

**The Prophetic Gift**  
**The Integrity of the Prophetic Gift**

Lesson #9 for February 28, 2009

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 7:1-7; 1 Kings 22:10-40; 2 Chronicles 18:1-34; Jeremiah 43:2-4; Daniel 8:27; 9:2.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss the fact that prophets are human beings, and the fact that not everything which they speak or write is a direct quotation from God. That's the challenge! So how should we evaluate the material which prophets have spoken or written? If a prophet makes a statement and later retracts that and says that God has corrected him, does that mean that the first statement was in error? Was it not given under inspiration? (2 Samuel 7:1-7) Nathan told David to go ahead and build a temple for God, and then he went back and reported that God had said no! Remember the power that kings exercised in that day! Are prophets ever influenced by their own personal opinions or perhaps by information given to them by other human beings? How much "leeway" should we allow prophets when they give their messages? Could their advice at times be wrong? Consider 1 Kings 13.
2. Read 1 Kings 22:10-40 and 2 Chronicles 18:1-34. King Jehoshaphat's son had married King Ahab's daughter. So, King Jehoshaphat was paying a "family visit" to his northern neighbor. That was a number of years after Elijah. Apparently, King Ahab had about 400 "prophets" "in his employ" who claimed to speak for "god" but not for Yahweh. (1 Kings 22:6) Later, they claimed to speak for Yahweh. (1 Kings 22:12)
3. King Jehoshaphat had asked if they could consult a prophet of Yahweh. King Ahab was not happy about the idea. The messenger who went to "fetch" Micaiah tried to convince Micaiah to speak the same message that the 400 other prophets had given. Micaiah responded, "By the living LORD I promise that I will say what he [Yahweh] tells me to!" (1 Kings: 22:14, *GNB*) Notice how Ahab responded to Micaiah. Clearly, Micaiah was speaking irony or even sarcasm. What does that tell us about the work of prophets? Clearly, he did not mean what he said. How do you explain the vision that Micaiah saw? Is that what really happened in heaven? Were God and Satan cooperating to destroy Ahab? Who was the "spirit" in this story? (1 Kings 2:21)
4. Was that the best way to try to influence Ahab? Would you dare to speak as Micaiah did with all those people opposing him? (Has your pastor ever spoken about this passage?) Prophets are a part of the cultural world in which they live! Is Micaiah's story like Job 1 & 2? As creatures limited by four dimensions, we tend to think that one must be near us to hear what we say. But don't we believe that God hears our prayers? Doesn't God hear everything Satan and his angels say to each other? Can't Satan address the heavenly council even from here on earth?
5. How do we act when we know that our personal opinion is not the popular one? Are we afraid to speak up at all? Micaiah spoke up against 400 prophets. On Mount Carmel, Elijah spoke up against 850 prophets of Baal. (Compare 1 Kings 18:1-40) How do you tell who is a false prophet and who is working on the side of Yahweh?
6. Historically, we know that Micaiah had the correct message, and the other 400 prophets were wrong. Do you think it was easy for Micaiah to bear that message? Micaiah was not the first recorded example that we have in the Bible where someone openly tried to convince a prophet to say something different than the instruction he was given by God. Down through the years, others repeatedly have attempted to influence prophets. Consider Balaam. Numbers 22-25,31.
7. Rather than attempting to influence the prophet, some other individuals have simply accused the prophet of being influenced by people who could not be trusted.
8. Those issues have arisen primarily because many people believe that prophets are supposed to be "verbally-inspired," that is, that every word they speak is directly given to them by God. That has not been the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but many members and leaders in the church have "taken" that position for Bible writers in the past considering that 75 years ago, "all" conservative Christians, called "fundamentalists" at the time, believed in the verbal inspiration

of Scripture. If we do not believe that biblical prophets were verbally-inspired, should we believe that about Ellen White?

9. It is always a difficult thing to deliver an unpopular message. If you were ever asked to do so, how did you respond? Is it easy to tell a person something he/she does not want to hear? Have you tried to excuse yourself on one pretense or another?
10. Read Jeremiah 42:1-43:7. The political leaders of the small group of Jews left in Palestine at the time went to Jeremiah asking for his advice. When Jeremiah received a message from the Lord and passed it along to them, they called him a liar! Jeremiah was accused of listening to the advice of his secretary rather than giving a message from God. What do you think really happened in the story of Jeremiah and the leaders who consulted him? Clearly, those political leaders believed that they knew what was right, and in their minds, their opinion was more important than the word of God to Jeremiah. How do we respond when God advises us to do something which we do not think is right or which we would prefer not to do? Is it ever wise to attempt to excuse ourselves from following God's word after we have become certain that it is God's word? How often do we choose to do things our way instead of God's way?
11. Why was there so much reluctance by God's people in almost every situation to accept the messages of the prophets? Why were the people in Jeremiah's day so opposed to his messages? Why do you think they accused him of getting his messages from his secretary? Why do you think they later forced Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them to Egypt?
12. Ellen White was repeatedly accused of depending upon her literary assistants and even having them write her books for her. What do you think about those charges? If a prophet uses some form of literary assistance, does that raise questions about his or her integrity? Does it raise questions about the validity of his/her messages?
13. Read Daniel 8:27 and 9:2. Why do you think God gave Daniel the message of Daniel 8 and then waited about 10 years before He gave him the explanation as we find it in Daniel 9?
14. When a person has been chosen to receive the special guidance of God and on some occasions has been asked to speak on God's behalf, does that suggest that all his/her future behavior is perfect? Is he/she never "allowed" to make any mistake? What standard does God set for His inspired prophets? Read Galatians 2:11-16. After all the experience that Peter had with Jesus and later being instructed in the story of Cornelius, (Acts 10) why do you think he slipped back into his old habits of prejudice? Shouldn't Peter have been "converted" after that experience with Cornelius? Could a person who had been one of the "inner three" associated with Jesus still be swept along by Jewish prejudice? Paul knew about the prejudices of Jews! He had been a "Pharisee"! (Philippians 3:5)
15. Read Hosea 1:1,2. How would you respond if you received a message from God which seemed "impossible" to believe? Hosea was told to go and marry a woman who was either already a prostitute or soon to become a prostitute. Is that the only kind of woman that was available at the time? (Hosea 4:13,14) Was she the best choice available? Can you think of other messages which God gave to His prophets which seemed "unbelievable" at the time? Jonah? Habakkuk?
16. Are there times when God only reveals part of the truth? Does God believe in "progressive revelation"? What do we mean when we talk about "present truth"? Does that mean new truth has been revealed which goes beyond previous truth or previous understanding of truth? Why do you think that in the Old Testament, "God spoke" only about a single coming for the Messiah. Even though events are recorded in the Old Testament which we apply to the first coming, to the second coming, and even to the third coming of Christ, the Old Testament prophets apparently believed that they would all occur at the first coming. In New Testament times, all of the apostles spoke about the hope of the second coming of Christ. Did Paul, Luke, and Peter know about the millennium? Not until Revelation 20 do we learn that there is to be a 1000-year period between His second coming and His third coming with other events happening at that time. Why do you think God waited so long to give us that information about the millennium? Jesus Himself said, "I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear." (John 16:12, *GNB*) Notice what we learn from that:  
1) God always has to work with the people who are available at a given time, and He has to work

in their cultural setting, and 2) There is a progression of truth. Since we have all of the Bible and all of Ellen White's writings to look back at, should we be able to "progress" in our understanding beyond Paul, John, and even Ellen White?

17. What do you think about the writings of Ellen White? Are you comfortable with the fact that her later understandings are much more broad and more detailed than her earlier understandings? Does that mean that the earlier information was incorrect?
18. Is God still leading His church today? Is it possible that there are some aspects of truth still to be learned by God's people? Are we expected to move beyond Scripture and beyond the writings of Ellen White to "larger" views of the great controversy, of God's character, and of the mission and purpose of the coming of Christ?
19. What if a glorious "prophet" should appear claiming to be "the Messiah come down to earth," and what if he were performing miracles? Should we believe him? (Revelation 13) How should we respond to messages which are contrary to our personal opinions? Is there ever a time when we should question the validity of a "prophet"?
20. Repeatedly throughout the Old and New Testaments, we have evidence that the prophets believed that they were speaking God's words. They believed that they were functioning as earthly ambassadors for the King of heaven. So what should we conclude from their expressions? 1) The prophets believed and they wanted us to believe that their messages have divine authority; 2) If they say something like "God spoke to me," then they believed that the words were a direct communication from God; 3) They believed—and they want us to believe—that these messages were given to them to be spoken to the appropriate individuals at the appropriate time.
21. Ellen White accepted the Bible as the inspired word of God. (*Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 17) She also claimed the same origin (God) for her own writings:

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....It is true concerning the articles in our papers and in the many volumes of my books. I have been instructed in accordance with the Word in the precepts of the law of God. I have been instructed in selecting from the lessons of Christ. Are not the positions taken in my writings in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ?  
{1SM 29.3}

22. So, if God does not change, how should we look at the authority of the Bible versus the authority of the writings of Ellen White?
  - (1) The Bible is God's message for all time and for all people. The writings of Ellen G. White are God's message for a particular time, the end time, and for a particular people, the remnant church. (2) Her writings are not a new or additional standard of doctrine but a help for the church in the time of the end. Her writings focus the reader's attention on Scripture they do not replace Scripture. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, February 24, 2009.
23. Some Seventh-day Adventists have gone to the point of placing Ellen White "above" the Bible. Why do you think they do that? What is the danger in doing that? For someone living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in America, is it easier to understand the writings of Ellen White—written relatively recently and directly in English—than to understand the Bible which was written so long ago? Do some people like to use Ellen White as a "club" on others, and do they read her for that purpose? Can truth ever be "codified" and finalized in a particular form?
24. How much of an advantage do we have since we are able to compare the writings of about 40 different Bible writers and the writings of Ellen White in order to determine what is "truth"? Should we always be able to "get it right" with all that information at our hands? After discovering and studying some of the problems in Scripture and then seeing the same problems in the writings of Ellen White, are we discouraged or is our faith strengthened?

25. How often does God have to use the “great circle route” to get us to follow His advice? How often does He have to come back and tell us again and again what we should do?
26. We have already suggested that the final criteria for determining if a message is from God is that it must be true. How do we determine if something is true? First of all, it must be consistent with everything else we know to be true. Any new message from God must be consistent with every other message that has been received from God.
27. What is the great standard of truth? Is it the scientific method with data and statistics? Remember that science can never truly prove anything! It can only give us a reasonable assumption based on chance and probability. What about personal experience? Is that the great standard? Or should we just admit that we live in a world where nothing can be known for sure? Would you dare to speak to your non-Christian or non-Adventist friends and tell them that you regard the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth? Why? Or why not?
28. Read the story of Nathan and David. (2 Samuel 7:1-7) In passing, it is interesting to note why God refused to let David build the temple. It was because David had done so much fighting and “shed too much blood.” (1 Chronicles 22:8, *NAB*) Why do you think Nathan at first told David to go ahead with his idea of building the temple and then later went back and said not to build the temple? Did Nathan believe that his first advice was valid? Did he believe that it was God’s will? Do you think he had received any specific information from God about that issue? How often do prophets or apostles give their own personal opinion? (1 Corinthians 7:25;40; 2 Corinthians 8:10) Should those personal opinions written in Scripture be discounted and not taken very seriously?
29. 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. Questions are asked at times that are not upon religious subjects at all, and these questions must be answered. We converse about houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions, their advantages and disadvantages.-- *Manuscript 107*, 1909. (Published in *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 39.) {3SM 58.3}
30. Why is it that some people really like to focus on what appear to be mistakes or errors both in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White?
31. When considering the integrity and authority of the prophets, we should ask ourselves the following questions: 1) Do I believe that God exists and that He knows what is best for my life? 2) Do I believe that God has the ability to communicate that information to a human prophet? 3) If I find counsel in the writings of the Bible or the writings of Ellen White that clearly applies to me and my situation, do I have the right to question it or set it aside based on my personal opinion?
32. The prophets of God including Ellen White made many claims. If those claims are true, then their messages should be accepted as valid. If those claims are clearly not true, then we have good reason to question their authenticity. But we cannot claim to “generally accept” the writings of prophets, and yet, believe that what they have told us is at least partly wrong. That is not rational or logical; and to do so means that we are either claiming that God has deceived us or that He is a liar. Do we have any evidence at all to suggest that we should “throw out” any of the biblical authors or any evidence that we should “throw out” Ellen White as a prophet of God? These are real issues—issues “where the rubber meets the road”!

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