

Southern Asia-Pacific

DIVISION

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
Jan • Feb • Mar 2009

Unions	Churches	Members	Population
Bangladesh Union Mission	107	26,160	149,002,000
Central Philippine Union Conference	1,141	118,897	15,329,200
East Indonesia Union Conference	656	93,984	21,378,000
Myanmar Union Mission	192	26,236	49,805,000
North Philippine Union Mission	1,300	208,352	54,865,000
Southeast Asia Union Conference	1,824	227,286	18,513,000
Southeast Asia Union Mission	305	77,434	203,232,000
West Indonesia Union Mission	660	91,110	210,251,300
Guam—Micronesia Mission	18	4,009	450,000
Sri Lanka Mission of Seventh-day Adventists	36	3,554	20,087,000
Totals January 2008	6,240	876,197	742,922,300

Map not drawn to scale

Mission Projects
 Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the Southern Asia-Pacific Division with these projects:

- 1 Junior college classroom block at Palawan Adventist Academy, Palawan, Philippines.
- 2 Secondary school in Dumaguete, Central Philippines.
- 3 Secondary school in Zamboanga, South Philippines.

For more information, visit www.adventistmission.org

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

THE PROPHETIC GIFT

Jan • Feb • Mar 2009

The Prophetic Gift



Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



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The Prophetic

“For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

No greater prophet than John? That would include, apparently, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, even Moses. Yet, according to Jesus, *John was the greatest of them all*. How fascinating, especially because, unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Moses—John the Baptist had no writings in the Bible, and yet John was a greater prophet than all those who, at least before him, did!

The prophetic gift wasn't limited only to the prophets whose writing became Scripture.

The point? The prophetic gift wasn't limited only to the prophets whose writing became Scripture. No, the prophetic gift included those whose work for the Lord involved something other than writing books

of the Bible.

The whole question of the prophetic gift, and of inspiration in general, has been a source of discussion and debate throughout church history. How were the prophets inspired? How do inspiration and revelation work? How much, if any, of culture and personal views appear in the writings of the prophets? If these questions still generate discussion within Christendom after centuries of debate, we're hardly going to solve them all in the *Adult Bible Study Guide* this quarter. But we'll sure do our best to try.

Issues regarding the nature of the prophetic gift and inspiration have been especially important to Seventh-day Adventists. In the book of Revelation, God promised that there will be a special manifestation of the prophetic gift at the time of the end (*Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9*). Seventh-day Adventists believe that the gift of prophecy has been manifested in the ministry of Mrs. Ellen G. White (1827–1915). For seven decades she gave messages of counsel and warning to our church; and though she died in 1915, her books, full of spiritual insights and counsel, have been a source of tremendous blessing to

Gift

countless millions whose lives have been, and continue to be, spiritually and theologically enriched through them. We truly have been given a gift.

Yet, questions remain. What is the role of the prophetic gift? If we claim the Bible as our final authority, what authority (if any) should the Spirit of Prophecy have? How should these writings be interpreted? Though this gift has been a blessing, in what ways has it been misused?

More than three decades have gone by since we last studied in Sabbath School the topic of the gift of prophecy. Since then the church has grown from 2.5 million members to more than 15 million (as of this writing). And though there are questions about the Spirit of Prophecy (along with the prophetic gift in general) that remain unanswered, we believe we've been given more than enough reasons to believe in this special manifestation of prophecy among us.

However, the real focus of this lesson isn't just on the gift but on the Gift-Giver. As we study the question of inspiration and revelation, we'll learn about the Lord who loves this world so much He gave of Himself, in the person of Jesus, as the sacrifice for our sins. Though God, though sinless, though the Creator Himself, He became a human being, and in that humanity took upon Himself the punishment for our evil as the only way that we, as sinners, could stand pardoned and justified before Him.

That's the God we serve, and that's the God we seek to reveal in this quarter's lessons.

Gerhard Pfandl, a native of Austria, has been associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference since 1999.

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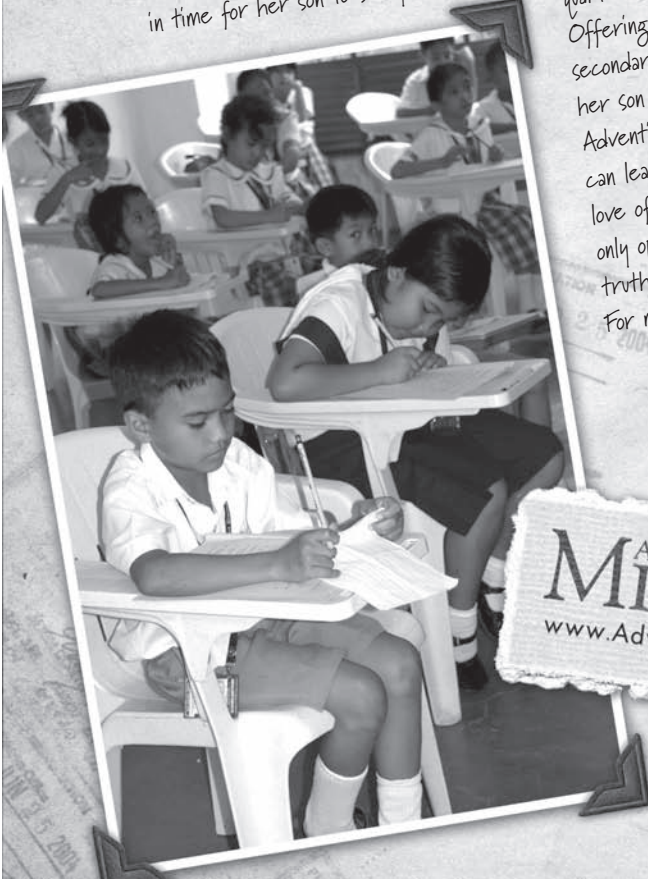
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The school in southern Philippines is bright and clean. Rebar juts from the roof where the school's second story secondary school will someday stand.

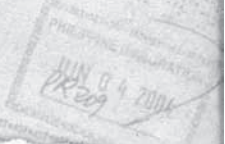
A student's mother approaches and follows my gaze to the rebar. "We are not Adventists," she offers. "But we love this school. My boys started studying here before this building was erected. The old school was pretty bad, but that didn't matter to us. We're happy with the education our sons are receiving." Then she grows quiet. "Our oldest son will graduate this year, and the secondary school won't be ready for him."

I see her yearning and I wish I could do something to finish the school in time for her son to study there. Then I realize that part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build this secondary school. Maybe her son can still study in an Adventist school, where he can learn more about the love of God. It may be his only opportunity to hear the truth. I want him to know. For me it's personal.



ADVENTIST MISSION

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Heaven's Means of Communication



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 18:1–15, 32:30, Exod. 4:10–17, Ps. 19:1–6, John 1:14, 3:16, Col. 2:9.*

Memory Text: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NKJV*).

There are two basic ways in which God has revealed Himself to humanity: general and special revelation. General revelation is God's revelation of Himself to all people through nature and conscience (*see Ps. 19:1, Rom. 1:20*). God's revelations through the prophets as recorded in Scripture, especially His revelation through Jesus Christ, is special revelation. Through this means, God appeared to the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets in order to make His will known. He revealed His power and purpose through Israel's history. Then later, He sent His Son, who, in the garb of humanity, revealed the Father in a unique and powerful way.

This week we'll look at both types of revelation.

The Week at a Glance: What is general and special revelation? What can nature teach us about God? What can it not teach us? How does the revelation through Jesus Christ differ from God's other revelations?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.*

In the Beginning

In the Garden of Eden God spoke with Adam and Eve face-to-face. “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (*Gen. 3:8*). However, after that fateful day, when they blatantly disobeyed their Lord, they no longer were allowed to enjoy His presence (*Gen. 3:23, 24*), and their face-to-face communion with Him ended.

What do the following texts tell us about face-to-face encounters with God? *Gen. 18:1–15; 32:30; Exod. 33:11; Judg. 6:22; 13:2, 3.*

Frequently the Old Testament identifies the Angel of God or the Angel of the Lord as God Himself. Jacob refers to God and the Angel in the same way (*Gen. 48:15, 16*); the Angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush; yet, it is God who speaks to him (*Exod. 3:2–6*); the Angel who appeared to Gideon is identified with God (*Judg. 6:11–14*); and the same is true of the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Manoah and his wife (*Judg. 13:11–22*). Whenever God manifested Himself to human beings in a bodily form, it was always in a humanlike manifestation.

In John 1:18 John says, “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” The Divine Being, therefore, who appeared to the people in the Old Testament must have been Jesus, not the Father. Ellen G. White tells us that “after the transgression of Adam, the Lord spoke no longer directly with man; the human race was given into the hands of Christ, and all communication came through Him to the world. It was Christ who spoke the law on Mount Sinai.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 237, 238.

What has been your own experience regarding what sin and rebellion do between you and God? That is, when you do something that you know is wrong, that you know is sinful, how does that impact your relationship with God? In what ways do you feel a separation from Him? How does guilt drive you away from Him, away from the desire to pray and commune with the Lord? How does this experience help you better understand what happened in Eden?

In Nature

What can nature reveal about God? *Ps. 19:1–6, 33:6–9, Rom. 1:19–23.*

The Bible tells us that the world that God created was perfect in every way (*Gen. 1:31*). But Scripture also reveals that sin has altered the natural world (*Gen. 3:17, 18*). Prior to the Fall, only beautiful or useful plants were found upon the earth. God “never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan’s work, the result of degeneration.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 186. Nevertheless, there is still great beauty in the changing of the leaves in autumn, in a vivid sunset, and in the opening of a rosebud on a sunny morning.

Bible writers often refer to the phenomena of nature as a revelation of God’s majesty and greatness (*Psalms 8 and 104*). Consider the universe! On a clear night one can see with the unaided eye thousands of stars. However, our Milky Way galaxy has about two hundred billion stars—and that’s only one galaxy among several hundred billion galaxies that we now can see. Who knows how many more are beyond our telescopes!

Distances in the universe boggle the mind: Apart from the sun, the nearest star to our earth, Alpha Centauri, is 4.37 light-years away (one light-year is the distance light travels in one year—5.9 trillion miles). A spaceship traveling 100,000 miles per hour would require about 29,000 years to get there. In contrast, our Milky Way has a diameter of *100,000 light-years!* The largest galaxy known thus far is Markarian, with a diameter of 1.3 million light-years.

Similar awe-inspiring facts would come to light if we used an electron microscope to study the tens of thousands of genes each individual possesses. Our finite minds are simply unable to comprehend all the wonders of the created world.

Yet, nature alone isn’t enough to reveal the fullness of God’s character (*Rom. 1:25*). Many of the fundamental questions about God cannot be answered through a study of nature. We will find it hard to see God’s love reflected in how cats and killer whales play with their prey before killing them. And while we can see God’s power and majesty in creation, nature does not tell us always that God is “merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (*Exod. 34:6, NKJV*).

What aspects of nature truly talk to you about the love and power of God? At the same time, what things do you find disturbing; and why? What do your answers tell you about how limited nature is in revealing the fullness of God’s love and character?

Through Prophets

After the Fall, when God no longer spoke to humanity directly, He communicated with them through men and women whom the Bible calls seers or prophets (1 Sam. 9:9). What do the following texts tell us about these prophets? 2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:5; Hos. 4:1; Amos 7:14, 15; Jonah 1:1–3.

The word *prophet* (in Hebrew *nabi*) means “one called [by God]” or “one who has a vocation [from God].” The prophet is a person who proclaims divine messages. These may relate to the past, the present, or the future and may consist of exhortation, instruction, consolation, or prediction.

The English word *prophet* comes from the Greek *prophetes*, a combination of the preposition *pro*, “for” or “on behalf of,” with the verb *phemi*, “to speak.” Thus the idea being “to speak for.”

Read Exodus 4:10–17. How does this help us better understand the role of a prophet?

Here Moses objects to God’s call for him to go to Egypt and confront Pharaoh, claiming that he is “slow of speech and of a slow tongue” (*vs. 10*). Even after God reminded Moses that He had made man’s mouth and would enable him to speak before Pharaoh, Moses still objected. Then God told Moses that He would send Aaron to go with him. “He shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” (*vs. 16, NKJV*). As Moses was to be the spokesperson for God, so Aaron would be the spokesperson for Moses. Thus, a prophet speaks for someone. The prophet may speak to humankind on behalf of God or vice versa. The primary task of a biblical prophet was not to predict the future but to declare the divine will. Throughout the history of Israel, the prophet’s main task was to guide God’s people. Particularly during the time of the monarchy, when the kings often “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 13:2), the prophetic institution was the guardian of the theocracy. The prophets upheld the law of God and taught it to the people.

Notice the humility of Moses and the sense of his own weakness. Why is that a good attitude for anyone, not just a prophet, to have? What dangers do we face if we get a sense of our own self-sufficiency?

Through the Word

Basic to the claims of Christianity is that it is a revealed religion, the record of which we find in Scripture. During the first few millennia of humankind's existence, God revealed Himself to individuals through dreams, visions, or epiphanies (appearances). From the time of Moses (fifteenth century B.C.) and onward, many of these revelations were written down. As a result, we have today 66 books in the Bible, containing all the knowledge necessary for salvation.

What do the following texts tell us about the Bible itself?

Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17; 4:14

John 20:30, 31

2 Tim. 3:16

There are a number of important characteristics of the Bible that should hold our attention. (1) Its unity: The Bible at first sight appears to be merely a collection of ancient literature. However, considering that it was written by approximately forty authors over a period of nearly sixteen hundred years, its unity is amazing. The plan of salvation is revealed progressively from Genesis to Revelation. There is unity in its theme: The Messiah is promised throughout the Old Testament and declared in every New Testament book to have come in the person of Jesus Christ. And there is complete harmony of teaching: The doctrines of the Old and New Testament are the same. (2) The history it portrays: The Old Testament embodies the oldest history of any people in the world. William F. Albright, the greatest archaeologist of the twentieth century, wrote, "Hebrew national tradition excels all other in its clear picture of tribal and family origins. In Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria and Phoenicia, in Greece and Rome, we look in vain for anything comparable. There is nothing like it in the tradition of the Germanic peoples. Neither India nor China can produce anything similar."—*The Biblical Period From Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper, Torch Book, 1963), p. 27. (3) Its survival: The Bible, compared with other ancient writings, has more manuscript evidence than any other piece of classical literature—in spite of early attempts by Roman emperors to destroy it. For example, there are more than five thousand known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in existence. Homer's *Iliad* is second with only 643 manuscripts that have survived.

The reason for this phenomenon is the Holy Spirit, the real author of God's Word, who inspired all the human authors. He ensured that the biblical historians presented an accurate picture, and He watched over the history and preservation of the Bible.

Through Christ

The center and substance of God's revelation is the person of Christ, God in human flesh. When in God's plan the time was right, Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the law" (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*). He lived for about thirty-three years in Palestine, died on the cross, rose from the tomb, and ascended to His Father.

What do the following texts tell us about how God's revelation through Christ differed from the other revelations discussed this week? *John 1:14; 3:16; 14:8, 9; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:1, 2.*

The Bible far surpasses the revelation of God in nature; yet, no written record can equal the personal presence of the Son of God. The Bible is God's tool to accomplish His purpose in our lives. However, it has no lasting value if we regard it only as an interesting history book. Unless it leads us to the One it reveals, our study of the Bible will be of little benefit. The Bible was written, above all, to give to us the revelation of God presented to the world through the life and death of His Son, Jesus.

"That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (*John 1:9, NKJV*). **What contribution does this text make to our understanding of the revelation of God in Christ?**

The NIV English translation catches the idea best: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." This does not mean that every person receives this light, only that if a person is illuminated at all, it must be from Jesus (*Acts 4:12*). The true light shines on all humankind in the same sense that Jesus died for everyone, but not everyone will be saved. As John goes on to say, many will not accept this light (*John 1:10-12*).

How well do you know Jesus yourself? If someone were to say to you, "Tell me about Jesus, what He is like and what He can do for me," what would you say and why? Be prepared to share your answer in class on Sabbath.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “A True Knowledge of God,” pp. 409–426, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “God in Nature,” pp. 99–101, in *Education*.

“Christ came to teach human beings what God desires them to know. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the broad waters of the ocean, we see the handiwork of God. All created things testify to His power, His wisdom, His love. But not from the stars or the ocean or the cataract can we learn of the personality of God as it is revealed in Christ. God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to reveal, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God.”

“Christ revealed all of God that sinful human beings could bear without being destroyed. He is the divine Teacher, the Enlightener. Had God thought us in need of revelations other than those made through Christ and in His written word, He would have given them.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 265, 266.

“The Bible is a wonderful book. It is a history that opens up to us the past centuries. Without the Bible we should have been left to conjectures and fables in regard to the occurrences of past ages. It is a prophecy that unveils the future. It is the Word of God, unfolding to us the plan of salvation, pointing out the way by which we may escape eternal death and gain eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, October 1, 1892, par. 5.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, compare your answers to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from each other?
- ❷ If God does reveal Himself to us through nature, at least partially, what does this tell us about our need to protect the environment?
- ❸ What are some other ways God communicates with us? How can we be sure it really is God talking to us? What safeguards are there to protect us from deceptions?
- ❹ As a class, plan an outing in nature in which you can look at the revelation of God found there. What things clearly testify to His creative power and love? What things leave large questions still unanswered? Why is nature, however beautiful, still not sufficient to tell us all that we need to know?

The Stranger on the Bus

by BENJAMIN D. SCHOUN

One family in the country of Azerbaijan is convinced that the stranger they encountered on a bus was no ordinary passenger.

Gunel's family was mourning the loss of her grandfather. One day Gunel's mother boarded a bus to visit her grandfather's grave. As she sat crying quietly, a woman sat down beside her. She comforted Gunel's mother by telling her that God is good, that Jesus will come again, and that there is hope for the future. The woman told her about a church she could visit to learn more about these things. Gunel's mother thanked the woman for her kind words.

A month later, Gunel's mother saw the woman on the bus again. The woman again encouraged her and gave her the address of the church. Gunel's mother was so moved by the experiences that she asked Gunel to go with her to visit the church on Saturday morning to see what it was like. The two women stood near the church, hesitant to go inside, for they had never been to a Christian church. A church greeter standing saw the two women and crossed the street to invite them in. Inside they were welcomed warmly with hugs and kisses.

After the service, Gunel's mother asked members about the woman she had met on the bus. She described her in detail, but no one recognized the woman from the description. The pastor, who knew all of the Adventists in the city, listened to the description and finally concluded that no such person attended the church. "I think you've met an angel," he told Gunel and her mother.

Gunel's mother continued attending the Adventist church. She studied the Bible diligently and was baptized. Later, Gunel and her brother and sister also were baptized. Now they hold a small group meeting in their

home. Many of their friends abandoned them when they left their traditional religion, but they are firm in their faith. Gunel is studying to help Adventist World Radio produce radio programs in the Azeri language.

The family has never seen the woman on the bus again.

Your mission offerings support outreach to Azerbaijan and all of Central Asia through Adventist World Radio and personal evangelism. Thank you.



GUNEL (left). Benjamin D. Schoun is president of Adventist World Radio.

The Prophetic Gift



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 20:7, Exod. 15:20, Deut. 18:15, Matt. 11:11, John 6:14, Heb. 11:24–26.*

Memory Text: “Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; and I speak to him in a dream’ ” (*Numbers 12:6, NKJV*).

All through history, and even up to the present, we can find examples of people uttering predictions about the future. In most cases, these things never come true. When they do come true, a number of factors could be involved. Could it be sheer luck? Maybe the Lord was in it? Or perhaps the enemy of souls was working to deceive as many as he could?

Sure Satan uses false prophecies and prophets to mislead people. But we can take comfort in knowing God has His true prophets to make known His will.

In Scripture, individuals whom God endowed with the gift of prophecy were people who walked with God. Not that they were sinless, but they strove to live in harmony with God's revealed will. They had a personal relationship with God, and in that context the Lord was able to use them in a special way.

This week we'll take a look at how He used them.

The Week at a Glance: Were the Old and New Testament prophets saints or just ordinary men and women? What role did women prophets play in Israel? What were the differences between apostles and prophets in the New Testament?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.*

Patriarch and Prophet

In Genesis 20:7 we find the first mention of the word *prophet* (Heb. *nabi'*) in the Bible. What was the context in which it was used? What can we learn from the context about what a prophet was and how he or she functioned?

In the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the word *prophet* describes the recipient of divine revelation. During the time of the judges the word *seer* (in Hebrew *ro'eh*) appears to have come into use (1 Sam. 9:9, 11, 18, 19); then, later, the usage reverted to the older term again.

Prophets were not only spokespersons for God but on occasion were also intermediaries between God and the people. Abraham in Genesis 20 was the intermediary between God and Abimelech—he was to pray to God on behalf of Abimelech.

Abraham is a towering figure in the Old Testament. Three times in Scripture he is called God's friend (2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8, James 2:23). When he was 99 years old, God told him, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (Gen. 17:6, NKJV), a promise that, humanly speaking, seemed impossible. Because Abraham believed God in spite of what human reason told him, he became "the father of all those who believe" (Rom. 4:11, NKJV).

Considering that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son in response to God's command (Genesis 22), it seems incredible that Abraham should have lied to Abimelech concerning Sarah (Gen. 20:2). However, the situation is only too true to life. "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man" (Prov. 27:19, NIV). The occasional manifestation of the remaining old nature in the believer, the backsliding of God's children in all ages, and our own sad departures from the path of righteousness are sufficient to explain the deplorable conduct of the "father of all those who believe." How human Abraham was—moments of great faith, moments of deep lapses. What follower of Abraham's God can't relate?

What encouragement can you take for yourself from the fact that, despite Abraham's mistakes and lack of faith, God used him anyway, even mightily? How can we learn not to let our lapses turn us away from continuing to press on ahead in faith?

The First Named Prophet of Israel

The first person of the nation of Israel called a prophet was Moses. Concerning his death, the statement is made, “since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (*Deut. 34:10, NKJV*). Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel, but Moses was the first prophet in Israel’s history—an example for all the prophets who followed him.

What do the following texts tell us about Moses’ personality and character? *Exod. 4:10; 32:11–13, 32; Num. 12:3; 20:10–12; Heb. 11:24–26.* How do some of these traits help us understand how he fit into his role as a prophet?

Through his upbringing in Egypt, his strong faith in God, and his personal experience with the Almighty at the burning bush (*Exodus 3*), Moses was well equipped to lead the people of Israel. From Scripture, we know that because of Israel’s repeated failure to have faith in God, Moses constantly was interceding with God for the nation (*Exod. 32:11–13, Num. 14:13–19, 16:46–50*), while at the same time admonishing the Israelites to be faithful.

Following the golden-calf episode at Mount Sinai (*Exodus 32*), Moses spent 40 days with God on the mountain. When he returned from the mountain, his face shone (*Exod. 34:28–35*). The radiant face of Moses was but a reflection of divine glory (*2 Cor. 3:7*). Considering the fact that Moses had the unique privilege of seeing the glory of the Creator, it is small wonder that his face shone after such an experience, but this was not the only reason. The golden-calf rebellion was directed not only against God but also against Moses. The evidence of his communion with God was instrumental in restoring him to his rightful place of leadership. When the people realized where he had been, his role of leader and mediator that had been questioned was restored.

Anyone filled with the Spirit of God will in some way reflect the glorious character of God. Those who live close to God will have a telling effect on the lives of others, though they may not know it themselves.

Who is someone who seems to have a close relationship with the Lord? How is that closeness revealed in their lives? What character traits do they manifest? How can you learn to walk closer to the Lord? What things in your life are holding you back from that closer walk?

Prophets in Israel

Prior to his death Moses told the Israelites: “ ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear’ ” (*Deut. 18:15, NKJV*). The context indicates that this prophecy had an immediate application to the prophetic leadership of Israel in the years following the death of Moses (*Deuteronomy 18; 34:9, 10; Hos. 12:10*). The prophets from Joshua to Malachi were partial fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

Christ, however, fully could meet the conditions set forth in Moses’ prediction (*see John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40*). He came as the Second Moses, not to free His people from the power of earthly rulers but to free them from the power of sin.

The writings of the prophets of the Old Testament from Isaiah to Malachi are well-known. In addition, there were many other prophets in the history of Israel. Samuel lived during the period of the judges (*1 Sam. 3:20*). Gad and Nathan continued his work (*2 Sam. 12:1, 24:13*). After the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. we find the prophets Ahijah (*1 Kings 11:29*), Elijah (*1 Kings 18:1*), and Elisha (*2 Kings 2:9–14*) ministering to the people of God.

Prophets came from all walks of life: Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests, Isaiah and Zephaniah were of royal blood, Daniel was prime minister of Babylon, Samuel was a judge, Elisha was a farmer, and Amos a shepherd. Whatever their backgrounds, all of them were God’s messengers through whom God tried to keep Israel from falling into sin. Some prophets wrote books (*1 Chron. 29:29, 2 Chron. 9:29*), others did not (*1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 2:15*); some were counselors to kings (*Jer. 38:14*), others preached to the people (*Ezek. 3:17*). After four centuries of prophetic silence, John the Baptist appeared as the last of the prophets of the Old Covenant period (*Matt. 3:1*).

All through the sacred Scriptures we see the Lord speaking to His people through His servants, the prophets. The whole Bible itself is the work of these prophets, delivering the messages that God gave them. No matter how diverse their backgrounds, education, temperaments; no matter the flaws in their characters (with the radical exception of Jesus), these human beings, flesh and blood like us, were used by the Lord to proclaim His messages, messages that still are being proclaimed today in almost every country in the world and will continue until the close of time.

Which prophet can you relate to the most? Which prophet speaks the clearest to you, and why? What have you taken from that prophet’s life and message? How are you able to apply what you’ve learned from them to your life in a way that changes you for the better?

Prophetesses in Israel

Scripture mentions a number of prophetesses. Who were they? What do the following texts tell us about the role they played in the history of Israel? *Exod. 15:20, 21; Judg. 4:4–10; 2 Kings 22:11–20.*

Miriam, the sister of Moses, is called a prophetess. She is described as leading the women in the Song of Moses and Miriam (*compare Exod. 15:1 and 15:21, NIV*). Moses was the appointed leader of the people of Israel, but his dealings would have been primarily with the men, who were considered the heads of their families. Miriam's task was, perhaps, with the Israelite women. She must have been several years older than Moses (*Exod. 2:1–8*), and according to Josephus she married Hur, who together with Aaron had held up the arms of Moses in the battle with the Amalekites.—*The Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher), p. 98.

That she was an important person in Israel is seen in the fact that all Israel had to wait seven days until God took away her leprosy after the unfortunate incident with her brother Moses and his wife (*Num. 12:1–15*).

Deborah (*Judges 5*) must have been an extraordinary person. In a society dominated by men, she became a political and spiritual leader, something few women achieved in those days. Deeply spiritual, she ascribed all praise for the victory over the Canaanites to God (*vss. 3–5, 13*); she did not take any glory for herself or Barak.

As a “mother in Israel” (*vs. 7*), she watched over the people with maternal care, counseling and aiding them in procuring justice.

Read Judges 4:1–8. What does this tell us about how highly respected this woman was in Israel at that time?

Another prophetess in Israel was Huldah (*2 Kings 22:14–20, 2 Chron. 34:20–28*). When King Josiah asked her concerning God's will, she prophesied judgment and disaster upon Jerusalem and its people but not in Josiah's day; his eyes were not to see the evil because he humbled himself before the Lord. It is interesting that Huldah was consulted although both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were living at the same time.

New Testament Prophets

The Old Testament prophetic period came to an end about four hundred years prior to the birth of Christ. During the period between that end and the birth of Christ, many Jewish books were written, but none were accepted as inspired.

The life of Christ ushered in a new era, in which God again called individuals to function as His spokespersons. Who were some of these New Testament prophets, and what was the difference between them and the apostles? *Luke 1:67; John 1:6, 7; Acts 11:27, 28; 13:1; Rev. 1:1–3.*

In New Testament Greek, the word *apostle* was used of persons in the sense of ambassador, envoy, or delegate. Josephus, for example, used this word when speaking of the ambassadors whom the Jews sent as their representatives to Rome.—Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, p. 11.

In the New Testament, *apostle* carries the concepts of mission and representation. The term appears in the context of Jesus' ordaining and sending forth His disciples on an evangelistic mission (*Matt. 10:2–6*). The apostles were those with special authority from the risen Lord; they had seen for themselves His death and resurrection, something that all the previous prophets hadn't. Some of the apostles, such as John and Paul, were also prophets, but not all apostles were prophets. According to Ephesians 2:20, apostles and prophets together provided the foundational interpretation of what God had done in Christ for humanity.

Read Matthew 11:11. Why was John the Baptist greater than all the Old Testament prophets? What does Jesus mean when He says, "But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (*NKJV*)?

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet in the sense that it was his privilege to announce the coming of Christ, to whom all the prophets had borne witness (*see Luke 24:27; John 5:39, 46*). Like Abraham, all the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day the Messiah would come (*1 Pet. 1:10, 11*), but John saw Him in the flesh. Hence, in some sense, the prophetic office in the Old Testament reached its climax in John. At the same time, John the Baptist was only at the door of the kingdom of grace, looking in, while the least follower of Jesus can look back and rejoice in the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies through Christ.

Dwell on some of the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Jesus as Messiah. How can they help strengthen your faith?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155; “Moses,” pp. 241–256, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection. In concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, he betrayed a distrust of the divine care, a lack of that lofty faith and courage so often and nobly exemplified in his life.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 130.

“Moses had been instructed in regard to the final reward to be given to the humble and obedient servants of God, and worldly gain sank to its proper insignificance in comparison. The magnificent palace of Pharaoh and the monarch’s throne were held out as an inducement to Moses; but he knew that the sinful pleasures that make men forget God were in its lordly courts. He looked beyond the gorgeous palace, beyond a monarch’s crown, to the high honors that will be bestowed on the saints of the Most High in a kingdom untainted by sin. He saw by faith an imperishable crown that the King of heaven would place on the brow of the overcomer.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 81.

“The glory reflected in the countenance of Moses illustrates the blessings to be received by God’s commandment-keeping people through the mediation of Christ. It testifies that the closer our communion with God, and the clearer our knowledge of His requirements, the more fully shall we be conformed to the divine image, and the more readily do we become partakers of the divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 330.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss some of the character flaws found in various prophets and apostles in the Bible. What hope can you take from these for yourself? At the same time, what are the good characteristics seen in many of these people? What hope and promise can you find there, as well?
- ❷ What about some of the so-called “prophets” today, those making all sorts of predictions, many of which are reported in the local newspaper? How should we relate to them? What kind of people are they; what kind of predictions do they make? What can we learn from the contrast between them and the prophets seen in the Bible?
- ❸ In what ways can we, as a church, act in the role of the prophets? In what ways are we called to do just that? How can we better fulfill that role?

Keeping the Faith on Sabbath

by MUHINDO KABWE

Schools in French-speaking countries hold classes on Sabbaths. Getting schools to accommodate Adventists is difficult. It's no different where I live in Congo.

After secondary school, I enrolled in a government school to study business. I knew that Sabbath would be a problem, but I was one of four Adventists in the school, and we helped one another stay faithful to God.

Three other Adventist students, who were older than I, told me that exams were scheduled for Sabbath, and rescheduling them was difficult. We had no option but to pray for God's will and request permission to take our exams on another day. But several teachers refused.

We fasted and prayed, then we went to the school administration. The administration told us that all exams are scheduled for Saturday, no exceptions. But we weren't ready to give up. We prayed for two more days and returned to plead our case. To our surprise the director decided to write a letter to the teachers stating that no exams would be scheduled on Saturday. And he even allowed us to make up the exams we had missed because they were given on Sabbath. We were overjoyed!

Then just before the end of my second year at the school, a new director was elected. He changed the exam policy so exams fell on Saturdays again. We appealed, but we were denied. Final exams came, and several fell on Sabbath. We faced failure. Instead of letting us take our exams on another day, the director offered to let us withdraw from school.

I decided to stay at the school. I fasted and prayed about the exam schedule, but the teachers could do nothing without the director's permission. It was a difficult situation, but by trusting God and praying much, I was able to take enough exams to pass on to the third year.

By this time my Adventist friends had finished their studies. I was the only Adventist still at the school. I held evangelistic meetings to introduce teachers and students to Adventist beliefs, especially about the Sabbath. The meetings focused on Jesus and drew about eighty people, including two teachers. After that, it was easier to get Sabbaths off. Two students wanted to know more about Adventists and why we are so firm in our beliefs. I explained the Sabbath from before Creation right through to Revelation and invited them to church. Both of them have since been baptized.

I completed my studies at last, and the new Adventists who now attend this school are able to get Sabbaths off because of the groundwork we laid for them.

Your mission offerings brought the news of Jesus to my country and to me. Now we share that news with others. Thank you for your help.

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Spiritual Gifts *and* Prophecy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 2:1–11; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 1:6, 7; 13:9; Eph. 4:11; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10.*

Memory Text: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (*1 Corinthians 12:4–6, NKJV*).

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the existence of spiritual gifts. We're not alone either. Many charismatic and Pentecostal churches have claimed to see the manifestation of spiritual gifts among themselves. Some of these have included people in church, making noises like animals (lions, donkeys, dogs, even chickens!), as well as the utterances of prognostications and prophecies, such as the time it was prophesied that God blew up the space shuttle *Challenger* in order to teach America a lesson because there was a public school-teacher on board. (Apparently, someone believed that God doesn't like public schoolteachers.)

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, but we also believe that everything should be tested by the Word of God. This week, using the Word, we'll take a closer look at some of these gifts.

The Week at a Glance: What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? How are they manifested? What about the gift of tongues? What does the Bible teach about counterfeit gifts?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.*

Spiritual Gifts

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (*Eph. 4:11*).

Spiritual gifts (Greek *charismata*) are known as spiritual because they originate with the Holy Spirit, who apportions them to each according to His will (*1 Cor. 12:11*). In addition, the Holy Spirit is given to Christians so that they may understand and appreciate these gifts (*1 Cor. 2:10–13*).

Paul provides four lists of spiritual gifts (*Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28–30; Eph. 4:11, 12*). **What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Why were they given?**

According to the New Testament, spiritual gifts are given for the completion of the mission entrusted to the church. This includes the nurture and edification of the church, as well as the proclamation of the gospel to the world. The existence of these gifts should serve as a constant reminder of our utter dependence upon the Lord in order for us to do the work He has called us to do.

From the Gospels we know that the apostles possessed spiritual gifts even prior to Pentecost. In Luke 9:1, Jesus “gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases” (*NKJV*), and in Matthew 10:8 He charged them to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons” (*NKJV*). Then at Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (*Acts 2:1–4*). This seems to indicate that it is possible to receive more than one baptism of the Holy Spirit.

How have spiritual gifts been manifested in your own church? What has been the fruits of these gifts? What can you do to help nurture these gifts in your local congregation? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath for discussion.

Spiritual Gifts in the Church Today

These days we find two views among Christians in regard to the permanency of spiritual gifts. Some believe that *edifying gifts*, such as knowledge, wisdom, teaching, exhortation, faith, and mercy, are permanent gifts but that the *sign gifts*, such as prophecy, healing, tongues, and miracles, ceased with the death of the apostles. Defenders of this view claim: “The sign gifts had a unique purpose: to give the apostles credentials, that is, to let the people know that these men all spoke the truth of God. Once the Word of God was inscripturated, the sign gifts were no longer needed and they ceased.”—John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), p. 199. Other Christians believe that all the spiritual gifts will be present in the church until the Lord comes.

What do the following texts say about the permanence of spiritual gifts? *1 Cor. 1:6, 7; 13:9, 10; Eph. 4:11–13.*

According to Paul, the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts, will be in the church until Jesus comes, but does this mean that all the gifts will be present all the time?

The church father Irenaeus (A.D. 120–195) wrote about the presence and operation of spiritual gifts even in his day. Thus, according to Irenaeus, spiritual gifts were still in evidence at the end of the second century A.D.

During the next two centuries, however, the church suffered a serious spiritual and theological deterioration, and the spiritual gifts largely disappeared. During the time of the Reformation, beginning with John Wycliffe in England, God used the Reformers to restore neglected truth, and they certainly had the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and teaching. None of the main Reformers, though, claimed to have the prophetic gift. This particular gift, according to Revelation 12:17, was to be manifested again in the end-time remnant church.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:12 that spiritual gifts are given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (NKJV). What kind of equipping is Paul referring to, and in what way do you see this happening in the church today?

Counterfeit Gifts

What does the Bible teach about counterfeit gifts and their origin?

Matt. 7:22, 23; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Rev. 16:13, 14.

By the power of God, Moses and Aaron, standing before Pharaoh, turned a staff into a snake (*Exod. 7:10*), the river Nile into blood (*vs. 20*), and made frogs come out of the Nile to cover the land (*Exod. 8:6*); but by the power of Satan the Egyptian magicians could do the same. However, from the third plague onward the Egyptian magicians were unable to counterfeit God's miracles.

This teaches us two things: (1) Satan can produce miracles that look like the genuine article, and (2) Satan can work only within the limits set by God.

Counterfeit gifts are not just a perversion of the true gifts of God but can be similar manifestations from a different source—Satan.

A study of the texts listed above should reveal to us a few other important points about the existence of counterfeit spiritual gifts. First, as we can see, these false manifestations can be done by those professing the name of Jesus; indeed, as Jesus said, many will claim to do some miracles in His name. And yet, according to Jesus, they are not of Him.

Second, there will be miracles, miraculous signs and wonders, powerful enough to deceive many. In other words, we need to be very careful not to be swept away by the existence of the supernatural. Even though something is done in the name of Jesus and appears to be supernatural doesn't mean it's a genuine gift of the Spirit.

Finally, in the end, Satan is working to do what he can to deceive as many people as possible. Thus, whatever manifestations that do appear, we always must test them by the Bible. If they are not in harmony with the Word of God, we have our answer, regardless of how impressive the manifestations appear to be. The Bible must be our ultimate standard.

With these thoughts in mind, what are we to make of these ministries that claim to manifest all sorts of prophecies, healing, and wonders week after week? Without wanting to judge anyone, why should we be leery? What kind of questions should we ask, and why?

The Gift of Prophecy

The French physician Michel de Notredame (1503–1566), known as Nostradamus, supposedly predicted the great fire of London of 1666 with the words: “The blood of the just will be demanded of London, burnt by the fire in the year 66.” (<http://www.armageddonline.org/nostradamus.php> [Accessed January 29, 2007.]) The Irish seer Cheiro warned journalist W. T. Stead in 1894 and again in 1911 that he would drown in April 1912. Stead died when the *Titanic* sank in April 1912. In 1956 Jean Dixon published a vision in which she said she saw that a Democrat would be elected president of the United States in 1960, only to be assassinated in office. John Kennedy, a Democrat elected in 1960, was assassinated in 1963 while in office.

How can we account for these exact predictions by people who had little in common with the biblical prophets? *Isa. 8:19, Acts 16:16, 2 Cor. 11:14.*

Ever since Satan used the snake in the Garden of Eden to deceive Eve, he has used a variety of human agents to deceive men and women, including the giving of predictions that have come true. Which means, then, that the fulfillment of a prediction is not a guarantee that it is a true prophecy from God.

Nevertheless, prophets and prophecies play an important part in the plan of salvation. This point is made clear in the Bible.

Prophecy, or the prophetic office, is listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It appears first on the list in Romans 12:6 and second, after apostleship, in both 1 Corinthians 12:28–30 and Ephesians 4:11. What makes the prophetic gift so important that it is the only gift that is mentioned in all four lists of spiritual gifts or ministries?

The purpose of the prophetic gift is to provide a means of communication between the Creator and His creatures. Prophetic messages in Scripture have unveiled the future (*Daniel 2*), counseled and reprovved kings (*Isa. 7:3, 4*), warned of coming judgments (*Jer. 1:14–16*), called for revival (*Joel 2:12, 13*), and encouraged and comforted God’s people (*Isa. 40:1, 2*).

Prophets were men and women who spoke the word of God to their generations. The emphasis in the prophetic gift was not on predicting the future (although this was one of the marks of a true prophet) but on setting forth what God wanted His people to hear.

Spiritual Gifts and 1 Corinthians 14

The church in Corinth had many problems: division, immorality, court cases among believers, marriage problems, and the abuse of the Lord's Supper. Another problem concerned spiritual gifts, particularly the use of the gift of tongues (*1 Cor. 14:1–5*).

What was the gift of tongues in the book of Acts? Going solely by what these verses in Acts 2:1–11 say, what kind of languages were being spoken?

What were the tongues spoken in the church in Corinth? *1 Cor. 14:1–25*.

When we apply the principle *Scripture interprets Scripture*, which means obscure passages are explained by plain ones, we have to conclude that the tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 are of the same nature as the tongues in the book of Acts, especially because the same Greek word *glossa* is used for tongues in both books. In other words, the evidence is that tongues in both places were the supernatural ability to speak in foreign languages. Some understand the gift to apply also to instances in which a person speaking in one language is understood in another language or languages by those listening. In either case, this undoubtedly rules out the common and popular notion of tongues today, in which people babble in unknown languages.

Also, God works through man's intelligence. Would the Lord, who warned us against babbling on as the heathen do (*Matt. 6:7, NEB*), inspire unknown noises? In 1 Corinthians 14:22, tongues are a sign to unbelievers as at Pentecost, and how could someone uttering noises that no one understands be a sign to unbelievers? Tongues, as Acts 2 shows, are real languages, given for the purpose of building up the church. Furthermore, spiritual gifts were given for the common good (*1 Cor. 12:7*), ruling out using a gift purely for personal gratification, as the so-called modern gifts of tongues are used today.

In spite of all the manifestations of ecstatic speech today, nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages. Modern tongues-speaking, called glossolalia, is not the same as the biblical gift of languages.

Think about the words you speak on a daily basis. How much is meaningful, purposeful talk, and how much is nonsensical banter?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ’s service. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

“The man who makes the working of miracles the test of his faith will find that Satan can, through a species of deceptions, perform wonders that will appear to be genuine miracles.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 52.

“Some of these persons have exercises which they call gifts and say that the Lord has placed them in the church. They have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver. Fanaticism, false excitement, false talking in tongues, and noisy exercises have been considered gifts which God has placed in the church. Some have been deceived here.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 412.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s study. What kind of gifts are manifested in your local church? How can you take better advantage of what you have? Most important, how are these gifts being used?
- 2 Pentecostal Christians believe that speaking in tongues is the evidence that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Scripture, what is the true evidence of a Spirit-filled life? See *Gal. 5:22, 23*.
- 3 What are some of the supernatural manifestations common in your culture and your part of the world? What seems to be the fruit of these manifestations? What are ways that you, as a church, cannot only protect other church members from being deceived but also help others outside the church be aware of the potential dangers inherent in these manifestations?
- 4 Discuss what Ellen G. White says in the first quote listed above. What does she mean about the gifts being “purified and ennobled”? What is she talking about? Can people have gifts that are used for wrong purposes? Explain.

Not Afraid

by ARASH*

I am a refugee living in a Middle Eastern country. I was imprisoned when I refused to work on a project involving chemical warfare. There I met someone who helped me escape and flee the country.

I applied to the United Nations for refugee status and hid in the city while the paperwork was processed. There I met a Christian couple who really impressed me. Although I had grown up in a religious country, I did not practice religion. But I could see the difference their God made in their lives. I accepted their invitation to worship with them in their house church though I did not intend to become a Christian. I did not understand a lot of what the man said, but his life and behavior made me want to know about God. I began to read the Bible they gave me.

When the government learned that I was a refugee and knew military secrets about my homeland, they pressed me to talk. I refused. They threatened me, beat me, and put a gun to my head; but still I refused to talk. My Christian friends prayed for my safety, and one day the interrogator told me to leave the city if I wanted to live. He actually helped me leave the city. I made my way to the capital city.

When I arrived, I missed my Christian friends. I started worshiping in a Protestant church, but I noticed that they did not have the same love in their lives. I remembered how my friends who had introduced me to Jesus *lived* like Jesus. I kept searching.

Then one day I met a Christian woman and saw God's love in her life. She invited me to worship with a small group, and I accepted. I watched the people and realized that these Christians lived what they preached, as my friends had.

The pastor asked me to translate *The Desire of Ages*, and the book changed my life. I realized that the Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. Reading just the New Testament is like reading only the last half of a book and trying to understand it. I realized that I had found the true church that followed God's Word.

The church members are not perfect, but they seek to follow God's Word. I want to be like Jesus, to serve people, teach people, and help people, no matter who or where they are. I will go where God leads me, even back to my homeland. I am not afraid.

Please pray for me; pray for the people in my homeland and the people in my adopted country. They need to meet Jesus, for they are His children; they just don't know it yet.

*ARASH (not his real name) awaits God's marching orders from his adopted home in the Middle East.

The Gift of Prophecy and God’s Remnant Church



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Revelation 12; 14:1–12.*

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*).

The remnant theme first appears with Noah and his family (*Gen. 7:23*) and resurfaces in the history of Israel. The apostle Paul refers to a remnant (*Rom. 11:5*) that was then constituted of Jews who had accepted Jesus and who later became the nucleus of the Christian church. In the book of Revelation a remnant appears in the churches of Thyatira (*Rev. 2:24*) and Sardis (*Rev. 3:4*). It appears also in chapter 12—the subject of our study this week.

God’s faithful remnant was not always a visible remnant; that is, from the early days up to the last days, God has His faithful ones in different faiths, which is why the call is made: “ ‘Come out of her [Babylon], my people’ ” (*Rev. 18:4*). Nevertheless, there is a specific depiction of God’s remnant in the last days.

The Week at a Glance: What do the symbols in Revelation 12 represent? What events in history can be seen as a fulfillment of this chapter? What is the meaning of the phrases “the testimony of Jesus” and “the spirit of prophecy”?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.*

Good Versus Evil: Act 1

Read Revelation 12:1–6. What’s happening here?

Revelation 12 introduces the great controversy between Christ and Satan in symbolic form and describes its progress from the time of Christ to the time of the end. In verse 1 John sees a dazzling sight—a pregnant woman, “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet” (*NKJV*), and wearing a crown of 12 stars. He calls the appearance a “great sign” (*NKJV*), indicating that the woman is more than a mere woman. She is a symbol for the church or for God’s faithful people (*see Isa. 54:5, 6; 2 Cor. 11:2*). The woman’s dazzling appearance links her to Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness (*Mal. 4:2, Rev. 1:16*).

According to Revelation 12:6, the woman flees from the dragon into the wilderness, where she is taken care of by God for 1,260 days. What is this talking about, and what do the 1,260 days symbolize? *Dan. 7:25, Rev. 12:14, 13:5*.

Until the nineteenth century, most students of prophecy used the year-day principle, and so they understood the 1,260 days to refer to the time of persecution of the church during the Middle Ages, a period of 1,260 years.

And with good reason, too. First, the whole section is filled with symbols that aren’t taken literally, so why should the time element be taken literally, as well? Second, the various time phrases used in Daniel and Revelation—“time and times and half a time” (*Dan. 7:25, 12:7, Rev. 12:14, NKJV*), “forty-two months” (*Rev. 11:2, 13:5, NKJV*), and “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (*Rev. 11:3, 12:6, NKJV*)—are not the natural way of expressing a literal three and one-half years (*see Luke 4:25, James 5:17*). For these reasons and others, Seventh-day Adventists (in contrast to most other Christians today) interpret the 1,260 days as 1,260 years and see it as a reference to the period of papal supremacy from the sixth to the end of the eighteenth century.

What are some of the symbols prevalent in your own society and culture? What purpose do they serve? What is the advantage (and disadvantage) of them? How do you use symbols in your everyday life? How does the way symbols are used around you help you better understand the way the Bible uses symbols?

Good Versus Evil: Act 2

Revelation 12:7–12 is an interlude in the story; it focuses on the fall of Satan in heaven and his being cast down to the earth. Hence, we are given a glimpse into the origins of the great controversy as it began in another part of the universe. The back-and-forth between heaven and earth should tell us how closely events in one impact events in the other. Truly, we are in the midst of a cosmic battle!

Revelation 12:13–17 picks up the story from verse 6 and describes in symbolic terms the persecution of the Christian church, first by the Roman Empire and later by the apostate Roman Church. What do the symbols here represent?

In these verses, a flood of water is sent against God’s people, a symbol of persecuting armies (*Jer. 46:7, 8; 47:2; Dan. 9:26*). In contrast, in Revelation 12:16 the earth is described as helping the persecuted church. In 1620, the first pilgrims, fleeing the religious persecution in Europe, arrived on the American continent. On this newly discovered continent, they found a safe haven where the persecuting armies of the European powers could not reach them. Thus, symbolically, the new continent America swallowed up the persecuting armies.

In Revelation 12:17, we are now in the time after the 1,260-day period (which ended at the close of the eighteenth century). Satan, seeing that he was unable to wipe out God’s faithful people, is angry with a particular group called “the rest of her offspring” (*NKJV*) or “the remnant of her seed” (*KJV*).

Read carefully Revelation 12:17. What is the first identifying mark of this special remnant? How do the following texts help us understand what “the commandments of God” mean? *Matt. 24:20, Rom. 3:31, Eph. 6:1, James 2:9–11, 1 John 3:4.*

How much simpler could God have made it? This end-time remnant will be distinguished, first of all, by the fact that it keeps the commandments of God, all of them, which, of course, includes the seventh-day Sabbath.

How firm are you in your own mind regarding God’s call that we keep His commandments? How can you be sure that the Lord commands us to keep them? How do you respond to arguments against keeping the commandments, especially the Sabbath?

The Testimony of Jesus

The second identifying mark of the remnant church is “the testimony of Jesus” (*marturia Iesou*). This expression occurs six times in the book of Revelation (*Rev. 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4, NIV*).

What is the meaning of the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” in the following texts? *Rev. 1:2, 9; 19:10; 20:4, NIV*.

Two grammatically possible explanations concerning its meaning have been put forward. The first view interprets “the testimony of Jesus” as man’s witness for Christ (*NEB, RSV*). The second view understands “the testimony of Jesus” as the self-revelation of Jesus—His own testimony (*NIV, NKJV*).

A study of the word *testimony* in John’s writings indicates that each time it appears in the same grammatical construction as in Revelation, it always refers to Jesus’ own testimony (*John 1:19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31*). In contrast, the idea of witnessing about somebody in John’s writings consistently is expressed by a different grammatical construction.

In the book of Revelation, therefore, the expression “testimony of Jesus” also should be understood as Jesus’ testimony about Himself and not the remnant’s testimony about Him. This is borne out by a study of the texts in Revelation themselves. Revelation 1:2 says that John bore witness to “the word of God” and to “the testimony of Jesus.” Thus, “the word of God” refers to what God says and is parallel to “the testimony of Jesus.” Thus, “the word of God” is simply what Jesus says; it is the testimony that Jesus gives about Himself.

The same is true in Revelation 1:9. John introduces himself, states his credentials, and says that he is on the island of Patmos because of “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus.” The parallelism between the “word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” is again clearly discernible. Thus, according to the principle of interpreting scripture with scripture, every text in the book of Revelation where the phrase “testimony of Jesus” appears always refers to Jesus’ own testimony.

How has Jesus revealed Himself to you? Would you like to know Him better? What is the only way you can?

The Spirit of Prophecy

Revelation 19:10 says, “ ‘ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ ” In all of Scripture the phrase “spirit of prophecy” appears only in this text. What does it mean? *1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28; Eph. 4:11.*

The closest parallel to the phrase “spirit of prophecy” in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. There Paul refers to the Holy Spirit, who gives the gift of prophecy among other gifts (*charismata*), and the person who receives this gift is called a prophet.

Now, just as in 1 Corinthians 12:28, those who have the gift of prophecy (verse 10 of the same chapter) are called prophets—in Revelation 22:8, 9 those who have the spirit of prophecy (*Rev. 19:10*) are also called prophets.

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ ” (*Rev. 19:10, NKJV*).

“I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God’ ” (*Rev. 22:8, 9, NKJV*).

The situation in both passages is the same. John falls at the feet of the angel to worship. The words of the angel’s response are almost identical, yet the difference is significant. In Revelation 19:10, the brethren are identified by the phrase “who hold to [have] the testimony of Jesus” (*NIV*). In Revelation 22:9, the brethren are called simply “prophets.”

If the Protestant principle of interpreting scripture by scripture means anything, this comparison must lead to the conclusion that “the spirit of prophecy” in Revelation 19:10 is the prophetic gift, which is given not to church members in general but only to those who have been called by God to be prophets.

This is not purely an Adventist interpretation. Lutheran scholar Hermann Strathmann says about “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.

The Remnant Church

From our study thus far, we understand that in Revelation 12:17 “the rest of her offspring” (*NKJV*) refers to God’s visible remnant church that can be recognized by two specific characteristics: (1) they “keep the commandments of God” as God has given them on Mount Sinai, including the Sabbath commandment, and (2) they “have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is the Spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift.

The Sabbath-keeping Adventist movement, from even before its organization in 1863, always has claimed these identifying signs for itself. As Adventists we proclaim the Ten Commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath; and we believe that as a church we have the testimony of Jesus; that is, that God manifested Himself in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just one church among many. It is a church prophetically foreseen. God has called this church into existence for a very specific purpose—to proclaim the three angels’ messages to a dying world.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What is happening there that helps us understand some of the characteristics of God’s end-time people? What elements come into play, and in what ways are we justified in seeing ourselves and our calling there?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that we are members of God’s remnant church. However, this identification with the remnant church does not accord us an exclusive status with God. We can be part of this corporate remnant and still be lost. Salvation is not guaranteed through membership in any church. We are saved as individuals, not as a church. It’s a great privilege and responsibility, being part of this church, because we have a sacred calling; but being a member of this church no more guarantees salvation than being a Hebrew in ancient Israel did (*Jer. 8:20*).

What is your only *guarantee* of salvation, and how can you have it as your own?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” pp. 7–16, in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1; “Historical Prologue,” pp. vii–xxxii, in *Early Writings*.

“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), p. 247.

A study of the idea of the remnant in the Old Testament reveals a few interesting characteristics. Perhaps the most important one is that all through the Bible, the remnant were those who were living with more light than others. Noah had the light about the coming flood. Abraham had the light about the true God. The nation of Israel was worshipping the Lord in the sanctuary, while their pagan neighbors were sacrificing children on their altars or bowing down to statues of cats and bulls and other animals. In short, the idea of the remnant had more to do with a revelation of truth and of God’s character than with the holiness of those who had that knowledge. The point? As expressed in Thursday’s lesson, being part of the remnant means only that you have great light, and with that light comes important responsibilities. It does not mean you automatically have salvation; nor does it mean that those who aren’t part of the remnant are lost. It’s an unfortunate fact of sacred history that many of those who were part of God’s remnant not only failed to live up to the light they were given but oftentimes rebelled against it.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What important message is found in Luke 12:48 for those who believe that they are part of the remnant church?
- ❷ The claim that we are the “remnant church” can sound very arrogant and exclusive. And yet, why does it make sense that God would have a special people with a special message in the last days? Or does it? Discuss.
- ❸ If being in the remnant does not guarantee salvation, then what’s the advantage of being part of it?

I Love to Preach!

by ARNEL BLANC

I didn't grow up in the Adventist Church. But God led me to this church in a wonderful way.

A Protestant pastor in town knew a little about Adventists, but he refused to acknowledge their teachings. Then he had a dream in which God told him to preach the fourth commandment or risk being lost forever. The pastor preached the Sabbath truth in his church, and I accepted the message.

Several months later I was baptized and started preaching. Preaching, for me, was my gift to God, and He blessed my efforts. An Adventist leader in the area urged me to study theology at the Adventist university. So I enrolled.

During school breaks, I returned home and preached and gave Bible studies. During one of my home visits, I studied with a young woman who was baptized. We were friends, but neither of us had any idea that it would go beyond that. Then God spoke to her and showed her that we were to be married. She resisted, but God persisted, and in time we married.

We now work in an exciting area. Our town is a political hot spot in Haiti. Sometimes things get so tense that people fear to leave their homes. But even during these tense times, people come to our evangelistic meetings. We preach and pray, and hundreds come. After one meeting 72 people were baptized! This difficult area has yielded more baptisms in a given year than anywhere else in Haiti.

I love evangelism! I want to preach and evangelize so that everyone in our area will know that Jesus is coming again.

I have eight congregations; the largest has 400 members. But there are still places where we have no Adventist believers. My wife and I have a burden to reach those areas, to bring God's light to the dark corners of Haiti.

In Haiti we have one Seventh-day Adventist for every 28 people! Yet there are places where not one Adventist lives. Haitian people love the gospel, and many Adventist laypeople want to reach out and preach to those who do not know that Jesus is coming again. But the political and economic situations here make it difficult to reach these people. We want Jesus to come soon, and we ask that you pray for the people of Haiti and continue to help us reach them for Christ through your mission offerings. Then we will be ready for Jesus to come. Hallelujah!

PASTOR ARNEL and JUQUELANDE BLANC share their faith in southern Haiti.

The Inspiration of the Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 36:1–4; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:1–4, 20, 21.*

Memory Text: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Christians have long debated the question, *What does it mean when we say that the Bible is inspired?* For Seventh-day Adventists there is, in addition, the question of the inspiration of Ellen G. White. In 1906, she wrote a letter to an Adventist physician in which she refuted the idea that every word she wrote was as inspired as the Ten Commandments: “My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have made any such claims, neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause ever made such claims.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 24. This week we will study some of the issues surrounding the question of inspiration.

The Week at a Glance: What is the difference between inspiration and revelation? What is the difference between verbal and thought inspiration? Can prophets get help from others when they write? What are some examples of prophets quoting sources outside the Bible?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.*

Revelation-Inspiration

Study 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20, 21. What do these texts tell us about the divine activity in the production of the books of the Bible?

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul says that the Bible is *theopneustos* (God-breathed). In the Latin translation of the Bible the text reads, *scriptura divinitus inspirata*, from which we get the English word *inspired*. Paul is saying that the Bible had its origin in an activity of the Holy Spirit. Through visions and dreams, the Holy Spirit revealed truth to the prophets (revelation), and then He ensured, through His guidance in the writing process (inspiration), that what the prophet wrote was in harmony with what God had revealed.

Second Peter 1:21 tells us that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (*NIV*). As a ship is carried along by the wind, the biblical writers were moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus, revelation-inspiration refers to that process whereby the Holy Spirit revealed to the prophets what God wanted them to know and then guided them in the proclamation of that message. Some spoke the word; others wrote it down. The written form became the inspired (God-breathed) Scripture.

Although in the New Testament the apostles did not claim inspiration as frequently as did the Old Testament writers, it is obvious that they regarded their messages as given by divine authority. Paul, for example, wrote, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches” (*1 Cor. 2:13, NKJV*), and “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (*1 Thess. 2:13, NKJV*).

Yet, the Bible is also a human book. At face value it bears all the hallmarks of human authorship. Authors in recording their own experiences refer to themselves with personal pronouns (*Neh. 1:1–11, Dan. 10:1–9, Gal. 1:12–20*), the customs and traditions of the authors’ times are seen in the writings, and some of the psalms and proverbs reflect the literature and culture of the surrounding nations. In short, though inspired by the Lord, the Bible also reflects the humanness of its penmen.

Of all the Bible authors, which one’s humanity comes through most clearly to you? In what ways can you sympathize and relate to that author purely on a human level? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Verbal or Thought Inspiration

What do the following texts tell us about inspiration in Scripture?

Isa. 2:1, 2; Ezek. 36:16; 1 Cor. 7:10–12, 39, 40; 1 Thess. 2:13.

Two important theories of inspiration are:

Verbal Inspiration. The focus in verbal inspiration is on the words of the Bible rather than on the author. All the words are said to be inspired by God, who chooses from the vocabulary and educational background of the writer. According to this view, only the original writings of the biblical writers are inspired, not the copies, which might have errors. This view must be distinguished from the dictation theory of inspiration, in which every word in Scripture is dictated by the Holy Spirit without reference to the vocabulary and educational background of the writer.

Thought Inspiration. The focus here is on the writers, not on the words. Primarily the thoughts, not so much the words of the Bible, are inspired (*1 Cor. 7:10–12, 39, 40; 1 Thess. 2:13*), except when the words of God or an angel are quoted (*Jer. 29:30, 31; Rev. 19:9*) or when God speaks directly through a prophet (*Num. 22:35; 23:1–12, 26*). The writer receives the vision, dream, or thought and puts it down in writing in his own words (*Isa. 2:1, 2; Rev. 4:1*); the Holy Spirit ensures that the words used convey God’s truth correctly. The Bible, therefore, is declared to be the infallible revelation of God’s will.

On the basis of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, Adventists hold to thought inspiration. “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. As the last sentence indicates, the words of the prophet become the Word of God. In the same vein David wrote, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (*2 Sam. 23:2, NKJV*). This indicates that inspiration not only imparted thoughts but ensured that the Written Word accurately conveyed God’s thoughts.

Why is it important to have a correct understanding of how inspiration works? What are the dangers of holding wrong views?

Visions and Physical Phenomena

What do the following texts tell us about how heavenly visions affected some biblical prophets? *Dan. 10:7–9, 17, 18; Acts 9:1–5; Rev. 1:17.*

To stand in the presence of a heavenly being can be a powerful experience. Daniel, Saul (Paul), and John all fell to the ground when they received a heavenly vision. Daniel wrote, “No strength remained in me” (*NKJV*), and John said, “I fell at his feet as dead.”

Ellen White describes her experience with these words: “As inquiries are frequently made as to my state in vision, and after I come out, I would say that when the Lord sees fit to give a vision, I am taken into the presence of Jesus and angels, and am entirely lost to earthly things. I can see no farther than the angel directs me.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 36.

In 1868 her husband, James White, gave the following description of her physical appearance while in vision: “1. She is utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her; 2. She does not breathe. . . . [This] has been repeatedly proved by pressing upon the chest, and by closing the mouth and nostrils; 3. Immediately on entering vision, her muscles become rigid, and joints fixed, so far as any external force can influence them; . . . 4. On coming out of vision, whether in the daytime or a well-lighted room at night, all is total darkness. Her power to distinguish even the most brilliant objects, held within a few inches of the eyes, returns but gradually.”—*Life Incidents* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press, 1868), p. 272.

Many observed her during her visions. Joseph Bates, for example, wrote, “I have seen her in vision a number of times, and also in Topsham, Maine; and those who were present during some of those exciting scenes know well with what interest and intensity I listened to every word, and watched every move to detect deception or mesmeric influence. And I thank God for the opportunity I have had with others to witness these things. I can now confidently speak for myself. I believe the work is of God.”—*Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 89.

However impressive these physical manifestations might be, why must we not base our belief in her gift on them? What ultimately must be the final test of Ellen White’s prophetic calling?

Inspiration and Literary Assistants

Prophets were not God's pens but His penmen. What they saw or heard in visions and dreams they wrote down according to the best of their ability. From Scripture we know that some of the biblical authors had secretaries to help them write down the messages of God.

Read Jeremiah 36:1–4, Romans 16:22, 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:15–18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17. What do they tell us about the use of literary assistants?

Thus, both Old Testament and New Testament writers used literary assistants or scribes to write down the messages God had given them.

From New Testament times we know that at times scribes used a wax tablet to take down the gist of what the author wanted to say before they wrote a good copy of the letter. Prior to sending it, the author would go over the letter to make sure it conveyed to the reader what he wanted to say.

Ellen White also used literary helpers. Here's why:

1. With formal schooling ending at the age of nine, she recognized her own limitations as a writer. "I am not a grammarian. I will try, if the Lord will help me, at forty-five years old to become a scholar in the science. God will help me. I believe He will."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 90. Thus, some of her assistants functioned as her copy editors.

2. The great demand for her writings made it necessary for her to have literary help. "After my husband's death, faithful helpers joined me, who labored untiringly in the work of copying the testimonies and preparing articles for publication."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 50.

3. Because most of her books were not written as books but were put together from previously written material, she needed special assistance in their production. Marian Davis was Ellen White's book-maker. "She takes my articles which are published in the papers, and pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if when she finds it, she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it. The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 91.

How does this understanding help us better grasp how inspiration works? What wrong views might you have held on the topic of inspiration?

Inspiration and the Book of Luke

What does Luke say about how his Gospel came into existence, and what does this tell us about inspiration? *Luke 1:1–4*.

In writing his Gospel, Luke doesn't seem to have relied on dreams or visions. Neither was he an eyewitness to the events he describes. Instead, he worked from what he had learned from others, all, no doubt, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, which ensured that what he wrote down was in harmony with the historical events and God's will.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul not only received information orally from others (*1 Cor. 1:10, 11*) but in a few places quoted from the writings of pagan authors. For example, in Acts 17:28 he quotes from the Cilician poet Aratus (ca. 315–240 B.C.) who wrote, "It is with Zeus that every one of us in every way has to do, *for we are also his offspring*." See also 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Titus 1:12, where Paul quoted other sources, all in order to teach inspired truth.

Ellen White from time to time used other books as sources for her own works. In the introduction to *The Great Controversy* she wrote: "The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. . . . In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works."—Pages xi and xii.

Prophets using other sources? Many people find that disturbing. What does this tell us, though, about how inspiration can work? If you think about it, what's wrong with prophets under the guidance of the Holy Spirit going to other sources as a way of helping express truth?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers,” pp. 15–23, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God. You know how the Lord has manifested Himself through the Spirit of prophecy. Past, present, and future have passed before me. I have been shown faces that I had never seen, and years afterward I knew them when I saw them. I have been aroused from my sleep with a vivid sense of subjects previously presented to my mind and I have written, at midnight, letters that have gone across the continent, and arriving at a crisis, have saved great disaster to the cause of God. This has been my work for many years. A power has impelled me to reprove and rebuke wrongs that I had not thought of. Is this work of the last thirty-six years from above or from beneath? . . .

“. . . 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—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, read your answers to Sunday’s study and compare notes on which prophets members were able to relate to. Which prophets were picked, and why?
- ② Some people have worked on the assumption that some parts of the Bible are more *inspired* than others. Though it’s true that some parts might be more relevant to us today than others, that’s radically different from the idea that some parts are more inspired than others. What’s the great danger of taking such a position? As you think about it, ask yourself the following questions: Who decides which parts are more *inspired* than others? What criteria does one use to make that determination? Where does the authority to make these decisions come from? What happens when people disagree about which parts are more inspired than others?
- ③ Think about the life and teachings of Ellen White during her long years of ministry. Despite the large amount of misinformation out there about her and her ministry, and despite the frequency with which her writings have been abused, what great evidence and reasons do we have for believing in the reality of her prophetic gift?

Saved by a Watermelon

by HOMER TRECARTIN

The 12 members of a small church in Dubuque, Iowa, planned evangelistic meetings. They asked Elder Dave Weigley to lead out. For three months before the meetings were scheduled to begin, the members prayed for Elder Weigley, the meetings, and the people who were searching for something better in their lives.

As time for the meetings drew near, Pastor Weigley remembered a girl he had studied with a year earlier in Florida. She wanted to clean up her life and start over, but she didn't know how to break free from her current situation. She had thought about moving back to Iowa to be near her family. She hoped that a move would give her the new start she needed.

Weigley called the local elder in Florida and asked about the girl. The elder remembered her first name, Sharon, but he couldn't remember her full name. He knew that she moved north, but he did not know where she had gone. Weigley urged the local elder to pray for this girl. If she was in the Dubuque area, he wanted to invite her to the meetings.

On the first day of the meetings, a young woman entered the rented hall, walked up to a greeter, and said, "Hi, I came to see Pastor Weigley." The greeter took her to the local pastor.

"I am Pastor Wagly," the man said, smiling.

The young woman looked at him and said slowly, "No, you're not the man I'm looking for."

Laughing, the man said, "Oh, you mean the other Pastor Weigley. Our names sound the same, but they are spelled differently. Let me take you to Pastor Dave Weigley." The pastor escorted the young woman to a back room where Elder Dave Weigley was preparing his message. When the two walked through the door, Pastor Weigley's mouth dropped open. "Sharon!" he exclaimed, "How did you come to be here?"

Sharon laughed. "I moved here shortly after I met you last year. It's been good for me to start over again. Then yesterday my mom invited me over for watermelon. She covered the table with newspapers to catch the juice, and we sat down to eat and talk. As I was eating, my eye fell on an advertisement for some prophecy meetings. Then I saw your name, and I decided right then I had to come."

Sharon attended the meetings faithfully and was baptized.

God doesn't always send a bright light and loud voice to catch someone's attention, as He did with Saul. Sometimes He uses simple things—such as a juice-soaked newspaper ad on the kitchen table.

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Testing *the* Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 8:20; Jer. 18:6–10; Jonah 3; 4; Matt. 7:20; Gal. 2:11–14.*

Memory Text: “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good” (*1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NKJV*).

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 and 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), p. 247. (*See Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14–21; Heb. 1:1–3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10*).

Although Mrs. White never called herself a prophetess, the church has recognized her as such. In 1905 she wrote: “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.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 36. This week we’ll look a little closer at her prophetic gift.

The Week at a Glance: How did God communicate to His prophets? What are the biblical tests of a true prophet? What is *conditional prophecy*? Are prophets infallible? Why do we believe that Ellen G. White’s visions and prophetic dreams were from God?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.

Dreams and Visions

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (*Joel 2:28*).

How did God communicate with individuals whom He called to prophetic office? *Gen. 15:1, Num. 12:6–8, Dan. 7:1.*

In Scripture we learn that God primarily used dreams and visions to communicate with His messengers. Prophetic dreams played an important role in the time of the patriarchs (*Genesis 20–41*), in the ministry of Daniel (*Daniel 1–7*), and in the Nativity narratives (*Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 19, 22*). Visions frequently are mentioned in the writings of the prophets (*Isa. 1:1, Ezek. 1:1, Dan. 8:1, Obad. 1:1, Nah. 1:1*) and in the book of Acts (*9:10, 10:3, 11:5, 16:9, 18:9*).

During her 70-year ministry (1844–1915) Ellen White received an estimated two thousand visions and prophetic dreams. “At times I am carried far ahead into the future and shown what is to take place. Then again I am shown things as they have occurred in the past. After I come out of vision I do not at once remember all that I have seen, and the matter is not so clear before me until I write, then the scene rises before me as was presented in vision, and I can write with freedom.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 36.

Often her visions were given while she was in the presence of others, who observed certain physical phenomena—she did not breathe, she had supernatural strength (no one could move her limbs), and she was unconscious of her surroundings. Adventists and non-Adventists have testified to the supernatural character of her visions. At the General Conference session in 1893, J. N. Loughborough said: “I have seen Sister White in vision about fifty times. . . . She has been examined while in vision by skillful physicians, and we have testimonials from them which declare that the phenomena of her visions are beyond their comprehension.”—*General Conference Daily Bulletin*, January 29, 1893.

What’s been your experience with Ellen White’s writings? In what ways have they impacted your spiritual life? Put aside any preconceived notions that you might have about her published works, and just read some of them. What can they tell you about the author?

Agreement With the Bible

What is one of the most important tests of a true prophet? *Isa. 8:20*. Why should this be so important?

Law (Heb. *torah*) is the common biblical term for the inspired writings of Moses (*Deut. 4:44, 31:9*); the *testimony* refers to the witness of the prophets (*2 Chron. 23:11, John 3:32*). In other words, what a prophet says must harmonize with what God has revealed already. Though later prophets may reveal additional insights regarding the plan of salvation, they will not contradict what God has said before. God's unchangeableness (*Mal. 3:6*) is at stake in His revelations to humanity.

An example of this test of a true prophet is given in Jeremiah 28. Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would serve the king of Babylon 70 years (*Jer. 25:11*). A few years into the 70 years, Hananiah the son of Azur claimed otherwise: "In the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, 'Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: "I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house . . . with all the captives of Judah who went to Babylon," says the Lord' " (*Jer. 28:1-4, NKJV*). Because this was not in harmony with what God had told Jeremiah previously, God gave another message to Jeremiah: "Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord: ' . . . This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord.' So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month" (*Jer. 28:15-17, NKJV*).

Every true prophet has made the writings of previous prophets the benchmark for his or her own ministry. The same is true for Ellen White. Anyone familiar with her books can testify that she used Scripture profusely. She immersed herself in the Bible and constantly referred to the biblical text, and what she wrote is in agreement with the Bible. Although she was not a theologian and did not write an exegetical commentary on the Bible, her message is in harmony with the message of Scripture.

Why must harmony with the Bible be our final test of everything moral, spiritual, and theological? Why must we have a final authority, especially in spiritual and theological matters?

Fulfilled Prophecy

Read Jeremiah 18:6–10. What important principle regarding the fulfillment of predictions is found here?

The proof of a true prophet lies, in part, in the fulfillment of his or her predictions (*see 1 Sam. 9:6, Jer. 28:9, Lam. 3:37*). At the same time, though, not all predictions come to pass if the people involved have a change of heart. It's what is known as conditional prophecy, and it's important for us to understand.

Study Jonah 3 and 4. What must be taken into consideration in applying the test of fulfilled prophecy?

The fulfillment of most prophecies (exceptions are the end-time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation) is dependent on the actions and attitudes of the people concerned. Jonah made the clear-cut statement, given to him from God, that in 40 days Nineveh would be “overturned” (*Jonah 3:4, NIV*). Yet, it never happened. Was Jonah a false prophet? Of course not. Instead, the prophecy was conditional—its fulfillment depended upon how the people responded to the message God had given them.

This principle may explain why a particular prophecy made by Ellen White did not come to pass. In 1856, Mrs. White declared: “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, 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.

All who were alive way back then are now, of course, dead. How do we explain this? The answer is conditional prophecy. We must remember that she was told God's kingdom could have come in her lifetime. In 1896 she wrote: “If those who claimed to have a living experience in the things of God had done their appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would have been warned ere this, and the Lord Jesus would have come in power and great glory.”—*Review and Herald*, Oct. 6, 1896.

In the last volume of the *Testimonies for the Church*, published in 1909, she wrote, “If every soldier of Christ had done his duty, if every watchman on the walls of Zion had given the trumpet a certain sound, the world might ere this have heard the message of warning. But the work is years behind. While men have slept, Satan has stolen a march upon us.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 29. If we apply the principle of conditionality to her 1856 vision, the problem disappears. See also Friday's lesson.

Confessing Jesus, the God-man

What was one of the issues John faced in his time; and what does he say is another mark of a true prophet? *1 John 4:1, 2.*

One of the problems in John's day was the question over the human nature of Christ. Was He really flesh and blood, or did He, as some taught, only appear to have a body? To understand and confess that Jesus was truly human became so important to John that he declared it to be a test of a true prophet.

This test is broader than simply believing that Jesus became a human being. It includes everything the Bible teaches about Jesus. He took on humanity for a purpose. He became man in order to live a sinless life and then die for sinful humanity. But more than that, He became man so that after His resurrection and ascension He could minister for us in the heavenly sanctuary. Our High Priest is one who is able to understand us and can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was tempted in every way human beings are tempted (*Heb. 4:14, 15*).

Every true prophet will point people to Jesus, the God-man, who is the Savior and example of all humanity. Ellen G. White's life was devoted to doing just that. She wrote, "Jesus Christ is everything to us,—the first, the last, the best in everything. Jesus Christ, His Spirit, His character, colors everything; it is the warp and woof, the very texture of our entire being. . . . Christ is a living Saviour. Continuing to look unto Jesus, we reflect His image to all around us."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 161.

Why is it so important that true prophets exalt Jesus Christ? *Acts 4:12.*

The ecumenical spirit and postmodern thinking have permeated almost all Christian churches today, in the process eroding the uniqueness of Christianity and especially the importance of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. In contrast, Ellen White wrote: "The only hope for fallen man is to look to Jesus and receive Him as the only Saviour."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 367. "Only Bible truth and Bible religion will stand the test of the judgment."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 127. "Let us lift up Jesus, the Saviour of men. Talk of his love, tell of his power."—*Signs of the Times*, March 18, 1889. See also Friday's study.

The Orchard Test

What did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount about how true prophets can be identified? *Matt. 7:20.*

The context of this statement is Jesus' warning to the disciples to beware of false prophets (*Matt. 7:15*). Jesus applied the principle—that a good tree bears good fruit—to the life of the prophets. What kind of fruit do they bring forth? What influence do their teachings have on others?

The orchard test takes time. Ellen White lived and worked for 70 years under the critical eyes of millions of people, largely skeptical, doubtful, suspicious, and in some cases openly hostile. Errors, faults, and inconsistencies were and still are exposed with great satisfaction by her opponents. God alone is flawless; His messengers never are.

What do these texts tell us about the character flaws of some people who had the prophetic gift? *Gen. 12:12, 13; Jon. 1:1–3; Acts 15:36–39; Gal. 2:11–14.*

Being a prophet, of course, does not make a person infallible or sinless. Mrs. White made mistakes and had character weaknesses, as did other people, but the trend of her life was such that at her death a local non-Adventist newspaper reported, “The life of Mrs. White is an example worthy of emulation by all. . . . She was a humble, devout disciple of Christ and ever went about doing good. . . . Her death marks the calling of another noted leader of religious thought and one whose almost ninety years were full to overflowing with good deeds, kind words and earnest prayers for all mankind.”—“Called to Her Reward,” *St. Helena Star* (Calif.), July 23, 1915.

Some people have difficulties accepting her prophetic ministry because they stumble over certain details of her writings but fail to see the bigger picture: the way God used her to raise up this church, the many wonderful insights she received from God, and the contributions she has made to this church.

What are the great advantages of having the prophetic gift manifested among us? What are potential challenges it brings?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Bible Prophets Wrote for Our Time,” pp. 338, 339, in *Selected Messages*, book 3; Arthur L. White, “Make It Known to Others,” pp. 60–72, in *The Early Years: 1827–1862*.

“As the subject was presented before me, the period of Christ’s ministration seemed almost accomplished. Am I accused of falsehood because time has continued longer than my testimony seemed to indicate? How is it with the testimonies of Christ and His disciples? Were they deceived?”

“Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not’ (1 Cor. 7:29, 30).

“Again, in his epistle to the Romans, he says: ‘The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light’ (Rom. 13:12). . . .

“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*, book 1, p. 67.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why have some Seventh-day Adventists lost confidence in Ellen White’s prophetic ministry? Could part of the problem be with how her work has been presented? Discuss.
- ❷ Take some of your favorite excerpts from her writings and read them again. What was it about them that you liked so much? What is the message she is giving in these sections? Bring your selections to class and share them.
- ❸ Some people use the writings of Ellen White as the final authority on every point. Why is that wrong? What great dangers does such an attitude present to our church? What are some ways this wonderful gift has been, and still is, abused in the church? What have been some of the results?

Excited About God

by NONHLANHLA KHUMALO

I attend an Adventist secondary school in Zimbabwe. I love sharing my faith with others, but it hasn't always been that way. At first it was hard for me to tell others what God was doing in my life. But as I prayed and studied the Bible, I became more certain of my faith and wanted to share it with others. I started with my twin brother. He's a Christian, but he didn't attend a Pathfinder camp I went to near Victoria Falls. At that camp I learned to make prayer and Bible study part of each day. And I heard stories of miracles God was doing in people's lives. I went home excited about God.

I started telling my brother what God meant to me. The more I shared, the more eager I was for him to experience the joy of sharing his faith.

When I started studying in this school, I joined the Christian Service Band. We went to a village about an hour away to hold Sabbath services. We rode in an open truck pulled by a tractor to reach the village. The dirt road spit dust onto us, but we didn't mind. We passed the time singing songs and talking about God. When we arrived, we brushed the dust off our clothes and entered the church. The church members knew we were coming, but other villagers watched curiously as we walked into the church.

I was a little nervous my first time there, and I asked God to help me teach the younger children their Bible lesson. We had no felts or no picture rolls, but the children listened carefully as we told them the Bible story. Then I read the story of the boy Samuel from my Bible. Few of the children prayed at home, so we taught them to pray and urged them to pray every day at home. I was surprised at how little these children knew about God and His love for them.

After Sabbath School and church, we divided up into teams and visited every home. We talked and prayed with the people and invited them to the evangelistic meetings that would start soon in the village.

It was late afternoon when we returned to the school, and I was hungry and dusty. But I was happy that we could make a difference in the lives of these villagers.

I want to continue visiting that village and watch people respond to God. In the meantime, I am praying that the people will see the light of God's love in our lives and in the lives of believers living in the village.

I invite you to join us in sharing God's love with these villagers through your mission offerings and your prayers.

Nonhlanhla Khumalo is a student living in Zimbabwe.

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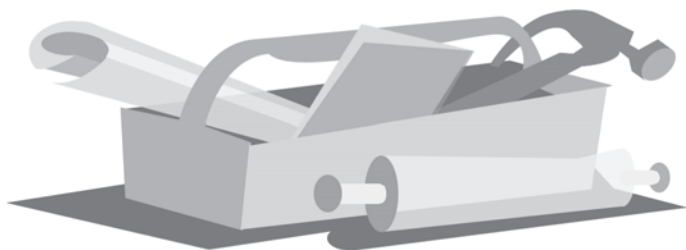
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The Work of the Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 22:1–14, Isaiah 53, Matt. 3:7–10, 1 Cor. 5:1–5.*

Memory Text: “By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved” (*Hosea 12:13, NKJV*).

As the Bible amply shows, the life of a prophet was never easy. Ellen White's was no exception, and though she didn't face the same kind of trials that many of the Bible prophets did (jail, stoning, etc.), she had plenty of trials just the same. In the early years, besides struggling with illness and various assaults of Satan, she and James were very poor and had to depend on others for living quarters and furniture. Two of their four children died young, and James wore himself out with traveling, preaching, writing, and guiding the fledgling church until 1881, when he died at the age of 60. For the last 34 years Ellen White continued to labor in an environment that was at times hardly friendly. This week we'll look at some of her work and how it paralleled the biblical prophets.

The Week at a Glance: Does the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament differ from the proclamation of salvation in the Old Testament? Why were the early Seventh-day Adventists, who came out of the Millerite movement, opposed to church organization? What were some ways prophets delivered God's messages to His people?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.*

Preaching the Gospel

Where do we find the gospel of salvation in the Old Testament? *Gen. 22:1–14, Lev. 4:27–31, Isaiah 53.*

The plan of salvation was explained to Adam and Eve as soon as they had sinned; it graphically was illustrated in Abraham’s test on Mount Moriah and in the sanctuary service instituted by Moses. The sanctuary rituals were designed for an agricultural people who lived closely with their animals. The sacrificed animals symbolized Christ’s death on the cross, and the priest’s services illustrated His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Does the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament differ from the proclamation of salvation in the Old Testament? *John 1:29, Rom. 3:21–26.*

While the Old Testament people looked forward by faith to the Messiah, the New Testament looks back to the accomplished salvation through Jesus Christ. In both testaments the focus is on what God has done to remedy humanity’s fall into sin.

It’s the same with the writings of Ellen White, where we find more than eight thousand references to the gospel and about six thousand references specifically to Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. The Christ of the Cross and the cross of Christ were the focus of her message. She admonished Seventh-day Adventists to uplift Jesus Christ before the world. “Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 156. “Christ as manifested to the patriarchs, as symbolized in the sacrificial service, as portrayed in the law, and as revealed by the prophets, is the riches of the Old Testament. Christ in His life, His death, and His resurrection, Christ as He is manifested by the Holy Spirit, is the treasure of the New Testament.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 126. “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. . . . This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.

How much time do you spend thinking about Jesus, focusing on His life and what He’s done for you? How much stronger would your faith be if you were to dwell more on Christ and His sacrifice in your behalf?

Guiding God's People

Jesus appointed Paul and the Twelve Apostles, some of whom also had the prophetic gift, to lead and guide the early Christian church. What are some of the specific areas in which Paul and the apostles provided counsel and guidance for the church? Acts 6:1–7, 1 Cor. 5:1–5, 7:10–16, Titus 1:5, 1 John 4:1–3.

The leaders of the early church faced many problems. Questions of immorality, apostasy, church organization, and a host of other matters occupied the time and attention of the early church. Prophets and apostles guided and directed the people of God in accordance with the Lord's revealed will.

The early days of our church had numerous struggles, as well. During the first 20 years of our church, there was no church organization, so there also was no paid ministry; preachers worked at other jobs to make a living. Anyone could preach if he felt called, and, as a result, heresies prospered. Furthermore, church buildings and the Review and Herald press were in the names of individuals, which created the potential for many problems. For years James White urged organization but with little success.

Then in 1854, Mrs. White published an article concerning church order. "The Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected. Formality should be shunned; but, in so doing, order should not be neglected. There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles. . . .

"The danger of those traveling whom God has not called was shown me. . . . I saw that this door at which the enemy comes in to perplex and trouble the flock can be shut. I inquired of the angel how it could be closed. He said, 'The church must flee to God's Word and become established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected.'" —Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 97, 100.

It took another six years until a church name was adopted in Michigan. In 1861 the Michigan Conference was established, and in 1863 the General Conference was established.

People sometimes talk about not wanting to be part of an organized church. What are the advantages of being part of an organized structure? How can you better serve the organized church and help remedy aspects of it that you believe could use improvement?

Reproving Sin

What were some of the evils the prophets spoke against, and what parallels can you see to our own days? *1 Kings 18:21, Isa. 1:10–14, Amos 5:12, Mal. 3:8–10, Matt. 3:7–10.*

Prophets were commissioned by God to resist social injustice, root out idolatry, protest against immorality, and condemn formalistic worship and hypocrisy. At times it seemed to them that their voices were the only dissenting cries (*1 Kings 19:14*); yet, their protests were God's protests and were delivered regardless of the consequences.

How did Ellen White deal with messages of reproof for individuals?

Like the prophets of old, Ellen White had to reprove sins known only to the individual and God. It was a work she did not enjoy. "I bore my testimony and related things which had been shown me in the past history of some present, warning them of their dangers and reproofing their wrong course of action. I stated that I had been placed in most disagreeable positions. When families and individuals were brought before me in vision, it was frequently the case that what was shown me in relation to them was of a private nature, reproofing secret sins. I have labored with some for months in regard to wrongs of which others knew nothing. As my brethren see these persons sad, and hear them express doubts in regard to their acceptance with God, also feelings of despondency, they have cast censure upon me, as though I were to blame for their being in trial. . . . It has been the disagreeable work assigned me to reprove private sins. Were I, in order to prevent suspicions and jealousy, to give a full explanation of my course, and make public that which should be kept private, I should sin against God and wrong the individuals. I have to keep private reproofs of private wrongs to myself, locked in my own breast. Let others judge as they may, I will never betray the confidence reposed in me by the erring and repentant, or reveal to others that which should only be brought before the ones that are guilty."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 584, 585.

If the Lord gave Ellen White a message for you, what do you think it would say, and why? Most important, how would you respond?

Communicating God's Will

What were some of the ways the prophets delivered God's messages to His people? *Num. 9:1–5; Jer. 37:16, 17; Ezek. 4:1–6; Col. 4:16.*

Prophets were charged by God to deliver to the people the messages that they received from Him. At times they proclaimed God's words in a discourse before a company of people. At other times they delivered their testimonies in private interviews. Frequently, prophets were told to write out the messages received so that not only the people living at that time but also all future generations would hear what God had to say.

When Ellen Harmon (Ellen G. White's maiden name) received her second vision in December 1844, she was told that she must go and relate to others what had been revealed to her. For several days, she prayed that this burden might be taken from her, but the words of the angel sounded continually in her ears, " 'Make known to others what I have revealed to you.' "—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 69.

During 1845, therefore, Ellen Harmon, accompanied by her sister Sarah or other friends, visited former Millerites in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, who had experienced the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844, and shared her early visions with them. James White, a former Millerite preacher, became convinced that her visions were genuine and began to travel with her and her companions, and in 1846 James and Ellen were married.

Early in her ministry, Ellen White also was told to write out the things revealed to her. Messages to individuals frequently were communicated to their recipients through letters (often called testimonies). Thousands of such communications were mailed from her home over the years. Of these she wrote, "In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 67. When Ellen White died, she left behind about one hundred thousand pages of published and unpublished material.

What do the writings of Ellen G. White mean to you personally? Discuss your answer in class.

Predicting the Future

What were some of the Bible prophecies that have been fulfilled?

Isa. 44:28, Jer. 25:11, Dan. 9:24–27.

About one hundred fifty years prior to the time of Cyrus, Isaiah prophesied that a king by the name of Cyrus would bring back the Jews from Babylon and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Ezra 1:1–4.

Jeremiah predicted the length of the Babylonian captivity, and Daniel predicted the time of the appearance of the Messiah almost six hundred years before Jesus was born. Both prophecies provide evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures.

And with Ellen White, too, we can find many of her predictions fulfilled. For instance, on January 12, 1861, three months before the outbreak of the American Civil War, Mrs. White received a vision in the Parkville, Michigan, church in which she was shown battlefields covered with the dead and dying. As she related what she had seen, she told her listeners, “There are men in this house who will lose sons in that war.”—*Pacific Union Recorder*, March 7, 1912 (Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years*, vol. 1, p. 463). No less than five families in the room that day lost sons in the Civil War.

In 1885, Ellen White predicted: “When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism . . . then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 451.

At the time she wrote those words, Protestants and Catholics were all but at war with each other. In 1885 the ecumenical movement was still a long way in the future, but times have changed greatly. Just one example: On March 29, 1994, 39 leading evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics signed a document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”—a stunning fulfillment of prophetic trends.

Further Study: Read Arthur L. White, “The Messenger of the Lord at Work,” pp. 73–89, in *The Early Years: 1827–1862*; Ellen G. White, “God’s Law Immutable,” pp. 433–450, in *The Great Controversy*.

“When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 445.

For more than one hundred fifty years, Adventists have been warning the world about the coming *reconciliation* between Catholics and Protestants—even when all political and religious indications made such a reconciliation seem impossible. Today, of course, the impossible has become all but inevitable, as time and again Catholics and various Protestants are coming together on a whole host of issues. Most interesting, and again in line with what Ellen White wrote more than a century ago, the Protestants are the ones who are making the most incredible compromises, all in order to bring about this unity with Rome. Though there’s still much to unfold, these events are leading to an amazing fulfillment of prophecy and are another powerful vindication of Ellen White’s prophetic gift.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ To whatever degree possible, do a little research about the religious climate in America in the 1800s, particularly regarding Catholic-Protestant relations. Bring what you learn to class on Sabbath, and then discuss the predictions she made during that time regarding Protestants and Rome.
- ❷ Talk about the hostility that some people have toward organized religion. What are their complaints? Are those complaints often valid? If so, what can we do, as an organized church, to solve as much as possible some of those things that cause this hostility?
- ❸ What are ways that Ellen G. White’s writings can be abused? What kind of principles can we follow in order to protect ourselves from misusing this wonderful gift?

Wendy's Prayers

Wendy lives in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. As the eldest child in her family, it was her job to care for her younger sisters. Even before she started school, she carried the youngest child on her back.

Wendy often heard the children next door singing songs about Jesus. One day she asked the children to teach her the songs. Her neighbors did, and they invited her to go to Sabbath School with them. Wendy wasn't sure whether her mother would let her go to Sabbath School, so on Sabbath morning she hid until her neighbors walked by her house. Then she followed them to church.

Wendy's mother learned that Wendy was going to church and gave her permission to go—as long as she took her sisters with her. So every Sabbath morning Wendy washed and dressed her little sisters and took them to church. They had to climb a steep hill, and Wendy could not carry her baby sister all the way. So her other sisters helped her. Wendy loved church and often invited her mother to come with her. Sometimes her mother came, but just to visit.

When Wendy was eight, a huge argument broke out at home. Her father had taken a second wife, which angered her mother so much that she and her children returned to her home village. Wendy missed her father, but she was delighted to find an Adventist church near their new home. Every Sabbath morning Wendy hustled her little sisters to church.

Wendy's aunt lived in the village. She was also an Adventist, and she often invited Mother to attend church. When Mother decided to give her heart to God, Wendy was thrilled.

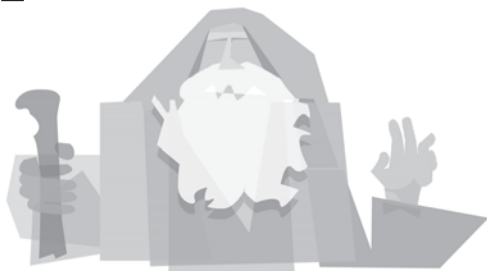
Wendy's aunt was moving to an isolated village high in the mountains and wanted Wendy to go with her. Wendy loved living with her aunt. She loved family worship when the family prayed for her family. Wendy's prayer was always that her mother would stay faithful to Jesus and her father would give his heart to God.

When Wendy returned home, she was thrilled to learn that her father was attending church with Mother! He was even bringing his other wife and their children! It was quite a sight: one man, two wives, and 11 children sitting together in church. In time Father's second wife gave her heart to Jesus and became an Adventist, but Father could not join the church because he had two wives. Still he faithfully attended church. Then one day Father said that he had sent his second wife home to her village and had asked the pastor to baptize him.

"God has answered so many of my prayers," Wendy says. "He helped me find Jesus, then led my whole family to God." Your mission offerings help reach people at home and in the uttermost parts of the earth for the Savior. Thank you for having a part in telling the world about God's love.

WENDY lives in Goroka, Papua New Guinea.

The Authority of the Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 4:10–16, 1 Sam. 12:1–14, 2 Kings 22:10–13, Jer. 36:22–31, Mark 1:21–27, Acts 16:25–34.*

Memory Text: “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NKJV).

All through the Bible, a theme recurs: God talks to people through His prophets, and the people either accept or reject what's being said. Of course, by rejecting the words of the prophets, they're not rejecting the prophets, they're rejecting the One who sent them.

It's a very serious thing, then, to claim to speak in the name of God. If you claim to speak for Him, and are, then you are a mouthpiece for the Creator of the universe, no small responsibility. People have been delegated authority to speak for the boss of the company, or the president, or prime minister—but to speak for the Lord? That's heavy. Unfortunately, much of biblical history is a story of God speaking through His prophets and of people rejecting what was said. How careful we need to be so as not to make the same mistake today.

The Week at a Glance: Why was Moses so reluctant to become God's prophet? What authority did the prophets have in Israel, even those who never wrote a book of the Bible? Is there a difference between the authority of the canonical and extracanonical prophet?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.*

The Prophet as God’s Mouthpiece

Read Exodus 4:10–16, the dialogue between God and Moses. What happened here, and what can we learn from this exchange about how prophets are called and how they operate?

According to the arrangement God put in place, Moses was literally “to become God” to Aaron (*see Exod. 4:16*), and Aaron was to become Moses’ mouthpiece or “prophet” (*Exod. 7:1*). This defines accurately the intimate relationship between God and all His prophets; they were His mouthpieces, His spokespersons. Furthermore, as in the case of Moses and Aaron—God “taught” all His prophets what they were to do in regard to being a mouthpiece. Moses was, however, somewhat of a reluctant prophet.

According to her own testimony, Ellen White was reluctant when first called by the Lord, as well. “In my second vision, about a week after the first, the Lord gave me a view of the trials through which I must pass, and told me that I must go and relate to others what He had revealed to me. It was shown me that my labors would meet with great opposition, and that my heart would be rent with anguish; but that the grace of God would be sufficient to sustain me through all. After I came out of this vision I was exceedingly troubled, for it pointed out my duty to go out among the people and present the truth. My health was so poor that I was in constant bodily suffering, and to all appearance had but a short time to live. I was only seventeen years of age, small and frail, unused to society, and naturally so timid and retiring that it was painful for me to meet strangers.

“For several days, and far into the night, I prayed that this burden might be removed from me, and laid upon some one more capable of bearing it. But the light of duty did not change, and the words of the angel sounded continually in my ears, ‘Make known to others what I have revealed to you.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 69.

In what way are we called, regardless of our position in the church, to “make known to others what I have revealed to you”? What has God revealed to you? How can you better share that with others?

The Authority of the Incarnate Word

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (*Matt. 28:18*).

In Matthew 21:23, while Jesus was teaching, the chief priests and the elders asked Him, “‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’” (*NKJV*). Jesus responded to the question in good rabbinic fashion, and that was with a counter question: “‘The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?’” (*vs. 25, NKJV; see vss. 24–27*). In rabbinic debates the counter question was meant to point the way to the answer of the original question. When they refused to answer, He refused to give a clear answer in return, because if they refused to acknowledge God’s power in John’s ministry, there was little point in discussing His own—which was also from God.

What do the following texts tell us about Jesus’ authority? *Matt. 7:28, 29; Mark 1:21–27; Luke 8:22–25; 9:1; John 5:25–27.*

Ultimate authority belongs to Christ as our Creator (*John 1:3*) and Redeemer (*Rom. 3:24*). He is at once the final court of appeal and the absolute norm by which each life is to be judged. Divine authority finds its focus and finality in Him. The Gospels, therefore, declare that His teaching caused astonishment because He taught as One having authority (*Matt. 7:29*).

Throughout the Gospels we find Christ’s more-than-human authority. He forgave sins (*Mark 2:10*), drove out devils (*Mark 3:15*), and claimed the right to judge men’s hearts (*John 2:24, 25*) and give eternal life (*John 10:28*). Yet, the authority that Christ exercised within His earthly commission was granted to Him by the Father (*John 17:2*). Whatever He did, including all the miracles He performed, always was done in dependence on and in cooperation with His Father (*John 5:19*). At the same time, He had absolute authority (*Matt. 28:18*). Therefore, He could delegate authority to His disciples (*Mark 6:7*) and will in the end judge all people (*John 5:27*).

We live in a day and age when it’s fashionable to question authority. How are we to relate to authority? What factors should determine our answer?

The Authority of the Written Word

Compare these two responses to God’s Written Word: 2 Kings 22:10–13; Jeremiah 36:22–31. Though we might not act quite as dramatically as the folk did here, how do these incidents represent the basic responses to God’s Written Word?

One can reject God’s Word today without openly burning it, as did this king. Instead, it can be ridiculed, ignored, denounced as out-of-date, or interpreted in such a way that it is deprived of any historical value or authority.

Yet, no one can disregard the authority of Scripture with impunity. Sooner or later, he or she will suffer the consequences of that rejection. In the Written Word, the character and will of God, the meaning of human existence, and the purposes of God for humanity in all ages are stated in propositional form that all can understand. To reject it may not have immediate consequences, but it will certainly result in eternal loss.

“He [Christ] pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 39, 40.

All through her life Mrs. White exalted the Word of God. In regard to the controversy between science and Scripture she wrote: “There should be a settled belief in the divine authority of God’s Holy Word. The Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science. Human knowledge is an unreliable guide.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 114.

In 1909 she attended her last General Conference session. At the close of her last sermon she picked up the Bible, opened it, and held it out on extended hands.

“‘Brethren and Sisters,’ ” she said, “ ‘I commend unto you this Book.’ ”—Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years*, p. 197.

Examine your own attitude toward the Scriptures. Ask yourself the following questions: How much time do I spend in them? How seriously do I try to follow the teachings? When I read, am I trying to find fault with it? What’s my attitude toward passages that I find disturbing or that express ideas that I don’t like? What can I learn from my answers?

The Authority of the Spoken Word

In ancient times, when writing material was scarce and most people could not read, the spoken word was very important. What effect did the spoken Word of God have on people in the following passages? *Jer. 38:1–4, John 3:1–10, 6:51–66, Acts 16:25–34.*

The Word of God, whether spoken or written, has a double function. It is like a two-edged sword, says Paul, “piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (*Heb. 4:12, NKJV*). In the context of what Paul is saying, the word refers to the messages that were preached both to ancient Israel and to Christians (*Heb. 4:2*).

Like a surgeon’s scalpel, the spoken Word of God can penetrate to heal and restore, or it can furnish the evidence of a deadly disease that will result in eternal condemnation. Unless the word preached meets with faith on the part of the hearers, it cannot benefit them.

While not everyone in the church was willing to accept Ellen G. White’s prophetic authority, the church by and large listened to her counsel and benefited by it. The following story reveals the good things the church experienced by following Ellen G. White’s advice. For example, church organization between 1863 (when the General Conference was organized) and 1901 remained basically unchanged. As work in different lines developed, various associations (Medical Missionary, Sabbath School, Religious Liberty, Tract Society, etc.) were formed to foster these ministries. Because these associations were all autonomous organizations represented by independent corporations but not integral parts of the General Conference organization, they were sometimes in competition with one another. On the other hand, all major decisions in regard to the worldwide work were made by a few people at the General Conference in Battle Creek.

The day before the General Conference session in 1901, Ellen G. White met with the church leaders and urged them to make drastic changes in the running of the church. Accordingly, when the conference opened, the usual order of business was set aside, and a large committee (about 75 people) was appointed to work on the reorganization of the church structure. The result was that the General Conference committee was enlarged considerably, the various associations became departments of the General Conference, and union conferences were organized to enable leaders in the field to make decisions on the spot without having to wait for answers from Battle Creek.

The reorganization of the church structure, directed by divine counsel, was accepted unanimously and has stood the test of time. With some modifications and enlargements, it is still the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

The Authority of Noncanonical Prophets

Apart from the canonical prophets, such as Isaiah and Amos, we find in Scripture a number of prophets whose books did not become part of the canon. What do the following texts tell us about these prophets and their writings? *1 Chron. 29:29, 2 Chron. 9:29, 12:15.*

Among its sources, the books of Chronicles refer to different prophetic books written by extracanonical prophets: Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, and Iddo.

What authority did extracanonical prophets have? *2 Sam. 12:1–4, 1 Kings 11:29–39, 14:2–18, Luke 7:28.*

In David's time, Scripture was the books of Moses, but not for one moment did David question the authority of Nathan. He knew that Nathan was a prophet and that his word was authoritative, even though Nathan had no books that ever made it into the Bible.

Let us suppose that archaeologists found a book written by Nathan today. Would it be added to the Bible? No; it would remain an inspired book outside of the canon. And if a theological statement were found in the book, it would remain an inspired and authoritative statement outside of the canon.

The canon is simply the collection of books that under God's guidance was put together as the rule of life and faith for God's people and by which everything else has to be measured. It contains everything a person needs to know to be saved. However, not everything the prophets wrote under inspiration is in the Bible. We know, for example, that Paul wrote more inspired letters than we have in the New Testament today (*1 Cor. 5:9, Col 4:16*). Now, if we found one of these letters today, it would not become part of the Bible. It would remain an authoritative, inspired letter, outside of the canon.

Ellen White's authority can be compared to the authority of the extracanonical prophets. The inspired messages she received for the church are not an addition to the canon. Her writings are not another Bible, nor do they carry the kind of authority found in the Bible. In the end, the Bible and the Bible alone is our ultimate authority.

**Why must even Ellen White's writings be tested by the Bible?
Why must she not be the final authority on doctrinal matters?**

Further Study:

In 1982, an ad hoc committee of the General Conference prepared a statement on the relationship between the Bible and Ellen G. White. It reads in part, “**Affirmations:** (1) We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. (2) We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. (3) We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. (4) We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language. (5) We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times. (6) We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy. (7) We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are applicable and authoritative especially to Seventh-day Adventists. (8) We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life. (9) We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (10) We believe that Ellen White’s use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible. **Denials:** (1) We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture. (2) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture. (3) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture. (4) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine. (5) We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture. (6) We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White. (7) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture. (8) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large. (9) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety. (10) We do not believe that Ellen White’s use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.”—“The Inspiration and Authority of Ellen G. White Writings” in *Ministry*, August 1982, p. 21.

The conclusion then was drawn that a correct understanding of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White will avoid two extremes: (1) regarding these writings as functioning on a canonical level identical with Scripture; (2) considering them as ordinary Christian literature.

Discussion Question:

Go through the lists above. How does this help clarify some issues regarding Ellen G. White? What questions does it raise?

Man With the Black Book

by SATURNINO SABALLA JR.

I am a SULAD, a student missionary, teaching in a newly opened village in Mindanao, Philippines. These villagers found God through a dream.

One night the datu (chief) dreamed that a Man dressed in white and carrying a big black book came to him. “Whoever obeys the commands written in this book will be my people,” the Man said. Then he explained the importance of the Sabbath.

The datu called the villagers together and shared his dream. The people agreed that they would worship the creator God on His sacred day. On Saturday they gathered to worship in the only way they knew—chewing betel nut and talking to an unseen spirit.

Then a villager met an Adventist tailor while visiting town. The villager told the tailor about their new religion, which required them to worship on Saturday and related the chief’s dream about the Man with a black book.

“I also am a Sabbath keeper!” the tailor said. “May I visit your village and worship with you?” The villager eagerly agreed.

The tailor and a lay worker set out on Friday for the six-hour hike to the village. They carried a large Bible. When they reached the village, they met the datu, who stared at the Bible. “This is the book I saw in my dream!” he said. “You must be Sabbath keepers too!”

The next morning the villagers gathered for worship followed by a feast of roasted pig and vegetables. Then the datu invited the visitors to speak at the afternoon meeting.

The lay worker read the Sabbath commandment from the Bible and explained how God wanted them to worship. The chief and villagers cheered in agreement. Then the lay worker explained God’s other laws, laws of good health. He explained that the pig is a scavenger and is not fit for food, and that betel nut is a drug that God does not want His followers to use.

The datu again responded. “My dear people,” he said. “This black book tells us many important things. We shall eat pig flesh no more. We shall use betel nut no more.” The datu turned to the two men and invited them to teach them more. “We will gladly obey,” he said.

In time every villager was baptized. Today SULAD missionaries are teaching the villagers to read the black book for themselves.

Our mission offerings help plant new churches in remote areas of God’s vineyard. Thank you for sharing in this work.

SATURNINO SABALLA JR. is teaching in Bantolinao Mission School in Mindanao, Philippines.

The Integrity of the Prophetic Gift



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Sam. 7:1–7, 1 Kings 22:10–18, Jer. 43:2–4, Dan. 8:27.*

Memory Text: “As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak” (*2 Chronicles 18:13, NKJV*).

If you ever read modern criticism of the Bible, one thing you'll notice: The same kind of attacks leveled against the Bible are similar to the attacks leveled against Ellen White. And one attack against Ellen White is that because she used other sources, she is not reliable or honest.

Yet, Ellen White has explained in print how she used the writings of others, and why. She even recommended that people read certain books she used in writing her own works. That hardly sounds as if she were trying to hide her use of other sources.

This week we'll explore a little more about how inspiration works, both with Bible writers and with Ellen White.

The Week at a Glance: What do we know about the integrity of biblical prophets? If Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White are both inspired by the same Spirit, what is the relationship between them? What is the danger in seeing prophets as infallible? Can prophets give wrong advice?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.*

The Integrity of the Prophet

The year was 853 B.C. King Ahab of Israel invited King Jehoshaphat of Judah to go with him into battle against the Arameans, and Jehoshaphat agreed. However, he requested that before they go into battle they ask for a word from the Lord. When Jehoshaphat refused to accept the word of the four hundred prophets of Ahab, Micaiah, a prophet of the Lord, was called.

Read 1 Kings 22:10–18. How did Ahab’s officer attempt to influence Micaiah, and what did the prophet do, regardless of the circumstances?

Micaiah’s message was unpopular with the king, and he was sent to prison for it (*1 Kings 22:27*). King Ahab, in spite of the prophet’s warning, went into battle and was killed; and King Jehoshaphat, who in a weak moment had agreed to support King Ahab, barely escaped with his life.

Though prophets, like all humans, have their moments of weakness, in this case Micaiah was determined to tell the truth, no matter how unpopular it was with those in authority. Throughout history, God’s prophets have endured hardship because they refused to change their testimony to suit their contemporaries.

During Ellen White’s lifetime, critics questioned her integrity and have continued to do so ever since her death. She has been accused of deception, falsehood, and lies. One major reason for these accusations has been personal presuppositions about how a prophet should function. For example, some critics believe that “prophets ‘should have full knowledge’ from the start of their ministry; their predictions should be unalterable, their writings exempt from all errors, discrepancies, and mistakes, and never include uninspired sources. For them, prophets never express merely personal opinions in their writings.” —Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 468. As we have seen in our study of biblical prophets, these presuppositions assume a verbal-inspiration concept that Seventh-day Adventists do not hold. If we don’t hold it for the Bible itself, why should we for Ellen White?

Have you ever had to deliver an unpopular message? What kind of pressures did you face? In what ways did you try to make excuses to yourself that could have allowed you not to deliver the message? What have you learned from that experience?

The Integrity of the Message

A few months after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, was assassinated. The leaders and the people left in the land were afraid of Babylonian reprisals and decided to seek safety in Egypt; but they wanted to make sure that God was on their side. So, they asked Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord concerning their plan.

What was Jeremiah’s message, and how did the people respond to it? **Of what did they accuse Jeremiah, and who was said to have originated the counsel that Jeremiah declared to be from the Lord?** *Jer. 43:2–4.*

Because some did not like the clear instructions God gave, they claimed Jeremiah’s message actually had originated with his literary assistant Baruch and not with the Lord.

How interesting that thousands of years later, Mrs. White (like Jeremiah) has at times been the focus of claims that her literary assistants wrote her books or that she plagiarized most of what she wrote. Yet, in the preface to *The Great Controversy* she stated that she had used other books: “In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted. . . . In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works.”—Page 14.

Does this justify the charge of plagiarism? In 1981 the General Conference asked a non-Adventist copyright lawyer to study the matter. After spending more than three hundred hours researching, he concluded that “Ellen White was not a plagiarist, and her works did not constitute copyright infringement/piracy.”—*Adventist Review*, September 17, 1981. Among the reasons given were first, the fact that the books Ellen White used were not covered by copyright; and second, even if they had been covered by copyright, her use of phrases and sentences did not constitute an infringement of copyright.

Why was there always hostility among God’s professed people to the messages of the prophets? Look in your own heart; can you find, at least somewhat, part of the answer there? Explain.

“Thus Says the Lord”

What did the prophets often designate as the source of their messages? *Jer. 1:4, Ezek. 7:1, Hos. 1:1*. Why is this so important to what they have to say?

The prophets repeatedly pointed out that their messages came from God. Their position can be compared to that of earthly ambassadors who are sent out by an earthly ruler and who are commissioned to represent their sovereign. In that capacity they must adhere closely to the instructions they have received. The expression “the Word of the Lord came unto . . .” means that (a) their messages carry divine authority, (b) they received them by direct communication from the Lord, and (c) these messages are in their minds, ready to be presented.

The expression “thus says the Lord” appears more than four hundred times in the Old Testament—a powerful testimony to the fact that in Scripture, God is speaking directly to the reader. The prophet’s responsibility was to bring these messages before the people and apply them to the audience’s situation.

Ellen White strongly emphasized the inspiration of the Scriptures. “I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word,” she said. —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 17. At the same time, she also claimed divine inspiration for her 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. . . . It is true concerning the articles in our papers and in the many volumes of my books.”—Page 29.

Ellen White called her writings the lesser light leading men and women to the greater light—the Bible. (See *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 125.) While both are light, their functions are different: (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.

How can we avoid the trap of putting Ellen White’s writings on par with the Bible? Why is that so easy to do and such a big mistake?

Growth in Understanding

Prophets did not receive all of God's light at one time. As they faithfully ministered as the Lord's servants, they received more light and grew in their understanding.

What do the following texts tell us about the spiritual-growth experience of biblical prophets? *Dan. 8:27, 9:2, Gal. 2:11–16, 1 Pet. 1:10.*

The possession of the prophetic gift in biblical times did not imply immediate, full, and complete knowledge of spiritual and other matters. Prophets received increased light as history unfolded and as they were able to understand it. They also had to study Scripture, as the case of Daniel illustrates (*Dan. 9:2*). In Daniel 8:27 the prophet said, "I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it" (*RSV*). About ten years later the angel Gabriel came and explained to him the full import of the vision (*Dan. 9:20–23*).

The prophets knew only that which God had revealed to them, and only this were they permitted to set forth as a "Thus saith the Lord." Since the messages to one prophet often complemented those given to others, it became necessary to study and compare the various revelations in order to get a balanced and comprehensive view of the messages from Heaven.

It was the same with Ellen White: "For sixty years I have been in communication with heavenly messengers, and I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things, and in reference to the way in which God is constantly working to bring souls from the error of their ways to the light in God's light."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 71.

Hence, when we compare earlier writings of Ellen G. White with her later works, we sometimes find that her later writings modify or expand her earlier writings, reflecting a deeper insight into God's messages.

She was not a systematic theologian but more of an evangelist and communicator of what God showed her. Her understanding of theology, though founded on Scripture and informed by her visions, grew through the years as she continued to study Scripture and the writings of others and was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We must be careful not to place the attributes of God, such as omniscience (knowing all things), on His messengers. What is the danger in seeing prophets as infallible and having full knowledge in all areas of life?

When Prophets Get It Wrong

Read 2 Samuel 7:1–7. What was wrong with Nathan’s advice to David, and why would God not allow David to build Him a temple? 1 Chron. 22:8.

The prophet Nathan was a wise, thoughtful, and God-fearing man, but not everything a prophet says or does is done under inspiration. In giving his approval to David’s plan, Nathan had spoken as a friend of the king and not in his capacity as a prophet. A permanent dwelling for the God of Israel was probably something that most pious people desired. In a night vision (2 Sam. 7:4–17), however, God told Nathan that what he had told David was wrong and that he had to go and tell David.

Ellen White was not infallible, and she never claimed infallibility. She grew, changed her mind on issues, and was constantly open for more light.

In one instance, when the publishing house in the South was doing poorly, she supported making it merely a depository for the Review and Herald. “Go ahead,” she said, “God’s cause must not be left to reproach, no matter who is made sore by arranging matters on a right basis. Edson should give himself to the ministry and to writing. . . . Finance is not his forte at all.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 270. But within 24 hours Ellen G. White received a vision that caused her to reverse herself. “Let the Southern field have its own home-published books,” she told the General Conference.—Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years*, p. 193.

We must remember that prophets are not always on duty—that is, they are not speaking constantly for God. “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.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 58.

But as history has shown, if erroneous counsel has been given by a prophet, God will intervene to correct the mistake.

Some people love to focus on every perceived error in either the Bible or in the lesser light, which is the writings of Ellen G. White. What’s so dangerous and unhealthy about that kind of attitude? How can you protect yourself from falling into that trap?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Question of Influence,” pp. 62–67, in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“Ellen White made claims about her ministry that leave no room for compromise or ambivalence about those claims. She claimed to have seen things that could have come only from supernatural inspiration. Either her claims are true or she was a lunatic and/or a powerful liar who promulgated her insane ravings or amazing deceptions from the middle of the nineteenth into the second decade of the twentieth century.

“What rational options are there for someone who claimed to have seen, in vision, what she claimed to have seen? She claimed to have seen Jesus bring the redeemed into the Holy City. She claimed to have seen people living on other planets and angels protecting God’s people. She claimed to have seen, in vision, Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary or what Satan looked like in heaven before he sinned. She claimed to have seen angels visiting Adam and Eve in Eden. She said that she saw the look on Adam’s face when he realized that Eve had sinned. She claimed to have seen Jesus, in vision, and what His face was like after the wilderness fast. She claimed to have seen the Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb, as well as an angel release Paul and Silas from prison. She claimed to have seen Satan lead lost multitudes into the final rebellion against God after the second resurrection. She claimed to have seen, in vision, life in the new earth, and on and on. . . .

“What does one do with these claims? Those who place her ministry on the level, for instance, of Martin Luther, are living in a logical fantasy world. Either we take her for what she has claimed for herself (which, of course, leaves open a whole group of questions that we, as a church, haven’t always answered in the most fortuitous manner), or we have to reject her as [a] liar, a lunatic, or someone inspired by the devil. These are the only logical options.”—Clifford Goldstein, *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2003), pp. 172, 173.

Discussion Questions:

1 Read over the argument above. The point is simple: Ellen White, by her claims, doesn’t leave us many logical options regarding her ministry. From what we know of her life, her teachings, and the legacy of writings that she has left, what’s really the best and most logical explanation for her life and ministry? Defend your answer.

2 As with the Bible, some questions remain regarding Ellen White’s ministry. The issue is do we focus on these few questions and miss the big picture of her work, or do we focus on the big picture, knowing that as with anything, some questions will remain?

Redeemed, Healed, and Joyful

by SUNG JA KOH

I live in Korea. I grew up believing in God, but Jesus wasn't my Savior. I married a Christian man, but I didn't know how to have a close relationship with Christ. I prayed that God would show Himself to me and show me that He is in control of my life.

My husband and I visited different churches, hoping to find a relationship with God. We prayed for hours, hoping that this would draw us closer to God. But we found no spiritual breakthrough. We stopped attending this church, but we didn't stop searching. Then my husband met a pastor who offered to study the Bible with us. At last we experienced God's love.

We moved back to my husband's hometown, where we lived with my in-laws. They still worshiped their ancestors, and the situation caused me great stress. I became sick. In spite of the doctors' advice, I grew worse. My husband urged me to have faith, and I begged God to heal me.

Then I learned about a health recovery program called NEWSTART that was being held in a nearby church. I went, hoping something there would help me. The program nourished my body and my soul. A change to a more natural diet eased my symptoms.

The daily devotionals at the program fed my soul, and I asked the leader for Bible studies. I found answers to Bible questions that had troubled me for years, and I became convinced of the truth. My husband wanted me to wait to visit the Adventist church until he could go, but his busy schedule left no time for Bible studies, so I went alone.

I knew I had found what I was searching for and was baptized. I shared cassettes, books, and pamphlets with my husband, and eventually he agreed to go to church with me. In spite of Satan's attempts to divert his attention from the truth, my husband also joined the church.

I prayed for my grown children, and one by one they opened their hearts to God's message. Some have been baptized, and others are on the way. My brother also found this beautiful faith. My mother was growing old and weak.

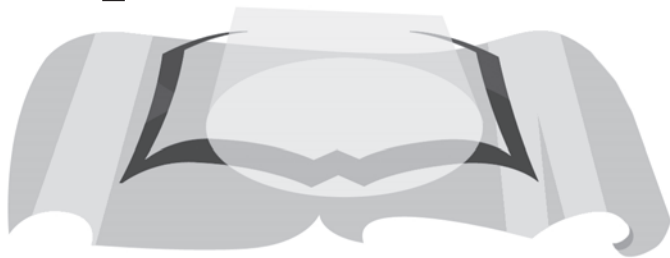
She told me that she did not have the peace she wanted, and there was little time left. Praise God, she surrendered her heart to God and asked to be baptized just two months before she passed away. My mother-in-law turned from ancestor worship and gave her life to Jesus too.

God has shown us the truth, and we want to share it with others. Please pray with us for family members who have not yet given their hearts to God. And thank you for your mission offerings, which help sponsor programs such as the one that brought me to God's church.



SUNG JA KOH shares her faith in Kwangju City, Korea.

The Message of the Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:1–17; Leviticus 16; Matt. 24:24–31; Rom. 3:21–28; Heb. 8:1, 2; 9:23.*

Memory Text: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (*1 Timothy 4:16, NKJV*).

The doctrinal framework of the Seventh-day Adventist Church largely was created by a small, dedicated group of Adventist pioneers. Their meetings were characterized by earnest Bible study and prayer. Writing in 1904, more than a half century after the events, Ellen G. White still had vivid memories of these gatherings. “Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 206. At times, when they could go no further, Ellen White would supply answers given to her in vision, though she never initiated doctrinal formulation. The visions were not given to take the place of faith, initiative, hard work, or Bible study. The crucial point to remember is that our church’s doctrines are based solely on the Bible. They are not dependent upon Ellen White’s writings, however helpful she has been in clarifying some of those teachings.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we need to keep the commandments when we are saved by grace? What is the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary? How does the Sabbath commandment differ from the other commandments? What happens at death, and why is knowledge of the state of the dead important? What does the Bible teach about the manner of Christ’s second coming?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.

Righteousness by Faith

What is the common lot of all human beings, and why? What is the only solution for the situation in which we find ourselves? *1 Kings 8:46, Rom. 3:21–28, 5:12.*

Sin is the greatest problem we face. The Egyptians thought that death was humanity's biggest problem, hence they developed the art of mummification and built huge pyramids to keep the mummies. The Greek philosophers thought ignorance was the chief enemy of true happiness, so they emphasized education. But the chief problem of humanity is sin. Sin destroys happiness and peace of mind. Sin kills, and no modern medicine can cure it. From the moment we are born, we begin to die. The only cure is Jesus Christ and the Cross. "There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone."—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 19.

According to the Greek poet Homer, ships passing through the Strait of Messina were in danger of running afoul of the rock Scylla on one side or the whirlpool Charybdis on the other. Christians are always in danger of running afoul of either legalism or cheap grace. Those who fear that talk of assurance of salvation in Christ will lead to cheap grace and the tolerance of sinful behavior stress the importance of obedience. Those who fear that talking of obedience and victorious Christian living directs attention away from Christ and leads to legalism emphasize God's part in salvation.

The balanced Christian will have assurance of salvation in Jesus *and* lead a victorious Christian life at the same time. The two go together like the two sides of a coin. Whomever God justifies, He also sanctifies. We cannot have one without the other. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone; good works follow, even though those good works, even done under the unction of the Holy Spirit, never can justify us before God. Our salvation is rooted only in what Jesus has done for us.

Discouraged over your spiritual life? Not getting the victories you wish you had? What great hope can you find in the fact that you are accepted solely through what Jesus has done for you and not through your victories or failures? Why should that hope keep you from never giving up in your struggles with sin and self?

The Sanctuary

What were the services of the Old Testament tabernacle, and how did they illustrate the plan of salvation? *Heb. 9:1–8.*

With the sanctuary service God produced a visual demonstration that enabled the sinner to understand the great plan of salvation. Confession, sacrifice, forgiveness, faith, reconciliation, holiness, all graphically were demonstrated in the daily and yearly services of the earthly sanctuary.

According to Hebrews 8:1, 2, Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. What does His ministry consist of, and why does Hebrews 9:23 say that the heavenly sanctuary needs cleansing?

In the Old Testament the sinner received forgiveness through faith in the atoning blood of the Promised Seed (*Gen. 3:15*), who was foreshadowed in the animal sacrifice of the sanctuary service. And just as in the earthly service at the close of the year there was a Day of Atonement, a day of judgment on which the sanctuary was cleansed, so in the heavenly sanctuary service there is a day of judgment prior to Christ's second coming.

The pre-Advent judgment reveals to the universe those who have professed Christ and are really His followers. God, so to speak, opens the books of heaven for all the universe to see that in each case His decision was just and fair. In that sense, this judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus (*Rom. 3:4*).

In Leviticus 16, the key element that appears again and again is blood. And that makes sense, because this is the Day of Atonement, and only blood atones. And what is atonement, other than the work of God saving us? Hence the judgment is good news; it's the work of God saving us because we can't save ourselves. The crucial point is that just as the high priest never went into the Most Holy Place without blood, neither should we, for to enter into the Most Holy Place without blood means death, not atonement. Dwell on these ideas. What hope and encouragement should they bring to us, who are living in the great antitypical day of atonement?

The Sabbath

The Sabbath and marriage are the only earthly institutions that come to us from the time before sin entered the world. Hence, sometimes they are called the twin sisters of Paradise. When you look at our world today, it's obvious that Satan has worked hard to deface and defile them.

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What is it about the Sabbath commandment that makes it stand out from the others?

The fourth commandment is, in a sense, a test commandment. It tests humanity's spirituality. Because it deals with time, which is invisible, rather than with tangible objects, it is well suited to measure humanity's attitude toward God. How we feel toward the Sabbath is an indicator of how we feel toward God. It is the only commandment an individual can break and yet be fully accepted as a good person in any conservative Christian society.

In a certain sense, the Sabbath is arbitrary. Why the seventh day over any other? It's because God said so, that's why. There's a lot of obvious and apparent logic in not stealing, not killing, not coveting, and so forth. You don't have to be a Christian to follow those precepts; many non-Christians do.

But to obey the seventh-day Sabbath, which isn't rooted in any natural phenomena, is to reveal a willingness to obey simply because God tells us to. Sabbath keeping is an act of faith; we keep the seventh-day Sabbath, not because it's socially acceptable, not because it's popular, not because it fits in with any natural cycle. No, we keep the seventh-day Sabbath because God commands us to, and as New Testament Christians saved by grace, we reveal our faith through obedience to God's commandments (*James 2:10, 11; 1 John 5:2, 3; Rev. 14:12*).

In fact, by resting on the Sabbath, we're revealing to the world that all this talk about *resting in Christ* isn't just talk. As Sabbath keepers, we truly rest in Christ's work of salvation for us, not just daily but also in a special way each week. We reveal the fullness of our assurance in Christ by resting on the Sabbath (*see Heb. 4:1–11*). Sabbath keeping is an outward expression of our rest in Christ.

Though the Sabbath is, in a sense, *arbitrary*, what are the tangible and practical benefits we get from keeping the Sabbath holy, as God commanded? What can you do to better enjoy the benefits of Sabbath keeping?

State of the Dead

What do the following Bible texts tell us about humanity's condition in death? *Ps. 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 6; John 11:11–14; Acts 2:34.*

Inspiration teaches that only God is immortal (*1 Tim. 6:16*) and that human beings apart from God are subject to death. Jesus taught that death is a sleep that ends in one of two resurrections—a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation (*John 5:28, 29*). William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury, recognized this when he wrote, “Man is not immortal by nature or of right; but he is capable of immortality and there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive it from God and on God’s terms.” —*Nature, Man, and God* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1934), p. 472.

How are we to understand texts such as **Matthew 25:46** and **Revelation 14:9–11**? Do they teach eternal torment in hell?

The notion of human immortality is found in all primal, animistic, and polytheistic religions. It was also an important concept in Greek philosophy, which conceived of Hades as a ghostly, shadowy underworld, in which the soul lived a twilight existence. The Greeks viewed human beings as consisting of matter and soul. At death, matter and soul separated, releasing the soul from the prison house of matter into an independent existence.

In Matthew 25 and Revelation 14, the words translated “everlasting” and “for ever” do not mean necessarily never ending. The Greek words *aion* and *aionios* express duration as long as the nature of the subject allows. For example, in Jude 7 we are told that the cities Sodom and Gomorrah are suffering the punishment of eternal (*aionios*) fire. Yet, 2 Peter 2:6 says that they were turned into ashes. When the subject of the words *eternal* or *forever* is the life of the redeemed who have received immortality, the word means a time without end. When it refers to the punishment of the wicked, who do not receive immortality, the word has the meaning of a limited time period.

From popular preachers to popular films, the world is flooded with spiritualism (the idea that the dead live on now in another existence). How does our understanding of the state of the dead give us powerful protection against this terrible deception?

The Second Coming

Since the early 1970s, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* has sold more than fifteen million copies. In recent years, the *Left Behind™* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers) has sold millions, as well. These facts indicate that there is a general awareness among many Christians that we are living in the time of the end.

The word *Adventist* in our church name means that we believe in the second coming of Christ so much that it's part of our identity. Yet, our understanding of the Second Coming is far different from that advocated in the *Left Behind™* series or by Hal Lindsey.

What does the Bible teach about the manner of Christ's coming, and why is it of vital importance to know this? What deceptions did Jesus warn us about regarding the manner of His coming? *Matt. 24:5, 24–31; Rev. 1:7.*

First introduced by John N. Darby in the nineteenth century, the concept that Christ's coming consists of two stages has captured the thinking of many Protestants today. The first supposed stage involves a secret rapture, when all true Christians will be *caught up* with Christ, and the second focuses on Christ's appearing seven years later to rule on earth for 1,000 years.

Seventh-day Adventists can find no scriptural support for splitting the Second Advent into a *rapture* and an *appearing*. According to the New Testament, Jesus' return will be an indivisible, single, literal, audible, and visible event (*1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 19:11–21*). And, just as important, Jesus warned us against false interpretations about the manner of His coming. Jesus obviously knew that deception would be rampant (*Matt. 24:24*), which is why the Word of God is so clear about how He will return.

Though the passing of every day brings us closer to Christ's return, the passing of each day also makes His return seem more and more delayed. How do we strike the balance between living in the expectation of Christ's return and yet simply getting on in the daily routine of life?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?” pp. 551–562; “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–652, in *The Great Controversy*.

During the early years, many of our pioneers became imbalanced in their preaching of the law. Hence, Ellen White wrote in 1890: “As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law.” —*Review & Herald*, March 11, 1890. At the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones did just that. The burden of their message was “to affirm the truth that the only way righteousness can be obtained is through a living faith in the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on Calvary’s cross as a propitiation for the sins of the world. No one can enter the kingdom of God without being clad in the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. This robe can neither be purchased with silver or gold nor earned by good works. This message was a clarion call to make Christ and His righteousness the center of all our living and our preaching. It placed special emphasis on righteousness by faith as a real personal experience rather than a mere theory.” —A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory 1888–1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1966), p. 35.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Is there any teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that is based on anything other than the Bible? That is, is there any doctrine that comes from Ellen White rather than the Bible? Though we believe in the gift of prophecy, why must we make sure that we know all our teachings are from the Bible alone? What problems are created if we lean on Ellen White for our doctrines? At the same time, why is she so helpful to us in clarifying and understanding teachings that we have gotten from the Bible?
- ❷ Dwell on the idea that Sabbath keeping is an expression of the rest we have in Christ, in that our salvation is based on His works for us, not on our own. How does this help answer the spurious charge that by keeping the Sabbath, we are denying the gospel of God’s grace?
- ❸ Even critics of Ellen G. White admit that she played a big role in moving the Adventist Church from legalism toward a more Cross-centered view of salvation, which is a strange thing for a “false prophet” (what many of these same people refer to her as) to do. How is the inconsistency of these critics revealed by their view that, though a “false prophet,” she nevertheless guided the church away from legalism?

The Eavesdropper

by DAVID VIKAS PAN

Chhabi stood in the shadows, straining to hear the visitor talking to her brother-in-law about a God named Jesus.

Several weeks earlier Chhabi had heard her brother-in-law say, “Something good is in this Jesus.” She wondered who this Jesus was and why her brother-in-law was interested in Him. Chhabi wanted to learn more about this Jesus, but her husband forbade her to join the Bible study on the veranda. So when the Global Mission pioneers, David and Swarna, visited their home, Chhabi eavesdropped on the Bible studies being held on the family’s veranda.

Chhabi found Swarna’s telephone number and called her. She told Swarna, “I want to know about Jesus, but my husband won’t allow it. Please pray to your God that He will cause my husband to allow me to search for the true God,” she begged. The two women began meeting secretly to study the Bible while Chhabi’s husband was at work.

One day when the women were studying, Chhabi’s daughter rushed in to tell her that Father was coming! Fearing what he would say, Chhabi asked Swarna to pray before he entered the house. When he arrived, he sat down to listen to their study. Chhabi asked her husband why he was home early, and he said that he was not feeling well. Swarna prayed for him, and soon he said he felt better. After that, Chhabi’s husband allowed her to study the Bible with Swarna.

Chhabi learned to pray and began praying for her husband. He didn’t argue when she wanted to attend church—a bold step for an Indian woman, and in time she was baptized. Men don’t allow their wives to teach them, but Chhabi encouraged him to read certain passages in the Bible and decide for himself whether he was going to worship the idols or the living God. Chhabi’s husband read the passages, and soon he joined her in the faith. Today Chhabi’s family and three of her husband’s brothers and their families have become Adventists.

Then Chhabi turned to her own family. She is encouraging her mother, a widow who lives in another area, to follow Jesus. She is praying that her two brothers will also consider following Jesus. But there are no Adventists in their village, and some villagers are pressuring them to reject Christianity.

Our mission offerings support Global Mission pioneers in India and around the world as they share the gospel and plant churches where the name of Jesus is not known.

DAVID VIKAS PAN is a district pastor and Global Mission supervisor near Kolkota (Calcutta), India.

Interpreting *the* Prophetic Writings



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 65:17; Mark 1:15; Rom. 2:14–16; Eph. 2:8, 9; James 2:14–26; 1 John 5:12, 13.*

Memory Text: “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (*Luke 24:27, NKJV*).

As Seventh-day Adventists we believe that Ellen White manifested the gift of prophecy. The next question, however, is how do we interpret her writings?

Though we believe that her inspiration, *not her authority*, is on the same level as the Old and New Testament prophets, when interpreting what she has written, we must apply the same principles of interpretation to her writings that we do to Scripture. Indeed, principles for interpreting the Bible can be used when interpreting Ellen White's writings, even though the authority of the Bible is above the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy. To use an analogy from American law, one might use the same principles for interpreting a decision of the United States Supreme Court as for interpreting a decision by a lower court, but in the end the decision of the Supreme Court carries the ultimate authority.

The Week at a Glance: What is the difference between exegesis and the homiletical use of a biblical text? Why is context so important? Can people who have never heard the gospel be saved? What distinguishes the kingdom of grace from the kingdom of glory?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 14.*

Exegesis

Exegesis is concerned with the original meaning of a text. It focuses on what the author wanted to say and what the text meant to the original reader.

What is the original or exegetical meaning of Romans 2:14–16?

Compare Ezek. 3:17–19, Rom. 10:12–17.

There is no question that there will be people in heaven who never have heard the gospel. “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

On occasion, God, apart from human messengers, reaches out to individuals in heathen lands and saves them. However, they are saved because the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they have responded appropriately as evidenced by their works. They are not saved because they have lived up to their conscience; if they were, then they would be saved by keeping the law, and the New Testament clearly denies that possibility (*Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16*). The issue in Romans 2:11–16 is the accountability of Jews and Gentiles, not their salvation. The fact that God is no respecter of persons (*vs. 11*) is illustrated by what Paul says in Romans 2:12. “As many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (*NKJV*). Those “without law” are the Gentiles who do not have the written law given to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. However, they will perish, not because they did not have the written law but because they are sinners who have transgressed against the law “*written in their hearts, their conscience*” (*vs. 15*).

In the judgment, Jews and Gentiles will be judged and condemned by their respective laws, the Jews by the written law and the Gentiles by the law “written in their hearts.” Among the Gentiles, conscience performed the same function as the written law performed among the Jews. Scripture clearly says that “‘there is no one righteous, not even one’” (*Rom. 3:10, NIV*). This means that Jews and Gentiles are sinners alike and are all saved the same way, not by any law keeping but only by Jesus’ death on the cross.

How reliable a guide is your conscience? Does following your conscience always guarantee that you will make a right decision? Justify your answer.

Homiletics

Homiletics is the art of preaching. In a homiletics class a student learns sermon preparation and how to use the Scriptures in preaching. Sometimes a preacher may use just the wording of a text, without special regard for its original meaning, to make a point or an appeal during a sermon. This is called the homiletical use of Scripture.

What was the kingdom Jesus was proclaiming as being near in Mark 1:15?

The kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming at that time was the kingdom of grace, which He established at His First Advent. But the text also can be applied to our situation today. A preacher on Sabbath morning may tell the congregation, “All the time prophecies have been fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand.” And he may appeal to them that today we need to repent and believe the gospel. The kingdom that the modern preacher has in mind, however, is no longer the kingdom of grace but the kingdom of glory that Christ will inaugurate at His second coming. The first interpretation of Mark 1:15 is exegetical, the second homiletical.

According to Mark 1:17, Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee one day when He saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea. Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men” (*NKJV*), and immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

A modern preacher, using the words of Mark 1:17, may call upon church members to follow Jesus because only He can make us fishers of men. Exegetically the text applies to Simon and Andrew, but homiletically it can be applied to every Christian, because Jesus wants us all to become fishers of men (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

Ellen G. White frequently used Scripture homiletically. She was steeped in the language of the Bible, and whenever she spoke or wrote on a topic, she used biblical language and biblical texts to convey to the church the message that she had received from the Lord. For example, in the book *Education*, Ellen G. White has a chapter on the study of physiology. Speaking of good posture she says, “Among the first things to be aimed at should be a correct position, both in sitting and in standing. God made man upright, and He desires him to possess not only the physical but the mental and moral benefit, the grace and dignity and self-possession, the courage and self-reliance, which an erect bearing so greatly tends to promote.”—*Education*, p. 198. That “God made man upright” is a quote from Ecclesiastes 7:29 (*NKJV*), but when Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, he was referring to moral uprightness, not to posture.

Time and Place

A crucial rule of biblical interpretation is the principle of studying the times and circumstances during which a particular text was written and by whom.

What is Jeremiah describing in Jeremiah 4:23–26?

When most Adventists read these texts, they think of the millennium. However, when Jeremiah wrote this text, around 600 B.C., he was not thinking of the millennium. The context of this passage is the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

God, through Jeremiah, pleaded with His people to turn from their evil ways, but they would not listen. In verses 23–26 the prophet sees in vision what will happen if they disobey. In poetic language he describes the waste and desolation that will come upon the land of Judah because of their disobedience. The crucial point is that when a text was written and under what circumstances need to be taken into account when we seek to interpret it.

What happened with Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C. is a symbol of what will happen to the world in the future. When Jesus comes and the earth is cleansed with fire, Jeremiah 4:23–26 will be an apt description of this earth during the millennium. Thus, exegetically, Jeremiah 4:23–26 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. Symbolically, however, it also refers to the time of the millennium. Ellen G. White, therefore, quotes from Jeremiah 4 to describe the situation on earth during the millennium.—*The Great Controversy*, p. 659.

In reading Ellen White, we also need to take time and circumstances into account. For example, in 1897 Mrs. White wrote that “the money expended in bicycles and dress and other needless things must be accounted for.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 398.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the bicycle was not an economical means of transportation but was rather a rich person’s toy. The best early bicycle cost US\$150, an investment comparable to the cost of an expensive car today. People were mortgaging their income for months in advance to buy what was then an expensive luxury item. Within a few years’ time the bicycle became a useful and inexpensive means of transportation, and she never again spoke against it.

Her policy on bicycles was based on the biblical principle of good stewardship. If she were alive today, she probably would apply this principle to other things that people spend frivolously on.

Time and circumstances are important not just in the interpretation of inspired writings but in all aspects of life. How quick are you to judge the actions of others without getting more background information? How can you improve in this area?

Immediate Context

Read Isaiah 65:17. What is the new heaven and new earth to which Isaiah is referring? Is it the new earth that Christians expect in the future?

In the immediate context, Isaiah says, “No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed” (*vs. 20, NKJV*). Death on the new earth? This cannot be the new earth we expect that follows the millennium. What then is the new heaven and the new earth in verse 17?

In this passage Isaiah describes a “new creation” that would have been brought about had Israel, following the restoration from the Babylonian captivity, remained faithful to God and fulfilled the divine commission to be a light to the world (*Isa. 42:6*). Unfortunately, it didn’t, and thus the prophecy, which was conditional, was not fulfilled. This “new heaven and new earth” never became a reality. Nevertheless, in a secondary sense these verses point forward to the new heaven and the new earth to be ushered in at the close of the millennium. But in that “new earth and new heaven” there will be no children born to the redeemed (*Matt. 22:30*), neither will there be any more sorrow or death (*Rev. 21:4*), so we have to be careful how far we seek to push the imagery.

In *Christ’s Object Lessons*, Ellen White makes the statement that “those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved.” —Page 155. Does this mean we can never be certain about our salvation? *1 John 5:12, 13.*

When we study the context, we discover that she is speaking about whether a person can fall from grace after conversion. Many Christians in her days believed in the doctrine of “once saved always saved.” Ellen White was clearly against this teaching. In context she says, “Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 155.

The immediate context makes it clear that she is addressing the issue of self-confidence and temptations after conversion. We are never secure against temptations, we can never say that we cannot fall, that we are saved and therefore secure from temptation, but this does not mean that in Jesus we cannot have day-by-day assurance of salvation.

If your hope of salvation rests in what Jesus did for you, how can you then not have assurance of salvation? On the other hand, if you are looking to self, how can you ever have any assurance at all?

The Larger Context

The larger context refers to what other texts beyond the immediate passage have to say on a particular topic. It can refer to other chapters in a book, the whole book, or to the whole of Scripture.

Are we saved by grace through faith alone, or do we also need works? *Eph. 2:8, 9; James 2:14–26. Is Paul in conflict with James on the issue of salvation? What do the following texts have to say on this topic?* *Rom. 3:21–28, Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6–12.*

When we look at the larger context in Scripture, what other passages have to say on the topic, we discover that James is not arguing for good works as a requirement for salvation. Rather, he insists that there are two kinds of faith, one valid and the other invalid. Paul speaks about the valid faith that is followed by good deeds. James refers to the invalid faith that stops at the intellectual level, faith that is mere mental assent.

Paul uses the example of Abraham to show that we are justified on the basis of valid, or real, faith. James shows that Abraham's faith was real because it produced good works (obedience). Therefore, we do not need anything but faith, valid faith, to be saved, and our behavior will show if our faith is valid or not.

When reading Ellen White, we also need to look at the larger context in her writings; i.e., everything she has written on a particular topic. We cannot just take one or two statements and run with them. For example, on the issue of meat-eating she has very absolute-sounding statements but also many modifying statements that need to be considered, as well.

In the book *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, she says: "Vegetables, fruits, and grains should compose our diet. Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs. The eating of flesh is unnatural. We are to return to God's original purpose in the creation of man."—Page 380. Anyone reading only this statement would have to come to the conclusion that under no circumstances are we to eat meat. However, a few pages further on is this statement: "A meat diet is not the most wholesome of diets, and yet I would not take the position that meat should be discarded by every one. Those who have feeble digestive organs can often use meat, when they cannot eat vegetables, fruit, or porridge."—Pages 394, 395. (See also Friday's lesson.) When we look at the total body of what she has written on a given topic, a balanced picture emerges that is invaluable for every Christian who takes religion seriously.

While we shouldn't make *meat and drink* our religion, God has given us wonderful counsel about diet that can have a positive impact on our health. How careful are you in your diet and all your habits? Why wait until sickness strikes before you make a change for the better?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Righteousness,” pp. 35–39; “Ellen White Clearly Draws the Lines,” pp. 41–46; “Faith and Works,” pp. 47–50, in *Faith and Works*.

Further Guidelines for the Interpretation of Inspired Writings

Apart from the guidelines studied in this week’s lesson, we need to (a) ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the study of His Word; (b) ensure that we use one or more good translations; (c) look for principles that are universal and apply to all people, in all places, and at all times; (d) be willing to obey the truths we discover; (e) be open-minded and willing to surrender previously held positions; (f) guard against extreme interpretations; (g) work together with people of experience; and (h) use common sense.

Ellen G. White on Once Saved Always Saved

“There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable. Peter’s fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. Self-confidence led him to the belief that he was saved, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation. Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 154, 155.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at the whole context of the Ellen White quote above. Now look at the one statement about not saying we are saved. How easy to take that one statement out of context and come away with a whole different meaning from what was intended. Why must we always be careful not to pull statements out of context? What other examples can you find of people having done just that? Why is it such a temptation?
- ② What are some other ways that Ellen White’s writings have been misused? What can we do, however, to avoid the trap of throwing the whole thing out, simply because it has not been used properly?
- ③ Think about what we’ve been given with the health message as it appears in the writings of Ellen White. What great blessings can we take away from it if we use it properly? What traps must we avoid?

Amina's Forbidden God

Amina* (ah-MEE-nah) lives in northern Africa. From childhood she read her holy book, and there she met Issa (Jesus) and fell in love with Him. She often asked her father to tell her more about this Prophet who was a perfect Man. As she grew to adulthood, Amina became a sincere and faithful follower of her family's religion, but she never forgot Issa.

One day a Christian girlfriend invited Amina to visit the Adventist chapel in her city, and Amina went. She couldn't explain why she went, for going to a Christian house of prayer was a dangerous thing to do. But she went. And something—some power she did not fully understand—drew her to return again and again. Little by little Amina's faith in her family's religion faded as her love for Issa grew.

Amina's father saw that Amina was losing her faith and wanted to wake her up to the danger she was in. Because she no longer submitted to daily prayers with the family, her father refused to allow her to enter his home. He hoped that she would realize her error and once more worship with them. But it didn't work. Finally after almost a year of estrangement, Amina's parents invited her to return home—but she wasn't allowed to speak of Issa or Christianity inside the house. For nearly 10 years Amina kept her faith to herself. For 10 years she didn't worship in the Adventist chapel in town or talk about Issa.

Then one day Amina asked her girlfriend to take her to the Adventist chapel. There she met a missionary who welcomed her with joy. Amina spoke at length with the missionary and asked many questions about Issa. Is He really God? What does He require of followers?

Amina continued worshiping at the chapel, and several months later, she surrendered her life to Issa and was baptized. The Lord, Issa, has become everything to her. Amina has made a dangerous decision, for in her culture to leave her family's faith could mean death.

In spite of the danger, Amina bravely shares her faith in quiet ways and with much prayer. With kind words, a visit, and a smile, she shares her faith. And through her actions, the Spirit of God is touching hearts. God often arranges opportunities for Amina to show her faith in Issa.

Pray for Amina and her quiet ministry in the shadows of her daily life. Pray that her acts of faith become as precious drops of water to the parched desert of her hostile homeland.

Your mission offerings help reach people such as Amina for Issa. Thank you.

* Not her real name.

The Blessings of the Prophetic Gift



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 17:14, 34:27, Lev. 11:1–8, Deut. 6:4–7, Isa. 44:8, 49:6.*

Memory Text: “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NKJV*).

All through biblical history, the Lord worked through the prophets (including those who wrote no books of the Bible) in order to encourage, uplift, and warn God's people. However unpopular at times their messages, or however often their motives were misunderstood, these people all had one goal in mind: to bless and benefit God's church. And it was certainly no different with Ellen White and her prophetic gift.

This week we are going to look at some of the blessings that come to God's people through the prophetic gift. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, certainly as we know it today, would probably not exist had it not been for the guidance God gave this movement through the Spirit of Prophecy.

The Week at a Glance: Why and for what purpose did God elect Israel as His special people? How were the young people in Israel educated in Old Testament times? What were some of the counsels on health that God gave the Israelites? Why did the Israelites write God's Word on the doorframes of their houses? How has the Lord used the gift of prophecy to benefit the church?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.*

Why did God elect Israel as His special people? *Deut. 7:7, 8; Isa. 44:8; 49:6.*

God chose Israel to be His witnesses. All nations of the earth were to share in the blessings that He was to bestow on His people. Israel was to show forth His praise (*Isa. 43:21*), declare His glory among the nations (*Isa. 66:19*), and be a light to the Gentiles.

What is the mission of the Christian church, and how well is it carrying out this mission? *Matt. 28:19, 20.*

The Christian church experienced two great periods of expansion in its history. The first period was the time of its establishment in the first and second centuries; the second was during the nineteenth century, also called the century of mission. Following the great revivals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Christian church established many Bible and missionary societies in Europe and America, and within 100 years it increased from 18 percent of the world population in the year 1800 to 34 percent in 1900.

In the early decades of Seventh-day Adventist history, it was believed that the church was fulfilling God's command to teach all nations simply by preaching to the immigrants in North America. However, Ellen White in 1871 wrote, "Young men should be qualifying themselves by becoming familiar with other languages, that God may use them as mediums to communicate His saving truth to those of other nations."—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 204.

Then in 1874 she had an impressive dream of giving the third angel's message to the world. In the dream she was told: "You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time. . . .

"The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea, to all nations, tongues, and peoples. . . . Your faith is limited, it is very small. Your conception of the work needs to be greatly enlarged."—Pages 208, 209.

In the same year J. N. Andrews became the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary. He and his children went to Switzerland, and three years later the John G. Matteson family was sent to Scandinavia. Today, out of 229 countries of the world recognized by the United Nations, Seventh-day Adventists have an established work in more than two hundred of them.

How do we strike the balance between working for souls overseas while at the same time not neglecting the mission field in our own backyard?

How were the young people in Israel educated in Old Testament times? What important principles can we take from these texts regarding the spiritual aspect of all proper education? *Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:4–7, 20–25.*

Through the father’s instructions Hebrew children were taught what God had done for His people in the past, how they were to live in His presence, and what God’s promises were for the future. They also were taught the skills they would need to be successful members of their community. It was, therefore, both an education in practical skills along with spiritual and religious instruction.

In the earliest days of the Adventist movement, private initiatives among our pioneers led to several attempts to establish a school for Adventist children, but none of them lasted long.

Then at the beginning of 1872, Ellen White received a vision on the proper principles of education. On the basis of this vision she wrote 30 pages on those principles. Among other things she wrote, “We need a school where those who are just entering the ministry may be taught at least the common branches of education, and where they may also learn more perfectly the truths of God’s word for this time.” —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 45, 46.

In May 1872 the General Conference committee agreed to assume responsibility for a locally operated church school in Battle Creek, Michigan, and on June 3 the first official Seventh-day Adventist school opened its doors. Two years later 100 students were enrolled in the newly established Battle Creek College.

Today more than six thousand Adventist schools, colleges, and universities serve more than one million students around the world.

What should an Adventist school be like today? How should it be different from other schools? Make a list of specific characteristics and discuss them in class.

Health

God told the Israelites: “If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight . . . I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians’ ” (*Exod. 15:26, NKJV*). **What were some of the counsels on health given to them by God?** *Lev. 7:22–26, 11:1–8, 13:46.*

For centuries, leprosy and the Black Death spread fear and terror among medieval humanity. It was only when church leaders remembered that people afflicted with leprosy in the Bible were segregated and excluded from the community, and they applied this principle to the victims of leprosy and the bubonic plague that these scourges were stopped.

Most Seventh-day Adventist pioneers were anything but health reformers. At the 1848 Sabbath Conferences, they most likely sat together eating pork chops for lunch. In a vision in 1848, Ellen G. White was shown that tobacco, tea, and coffee are harmful, but it took several years to convince the membership.

On June 6, 1863, Ellen G. White received a vision in which she was shown the need for health reform. “I saw that it was a sacred duty to attend to our health, and arouse others to their duty.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 280. Two years later, on December 25, 1865, she was shown that Seventh-day Adventists should establish a health institute. The Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, which opened its doors in 1866, was the first of a network of more than three hundred hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries that the church operates today.

What can we say to those who claim that Ellen G. White copied the health message from other health reformers of her time?

Recent research into Ellen G. White’s health message has revealed that there is a vast difference in quality between Ellen G. White’s principles of health and those advocated by other health reformers in her time. “Modern medical science has verified a high percentage of her health principles . . . while the sources from which she supposedly copied had a low percentage of health principles that have been verified. This difference indicates that Mrs. White had health information that could not have come from any human source available anywhere at the time she lived.”—Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 87, 88.

The health message is a wonderful gift from God to us. Like all of His gifts, it can be, and indeed, has been abused. How can we avoid turning this gift into a curse?

Publishing

According to Scripture, Moses was the first one to write down God's words (*Exod. 17:14, 34:27, Deut. 31:24*). Today, the Bible is the most published and most read book in history.

Where were the Israelites to write the words of the law? Why do you think that command was given? *Deut. 6:1–9, 11:18–20*.

To inscribe important sayings or statements in conspicuous places on their dwellings was a custom widely prevalent in the ancient Near East. It is evident in Muslim countries and even among Western nations. In the British Isles, as well as in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, inscriptions can be seen on houses.

In Israel the purpose of writing God's Word on the doorframes of their dwellings was to keep God's instructions constantly in view and in mind, thereby reminding them continuously to keep God's commandments.

What role did publishing play in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

The publishing work in our church did not originate from human wisdom. In 1848, Ellen G. White had a vision in the home of Otis Nichols in Dorchester, Massachusetts. When she came out of it, she said to James, "I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world."—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 125.

"Streams of light that went clear round the world"! How could that be? Jesus was coming soon. The number of Adventists were so few. There were no wealthy persons or great scholars among them. The world was unbelieving. *And yet, here was a young woman who predicted that a work of publishing, to be started by her penniless husband, would grow until it would encompass the globe?* More than six months went by before James White could make even the smallest beginning, arranging on a charge account for the printing of 1,000 copies of an eight-page paper. Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church owns more than fifty publishing houses, and the message is being printed and proclaimed in more than two hundred twenty languages.

What has been the impact of the printed page in your own spiritual experience?

Theology

All through biblical history, God has used the prophetic gift to protect His people from theological errors. It was no different with the ministry of Ellen White. In the early days of our church she had to combat fanaticism of various kinds. Some people claimed to be perfect, others stated that no more work should be done, and some kept on setting times for Christ's return. During the Kellogg crisis at the turn of the century, her counsel saved the church from pantheism. At the same time, almost single-handedly she led the church from a semi-Arian (a belief that Jesus was not God) to a Trinitarian position. When A. F. Ballenger tried to change the sanctuary teaching, she took a strong stand against it. Ellen White also had a strong role in keeping the church of her day from falling deep into legalism; along with A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, she was a great proponent of salvation by faith in Christ alone, without the deeds of the law.

After her death, her writings continued to give guidance to the church. In more recent times, her writings provide clear direction on the issue of Creation, which is coming under attack even from within our own ranks.

What does the Old Testament teach about origins of human life? *Gen. 1:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11, Ps. 33:6, Isa. 42:5.*

According to the Old Testament, the Lord created life on our earth in six days. The Hebrew word translated *day* in Genesis 1 is *yom*. Whenever this word in the historical books of the Bible is accompanied by a numeral, it always refers to a literal 24-hour period (see *Gen. 7:11, Exod. 16:1*). In resting on the seventh day of the Creation week, God established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. In short, we are on immovable biblical ground by adhering to a literal six-day Creation, despite voices, even among us, that would argue for something else.

And though Ellen White has been dead for almost a century, here, too, her words give us a strong affirmation of this great Bible truth: “I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 90.

Despite the clear testimony of the Bible, despite the strong affirmation of Ellen White, some among us still insist that God used millions of years of evolution to create human life. What examples can you find from the Bible of people getting so caught up in the trends of their time that they lose sight of important truth? How can we protect ourselves from falling into the same tired, old trap?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” pp. 139–160, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Source and Aim of True Education,” pp. 13–19; “Relation of Education to Redemption,” pp. 28–30, in *Education*.

Many of the principles of healthful living found in the writings of Ellen White already were taught in a limited way by other health reformers of her day. But in their teaching we find many errors and extremes that Ellen White avoided because of the instructions she received from God. For example, Sylvester Graham and James Jackson, two prominent health reformers in Ellen White’s day, both taught, “Don’t eat salt.” Ellen G. White, however, wrote, “I use some salt, and always have, because salt, instead of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 162.

Other errors that were taught by health reformers in the nineteenth century and that Ellen G. White avoided included: Do not cut your hair; do not drink water—get your liquids from fruit only; when eating meat, eat mostly the fat; overweight people are healthy people; do not use soap, etc.—Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 77, 78.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answer to Monday’s final question.
- 2 We now live in the day and age of science, where for many people science is the only way to know truth. How interesting that of all the things we teach (the Second Coming, salvation by faith, the state of the dead, etc.), only one can be verified scientifically: our health message. Dwell on the implications of that thought.
- 3 As Seventh-day Adventists we insist, and rightly so, that all our doctrines need to come from the Bible and the Bible only. At the same time, if we believe that Ellen White manifested the gift of prophecy, shouldn’t weight and credence be given to her writings on doctrine, as well? How do we find the right balance in how we use her writings to deal with theological issues?
- 4 As with the Bible, there are things about Ellen White’s writings that we don’t understand. How can we protect ourselves from getting into the deadly mode of focusing only on the problems or concerns, and missing the greater picture?

Moans in the Night

by JAMES APPEL

Wails and moans cut into the evening's silence. These sounds of mourning come from just beyond the hospital wall. Allawaye lives there. His third wife's baby was recently hospitalized for meningitis. After a course of antibiotics he was sent home eating and with no fever. But three days later Allawaye brought him back, feverish again. The bacteria in his body is resistant, and we have no other antibiotics to treat it.

The next morning Allawaye returned to the hospital. The baby is better, but not well enough to go home. I explain that the baby is still sick and could still die. One of Allawaye's wives speaks in a low, threatening tone. "We will take the baby home. Your treatments have not worked, and it's time to consult a witch doctor." I explain why the child must stay in the hospital, and Allawaye agrees to finish the treatment.

I offer to pray for the baby, and the family agrees. I plead with God to prove that it's not witchcraft that has made the child sick and ask Him to heal the child. We've done all we can with our limited medical supplies, and now we need a miracle.

The wails next door tell me that God has not intervened.

Most people in this area believe that disease is caused by witchcraft, that someone has cast a spell on them. They seek treatment from the "traditional" healers—the witch doctors—and come to the hospital only when the patient is nearly dead. Then, if the patient dies, it's our fault.

My frustration rises with the wailing. How does one fight, not just against the forces of physical disease in a resource-poor setting, but against the forces of ignorance and evil? I've tried to give patients hope, to encourage them to fight, only to hear family members tell them that they are going to die. The sick person loses hope and eventually dies, at least in part because of the psychological attacks of their family. Nothing I've experienced in Tchad even comes close to that for discouraging.

I light my kerosene lamp and open my Bible to John 3:19. "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (*NIV*).

I understand God's dilemma. He can't mess with free will. Satan can use fear, superstition, manipulation, coercion, and brutality, but God won't. And because I've aligned myself on God's side, I can't use force either. Sometimes I'd like to shake parents who wait to bring their child to the hospital half dead instead of when they first get sick.

It's true: People do love the darkness rather than the light. There's nothing we can do except continue to fight, continue to pray. Maybe one or two will see the light and come out of the darkness.

JAMES APPEL is a missionary doctor serving in Tchad, central Africa.

Confidence *in the* Prophetic Gift



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 41:9; Isa. 53:4–6; Matt. 23:28–31; John 5:39; Acts 10:9–16, 44–48; 17:11.*

Memory Text: “Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper’” (2 Chronicles 20:20, NKJV).

Some folk were interested in joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They had come to accept the teachings of the church through their study of the Bible but had questions about Ellen White. After all, with so many false prophets and false teachers out there, they wanted to be careful. Knowing their concerns, and understanding them, the minister said to them: “This is something you have to come to on your own, through a personal conviction of the Holy Spirit. Take time to read her writings. Some things will resonate clearly with you right away; other things you might have questions about. But just read the books yourself and then come to your own conclusion about them. In the end, her writings are really the best and ultimate testimony regarding their origins.”

The Week at a Glance: Why must the Bible be our final doctrinal authority? How important is Bible study in our lives today? What happens when people ignore the prophetic word? What role should miracles have in establishing our faith? Why do people rebel against the prophetic gift?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.*

Biblical Authority

What parallels do you see between the experience of the disciples after the Crucifixion and the early Advent believers after the Great Disappointment in 1844? *Luke 24:13–27; Acts 10:9–16, 44–48.*

The disciples experienced their great disappointment at the Crucifixion. They had hoped Jesus would *redeem* Israel; as they watched Him ride a donkey into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy, they were certain that He would set Himself up as their king, drive out the Romans, and establish God’s kingdom on earth. Only after His death, when He had “opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (*Luke 24:45, NKJV*), did they see for the first time that He had come for a different purpose. In other words, even with all those years of Jesus being in their midst, even with His plain testimony, they made mistakes; they still didn’t understand what the Scriptures had taught. Jesus pointed them to the Bible, and on that they were to base their beliefs.

Read Acts 1:6. What does this say about how, even after Jesus was with them after the Resurrection, they still were carrying false ideas about what His coming meant?

The early Advent believers also experienced a great disappointment because of William Miller’s mistaken view that the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 was the earth. And just as Bible study and God’s supernatural interventions had helped the disciples to shed their mistaken views, so, too, did the early Advent believers come to a new understanding of the sanctuary truth through their study of Scripture and by God’s guidance in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

In the end, however helpful the prophetic gift was, our pioneers were determined to base doctrines on the Bible without using the prophetic gift as a doctrinal authority.

Today, too, the strength and certainty of what we believe as Seventh-day Adventists must be based on the Word of God alone. Once we are certain of our doctrines from the Bible, and work from that firm base, we can truly have confidence in the prophetic gift.

Into the Word

Why did the Bereans study the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true? Why did they not trust his words? *Acts 17:11*.

Because Paul preached Christ from Scripture, showing that He was the promised Messiah, those who heard him with an open mind were driven to study the Scriptures for themselves to see if these things were indeed so. In other words, even Paul's words weren't good enough. They had to be confirmed by the Bible.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of the study of Scripture? *Prov. 2:1–6, Isa. 34:16, Matt. 4:4, Rev. 1:3*.

Ellen White consistently lifted up God's Word and encouraged church members to study it. "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice," she wrote in *Early Writings* (p. 78). In the introduction to *The Great Controversy* she wrote, "In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience."—Page 9.

Why did the prophets throughout history admonish God's people to read and study God's Word? The reason is simple: God "gave His word to men as a revelation of Himself. Every new truth discerned is a fresh disclosure of the character of its Author. The study of the Scriptures is the means divinely ordained to bring men into closer connection with their Creator and to give them a clearer knowledge of His will. It is the medium of communication between God and man."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 69.

Ellen White's writings are never to be used in place of the Bible; on the contrary, she spent her life trying to get church members to read the Bible and make it the rule of faith for their lives.

What are ways that you can get more out of your own Bible study? How can you make your time in the Bible more profitable than it is now?

Pointing to Jesus

Jesus said: “‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (*John 5:39, NKJV*). **What do the following Old Testament texts tell us about Jesus?** *Ps. 16:9, 10; 41:9; Isa. 53:4–6; Mic. 5:2.*

Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day” (*John 8:56*), “Moses . . . wrote about Me” (*John 5:46, NKJV*), and “David [called Me] Lord” (*Matt. 22:45*). He began His ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth with the words of Isaiah, “‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because / the Lord has anointed Me / To preach good tidings to the poor’ ” (*Isa. 61:1, NKJV*). Jesus then said, “‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ ” (*Luke 4:21, NKJV*). Jesus knew that the Old Testament was replete with references to Him. He was the central figure in Israel’s hope.

The biblical authors from Moses to the apostle John directed their readers to the One who would come first to save His people from their sins (*Matt. 1:21*) and a second time to deliver them from the presence of sin (*Rev. 21:4*).

Following in the footsteps of the biblical prophets, Ellen White consistently pointed people to their Savior Jesus Christ. “Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 9. And she admonished ministers to make Christ the center of everything. “Put Christ into every sermon. Let the preciousness, mercy, and glory of Jesus Christ be dwelt upon until Christ is formed within, the hope of glory.”—*Evangelism*, p. 186.

Repeatedly she emphasized that Jesus was very real to her. “I know my Saviour loves me, and I love my Jesus. I rest in His love, notwithstanding my imperfections.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 245. Jesus was the center of her ministry. “The object of all ministry,” she said, “is to keep self out of sight, and to let Christ appear. The exaltation of Christ is the great truth that all who labor in word and doctrine are to reveal.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 155.

Forgetting for a moment about doctrine and theology, ask yourself this basic question: How well do I know Jesus? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your spiritual life? What changes might you need to make?

The Blood of the Prophets

“ ‘Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets’ ” (*Matt. 23:28–31*).

What do Jesus’ words have to say about the attitude that many have had toward the prophets? What lesson can we draw from these words for ourselves?

Despite all the evidence for the integrity and validity of Ellen White’s ministry, even among us there are those who are, in a sense, spilling “the blood of the prophets.” Among us, as in ancient Israel, there are those who in various ways, subtle and sometimes not so subtle, are working to destroy confidence in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. It has been that way from the beginning, and we can be sure it will be right up to the end, as well. Just about every charge leveled against her and her works are similar to the charges leveled against the prophets of old and against the Word of God itself.

Reasons for these attitudes vary (see Friday’s lesson). Some people have elevated her writings to a level that is inappropriate, and so others have reacted to that, sometimes going too far in response. Others have a false understanding of how inspiration works, and because her writings do not fit that understanding, they have turned against them. Some speak, perhaps, out of ignorance; others, perhaps, from mean-spirited hostility. Fortunately, we aren’t to judge motives or hearts. We simply have to be able, as Peter wrote, “to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15*). In the end, each one of us will have to make a choice, regarding the voices we listen to and believe.

What is your own attitude about the writings of Ellen White? Why do you hold them? Think through your reasons for those attitudes. Are you open to change, if need be?

The Gift and Miracles

“And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them” (*Matt. 4:24*).

Think about the ministry of Christ when He was here in the flesh. Time and again, Jesus performed miracle after miracle. Whether turning water into wine (*John 2:1–11*), feeding the 5,000 (*Matt. 14:14–21*), healing the sick (*Matt. 4:24*), or raising the dead (*John 11:1–45*), Jesus punctuated His time here on earth with miracles, a powerful testimony to His divine power.

Read *Luke 24:13–27*, the story of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. What did He point them to in order to persuade them that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, the Messiah? Why is that answer so important to us, particularly in the context of the prophetic gift?

Despite all the miraculous things that Christ did while here, He pointed the two disciples to the Word of God and from the Bible alone worked to teach them the truth about His death and resurrection and what it all meant.

This point shouldn't be overlooked. Over the years, there have been numerous accounts of the miraculous ways in which the Lord worked through the ministry of Ellen White. Some of these accounts are more easily verifiable than others. Either way, in the end, our belief in the manifestation of the gift should not rest on accounts of miracles and so forth. Though they might have a role, the ultimate test must always be the Word of God and how the gift harmonizes with the Bible. Miracles are fine, but they are hardly the final test and mean nothing if the teachings are unbiblical.

As with the inspiration of the Bible, questions remain about the manifestation of the prophetic gift in the life of Ellen White. Yet, the gift speaks for itself and gives the best testimony and witness regarding itself. There's little that we, or accounts of miracles, could or should add. More than enough evidence has been given for anyone to make an informed decision regarding the gift, regardless of the unanswered questions that we who “see through a glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*) might still have.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Attitudes Toward the Testimonies,” pp. 40–48, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

Opposition or indifference to the writings of Ellen G. White usually is the result of (1) a failure to read enough of her writings to recognize and understand her overall and well-balanced instructions; (2) a failure to understand the proper relationship of her writings to Scripture; (3) a failure to recognize the true nature of divine inspiration; (4) a failure to recognize the principle of time and place in connection with the counsel she has given; (5) a failure to acknowledge that her counsels are still relevant today; (6) a failure to recognize that while sufficient evidence is given to convince the honest in heart, the Lord does not remove the opportunities for doubt; (7) an unwillingness to make a personal sacrifice of some cherished habit or practice that seems out of harmony with the counsels given in the writings of Ellen G. White.

Most opposition to the Spirit of Prophecy would disappear (1) if people would stop using some pet sentence or paragraph as a club with which to hit somebody else; (2) if everyone would apply the counsels to themselves instead of trying to apply them to someone else; (3) if we would not quote her without knowing where the quote is found (there are too many apocryphal sayings in existence); (4) if we would not discuss something she wrote without having studied everything she wrote on a particular topic (partial knowledge can be more dangerous than no knowledge at all); (5) if we would recognize that people’s failure to live up to or carry out the counsels that Ellen White has given has nothing whatsoever to do with the reliability of the visions and instructions.—Based on Denton E. Rebok, *Believe His Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: The Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1956), pp. 309–312.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about the blessings the Adventist Church has received from the ministry of Ellen White. What are some favorite quotations? How has her writing personally impacted each member’s spiritual growth? At the same time, what struggles have people sometimes had with her writings? What was the cause of those problems, and how can we help folk work through them?
- ❷ Many new people coming to the Adventist Church have questions regarding Ellen White. What are some approaches we could take in helping them come to a balanced understanding of the gift?
- ❸ What have you learned this quarter that helps you better understand the role of the Spirit of Prophecy? What positions have you had to change? What new insights have you gained? What questions still remain?

The Drunkard and the Tailor

by FULGÊNCIO CHALUFOIA

I was a drunkard, and my drinking robbed me of everything. But a humble tailor helped me find my way back from the edge of hell.

I live in Mozambique. I kept my drinking a secret until I was married, hoping that I could stop. But I was powerless to stop. After we were married, my drinking only got worse. Sometimes I was so drunk I beat my wife, and she threatened to leave me.

I went to a witch doctor, but he could not help me conquer my addiction. Finally my wife had enough; she left me.

Desperate to stop drinking, I bought a Bible and began attending church. One Sunday on my way to church, I met a tailor working in his roadside shop. “Where are you going?” he asked.

“To church,” I replied.

“Why are you going today?” he asked. “Yesterday was God’s Sabbath day.” Curious, I stopped. The tailor told me that God had the answer to my drinking problem and offered to teach me the Bible. The tailor could not read, but he knew the Bible. He sat down beside me, opened a notebook filled with Bible references, and pointed to one. “Look up this verse,” he said. I found the Bible verses and read them. Then he explained what they meant.

We read many Bible texts, and the tailor explained each one to me. Finally he told me to read Exodus 20. I read the Ten Commandments, and suddenly I realized that the Bible was filled with new truths that I had never read before.

I asked the tailor what church he belonged to, and he told me the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He invited me to worship there the following Sabbath. I promised to be there as I continued on to my church to tell my friends what I had just learned.

The next Sabbath I found the Adventist church and worshiped there. In that church I found God’s grace and the power to overcome alcohol and tobacco. It took some time, but with God’s help, I never smoked or drank again.

My drinking had cost me everything—my job, my wife, my home. But God has given me my life back. I am happy in Jesus, and I have invited my friends to find Jesus as well. So far at least 15 of my friends have discovered God’s truth and joined the Adventist church because I shared with them what God has done for me.

Your mission offerings help bring the gospel to thirsty souls everywhere.

FULGÊNCIO CHALUFOIA *lives in Chimoio, Mozambique.*

This quarter we will look at two important aspects of faith—doctrine and experience. We will focus on 13 essential themes of the Christian faith, 13 essential teachings. Each week's lesson will attempt to maintain a careful balance between a correct biblical understanding of these various elements of our faith and how they impact our daily experience. It's our hope that by the end of the quarter you will not only understand these themes better but also have been enriched as far as your Christian experience is concerned. Each lesson is not just about truth but about "the truth as it is in Jesus."

After all, He is the One who is the Alpha and Omega of our faith. There may be 13 different themes, but they will have one focus: the One in whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*).

Lesson 1—Love

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Love—The Fabric of Life (*Gen. 1:26, John 3:16*)

MONDAY: The Old Testament God—A God of Love (*Jer. 31:3*)

TUESDAY: The New Testament God (*Phil. 2:5–8*)

WEDNESDAY: A Response of Love (*Matt. 5:44, 25:31–46, 1 Pet. 1:22*)

THURSDAY: Love Personified (*Luke 17:12–19*)

Memory Text—1 Corinthians 13:13

Sabbath Gem: God is love. His love is more than we can fathom. Our concept of love is often shallow in comparison with the infinite love of God. Whatever else God is aside from love, whatever He has done, is doing, and will do—everything is a manifestation of His never-ending love.

Lesson 2—Faith

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: A Gift From God (*Rom. 10:17*)

MONDAY: The Basis of Our Faith (*John 5:39*)

TUESDAY: Exercising Faith (*Matt. 9:29*)

WEDNESDAY: Growing in Faith (*1 Cor. 16:13*)

THURSDAY: Faith in a Person (*1 Pet. 2:4–8*)

Memory Text—Ephesians 2:8

Sabbath Gem: Faith is a deep-rooted assurance that affects an entire person. It is a principle that governs life. Faith is the means by which we reach out and grab hold of God's promises that we can't see but trust are there.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.