

The Prophetic Gift
Testing the Prophets

Lesson #6 for February 7, 2009

Scriptures: Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 18:6-10; Jonah 3; 4; Matthew 7:20; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:20,21.

1. Seventh-day Adventists have identified 28 “fundamental beliefs.” Fundamental Belief number 18 states:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White, the Lord’s messenger. Her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* (2nd ed.) (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005), page 247 as quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for January 31, 2009.

2. Read Revelation 12:17 and 19:10. Seventh-day Adventists have interpreted these verses as saying that our possession of the writings of Ellen White along with our keeping of all ten of the Ten Commandments make us “the true church.” Our next few lessons will be talking about the nature of prophets and prophesying, how to test prophets, and how to use their works.
3. How did God communicate with Ellen White? Do you have any questions about her visions and dreams? What criteria are important to you in determining whether or not a prophet is reliable?
4. Many biblical characters starting with Abraham had visions and/or dreams. (Genesis 15:1; Numbers 12:6-8; Daniel 7:1; Isaiah 1:1; Ezekiel 1:1; Daniel 8:1; Obadiah 1:1; Nahum 1:1; Acts 9:10; 10:3; 11:5; 16:9; 18:9) Why is it—according to Joel 2:28—that old people have dreams while younger people have visions?
5. Why do you suppose God chooses to use visions and dreams as a means to communicate with His prophets? Read Numbers 12:5-8. What was the difference in the way God communicated with Moses from the way He communicated with “ordinary” prophets? Does this suggest that visions and dreams may be difficult to understand or interpret? Are we so far removed from God that He can hardly speak to us? Was Moses humbled by his experience with the sheep, and therefore, God could talk to him more directly? Remember that Moses had spent 40 years getting the world’s best education!
6. During her ministry of about 70 years, Ellen White received about 2000 visions and dreams. (Starting at the age of 17) In her early years, visions were more common; in her later years, she more often received her messages in dreams. Ellen White was shown a number of historical events and also future events in those visions and dreams. (See especially *Great Controversy*, pp. 531-678) While in her visions, she was totally unaware of anything surrounding her physically. Instead, what she saw was what the angel showed her. She had no choice about where she went or what she saw. She sometimes was shown things in “snapshots” which later she would relate to other visions that she had. But often, immediately after coming out of her visions or dreams, she could not remember everything that she had been shown. Later, when it was time for her to write about what she had been shown or testify about what she had seen, the visions came back to her clearly.

She received, for example, more than one “great controversy” vision. But she often consulted historical sources to arrange the events that she saw in chronological order. Compare the book of Revelation.

7. What has been your personal experience with the writings of Ellen White? Why do you believe many Seventh-day Adventists have questions about her material? Why are some prejudiced against them? What do you believe is the most important contribution that Ellen White has made to the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
8. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests that there are five tests from Scripture for testing prophets:
 - 1) They must speak in harmony with the previously revealed Word of God. (Isaiah 8:20)
 - 2) Prophecies made by true prophets will come true. (Jeremiah 28:9; Deuteronomy 18:21,22; but consider Deuteronomy 13:1-3) We must decide if the new truth that has come is guidance from God or a “test.”
 - 3) Some prophecies are conditional. Usually the condition is the obedience of the people involved. (Jeremiah 18:5-10) Think of Jonah!
 - 4) True prophets will accept Christ as the center of their message. (1 John 4:1-2) Beware of anyone trying to shift the focus away from Christ and His life on earth.
 - 5) True prophets will be known by their “fruits.” (Matthew 7:15-23)
9. Then, are we to understand that prophets are perfect? Moses struck the rock (Numbers 20:10,11); Matthew made mistakes (Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:50,51 and compare 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 and Zechariah 1:1; See also Matthew 27:9,10 and compare Zechariah 11:12,13); and even Peter was intimidated by the brethren who came from Jerusalem! (Galatians 2:11-14)
10. What criteria can one use to be certain that a prophet is speaking the truth as revealed by God Himself? Matthew 24:23,24 and Revelation 13 suggest that at the end of time, the Devil himself will convince almost the whole world that he has come as Jesus Christ. How will we be able to know that he is a fake? That is a real challenge! All the time there are people claiming to be the Messiah. Remember that God never coerces. (DA 23) If we know God well enough, we will be able to tell when the counterfeit arrives.
11. The apostle John specifies in 1 John 4:1,2 that those who are true prophets will “confess” that Jesus was truly human and truly divine. Included in that confession is the fact that we recognize that Jesus came especially to reveal the Father. That is the “essential knowledge.” (John 17:3)
12. Read Isaiah 8:20 in several different versions. When read in the *King James Version*, this verse says: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.” We like this verse because it says what we want it to say. You will notice that there is considerable variation in the translation of this verse. The reason is that the Hebrew is unclear! The interlinear Hebrew text says: “*For teaching and for [written legal] testimony if not they [who] say like the words these it is because for him there is not dawn.*” (Lexham Hebrew-English Interlinear Bible) Nevertheless, there are some things we can say for certain: **truth can never be inconsistent with itself**. If God does not change, (1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6) then what He reveals to His prophets must be consistent through all ages. Any truth given to a modern-day prophet must be consistent with the truth revealed in God's original Canon, the Old and New Testaments. (Jeremiah 28)

Jews and Protestants in general have agreed that any new revelation must agree with previous revelations. The writings of Moses served as the standard by which “the prophets” were evaluated. Later, the “Holy Writings” (the last parts of the Old Testament to be written) were evaluated on the basis of the Law (Moses’ writings) and the Prophets. Protestants have gone on to say that the New Testament must be judged by the Old Testament. Seventh-day Adventists go further to suggest that any future writings that claim to be inspired must be judged by the Old and New Testaments.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Mormon Church by contrast believe that their church leaders have the authority to change anything that was said in the past.

13. In order to be regarded as authentic, a prophet’s message must be not only consistent with all of Scripture but also it must speak the truth about God. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3) But if we recognize that we can only see through a “glass darkly,” (1 Corinthians 13:12) how can we be certain about the truth? A true knowledge of God may be the basis for a relationship (John 17:3) but we must also be willing to listen. That is the basis for a progressive revelation which Adventists have sometimes called “present truth.” Remember that what we believe is “truth” is never better than our best understanding of what is “truth.” What do we do when we have two statements in the Bible that seem to be contradictory? (See 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1) It sometimes takes a “larger view” to reconcile such statements.
14. Why do you think there are so many modern people claiming to be prophets and even messiahs? (Matthew 24:23,24)
15. While recognizing that the fulfillment of prophecy is one of the tests for a true prophet, (1 Samuel 9:6; Jeremiah 28:9; Lamentations 3:37; and Deuteronomy 18:21,22) we must recognize that there are prophecies which seem to be “conditional.” How would you identify a conditional prophecy? In 1856, (before there was an SDA Church, no health message had been given yet, no great controversy had been revealed yet, “adventists” were still smoking and eating pork, etc., and they were meeting together in Sabbath conferences to try to decide what it was that they collectively believed) Ellen White wrote:

I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said [132] the angel: "Some food for worms, [SISTER CLARISSA M. BONFOEY, WHO FELL ASLEEP IN Jesus ONLY THREE DAYS AFTER THIS VISION WAS GIVEN, WAS PRESENT IN USUAL HEALTH, AND WAS DEEPLY IMPRESSED THAT SHE WAS ONE WHO WOULD GO INTO THE GRAVE, AND STATED HER CONVICTIONS TO OTHERS.] some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 131,132.

Is this proof that Ellen White was a false prophet? What is there in the context of this quotation to suggest that it was conditional? Are any of those who were present at the 1856 conference still living? What evidence can we provide to suggest what God's original purpose was in giving that prophecy? Why has the second coming of Christ been delayed? (*Evangelism* 694-697)

16. There is much evidence to suggest that the coming of Christ has been delayed. That was not as God had planned it, but it has been necessitated by the unfaithfulness of God's people. That does not mean that prophecies made about Christ's coming which were not fulfilled at the time when they should have been are in error. Ellen White said:

The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus

it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 67.

Compare Matthew 25:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:37; Revelation 10:6. What reasons does the Bible give for the apparent delay? (2 Thessalonians 2:1-10; Revelation 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 3:9-12)

“The day of the Lord” is always described as very near. (Joel 1:15; 2:1,2; 3:14; Zephaniah 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 1 John 2:18; Romans 13:11,12; 1 Corinthians 7:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15,17; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:8,9; 1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 22:6,7; Contrast 2 Thessalonians 2:1-6; Revelation 7:1-3)

Ellen White was told in 1868: “God’s unwillingness to have His people perish, has been the reason of so long delay.”—Testimonies, vol. 2, p. 194. (1868)

In 1883 she was told:

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward. —*Manuscript 4*, 1883. {Ev 696.2}

What would we do if God told us that He is definitely not coming back for at least 100 years?

17. Why do you think Ellen White said that she did not refer to herself as a prophetess? Should we as Seventh-day Adventists call her a prophetess if she did not call herself one? Why did she not call herself a prophetess?

During the discourse, I said that **I did not claim to be a prophetess**. Some were surprised at this statement, and as [36] much is being said in regard to it, I will make an explanation. Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to designate myself. Those who boldly assume that they are prophets in this our day are often a reproach to the cause of Christ. {1SM 35.6}

My work includes much more than this name signifies. I regard myself as a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people.—Ellen G. White, Letter 55, 1905, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, pp. 35,36.

18. Did Ellen White prophesy of any future events before they happened?
19. Are you convinced that all of her writings are consistent with Scripture?
20. What are the major reasons why people reject her writings? Probably the single most important reason why Ellen White has been set aside or rejected is that she has been misused by Adventists. There are people who love her who use her as if she were a “club” with which to beat people.
21. Seventh-day Adventists should recognize that the major contribution of Ellen White was her understanding of the great controversy and the issues involved. No one else has given us such a clear understanding of that core issue of Christian theology. This approach to Christian

thought helps us to understand many things in Scripture that would otherwise be confusing, and it gives us a solid footing for dealing with all of the deceptions that are coming in the final days of this earth's history. But Ellen White is not the only one in this church whom God has called to be a prophet. Every one of us has been called to "speak for God."

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