

The Prophetic Gift
The Gift of Prophecy and God's Remnant Church

Lesson #4 for January 24, 2009

Scriptures: Revelation 12; 14:1-12.

1. The focus of this lesson is on "God's remnant people." Does that only include members of the Seventh-day Adventist church? How do we identify God's remnant people? Who has the right to say who belongs?
2. Small groups of people identified as "remnants" have been mentioned throughout Scripture at various times: Noah and his family (Genesis 7:20); a small group of Jewish people who became the initial core, or seed, of the Christian church (Romans 11:5); and other small groups identified with the churches of Thyatira (Revelation 2:24) and Sardis (Revelation 3:4). That is not the name of just one group of people at one time. It is a name that describes groups that meet certain qualifications.
3. Many groups of believers have identified themselves as God's "one" faithful group of people. The Roman Catholic Church asserts that one cannot be saved unless s/he is baptized as a Roman Catholic, preferably when s/he is born. It maintains that the current pope has received the keys of the kingdom as handed down from Peter through each of the "subsequent popes" until the present day. (Matthew 16:18,19; compare Matthew 18:18,19; John 20:23) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints maintains that unless one is baptized as a member of the Mormon communion, s/he cannot be saved. Down through history many churches have claimed that they are the special people of God.
4. Seventh-day Adventists have taken three key passages from the book of Revelation (Revelation 14:12; Revelation 12:17; and Revelation 19:10) as identifying God's faithful remnant church at the end of time because they "keep the commandments of God" and have "the spirit of prophecy." Are our claims any more valid than those of other Christian groups? If so, why? If not, why not? What is the meaning of "the testimony of Jesus"? (Revelation 12:17) "The faith of Jesus"? (Revelation 14:12) "The spirit of prophecy"? (Revelation 19:10)
5. Revelation 12 gives a panoramic view of the events of the great controversy. First, John saw a "pure woman" dressed in white and clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and wearing a crown of 12 stars. Pure women have symbolized the church or God's faithful people in several places in Scripture. (See Isaiah 54:5,6; 2 Corinthians 11:2) Prostitutes and other impure women have represented false or fallen churches. The way this particular woman is dressed is similar to the way Jesus is pictured in other places in Scripture. (Malachi 4:2; Revelation 1:16)
6. Almost immediately in Revelation 12, we note that the "dragon"—later identified as Satan himself—was determined to destroy the child born of the woman. That child is clearly a reference to Jesus Christ who ascended back to heaven before Satan could destroy Him.
7. Then the dragon apparently attacked the church herself, and the church fled to an uninhabited area described as a desert for a period of 1260 prophetic days or years. (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 12:14; 13:5).
8. This period of 1260 prophetic days is equal to the "time and times and half a time" (3 ½ years) in Daniel 7:25; 12:7; and in Revelation 12:14. It also equates to "42 months" (Revelation 11:2; 13:5) and to two places where Scripture specifically mentions 1260 days. (Revelation 11:3; 12:6)
9. There are several reasons why this time period should be taken as symbolic and prophetic

rather than as literal time. The whole context is full of symbolism. Furthermore, these particular passages are not presented in the normal way that a regular time period would be expressed. (See Luke 4:25; James 5:17) For these reasons and others, Seventh-day Adventists have identified this 1260-year prophecy with the period of time from A.D. 538 when the pope took political control of the city of Rome until A.D. 1798 when the pope himself was taken captive by Napoleon's army. This period of time is equated with the time of papal supremacy.

10. Do you find these arguments convincing? Why do you think God was using so much symbolic language? Why didn't God just tell us "straight" what He has in mind. Think of the way symbols are used in our day. Millions of dollars are spent in producing trademark symbols and other identifying marks of major corporations. High-level entertainers also seek to become identified by certain catch words or phrases which they take as their "names." When those symbols or words are used, those groups are hoping that you will think of them. If we say "Madonna" what do you think about? It no longer brings immediately to mind the mother of Jesus! It now means a modern singer/entertainer. Does that help us to understand why God used so many symbols in the Old Testament and in the book of Revelation?

Why did Jesus make so much use of parables based on certain "symbols" with which the people were very familiar? He wanted them to be constantly reminded of His teachings.

11. Are you comfortable with and proud to be a part of God's remnant church identified by these marks in the book of Revelation? Should we be comfortable and proud?
12. What was John—inspired by the Holy Spirit—writing about what he mentioned "the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 1:1-3; 19:10) How did John receive that message which was the "witness" or the "testimony" or "the truths" revealed about or by Jesus? Wasn't he an eyewitness to many of the events of the ministry of Jesus? It is even possible that John was a cousin of Jesus and may have known Him from His childhood. Did the Holy Spirit reveal to him some of the deeper meanings of the life and death of Jesus? Can we have the testimony of Jesus in the same way that John did? What would that mean? Read Revelation 1:9; 2:13; 6:9; 12:13-17; 20:4. Several groups down through history are identified in these passages as faithful witnesses for God. It is significant to note that the original Greek word *marturia* which refers to witnessing is the source of our modern word *martyr*. These groups were faithful witnesses even when it meant death. Long after Jesus died, John wrote many things that he obviously did not realize at the time he was living and working with Jesus. Did he need a paradigm shift to be able to realize those things?
13. On many occasions when God was about to do something significant on this earth, that event or those events were preceded by "voices" explaining something about what the event was to signify. For example, remember the stories of Noah and John the Baptist. Will God have a remnant people who witness fully and correctly for Him at the end of time? (Revelation 20:20) Do we have any "Noahs" or "John the Baptists" in our day?
14. Read Revelation 12:1-17. Notice that the story begins with Revelation 12:1-6, and then there are two "parentheses"—Revelation 12:7-9 and Revelation 12:10-12—and finally, the story continues with Revelation 12:13-17. The main focus is on the history of the church from the days of Jesus until the end of time. But in the midst, we see a very important parenthesis which—for the first time in the Bible—reviews the events connected with the original fall of Satan from heaven. While it is clear that the parenthesis begins with the fall of Satan from heaven, there are several reasons to believe that the main "casting out" of Satan from heaven occurred after he was fully defeated at the cross of Calvary. Consider the following points:

- 1) By carefully reading Revelation 12:7-9 and then jumping to verse 13, it is clear that verses

10-12 are primarily an explanation of Satan's status following his defeat by the plan of salvation at the cross.

2) Notice that the first declaration by the loud voice in Revelation 12:10 refers to several events which took place when Christ triumphed on the cross:

The plan of "salvation" was made sure, "strength" was provided for resisting the wiles of Satan, Christ's "kingdom" was made sure, and His "power," literally, "authority," to be man's savior, high priest, and King was confirmed. (Compare Matthew 28:18; *Great Controversy* 503).

3) Notice that the events in this section are directly linked to "the accuser of our brothers and sisters." That refers to the "casting down" mentioned in Revelation 12:9.

4) The casting down mentioned in Revelation 12:9,10,13 mentions "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" who has already been actively accusing them before God day and night. Clearly, that could not be referring exclusively to his original fall before this earth was created.

5) In Revelation 12:11, we note that it specifically mentions "the blood of the Lamb"—the death of Christ on the cross—that made possible the casting down of "the accuser of our brothers and sisters."

15. These events suggest that the casting down of Satan actually took place in steps.

1) Following his rebellion in heaven, he was cast down with his angels to this earth. (Revelation 12:9) But he still had access to the courts of heaven on a regular basis. (Job 1:6; 2:1)

2) Following his defeat at Calvary and the revelation of the truth about his character at that time, he was no longer welcome in the courts of heaven. That constituted the major casting down.

3) He will be further cast down at the second coming by being "bound to this earth." (Revelation 20:1-3)

4) His final casting down will occur when he is totally destroyed at the third coming.

Thus, we see that there are four steps in his ultimate demise.

16. Returning to Revelation 12:13-17, what are the "floodwaters" that were sent after the church? What groups have persecuted the Christian church—the remnant few—down through the generations? Those persecutions were carried out first by the Roman Empire and later by the Roman Catholic Church. Notice that floods of water have been used to symbolize persecuting armies in the past. (Jeremiah 46:7,8; 47:2; Daniel 9:26) So, what historical events are represented by the swallowing up of the waters by the desert in Revelation 12:16? What time period is that referring to? In the early years, faithful groups found refuge in the northern mountains of Italy and the southern mountains of France. Others were located in Ethiopia and Armenia. But in a much larger sense, beginning in 1620, people who were determined to follow God's will as they understood it escaped the persecuting armies of Europe and fled to North America. Thus, they were out of the reach of the Roman Catholic authorities.

17. Read Revelation 12:17 again. The context seems to suggest that it refers to the close of the 1260-day prophecy. What was the identifying mark of God's faithful people at that time? Is it clear what "the commandments of God" means? (Matthew 24:20; Romans 3:13; Ephesians 6:1; James 2:9-11; 1 John 3:4) After reading these passages, is there any question left in your mind about what commandments are being referred to? Why is the keeping of the

seventh-day Sabbath such a key part of “keeping the commandments” and identifying the remnant at this point in history? Is this an arbitrary test on God’s part? Or do we want to be different? “If God has said it, I believe it, and that’s all there is to it!” The seventh-day Sabbath means we believe that we are all sons and daughters of God, and thus, brothers and sisters. It means we believe that God is the Creator and we reject macro-evolution. The Sabbath is intended to be our opportunity to fellowship with God on His terms. God also claims one-tenth of our money. God will bless those who honor His claims. But what if someone spends more than 24 hours in a week in worship or study? God asks us on a “date.” The Sabbath reminds us of creation, of our redemption from the slavery of sin, of the salvation offered by the death of Jesus, and of the future home and reward of the blessed.

18. God’s “remnant” people are also identified as having “the testimony of Jesus” (*Marturia iesou*). (Revelation 1:2,9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4) What this expression means depends on whether one believes it is a subjective genitive or an objective genitive in the Greek language. The closest way to express that in English would be to translate it as *Jesus-testimony*. It could mean the testimony that Jesus Himself gave us, or it could mean testimony about Jesus. A careful review of John’s own writings strongly suggests that he was referring to the testimony that Jesus Himself gave. (John 3:11,32,33; 5:31; 16:25-27) Do we accept Jesus’ own words to the effect that it is not necessary for Him to plead with the Father for us? (John 16:25-27) So, what was Jesus’s testimony or the truth He revealed? Ellen White specifically mentioned again and again that the testimony of Jesus involved His revealing the truth about God, the Father. (See *Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890) If we have understood the “testimony of Jesus,” and therefore, know the truth about God, then, when Satan comes and seeks to counterfeit it as closely as he can, we will not be deceived.
19. Look briefly at two additional examples: 1) Revelation 1:2 says that John was bearing witness to “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus.” Clearly, *the word of God* means God’s words and is used parallel to *the testimony of Jesus* which should then mean *the words of Jesus*. 2) A similar expression occurs in Revelation 1:9. John stated that he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos because of “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus.” So, the same argument applies. If we are going to honestly compare Scripture with Scripture, then when reading Revelation 12:17, we should interpret it as does the *Good News Bible*—“the truth revealed by Jesus.”
20. In this same context, who are the “remnant”? (Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 19:10; Isaiah 10:22; Jeremiah 40 2:2) Unfortunately, the suggestion is that the majority of God’s people have ceased following His directions for their lives and only a small group—a remnant—remain faithful.
21. Read Revelation 19:9,10. In the traditional translations which closely follow the original Greek, we read “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” That is the only occurrence of the expression *spirit of prophecy* in all of Scripture. How should we interpret it? (1 Corinthians 12:8-10,28; Ephesians 4:11) Those who receive the spiritual gift of prophecy are referred to as prophets. Compare Revelation 22:8,9; Revelation 19:10; and Revelation 22:8,9. Ultimately, the remnant church will be narrowed down to the “144,000” and that remnant will be able to “stand tall” and “face” the Devil and tell him that his picture of God is wrong. Those people will be doing just exactly what every prophet has done: representing God correctly.

The *spirit of prophecy* means a lot more than the “red-leather books”—as important as they are. Ellen White’s writings are the key to our understanding of the great controversy which is the central belief of our church. But, God needs an entire group of people who will witness with the same commitment as Ellen White did.

We need a change in our paradigm. We need to realize that the great controversy is about God and His character and how He runs His government and not just about how God saves you and me.

22. It seems clear that in John's mind, prophets are those who have "the spirit of prophecy."
23. Seventh-day Adventists are not the only ones who take that interpretation. Lutheran scholar Hermann Strassmann wrote:

"Brothers who have the testimony of Jesus" (NJKV) in 19:10: According to the parallel 22:9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general, but the prophets. . . . If they have the *marturia Iesou* [the testimony of Jesus], they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets.—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), vol. 4, p. 501.
24. So, what is the mission of the remnant church? Are they supposed to carry a very specific message about God—as Jesus did? How does that relate to the "three angels' messages"?
25. Don't forget that Jesus Himself warned us about false prophets. (Matthew 24:23; 1 John 4:1)
 - 1) True prophets—inspired by the Holy Spirit—should live lives in harmony with the Scripture;
 - 2) What they say—their message—should be in harmony with Scripture;
 - 3) Everything they do and say should honor the Father and the Son; and
 - 4) When they speak about the future, their prophecies will come true.
26. So, in conclusion, what does one need to do—or have to become—to qualify for being a member of the remnant? Must one be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Has God chosen the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a special role at the end of history?
27. God's remnant church—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—has been immensely blessed by having the writings of Ellen G. White to help in studying the Bible. There is no way we could have survived and grown to what we have become without her guidance. But, the "spirit of prophecy" which John wrote about must involve the entire remnant at the end and not just a single individual, especially a dead one.
28. Claiming to be a member of the remnant does not give us special privileges—just as it did not give special privileges to the Jews in Old Testament times. Instead, it places on us "special responsibilities." If we have more light than others, we have more responsibility to share that light. But, if being a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not guarantee salvation, is there any way to know that we are really a part of the "remnant"?

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