

The Work of the Prophets



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

Where There Is Vision

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 1; 6:1–8; 58:6–14; John 13:20

Imagine a time long past, when Judah was caught in the middle of crossfire between religious immorality and hope for new life. The area, which was highly populated, resourceful, and full of life, could be compared to one of the best cities of the world today. With its superb technological innovations, life improved greatly. However, apostasy was deeply entrenched, and under the umbrella of worship, people were satisfying their personal needs. In this state of disobedience to God and lack of trust in Him, people were crushed in exile and hopelessness; and as the economy progressively became more distorted, the gap between the rich and the poor continued to widen.

God, however, looked with pity upon His children. He revealed His will to them. A plan was devised that showed His concern for His suffering children. It was a good plan that would affirm righteousness, justice, and Sabbath observance. Prayer and faithfulness would transform the lives of the suffering inhabitants of Judah. This plan was a light beyond the darkest hour for the victims of oppression.

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How did God give the message of goodwill to the suffering people of Judah? He chose Isaiah to deliver the message of hope and new life. At first, it seemed quite an impossible task for the prophet. How does one tell people to their faces that they need to leave their sins in order to change for the better? But God anointed Isaiah long before for this specific task. Amid great odds, Isaiah persevered to fulfill his appointment with the Lord. And, like many of his counterparts, Isaiah's life as a prophet was never easy. He endured the many assaults that Satan always inflicts on God's chosen people. But all in all, the deliverance of the people of Judah came as a result of God's intervention through one chosen person.

This week we are looking at the life of Ellen White as another one of God's messengers, and how her work has paralleled that of biblical prophets such as Isaiah.

A Prophet's Duties

LOGOS

Gen. 22:1–14; Isaiah 53; Matt. 3:7–10; Revelation 13

A Call for Change (Matt. 3:7–10)

Often, for a person to develop successfully, a change of attitude is called for. I remember how difficult it was for me to help people change when they believed their way of life was the best. In the spiritual sphere, the same problem is encountered. John the Baptist was one prophet who urged people to change in preparation for the Lord Jesus Christ. As he fulfilled his duty, he experienced many problems and walked long distances in order to call people to repent and to be baptized. In some instances, people were not positive in their responses, and others were not ready to leave their old way of life.

Ellen White was no exception in the struggle to champion change for Christ's cause. She wrote, "As the spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make

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known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future."¹

In shedding light on God's Word, prophets (God's messengers) depended on the Bible itself. In facing challenges, they received their power from heaven. Read the story of Stephen in Acts 6:8–7:60.

Undaunted in Faith and Courage (Gen. 22:1–14)

The Word of God is consistent throughout, and history can reveal from the time of the prophets that when we rely on the Holy Spirit to illuminate our hearts, we can discern the greatest truths in God's Holy Book. One may ask, after being childless for so long, what could possibly prompt Abraham to take his only son as a sacrifice to the Lord?

We would all find it impossible to offer a dear child as a sacrifice to our Savior. But Abraham committed his way to the Lord, believing the Lord Himself would provide a lamb. In order to commit our plans and ways to the Lord, we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit to give us faith (John 14:26). Faith such as this is needed

in the world today—faith that will lay hold on the promises of God’s Word and refuse to let go until Heaven hears us. Faith such as this connects us with God and strengthens us for coping with the powers of darkness. Through faith, God’s children have “conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; . . . shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword” (Heb. 11:33, 34, NIV). Just as in the case of Abraham or one of our church’s founders, Ellen White, we are called to wait on the Lord to provide ways to sustain His cause. The work of the Lord’s messengers is tested by the amount of faith they have to withstand the fiery tests, which are part and parcel of the process of salvation.

Church-State Handshake (Revelation 13)

Any union between church and state will eventually obfuscate God’s Word. The Bible warns us about this in Revelation 13. Ellen White wrote, “Whenever the church has obtained secular power, she has employed it to punish dissent from her doctrines. Protestant churches that have followed in the steps of Rome by forming alliance with worldly powers, have manifested a similar desire to restrict liberty of conscience.”²

As Seventh-day Adventists waiting for the second coming of Christ, we should be ever mindful of seemingly harmless entities, even those from other churches who want to link hands with politicians in their efforts to persuade governments to enact specific laws. Again from the pen of Ellen White, we read the following: “Apostasy in the church will prepare the way for the image to the beast.

“The Bible declares that before the coming of the Lord, there will exist a state of religious declension similar to that in the first centuries.”³

As we move closer to the end of time, it is important for us to heed God’s messages given to us through His many prophets, including Ellen White.

REACT

1. Consider some of the arguments people are using in favor of a church-state union. How would you respectfully debate against them?

2. Consider your life over the past year. How has the Word of God, as spoken through His prophets, guided you?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. xi.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 443.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

TESTIMONY

Isa. 6:8

Born in 1827, Ellen White married early and experienced the problems of rearing a family, traveling extensively, preaching, and writing. Despite these circumstances, she stood out as one of the best female authors the world has ever produced.

“The rare insight of Ellen G. White and the persuasive manner in which she presented her subject matter have led many to the conclusion that her mind was especially guided by the Spirit of God.”¹

“Ellen White lived in a time of great ignorance of physiology, hygiene, and nutrition. She took the lead in calling for reforms, most of which, now generally accepted, have yielded better health and longer life to mankind. The sound philosophy she set forth by pen and voice has now crystallized into a worldwide system of medical institutions, known for the highest standards of medical practice. . . . Her publications in education have been acclaimed by outstanding educators to be ‘fifty years ahead of their times.’ ”²

Because of her writings and her willingness to share the messages God gave her, Ellen White is regarded as

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one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She wrote, “Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communication with his Maker; but since

man separated himself from God by transgression, the human race has been cut off from this high privilege. By the plan of redemption, however, a way has been opened whereby the inhabitants of the earth may still have connection with heaven. God has communicated with men by His spirit, and divine light has been imparted to the world by revelations to His chosen servants.”³

All of God’s prophets are in perfect harmony with His Word. To show that she fully depended on God’s yardstick to convey her messages, she wrote, “The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language; yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.”⁴

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Coldwater, Mich.: Remnant Publications, 1988), p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. v.

4. *Lift Him Up*, p. 118.

The Importance of the Prophets

EVIDENCE

Amos 3:7

In appointing the prophets their work, God shows us that He values human beings enough to choose from among them messengers to represent Him. This in itself is enough evidence to show that we cannot dispense with the prophetic gift to help us understand Scripture and the plan of salvation. Ellen White wrote, “God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write.”¹

We can bank our hopes on the works of the great pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who advocated for religious reformation and rang a bell for the second coming of Christ. As one of these reformers, Ellen White wrote, “From age to age the warnings which God has sent to the world by His servants have been received with like incredulity and unbelief. . . .

“Christ declares that there will exist similar unbelief concerning His second coming. As the people of Noah’s day ‘knew not until the Flood came, and took them all away; so,’ in the words of our Saviour, ‘shall also the coming of the Son of man be.’ [Matthew 24:39.]”²

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Concerning the dangerous union between church and state, she wrote, “When the professed people of God are uniting with the world, living as they live, and joining with them in forbidden pleasure; when the luxury of the world becomes the luxury of the church; when the marriage bells are chiming, and all are looking forward to many years of worldly prosperity,—then, suddenly as the lightning flashes from the heavens, will come the end of their bright visions and delusive hopes.”³

During our day, the prophetic gift of Ellen White speaks to the dangers of apostasy in the church. We see this fulfilled before our own eyes as many Protestant churches opt for a reconciliation with the Catholic Church on a number of issues. As present-day Adventists, we should remain firm, both as individuals and as a church, concerning what all of God’s prophets said regarding such topics.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. vi, vii.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 337, 338.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 338, 339.

Prophecy Test

HOW-TO

2 Pet. 1:21

On a hot afternoon, a gentleman was speaking to a large crowd at Homa Bay Municipal Stadium. His speech, titled “Thief Number Two,” was quite captivating. In one hand, he held a microphone. In the other hand, he held a black book, which was the center of his focus. However, I observed that people were more interested in him than in his message. He was handsome, and his oratory skills were perfect.

Such scenes are quite common these days. People flock to see a celebrity preacher and to contribute money to that preacher’s ministry. But do they really understand what is being preached?

Even some Adventists put Ellen White on a pedestal and quote her without really understanding what she is all about. Because of this, many people feel that Adventists believe in her before they believe in the Bible. Some people have refused to join our church because of this or have left the church because of it. But as with any other prophet of God, we are to test her writings according to the following guidelines:

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following guidelines:

1. *Consistency with the Word of God.* No prophetic message can match God’s standards if it’s not consistent with His Word. “The Holy Scriptures are to be accept-

ed as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.”¹

2. *The amount of truth in the message.* “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1, NIV). The difference between false and true prophets is told by the amount of truth in the content of their messages.

3. *A three-dimensional view of time.* True prophecy must embrace time in three dimensions: the past, the present, and the future. Ellen White wrote, “As the spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed.”²

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. vii.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. xi.

Faith in the Prophets

OPINION

Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 16:31

This week, we concentrated on the prophets, especially Ellen White and the difference her work makes in our lives as Seventh-day Adventists. In my own life, the work of the prophets is very important.

The Spirit of prophecy calls to our attention that like “Korah and his companions, many, even of the professed followers of Christ, are thinking, planning, and working so eagerly for self-exaltation, that in order to gain the sympathy and support of the people, they are ready to pervert the truth, falsifying and misrepresenting the Lord’s servants.”*

That is why we are called to be in the camp of the saints who had faith in God and His messengers. Our actions should reflect our belief and faith in the work of the prophets. However, do we really believe in their writings? The only way we can answer this question is to act according to the instructions of Christ. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NKJV). Once we get out of this mindset, we miss the point: “But why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46, NKJV).

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In all our communication with God, one thing is clear: either we believe in what He says through the prophets, or we do not. If we believe that the work of reformers is a revelation from God, we will tend to do what God has revealed through them. But when we fail to heed the instructions of the prophets, we lose sight of all the important things God has revealed through them. This lost sight will be revealed in our behavior.

To conclude, our faith in the prophets should be strong enough to keep us from being like the five foolish virgins with no oil in their lamps at the midnight grand reception of the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1–13).

REACT

1. How have your actions in the past week reflected faith in the prophets?
2. How can we as Adventists convince our friends and the unchurched community about the importance of the prophets?

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 404.

End-Time Prophet for Us

EXPLORATION

Deut. 18:18

CONCLUDE

There should be no question for those who consider themselves Adventists that we are blessed to have the inspired writings of Ellen G. White to further extend godly light on subject matter that pertains to us in these last days. It is very important for us to remember, as Mrs. White counsels, that she is the lesser light pointing to the greater light of the Bible. It would be wise for us to read and to pay heed to the light of guidance that the Lord has raised up for us in these last days as we prepare for His return.

CONSIDER

- Listening to Ellen G. White's writings that have been made available in audio form.
- Singing or playing the hymns that our pioneers sang to give them hope and encouragement, such as "When Peace Like a River."
- Memorizing passages of the Spirit of Prophecy to strengthen your daily devotional life.
- Taking a tour through one of the Adventist historical sites and reminiscing about those pioneer days and the struggles the pioneers encountered.
- Sharing some of the things you have learned through reading the Spirit of Prophecy, such as counsels on health, with a nonbeliever.
- Charting the changes in lifestyle, technology, and events that have taken place from the time of Ellen White to our present time in light of the facts found in Matthew 24.

CONNECT

Pathways to the Pioneers, audio CD series from adventsource.org.
Roger Coon, *The Great Visions of Ellen G. White*.