

The Prophetic Gift

The Work of the Prophets

Lesson #7 for February 14, 2009

Scriptures: Genesis 22:1-14; Isaiah 53; Matthew 3:7-10; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

1. This week we will discuss some of the more challenging and sometimes unpleasant parts of the work of a prophet.
2. James and Ellen White accomplished a phenomenal amount of work despite their poverty and the difficulties they faced. They established a number of schools. They established publishing houses. Ellen White wrote many books, and all the while they were being assaulted by attacks from Satan. Two of their four sons died when they were quite young. James had been completely worn out by hard work at the age of 34. He had a paralytic stroke at a young age (about age 45) associated with poor health practices after tirelessly traveling, preaching, and writing. Finally, in 1881 at the age of 60, he died with fever, possibly of cerebral malaria. (*Ellen G. White in Europe, 1885-1887*, p. 90.1) Soon after that, Ellen White was asked to travel to Europe for several years. Not long after returning to America, she was asked to go to Australia for a period of almost 10 years.
3. If we study Scripture carefully, we will observe that the gospel—the truth about God and His plan to rescue sinful human beings—is spread out in various forms from Genesis to Revelation. The idea of “substitution” is particularly emphasized in Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53. Specific ceremonies were set up for dealing with “unintentional sins,” and those are described in Leviticus 4:27-31 and elsewhere. “Intentional sins” were to be punished with death! (Numbers 15:30,31) And every part of the plan of salvation is based on the truth about God as we know it. What do these two passages say to you about God?
4. Read Romans 3:21-26. (We suggest reading the *KJV* or *RSV*.) While the sinfulness of man is recognized, God’s solution is to demonstrate His own righteousness (mentioned 5 times in these few verses) so that we can be “won over” by getting to know Him. (Romans 2:4) The entire Old and New Testaments are full of various ways of demonstrating the fact that God is righteous, fair, and loving, but that He is also a God of law and order.
5. Many places in Scripture could be quoted in defense of the idea that God will do everything possible to save human beings. There are also many references to the fact that in order to do that, God must reveal the truth about His character and His government. Hundreds of times Ellen White said that Jesus came to reveal the Father. Those are in addition to about 8000 references to God’s plan of salvation and at least 6000 references to Jesus and the cross.
6. What is the relationship between the coming of Jesus, His death on the cross, and the truth about God and His government?
7. How would our lives change for the better if we spent more time—even “a thoughtful hour” every day (*Desire of Ages* p. 83.4)—thinking about God and what He has done for us?
8. In Scripture we are told about prophets doing a variety of things. The prophet Moses led God’s people out of Egypt. (Exodus 5-14) The prophet Samuel established the schools of the prophets. (1 Samuel 10:5,9-12; 19:20; *PP* 593.1; *CE* 61.1; *Ed* 46.1,2; *FE* 96.3; *PK* 224.3) The prophet Joshua helped the children of Israel to conquer the land of Canaan. Many of the prophets reprovved sin, especially in the nation’s leaders. (See #12 below) Some prophets

(Daniel and John) seemed to have the special task of revealing the future. Prophets wrote the messages God gave them. They spoke about the gospel, gave divine guidance, and were given very specific instructions about what God's people should do on many occasions.

9. While we do not have many of the intimate details of the lives of Old and New Testament prophets, Ellen White did all of the above in addition to taking in orphans, running a "health clinic," caring for numerous sick people, caring for her family, publishing books, establishing schools and publishing houses, etc., along with a lot of preaching and traveling.
10. In the early years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, James and Ellen White provided guidance for establishing church organization and getting it on a sound legal basis. They gave guidance for the establishment of church leadership similar to what the apostles did. (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16; Titus 1:5; 1 John 4:1-3) During the first 20 years of the history of our church following 1844, the church had no official organization and no paid ministers. Those who worked for the church did so by supporting themselves or from donations from others. We were a group of believers but there was no legal church.
11. Think of the problems associated with having no legal church organization. Property had to be held in the names of individuals. Virtually anyone could call himself a preacher and begin to preach whatever he/she thought was right. Even publishing houses legally belonged to individuals. The church did not even have an official name!
12. One of the toughest jobs that a prophet had was to "reprove" sin. Many examples could be given from the Old and New Testaments. (**2 Samuel 12:1-15**; 1 Kings 18:21; **Isaiah 1:10-18**; **Amos 5:12**; Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 3:7-10) Elijah challenged the people of Israel to choose between false gods and the true God. Many prophets spoke against the worship of Baal and other pagan gods. They spoke against persecution of the poor, against taking bribes, and even against cheating God. How would you like to have some of those tasks? How do we respond if we see a fellow church member sinning?
13. Ellen White was also given the task of reproofing "private sins." Often she carried a very heavy burden for individuals who were involved in secret sins. Sometimes, she would share her burdens with her husband, but most often, she kept her reproofs privately between herself and the individual involved.
14. Try to imagine what it would be like to live—even being a church leader—with a living prophet in the church especially if that prophet sent you a letter reproofing your private sins. How would you respond?

Do you remember the story of how Loma Linda University got started? The church was completely "strapped" for money, but Ellen White received a vision telling her that in Southern California there was a place where the church needed to start a new institution. When the message came by letter from John Burden to Ellen White that he had found a potential location, Ellen recognized the description and told him to put money down. The next day Elder Burden received a telegram from the conference instructing him that they could not put any money down because there was no way they could afford a new institution! The money had already been put down! What would Ellen White say if she could see Loma Linda now? She envisioned something very different than what we have now. It was appropriate for her time. What we have now fits with our situation now. Several of our denominational institutions are closing. Are we practicing situation ethics?

15. Read 1 Kings 18:21,22; Jeremiah 23:36; Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 6:24; 7:1. Do the

messages of these verses still apply to the church in our day? How would you apply each verse? In Old Testament times, there were three sources of authority: the king, the priests, and sometimes a living prophet. To whom would you pay more attention?

16. Read Numbers 9:1-5; Jeremiah 37:16,17; Ezekiel 4:1-6; Colossians 4:16. Notice some of the different ways in which God used prophets for the benefit of the church as a whole. Moses instructed the children of Israel to worship God using various ceremonies. (Leviticus 1-16) Jeremiah was called to speak privately to the king. Ezekiel was asked to act out a symbolic representation of the destruction of Jerusalem. The Colossians were asked to share their letter with the Laodiceans and to read the letter which Paul had sent to the Laodiceans.
17. In all of these ways, Ellen White guided the Seventh-day Adventist Church in her day. While we do not have a king, she was very clear in instructing church leaders including presidents of the General Conference. While she did not act out symbolic things in the way that Ezekiel did, she and her husband often moved ahead and did things that needed to be done like starting Loma Linda University without the authorization of the General Conference. When she died she left behind 100,000 pages of written materials, some published but much unpublished. In those pages there was advice about almost everything that could happen to a person in our day. Do these testimonies—many of them written more than a century ago—still apply, at least in principle, to Seventh-day Adventists today?
18. Has the time come when we must look at the writings of Ellen White and try to understand the principle and then adapt it to our current situation? Do you think that every problem that we might face today has an answer in her writings? Should we consult the Bible first?
19. Were some of Ellen White's prophecies conditional? We noted in our previous lesson that she, like many Bible writers, always spoke as if the second coming was very near. When generations, even millennia, have passed and the prophecies are not fulfilled, is that sufficient criteria for rejecting the writings of all those prophets? Is that now an impossible task? If we tried to follow her carefully, would we be called legalists. Is God waiting for us? What would He be waiting for us to do?
20. Has the time come for the Adventist church to openly and honestly talk about the place of Ellen White in our church? Is there anyone else in history who has so clearly set out the principles of the great controversy?
21. If a problem arises in the church, is it fair to turn to Ellen White and seek counsel from her writings?
22. Read Isaiah 44:28; compare Ezra 1:1-4; Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10; Daniel 9:24-27; Micah 5:2. These are just a few of the very specific prophecies which were clearly fulfilled at precisely the right time. Is that one of the essential criteria for a prophet?
23. Ellen White predicted a number of the events of the Civil War. (Ellen G. White: *The Early Years*, volume 1, p. 463) She saw the San Francisco earthquake in vision 2 days before it happened. (*LS* 407-409; *9T* 94,95; *6Bio* 79-83) She predicted that the day would come when Protestantism would reach its hands across the gulf to cooperate with Roman Catholicism. This is happening at an ever increasing rate of speed in our day. (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 451) It seemed impossible in the day when Ellen White was writing!
24. Review the last 10 chapters of *Great Controversy*—pp. 531-678. These chapters include many details yet future. Everything that Scripture has prophesied and which Ellen White has

prophesied so far has been fulfilled except for those conditional prophecies for which the conditions were not met or have not yet been met. Is there any reason for us to doubt the prophecies yet to be fulfilled?

25. If you read the writings of Ellen White and find a message that rebukes your sin, how do you respond? Do you throw out Ellen White, or do you believe that God has spoken to you? Many throw out Ellen White.
26. If you read the writings of Ellen White and find that the church is not following the advice she gave, how should you respond? If we believe that the church has abandoned its standards, is that reason enough for leaving its fellowship?
27. When there is a national Sunday law and later an international Sunday law, what do you think will happen to the official Seventh-day Adventist Church? Will it be legally possible to continue as we are now? Will the legal entity known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church be forced to disband? What would we do under those circumstances? If the General Conference is forced to close will we be able to move forward without that institution?
28. We have seen that it is a real challenge for God to communicate with human beings. Wouldn't it be a lot better if God would just speak to each one of us—maybe once a week—and tell us what He wants us to do? But, wouldn't the Devil immediately demand equal time? Then who would we believe? And how would we know which was God?

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