



A SPECIAL GIFT TO THE CHURCH

QUEST LESSON F-3

The Problem: Will there be genuine prophets in the last days? Have there been any prophets in the twentieth-century church, who have received special direct revelations from God for the instruction of His people? How would we recognize them even if there were such people in the church? How do we test the claims of those who declare that they are prophets of God?

Jesus predicted: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). Whatever fulfillments there may have been of that prediction in past centuries, no one can doubt that we are seeing it dramatically fulfilled today. Not only false religious teachers but also people either claiming to be Christ or claiming to have received direct communications from God are quite prevalent in our contemporary world.

To be able to distinguish the false from the true is very important for every Christian believer. On what basis do we make such judgments? Fortunately, the Bible does not leave us in doubt on this question. It has much to say about prophets and their work, and the means by which true ones can be identified. None of us wishes to be deceived in these last days just before the second advent of Jesus. We want to be sure that our beliefs are truth, not man-made or demonic phantoms that will lead us to ruin.

If God could choose people in past ages of earth's history to whom He gave special messages for the encouragement and spiritual enlightenment of His people, why could he not use someone in that way in the twentieth century? Is God's power any less today than it was in the era of Elijah or Jeremiah? Why should we accept the reality of miraculous prophetic inspiration in earlier ages but deny it for our age? Such an argument does not prove that true prophets who receive visions and dreams exist in our age, but surely, it suggests that we should not rule out the possibility. And if, having applied all the Bible tests, we discover that someone has been chosen by God to receive and convey special messages, how unwise we would be not to accept those messages as important to us!

Let us turn now to the Word of God and discover what it teaches about prophets and their work. In the process, we will be able to discover how the Lord Himself answers the questions we have raised in this introduction.

Objectives

First, we ask, what was the work of inspired Bible prophets? Second, how did the prophets receive their messages?

Third, how can we identify a true prophet?

Fourth, will there be true prophets in the last-day church?

Fifth, has the prophetic gift been manifested already in the last-day church?

I. What Was The Work Of Inspired Bible Prophets?

Since the whole Bible was written by inspired prophets, it is not difficult at all to discover what work the Lord gave them. All we have to do is read their writings and take note of what they say about their mission for God.

The Word

1. Who is the central theme in all Bible prophecy? John 1:45; 5:39; Luke 24:27.
2. What timeless aspect of their work was emphasized by Bible prophets? 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jeremiah 1:73 Isaiah 58:1.
3. Of what importance were the prophets' predictions of the future? 1 Peter 1:10-11; Daniel 2:28; Isaiah 46:9-10.
4. Name a few Bible prophets whose writings are not included in the sacred canon, because they gave messages exclusively to the people of their own day. 1 Chronicles 29:29-30; 1 Kings 11:29; 16:7.
5. Name some women who were used by the Lord as prophetesses:
 - a. Exodus 15:20-21
 - b. Judges 4:4-5
 - c. 2 Kings 22:14
 - d. Nehemiah 6:14
 - e. Isaiah 8:3
 - f. Luke 2:36
 - g. Acts 21:9

Explanation: As indicated in the above Bible passages, the work of Bible prophets included:

1. Exaltation of Christ is the only way of salvation.
2. Giving instruction from God for their own and for future generations. Such instruction included doctrinal teaching, counsel to meet special situations, reproof, and encouragement for God's people. Special messages of appeal and warning were given to unbelievers.
3. Many of the prophets made predictions of the future. Although this was by no means their main function, it was a very vital aspect of their work. Prophets predicted the first coming of Christ and also His second coming. Prophets like Daniel and John the Revelator provided a review of world history, including details of last-day events. One of the reasons we can be sure that their prophecies were inspired is that their predictions have come true.
4. Sometimes prophets were chosen by God to give messages exclusively for their own day. Such prophets were Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, Jehu, and many others like them. Their writings are not in the sacred canon simply because they did not have special application for future generations. There are some situations in God's church that are local as to time and place. The Lord has sometimes chosen special prophets to meet those local situations. And some of those prophets have been women. The Lord does not discriminate on the basis of sex when He wishes to convey special messages to His people.

Relevance: Since we know why God has appointed prophets in the past, we can know that, if contemporary prophets were appointed, it would be for similar reasons. The Lord does not appoint prophets as authoritarian rulers of His people, give a series of new doctrines that have not been revealed in the past, or lead people into moral and ethical practices that are condemned by past prophetic counsels. God is consistent (James 1:17; Malachi 3:6). Moreover, since He selected prophets in the past who were not used to writing the Bible, but to

give special counsel to their contemporaries, we should not rule out the possibility that He will do that again. To be an inspired prophet is not the same thing as being a canonical prophet. The messages of inspired non-canonical prophets came directly from God, just as did the messages of the canonical prophets. The only difference was that the writings of the canonical prophets were selected by God for inclusion in the Bible. God wanted to give His people a Bible that would have all the counsel necessary for salvation. The counsel of the non-canonical prophets was very important for the spiritual life of God's people, but it was not added to the Bible, either because it was already represented there, or because it was designed to meet some local situation.

II. How Did The Prophets Receive Their Messages?

An understanding of the answer to this question provides us with important additional information for judging whether a particular claimant to the prophetic office really has been chosen by God. Knowing how the prophets received their messages, we are better informed in regard to the nature of Bible inspiration.

The Word

6. Who gave the prophets their messages? 2 Peter 1:21; Jeremiah 1:4-9; Amos 3:7.
7. What special methods did the Lord use in giving instructions to the prophets? Numbers 12:6; Hosea 12:10.
8. What is the difference between an inspired vision and an inspired dream? Daniel 2:1, 19; 7:1, 7, 13.
9. How did the Lord speak to Moses? Numbers 12:7-8.
10. How did the Lord sometimes speak to other prophets? 2 Samuel 23:1-3; Ezekiel 2:2-3.
11. What role did angels sometimes fill? Daniel 8:16-17; Luke 1:11, 19, 26-28; Acts 12:7-10
12. What physical state did the prophet sometimes experience when in vision? Daniel 10:7-9, 16-19; Numbers 24:3-4, 16; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4.
13. In what two ways did prophets pass on God's messages to the people? Isaiah 6:9-11 (compare Ezekiel 20:1-3); Jeremiah 36:1-2 (compare Revelation 1:11).

Explanation: The messages from God to the prophets came in four main ways: (i) visions; (ii) dreams; (iii) communications from angels; (iv) the direct instruction of the Holy Spirit, which was either heard audibly, or recognized because of an unmistakable inner command. This fourth kind of communication was not the same as the conviction of the Holy Spirit that every believer experiences. It was a direct communication from the mind of God to the mind of the prophet, by which a specific divine message was communicated. The prophet knew that his responsibility was to pass this message on to the people.

The difference between an inspired vision and an inspired dream was simply that the vision began when the prophet was conscious; the dream began while he was sleeping.

A number of instances are recorded in Scripture that reveals the physical state of a prophet while in vision: (i) loss of ordinary strength; (ii) unconsciousness to surroundings; (iii) the prophet did not breathe; (iv) his eyes were open; (v) he was given new strength. No passage of Scripture says that this was always the prophets' physical state while in vision, and the Bible does not teach that these physical phenomena are to be used as a test of the genuineness of a prophet's claims. The physical state could be counterfeited. Even so, if such physical phenomena are present when other Bible tests of a true prophet result in positive results, they can be regarded as supporting evidence.

The prophet communicated God's message to the people orally, or in writing, or in both ways. The Bible was written because prophets wrote down for their own and future generations the messages that God had communicated to them.

Relevance: Throughout the centuries God has mercifully communicated with mankind. His purpose has always been to save lost humanity from sin and eternal ruin. No one will ever be able to argue that he was left without sufficient light to be saved. Even those who, for one reason or another, cannot read the messages of the Bible prophets, have the 'inner conviction of the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 2:11-16).

III. How Can We Identify A True Prophet?

The Bible gives us clear tests which may be applied to anyone claiming the prophetic office.

The Word

14. With what teachings will the true prophet's messages be consistent? Isaiah 8:20; Revelation 22:18-19; (compare Jeremiah 23:16, 21-22, 28).
15. What will be the spiritual results of a true prophet's teaching, in his own life and in the lives of those he influences? Matthew 7:15-20.
16. How reliable are the predictions of a true prophet of God? Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Jeremiah 28:9.
17. What are we told regarding the conditional nature of some prophetic predictions? Jeremiah 18:7-10; Jonah 3:10.
18. What will the true prophet teach in regard to Jesus Christ? 1 John 4:1-3.

Explanation: There are four major Bible tests to be applied to every individual claiming the prophetic office:

1. His teaching will be consistent with Scripture. Isaiah 8:20 translates literally from the Hebrew: "If they do not speak according to this word, then there is no dawn to them." If they do not teach according to the Bible, you know that it did not come from God. All religious messages, whether from one who claims to be a prophet or from an ordinary preacher or teacher, must be tested by the Word of God. The Bible is the ultimate authority of Christian truth.
2. The fruitage of a prophet's teaching will be good if he is of God, and bad if he is not (Matthew 7:15-29). Jesus emphasized that we must test the prophets by the results of their work. These results will be seen in their own lives and in the lives of the people they influence. A true prophet will draw people nearer to Christ. A false prophet will lead them away from Christ.
3. The predictions of a true prophet of God will be fulfilled (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). We know that Daniel was of God because his predictions of world history's future to his day have been dramatically fulfilled. We know that Micah was a truly inspired prophet because he successfully predicted the very town in which the Messiah was to be born (Micah 5:2). If the predictions of a professed prophet do not come to pass, we can be sure that he is not of God. Of course, we must keep in mind that some divine predictions are conditional upon man's response. Nineveh was saved, despite Jonah's predictions that it would be destroyed, because the people repented of their sin. Many of the divine promises to literal Israel could not be fulfilled because of the people's continuing apostasy. Nevertheless, the test is valid; a true prophet will not make false predictions.
4. The true prophet of God will teach that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man (1 John 4:1-3; compare Colossians 2:9). Anyone who denies the Messianic mission of Jesus, the atoning sacrifice for the whole world, and His mediatorial and judgment ministry in heaven, is not a prophet of God. A genuinely

inspired prophet will emphasize the Christian message, that salvation is available only by faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Relevance: Anyone claiming to be an inspired prophet will measure up to all four tests. Moreover, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will convict people in regard to who is true and who is false. Jesus' warnings about false prophets must be taken very seriously. Only as we stay close to the Scriptures and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we apply the tests can we have security against Satanic deceptions.

IV. Will There Be True Prophets In The Last-Day Church?

This is a question that many today are asking. The presence of so many obviously false prophets in our world today leads one to wonder if the Lord plans to counteract their influence by giving special messages to faithfully chosen instruments.

The Word

19. What did Joel predict regarding the presence of prophecy in the last-day church? Joel 2:28-32.
20. According to the Apostle Paul, how long would prophets be needed in the church? Ephesians 4:11-14.
21. What did Paul say is "confirmed" in believers to prepare them for the second coming of Jesus? 1 Corinthians 1:4-7.
22. Whose "testimony" or "witness" is present in the remnant church? Revelation 12:17.
23. What is "the testimony of Jesus"? Revelation 19:10.
24. What should be our attitude to the work of genuinely inspired prophets? 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 2 Chronicles 20:20.

Explanation: Joel's prophecy establishes quite conclusively that there will be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon God's faithful people just before the second coming of Jesus (Joel 2:28-32). The result of that "latter rain" experience (Hosea 6:3) will be that some faithful ones will receive visions and dreams from the Lord. When God's people are facing the last great crisis of this earth's history, with the whole world ranged against them, the Lord will give special messages of encouragement and guidance.

Paul taught that prophets will be needed in the church until God's people experience victory over sin and are reflecting the character of Jesus (Ephesians 4:11-14).

He pointed out that "the testimony of Christ" is to be confirmed in the hearts of believers so that they will be made ready for the coming of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:6-8). What is this testimony of Christ? It could be regarded as the testimony or witness of others about Christ. Or it could be regarded as Christ's personal testimony about Himself. The phrase reminds us of John 16:13-14. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to bestow upon believers, would "not speak of himself." He would glorify Christ in the hearts of His people. Now this testimony or witness of Christ to our hearts by the Holy Spirit is not the gift of prophecy, in the sense of special revelation based on visions and dreams. We all may have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, but that does not make us all prophets. Even so, as we read the New Testament, we are given the decided impression that Christ's testimony regarding Himself includes the gift of prophets to the church.

Years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, John the Revelator began his book with the words: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servant's things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (Revelation 1:1). There is Christ's testimony to His people through the angel and through the prophet John. Both the angel and John were given the same special

revelations for the church. These revelations were conveyed to John by visions and dreams and by verbal instructions from Christ and His angel.

The testimony of Christ is spoken of again in Revelation 12:17. The dragon who is angry with the woman (the church) is Satan, and those earthly powers that he uses to destroy God's faithful people. The remnants of the seed of the woman are the faithful servants of Christ in the last days. These make up the remnant church, the church that existed just before the coming of Jesus. The characteristics of this church are given very clearly. Its members "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Now, we all know what is meant by keeping the commandments of God. Through faith in Jesus, we are given the power to obey God's will (1 John 5:1-4). In his epistle, John stated very clearly that "his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3). That means we can keep them if we have faith in Christ and His overcoming power. He "is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24).

The "testimony of Jesus Christ" that John spoke of (Revelation 12:17) is defined in Revelation 19:10. John fell at the feet of the angel to worship him, and the angel restrained him. He said, "I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Now, in the context of the statement, the angel clearly meant that, like John, he had prophetic messages from Christ. Prophets are not to be worshiped, not even if they are angels. Angels are created beings. Only God the Creator is to be worshiped. The task of prophets, whether they are angels or men, is to present Christ's testimony to the people. Just as the angel was given the knowledge to pass on Christ's witness to the world, so was John. The angel meant that Christ's revelation of Himself was given to him to pass on to John, but that did not mean that John should worship him. John was to worship God, just as the angel did.

The point is that the "testimony of Christ" in the book of Revelation refers to more than the work of the Holy Spirit in every believing heart. It refers to the work of inspired prophets who, like John, have received visions and dreams, in special verbal communications to be given to the people of earth.

This "testimony of Christ," which is the "spirit of prophecy," is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the last-day church (Revelation 12:17). Christ wants us all to have His testimony or witness in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. But He also wants us to receive the messages of those in these last days whom He might choose as prophets. Through them, we will receive special encouragement. This will not be true to take the place of the Scriptures, nor will it be a new rule of faith and practice that should be added to the Bible. Just as Nathan had messages for David, and Deborah had messages for Barak, so God's last-day prophets will have special counsels for His people. These counsels are not to become part of the sacred canon of Scripture. Nothing is to be added to the Bible revelation (Revelation 22:18-19). But God will give prophets who will lead people back to the Bible and will speak to special problems in the church and in people's lives so that we can all come into "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Relevance: If you discovered that tests of a true prophet applied to the work of a particular person in these last days, would you accept their message as from God? Suppose David, after his great sin, had refused to accept Nathan's counsel as a message from God. Would the Lord have forgiven David for his sin and allowed him to continue as king of Israel?

V. Has The Prophetic Gift Been Manifested Already In The Last-Day Church?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes the following in regard to the work of Ellen G. White (1827-1915):

"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. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth that provides 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. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)" "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1984, p. 7.

We will ask a series of questions suggested by our Bible study in the above four sections:

1. What did Ellen White claim for herself?

"I have had no claims to make, only that I am instructed that I am the Lord's messenger; that He called me in my youth to be His messenger, to receive His word, and to give a clear and decided message in the name of the Lord Jesus.

"Early in my youth I was asked several times, Are you a prophet? I have ever responded, I am the Lord's messenger. I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title. My Savior declared me to be His messenger. 'Your work,' He instructed me, 'is to bear My word...!

"Why have I not claimed to be a prophet? Because in these days many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes much more than the word 'prophet' signifies." Selected Messages, Vol. I, p. 32.

Hence, Ellen White did not reject the title "prophet" because she had not received direct visions and dreams from the Lord, but because of the unfortunate connotations that the word "prophet" conjured up in some minds, and because her work was so comprehensive in nature that it included more than the word "prophet" signifies.

2. Did Ellen White claim to have had visions and dreams From the Lord? Many times in her writings she refers to Visions and dreams given her by God. See, for example, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, pp. 58-61, 67-71, 72, 74, 76-17, 79, 83, 86 etc.

3. Does Ellen White measure up to the tests of a true prophet?

a. The consistency of her writings with Scripture:

The doctrinal and prophetic teachings given in these lessons from the Bible alone can be found in the writings of Ellen G. White. She declares no doctrine that cannot be substantiated solely from Scripture. Her writings lead us back to the Bible. They provide simple explanations of the Bible, which have been neglected by those who should have been well acquainted with the sacred volume.

Did Ellen White teach that her writings should be used as another Bible, or that they should be added to the sacred canon? Or did she believe in sola Scriptura, the Reformation doctrine that the Bible and the Bible only is the rule of our faith and practice? Note what she wrote on this subject:

"I recommend to you, dear reader, the word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word, we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the 'last days;' not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of his people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth." Experience and Views, p. 64. (See also Early Writings, p. 78).

"Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light." Review and Herald, Jan. 20, 1903, p. 15.

b. What is the fruitage of Ellen White's work?

The noble Christian character of Ellen White was attested to by many of those who knew her during her lifetime. [See *Our Firm Foundation, Review, and Herald, Volume I*, pp. 225-228, Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, six vols.; F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White, and Her Critics, Review and Herald*]. Either Ellen White was correct in regard to her claim to have special messages from God, or she was dishonest or insane. Some have unsuccessfully tried to establish that she was either dishonest or insane. Since they have failed to establish those accusations, we conclude that Ellen White was telling the truth because good people in their right minds do not tell lies.

The fruitage of Ellen White's work in the lives of others is demonstrated in two ways: (i) The growth of Seventh-day Adventist work and institutions around the world. It was her vision that has resulted in hospitals, schools, colleges, publishing houses, and churches being established all over the world. (ii) Even more significant is the spiritual impact of her writings. Millions have been drawn to Christ and the Bible through her published works. The only way to test her influence for yourself is to read her works. Begin with the *Conflict of the Ages Series: Patriarchs and Prophets, Prophets and Kings, Desire of Ages, Acts of the Apostles, "Great Controversy*. The counsels given in testimonies for the Church have changed the lives of many people for the better. No one who prayerfully reads Ellen White's works ever claims that he was led away from the Lord. Quite the contrary!

c. Have Ellen White's predictions come true?

All of the unconditional predictions, applying to the period prior to our day (1985), have been fulfilled. And current events reveal the gradual fulfillment of her predictions for the last days. [See the final chapters of *The Great Controversy*]. In 1848, she successfully predicted the amazing growth of the Seventh-day Adventist publishing work. In 1849, when spiritualism, as it is known in our world today, was only just beginning, Ellen White wrote: "I saw that the mysterious knocking in New York and other places was the power of Satan and that such things would be more and more common, clothed in a religious garb so as to lull the deceived to greater security...." *Early Writings*, p. 43. Again, in 1850 and 1854, she predicted the phenomenal rise to worldwide influence of the spiritualistic movement. *Early Writings*, pp. 59, 87. Her predictions have been remarkably fulfilled. From 1902 on, she predicted the impending destruction of San Francisco and Oakland. She wrote that "not long hence, these cities will suffer under the judgments of God." *Evangelism*, p. 403. Everyone knows how these predictions were fulfilled in the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. In 1890, she predicted the destruction that we have seen in two world wars:

"Thousands of ships will be hurled into the depths of the sea. Navies will go down, and human lives will be sacrificed by millions. Fires will break out unexpectedly, and no human effort will be able to quench them. The palaces of earth will be swept away in the fury of the flames. Disasters by rail will become more and more frequent; confusion, collision, and death without a moment's warning will occur on the great lines of travel... Oh, let us seek God while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near!" Quoted in *Our Firm Foundation, Volume I*, p. 220.

A reading of Arthur L. White's 6-volume biography of Ellen G. White will convince anyone that Ellen White's predictions for the lives of individuals and for the circumstances of the church have been remarkably fulfilled.

d. Did Ellen White exalt Christ?

Her writings constantly exalt Christ as the only source of salvation, the Head of the church, the all-sufficient sacrifice, the forgiving Mediator, and the merciful Judge. She depicts Christ as Deity in the highest sense, and human in every respect except sin. [See *The Desire of Ages*]. Her little book *Steps to Christ*, read by many thousands of people all over the world, is the finest commentary on the Bible's teaching of righteousness by faith in Jesus.

4. Other evidence of Ellen White's genuineness as an inspired messenger of the Lord can be listed:
 - a. The timeliness of her messages. This point is illustrated very well in Arthur White's biography. Before situations arose in the church, the Lord revealed to her that they were coming, and gave instruction in regard to how they should be met. She saw in vision the meetings of the church's leaders, heard conversations when she was many miles away, and was told of problems in the lives of people she had never met.
 - b. The practical nature of the messages. The practical problems "of the church and of individuals were revealed to her often well in advance of actual situations.
 - c. The absolute certainty of the messages. See *Our Firm Foundation*, Volume I, pp. 233-234.
 - d. The physical phenomena. In public visions, Ellen White's physical condition was identical to that of Bible prophets. See F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, pp. 51-61.

Relevance: We conclude that the Lord called Ellen White to function as a modern prophet. He gave her visions and dreams and spoke to her through angels and by the inner directives of the Holy Spirit. She was the messenger of the Lord in the special sense that she received direct communications from heaven for the church and for many individuals. If we follow the counsel of the Word of God, we will not despise the prophesyings that came through God's servant Ellen White (1 Thessalonians 5:20). We urge you to read her works for yourself and test them by the Word of God. Read the story of her life and apply the Scriptural tests. We believe that if you follow this plan prayerfully, you will conclude with us that Ellen White was a modern prophet and that her written works are full of inspired counsel for those living just before the coming of Jesus.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The Bible says that there will be no inspired prophets in the last days.
 - b. Visions will be given by God in the last days.
 - c. Jesus said that prophets should be tested by the fruitage of their work.
 - d. There are no women prophets mentioned in the Bible.
2. Discuss: What circumstances made it necessary for the Lord to communicate His messages through prophets? Do we see any such circumstances in our world today?