen G. White was instrumental in developing the Adventist educational system. Her philosophy of wholistic education (academic, practical, and spiritual) was gradually adopted and implemented. As she would point out: "True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers."—*Education*, p. 13.

In the 1880s, she played a critical role in bringing balance to Seventh-day Adventist theology on salvation. She emphasized the centrality of God's grace and righteousness by faith within the framework of Adventists' unique emphasis on the law. From 1901 to 1903, she helped reorganize the denominational structure so that the church's mission to the world would be better accomplished.

In short, there would be no Seventh-day Adventist denomination as we know it today without Ellen G. White's ministry. She was God's messenger in critical moments.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/11.

INSIDE *Story*

Demons and Death: Part 1

By Mission Editor

Leena abruptly turned to her friends, Anneli and Timo, during a Bible study in her apartment in Raahe, a Finnish town located about 370 miles (600 kilometers) north of the capital, Helsinki.

"I have a bad feeling," she said. "Let's pray."

The three university students sank onto their knees. At that moment, a tall dark figure burst into the living room and darted over to Anneli. She reeled in stark horror as the dark figure tried to grab her.

Timo and Leena prayed more earnestly.

Then a light figure entered the room and chased out the dark figure. The dark figure stood by the door and tried to reenter, but the light figure blocked every attempt. After about 10 minutes, the dark figure gave up and left.

When calm returned to the room, the shaken students pieced together what had happened. Leena described the exchange between the light and dark figures. Timo had only seen light and dark shadows streak past him on the floor. Anneli didn't want to talk about what she had seen.

Later on, the students learned that the attack had unfolded at the same time as a suicide in a nearby home.

"That's why I had that bad feeling," Leena declared.

Breaking her silence, Anneli acknowledged that she had practiced spiritism in the past and was still harassed by evil spirits. God, however, was more powerful, she said. Alone in bed after the attack, she had seen the light figure enter her room and sit on the bed until dawn.

The demonic attacks stopped after Anneli was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It was the first time that Timo had encountered the great controversy between Christ and Satan up close. It was not the last. Timo, usually a sound sleeper, woke up one night with the sensation that someone was staring at him in the darkness. Then he heard a voice.

"Don't get baptized," the voice said.

Timo, a software engineering student, was preparing to be baptized into the Adventist Church. He peered into the darkness. He couldn't see anything, but he could sense someone's presence. He prayed, and the presence left.

The next day, Leena told Timo that someone had committed suicide near his home the previous night.

"Do you know what time?" Timo asked.

She did. It was the exact time when he had woken up.

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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."

LESSON 13 *December 19–25

(page 104 of Standard Edition)

Blessings From *the* Prophetic Word



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 2:2; John 1:1–5; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Tim. 4:1–5; Isa. 40:1–5; John 17:20–23; 1 Cor. 1:10–13.*

Memory Text: **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** *(2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NKJV).*

God never asks us to believe blindly. On the contrary, the evidence for His existence is powerful. Nature alone, even after 6,000 years of sin, testifies to the reality not just of a God of incredible creative power (look at photos from the James Webb Space Telescope) but also of a God of love.

And yet there's more. Even after the "voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount," Peter would still write that we "have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" *(2 Pet. 1:18, 19)*. We might not, as did Peter, hear the voice of God, but we, too, have the "more sure word of prophecy."

God has spoken to us through His prophets, both canonical (writings in the Bible) and noncanonical (writings not in the Bible). The evidence given us is more than abundant. The question remaining is: Are we open to receive it?

Sacred history shows that many were not open. May we, by God's grace, not make the same mistake.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 26.*

Prophecy Exalts Christ

Prophecy is God's means of communicating with His people and connecting them to God. No wonder, then, that Satan (the dragon) was enraged at the woman (God's church) and went to make war with the remnant of her seed *(see Rev. 12:17).*

What are the distinguishing marks of this remnant of the woman's seed? They keep the commandments and possess the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 19:10 tells us that this testimony is "the spirit of prophecy."

Read 1 Corinthians 2:2 and Galatians 6:14. How does Paul see the purpose of his life and ministry—the great motivation for which he lived?

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Besides their own experiences, the apostles accepted Jesus upon the testimony of prophets and righteous men, whose words stretched over a period of many centuries. The Christian world has a full and complete chain of evidence running through both the Old and the New Testaments: in the former, which points to a Savior to come, and in the latter, which reveals Jesus as fulfilling the conditions of the Savior. All this is sufficient to establish the faith of those willing to believe. "The design of God was to leave the race a fair opportunity to develop faith in the power of God and of his Son and in the work of the Holy Spirit."—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 182.

In many ways, the issue of saving faith is not intellectual; it's moral. It's a heart thing, not a head thing. When people close their hearts, their minds, unfortunately, will follow.

Read John 1:1–5. What do these verses tell us about who Jesus is?

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If Jesus, the Word of God, pre-existed, was made flesh, and dwelled among us, then it follows that Jesus was integral to the words or messages given by God to His prophets. Even prophets who bore messages that did not explicitly refer to Jesus nevertheless were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Consider how vast the cosmos is, and to think that the One who created it, Jesus, is also the One who died for us! What great hope does that offer you?

Prophecy Affirms the Bible

The Bible is ultimately the product of the Holy Spirit, through the gift of prophecy. Second Peter 1:21 reveals the process God used: "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" *(NKJV)*.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. How does this passage emphasize both the authority and inspiration of Scripture?

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Without the Bible, human beings would be left without a way to navigate the pitfalls of a sinful world, and that would be a recipe for destruction. Today the Bible is everywhere and available in multiple formats, but this was not always the case. For instance, during the time of Jesus, only Old Testament scrolls were available to be read, and only priests or rabbis could do so. Common people often had no direct access to Scripture. A word from God was precious in those days.

Read Luke 24:27. After His resurrection, what did Jesus use to help two despondent disciples understand His unique purpose?

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Jesus, the greatest Prophet ever—the One who alone is the Word *(John 1:1–3)*—exalted Scripture *(John 7:38)*. Among the most precious blessings of the gift of prophecy is that it affirms the Bible.

"Those who have been impressed by the Holy Scriptures as the voice of God, and desire to follow its teachings, are to be daily learning, daily receiving spiritual fervor and power, which have been provided for every true believer in the gift of the Holy Spirit."—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1910. The authentic gift of prophecy always exalts Scripture. It always points men and women back to the Word of God as their only rule of faith and practice.

Why did Jesus first point the two disciples on the road to Emmaus to the Scriptures before revealing to them who He was? What should that tell us about how foundational the Word must be to us?

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Prophecy Is God's Truth Detector

Some scholars estimate that there are more than forty-five thousand Christian denominations in the world today. How could a faith that started with Jesus Christ have mushroomed into so many different systems of belief? The answer lies in the many different interpretations of Scripture developed over time. Obviously, they can't all be correct because, after all, in so many cases, what one church teaches contradicts what others do.

From the start *(see Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 3:1–5)*, confusion was one of Satan's greatest ways of leading human beings away from God's truth. As he did with Adam and Eve, Satan mixes just enough truth with error in order to pull men and women under his control. Satan has misled God's people down through time *(2 Chron. 36:14–16)*. He even attempted to mislead Jesus *(Matt. 4:1–11)*, but Jesus met Satan's entreaties with a clear " 'It is written' " *(Matt. 4:4, NKJV)*.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5. What important advice does Paul give Timothy concerning God's Word? Why was he so adamant that Timothy be spiritually prepared for what was to come?

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With a prophetic eye, Paul foresaw a time that men and women would neither love God's Word nor obey it. Instead, they would go in search of spiritual teachers to tickle their fancies with cunningly devised fables. To such, God sends strong delusions so that they should believe the very lies for which they search. "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" *(2 Thess. 2:11, 12, NKJV)*.

But to those who were open, Jesus promised that they would "know the truth" *(John 8:32)*. The prophetic gift is God's means of separating truth from error, light from darkness.

In one sense, we can know the truth easily enough amid all these different denominations. If you are not going to give up the biblical seventh-day Sabbath, you have pretty much wiped out 99.5 percent of your options, as the vast majority of churches do not keep the fourth commandment.

If you are not going to believe that the dead either go immediately into heaven to be with Jesus or are burning now in hell and will for eternity, as well—then what?

You have eliminated most, if not all, of the .5 percent left.

To where else but the Seventh-day Adventist Church can you go?

(page 108 of Standard Edition)

Prophecy Comforts God's People

Read Matthew 11:28, 29. What does Jesus tell us to do? What does He promise all who come to Him?

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God has always been concerned about the well-being of human beings. Before creating Adam and Eve, God prepared a perfect dwelling for them that would both excite and delight them *(Genesis 1)*. God provided everything needed for their comfort. After the holy pair fell, God came in search of them *(Gen. 3:9)*, prophesied the coming of a Savior *(Gen. 3:15)*, and fashioned clothing to cover their nakedness *(Gen. 3:21)*. God is invested in the well-being of His creatures.

Perhaps no blessing of the gift of prophecy is more overlooked than its function as a source of comfort and renewal for God's people down through time.

Read Isaiah 40:1–5. What message does God give His prophet for His hurting people? How can we apply that principle to us today?

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God wanted Judah to know that, although He had to punish them, He would not utterly cast them off. He does not simply give Isaiah a message of encouragement for His broken people. He instructed Isaiah exactly how to deliver the message. The message needed to be delivered with great tenderness, love, and care. God was so concerned about this message of comfort reaching the hearts of His people that He left nothing to chance. Such messages of comfort were repeated throughout the book of Isaiah *(Isa. 12:1, Isa. 49:13, Isa. 51:3, etc.)*.

The apostle Paul warned that those who live godly in Christ Jesus would experience fierce persecution *(2 Tim. 3:12)*. In the difficult times ahead, we will need words of comfort and hope. The gift of prophecy is the means that God will use to soothe and strengthen His people before Jesus returns to take them home.

In what area of your life do you need to hear a word of comfort and hope? What does God empower us to do after He comforts us? *(2 Cor. 1:3, 4).*

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Prophecy Unites the Body in Christ

Read John 17:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 1:10–13. What core appeal is at the heart of these two passages of Scripture?

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As Jesus approached the cross, His heart was moved by one overriding desire. He wanted all of His followers to be one, as He and the Father are one in love, purpose, and action. The unity for which Jesus prayed was not some bland uniformity. Jesus prayed a powerful prophecy that will be fulfilled before His return—a rich tapestry of human beings with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and perspectives would all unite in Him and in the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul built on this theme when he pleaded with the Corinthian believers to have the same mind, speak the same truth, and harbor no divisions *(1 Cor. 1:10)*. But why is this prophetic unity so important?

Jesus prayed " 'that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me' " *(John 17:21, NKJV)*.

God desires that all men and women be saved, but before they can be saved, they must believe in Jesus and believe that God sent Him to save the world. When a diverse group of people claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior, loving and serving each other selflessly, then the world will believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be. The unity Jesus craved is both purposeful and powerful. Unfortunately, even from the start, forces threatened that unity. See, for example, Acts 6:1. And Christianity has been radically divided since!

This unity is the work of the Holy Spirit through the gifts that He dispenses. Ephesians 4:11–15 tells us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to equip believers and edify the body of Christ, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" *(Eph. 4:13, NKJV)*. The gift of prophecy, one of the signature gifts of the Spirit, is essential to unify God's people, especially as they near the second coming of Jesus, so that they might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved *(Acts 16:31)*.

At a time when the Seventh-day Adventist Church is perhaps the most diverse Protestant religious body in the world, how can we exhibit the kind of unity that helps people believe in Jesus? What forces threaten that unity?

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(page 110 of Standard Edition)

Try It Again

Some years ago, the Kellogg company featured a catchy advertising slogan for its breakfast cereals. In an effort to win back customers who had migrated to other brands, it encouraged them to "taste them again for the very first time." Might this saying also work for Seventh-day Adventists who have spent much time learning *about* the Bible and Ellen G. White and less time "tasting" her writings? Attending seminars about Ellen G. White will give you an idea about her life and ministry, but unless you "taste" for yourself, you will not be truly able to evaluate and experience the spiritual blessing of her prophetic messages. Only those who read her, especially in context, can fully appreciate what God has given us.

As we have noted throughout this quarter, Ellen G. White anchors us to Bible truth and connects us to God. There are certain blessings of reading her prophetic messages.

A survey done by Roger Dudley and Des Cummings Jr. reveals some fascinating facts. Those who regularly read Ellen G. White's writings have a deeper and more intimate relationship with Jesus than those who don't read her; they have a stronger assurance of salvation, more regular family worship, and a desire to witness to others. "Seldom does a research study find the evidence so heavily weighted toward one conclusion," the two researchers wrote. "In the church growth survey, on *every single item* that deals with personal attitudes or practices, the member who regularly studies Ellen G. White's books tends to rank higher than does the member who reads them only occasionally or never. . . . Certainly the implication is that the regular reading of Ellen White's material does make a positive difference in Christian life and witness."—Dudley and Cummings, "Who Reads Ellen White?" *Ministry*, October 1982, p. 12.

During this quarter, we have learned that God communicates through His prophets. Their messages connect us to God and bring a holy and sanctifying influence into all aspects of human life, especially relating to the promise of salvation found in Jesus: "Oh taste and see that the LORD is good" *(Ps. 34:8)*. They call us to holy action, life transformation, personal evangelism, and a life of service to others. This is essential preparation to fulfill our part in the last proclamation to the world as we look for the coming of Jesus.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/13.

INSIDE *Story*

Where Are You, God?

By HANNELE AMBERLA

I tore open my cousin's letter and began reading. "I've given my life to Jesus," she wrote. *What does that mean?* I wondered. I'd sometimes attended Sunday School, but I'd never heard of someone giving their life to Jesus. I longed for a similar experience with God, but I wasn't sure how to have it. I attended several different churches, but I didn't find what my cousin had described.

After finishing university, I moved to Helsinki, where I met my future husband. I invited him to attend church with me, hoping he would find God and show me how to find Him. But it didn't work.

Our children were born, and life became busy. I had everything I wanted—except God. I continued visiting churches and prayed, "Lord, I can't find You. Please find me."

Our teenage daughter decided to study in Australia for a year. I was worried, and prayed she would find a good family to live with. And she did! We kept in touch by instant messaging and got to know her host family that way. The father of the family was named Greg, and I told him of my search for God. He told me he had drifted away from his childhood church, but suggested I read his favorite book, *The Desire of Ages*. I found it on the internet. It changed my life! I found answers to my questions and had a closer walk with God.

Greg's father had been a missionary and answered my questions about God. He told me he was a Seventh-day Adventist, but I had never heard of them.

Then Greg encouraged me to visit an Adventist church, which I did. When I arrived at the church, I was overwhelmed with the love people showered on me. I was amazed to hear the Bible discussion. These people knew so much about the Bible! I loved the sermon, too. I returned to church the following week.

I fell in love with Jesus, just as my cousin had done so many years earlier. That summer I visited the church's Bible camp, where I studied the Bible deeply and came away spiritually refreshed.

I returned home from camp rejoicing and shared my love for God with my husband. But this time I felt compelled to urge him to make a decision for Jesus. I didn't know it then, but this was our last conversation about religion. Two days later he died in a car accident.

I couldn't understand why God would take away my husband so soon after I had given my life to Him. Now I understand that God gave me a church family to support and pray with me during those difficult days. The Bible texts I had memorized gave me peace, and the Holy Spirit comforted me.

I went to work for the church's Bible correspondence school, where I help others struggling with some of the same issues I have. I met a good man at church, and eventually we married. God has given us a ministry together. As for Greg in Australia, he returned to the Lord, as well. God surely works in mysterious ways!

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.

This year marks the 2,000-year anniversary of Jesus' baptism, when He was anointed as the Messiah. It was at this point, the fulfillment of Daniel's 70-week prophecy *(Dan. 9:24-27),* that Jesus began His earthly ministry.

However much we rejoice in Christ's first coming, our hope is found in His second coming. To keep us from getting discouraged as we wait, we have been given prophecies, which reveal His many divine roles.

In Daniel 2, we see the Jesus of the Second Coming, the One who ends this world and ushers in a new one. In Daniel 7, we see Jesus as "One like the Son of Man" who issues judgment in "favor of the saints" *(NKJV)*. In Daniel 8, we see Jesus as the "prince of the host" in the heavenly sanctuary. In Daniel 9, we see Jesus as the Anointed Messiah who will be "cut off." In Revelation 12, we see Jesus as the child caught up to the throne. Central to all that is revealed is Jesus, who is at the heart of apocalyptic prophecy. It is this same Jesus whose baptism we now commemorate, rejoicing in the hope He offers us in a world that, in and of itself, offers us nothing.

Lesson 1—Interpreting Apocalyptic Prophecies

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **History at a Glance** *(Dan. 2:38; Dan. 8:20, 21)*
MONDAY: **Jesus' Method of Interpretation** *(Matt. 24:15, 16)*
TUESDAY: **Interpretation of Symbols** *(Rev. 21:6)*
WEDNESDAY: **Paul's View of Prophecy** *(2 Thess. 2:3–8)*
THURSDAY: **Jesus—The Heart of Apocalyptic Prophecy** *(John 5:39)*

Memory Text—*Daniel 2:27, 28, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: One reason we can celebrate the 2,000-year anniversary of Jesus' baptism and anointing as the Messiah is because of the biblical notion of linear time, the idea that time moves in a straight line, from one distinct beginning to one distinct end.

Lesson 2—Daniel 2 and 7: The ABCs of Apocalyptic Prophecies

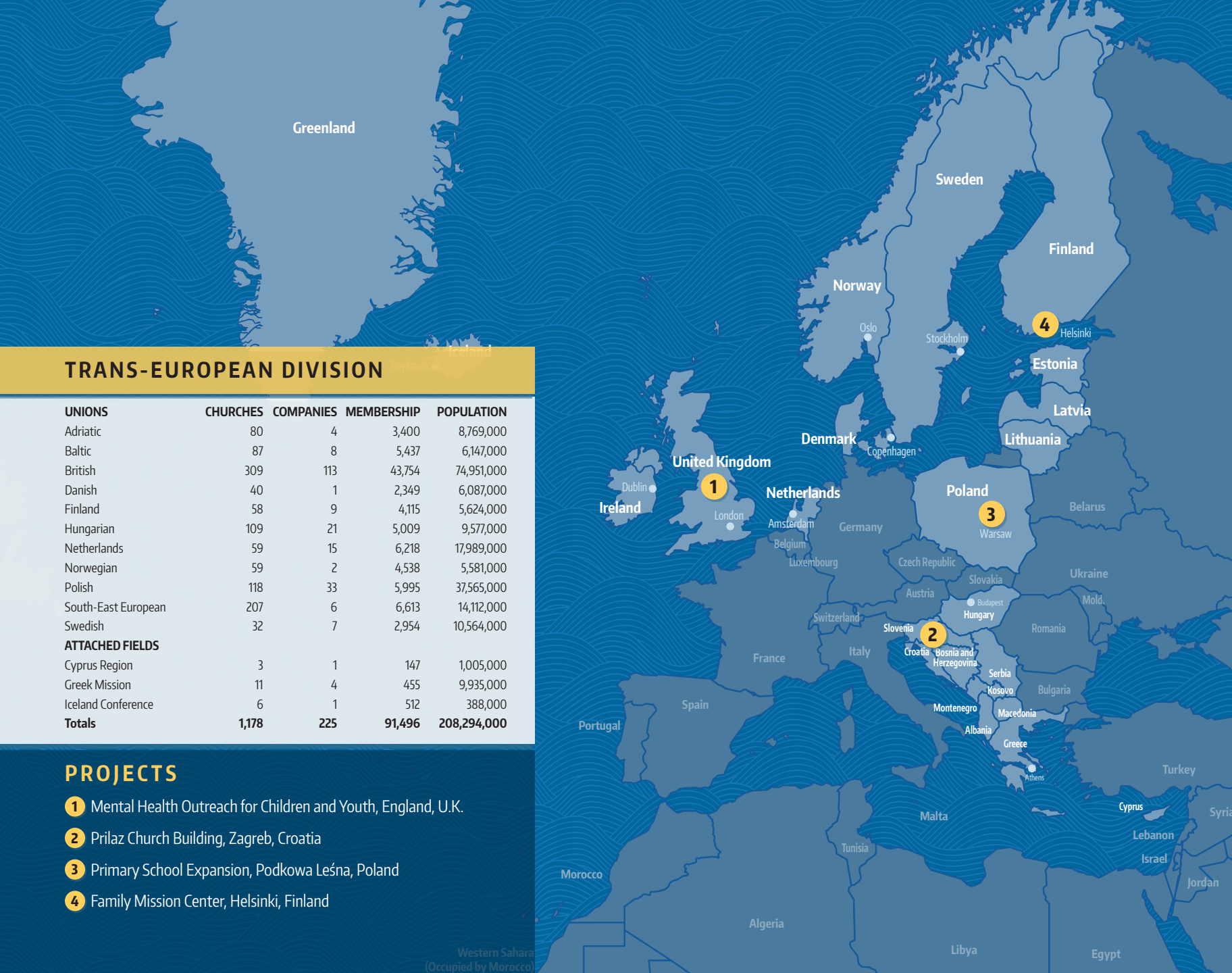
The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Two Parallel Visions** *(Daniel 2, Daniel 7)*
MONDAY: **The Fourth Beast** *(Dan. 2:40, Dan. 7:19)*
TUESDAY: **The Little Horn: Part 1** *(Dan. 7:8, 24)*
WEDNESDAY: **The Little Horn: Part 2** *(Dan. 7:25)*
THURSDAY: **The First Apocalyptic Time Prophecy** *(Dan. 7:25)*

Memory Text—*Daniel 7:27, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: Some of the most incredible faith-building prophecies in all of Scripture appear in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, both of which climax with Jesus at His second coming.

Lessons for People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision: Christian Record Services offers the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* free of charge in braille, MP3 disc, and online download to people who are blind, have low vision, or cannot hold or focus on standard ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.



TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

UNIONS	CHURCHES	COMPANIES	MEMBERSHIP	POPULATION
Adriatic	80	4	3,400	8,769,000
Baltic	87	8	5,437	6,147,000
British	309	113	43,754	74,951,000
Danish	40	1	2,349	6,087,000
Finland	58	9	4,115	5,624,000
Hungarian	109	21	5,009	9,577,000
Netherlands	59	15	6,218	17,989,000
Norwegian	59	2	4,538	5,581,000
Polish	118	33	5,995	37,565,000
South-East European	207	6	6,613	14,112,000
Swedish	32	7	2,954	10,564,000
ATTACHED FIELDS				
Cyprus Region	3	1	147	1,005,000
Greek Mission	11	4	455	9,935,000
Iceland Conference	6	1	512	388,000
Totals	**1,178**	**225**	**91,496**	**208,294,000**

PROJECTS

1. Mental Health Outreach for Children and Youth, England, U.K.
2. Prilaz Church Building, Zagreb, Croatia
3. Primary School Expansion, Podkowa Leśna, Poland
4. Family Mission Center, Helsinki, Finland