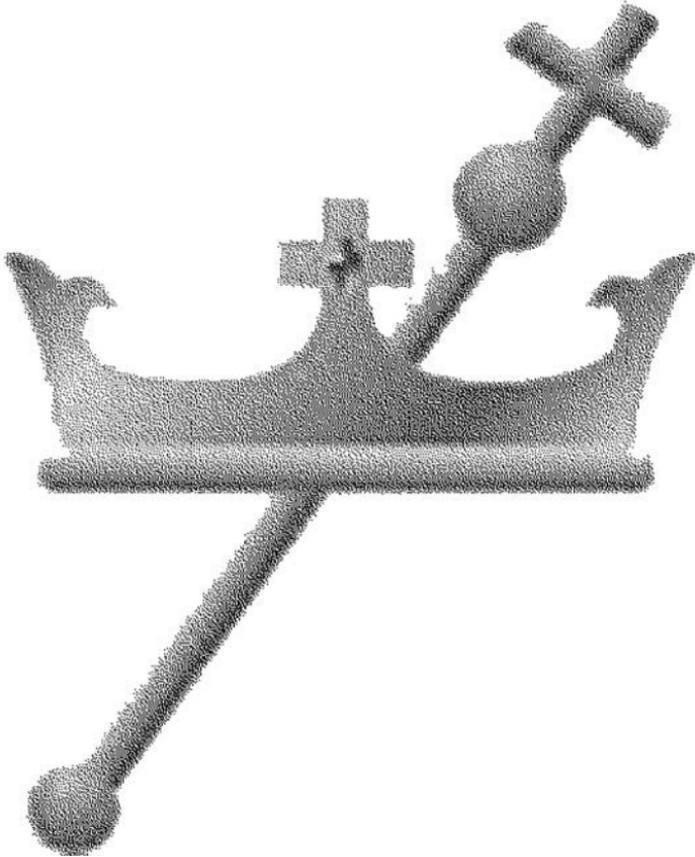


The Authority of the Prophets



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

Sometimes You Need a Prophet

INTRODUCTION

2 Chron. 20:20; Prov. 14:12; 29:18; 1 Thess. 5:20, 21; Rev. 12:17

We live in a world where there are many individuals who purport to tell the future and make predictions, some of which come to pass, some of which are abysmal failures. Some of these individuals are sought out by persons in “high places,” because they want to be sure that the decisions they make will turn out in their favor. There are even people who refuse to get out of their beds until they have read their horoscope or contacted an astrologer.

In biblical times, God used His prophets as His spokespersons to let His people know what needed to be done and what the outcome would be if the prophecies were not heeded. Yet some people disregarded the prophets’ words, and there were dire consequences as a result (Genesis 7, 8). Still others, who should have known better, went to witches (1 Samuel 28) to find God’s will.

In recent times, there has been an increase in natural disasters, such as storms, floods, tsunamis, famines, and earthquakes. This increase brings forcefully to mind the Bible prophecies that speak of wars and rumors of wars, along with pestilences and calamities such as we have never seen before.

**The order was mandatory—
pack your necessities and
leave.**

I moved to Biloxi, Mississippi, two weeks before Hurricane Katrina smashed into Louisiana and Mississippi. I remember when the warnings for evacuation came over the airwaves. They went something like this: “The system is big and will cause devastation and loss of life if you do not leave; it seems as though it is going to be a category 5 on the Saffir-Simpson Scale—winds of more than 150 miles per hour, pelting rain, and storm surges of more than 30 feet.” The order was mandatory—pack your necessities and leave. Batten down, take no chances, leave town, find some place to go! Some people scoffed and said it couldn’t be as bad as it sounded. It’s been a few years since the “prophets” warned of the devastation—some didn’t move, and the symbols on the dwellings tell the story. In some instances, there is nothing and nobody left to tell the tale.

What is your reaction to prophecy? Do you think it’s not meant for you? Do you think it won’t happen in your lifetime? Do you examine your situation and put your house in order, or do you make an appointment with “the witch of Endor” to tell you what is really going to happen?

Is God Concerned?

EVIDENCE

Mark 1:21–27; Acts 16:25–34

Archaeological digs continually unearth scrolls, cuneiform tablets, ruins of ancient cities, and more that verify the writings of the prophets of old. But who gave these prophets the authority, wisdom, and words to share these predictions, these warnings, so that we could make a conscious, informed decision about our eternal future? We are reminded in Revelation 19:10 that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Genesis reminds us that the serpent, Satan, would bruise Christ’s heel, but that Christ would deal a deathblow to Satan’s head. This was fulfilled in Christ’s death and resurrection.

Noah was told to warn the country while building the ark of refuge. The animals obeyed, but most people did not, thus perishing in the Flood. Jonah warned the people of Nineveh about their rebellion. They confessed and turned from their evil deeds, and God saved them. Lot was told to leave his hometown because God abhorred its wickedness. He obeyed, while fire and brimstone destroyed those who remained behind.

Moses was given a job to do but was reluctant because he thought he could not rightly repre-

**He believed, but only after his
firstborn lay dead.**

sent God by his speech; but the prophecies of Moses are evidenced by his prediction of the plagues of Egypt, which were largely disregarded by Pharaoh, who questioned God’s veracity and asked, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” (Exod. 5:2, NKJV). He believed, but only after his firstborn lay dead.

Jehoiakim read the prophecies of Jeremiah and thought that by burning the scroll the prophecies of destruction would disappear. Young King Josiah learned of the misdeeds of his people and acknowledged their collective sins and inquired of the prophet what he should do. His obedience led to the saving of an entire nation. The destruction of Jerusalem was foretold, and those who believed fled and were saved. Sometimes we understand after the fulfillment. Let this not be the case with Christ’s second coming.

REACT

What of predictions and “new” light in the religious world? Can they be regarded as prophecy?

“Thus Saith the Lord”

LOGOS

Exod. 4:10–16; 2 Chron. 20:14–20; Hos. 12:13; 2 Pet. 1:21

Divine Power-Sharing (Exod. 4:10–16)

There are several Greek “power” words that are often used in the New Testament. Two of these words are *exousia* and *dunamis*. *Exousia* is translated “authority,” while *dunamis* is translated “might,” “power,” “strength,” etc. The source of ultimate authority is God, who delegates authority to His human agents, including governments. Read Romans 13:1.

Prophets of God are divinely appointed human agents who work and speak on behalf of Him. They are sometimes also given supernatural power to do miracles. When they speak God’s words, those who hear can usually discern the divine authority that accentuates their utterances. When God gives authority to the prophet, He also gives the prophet courage to carry out the assignment.

Success in any line is guaranteed when we obey the word of prophecy.

When Moses was commissioned by God to go to Egypt, the shepherd of Midian was fearful. However, the Lord assured him of His presence (Exod. 4:12). The former shepherd, now prophet, went boldly into the presence of Pharaoh and demanded that he

let God’s people go (Exod. 5:1).

The authority and fearlessness manifested by Moses after he was imbued with the Spirit of prophecy shocked the king and his government officials.

Speaking Authoritatively (2 Chron. 20:14–20)

God’s prophets bring messages of warning, counsel, doctrine, admonition, correction, and instruction regarding God’s ways for the benefit of His people and the furtherance of His cause. Success in any line is guaranteed when we obey the word of prophecy. In times of distress and confusion, in periods of uncertainty, the Spirit of God speaks through the prophets to assure people of His presence and power to deliver them.

When Judah was surrounded by the Ammonites and Moabites, the prophet Jahaziel spoke saying, “ ‘Thus says the Lord to you: “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s” ’ ” (2 Chron. 20:15, NKJV). The voice of God was heard through the words of the

prophet and the king responded. Read that response in 2 Chronicles 20:20.

The Source of Prophetic Authority (2 Pet. 1:21)

The Bible reveals that prophets usually refer to God as the authority for the message they deliver. Statements like “thus saith the Lord” and “the word of the Lord came to me” are evidence that the prophets did not take upon themselves the responsibility to speak what they thought God wanted the people to hear. The apostle Peter, himself a prophet, states, “No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke” (2 Pet. 1:21, NRSV).

The psalmist David acknowledged the Lord’s authority in giving prophetic messages through human instruments when he said, “ ‘The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, / And His word was on my tongue’ ” (2 Sam. 23:2, NKJV).

Israel’s history reveals that as long as the people remained faithful to God and followed the directives of the prophets, they received God’s blessings and protection. Disobedience to the messages of the prophets was disobedience to God.

The authority of the prophets is really God’s power working through imperfect humans, who sometimes didn’t understand some of the things they spoke about, and who could only do unusual things through the power of the indwelling Christ (Amos 3:7).

How God Used the Prophets (Hos. 12:13)

Many of God’s prophets were His servants in many other areas. The prophet Haggai was a counselor and motivator to Zerubbabel, the chief builder of the temple after the return from Babylonian exile. Daniel was a statesman under several kings and was instrumental in governing the affairs of Babylon and of Media and Persia. David was king, builder, musician, army commander, and one of the greatest leaders Israel ever had.

Prophets were teachers, kings, politicians, military personnel, judges, etc. Thus, the authority bestowed on them was multifaceted. Read Hosea 12:13. The preservation of a nation by a prophet suggests that the prophet was given authority by God to operate in many areas other than only speaking God’s word.

A study of the history of the Adventist Church will reveal a similar manner of the operation of the prophetic gift in Ellen White. As such, her writings also carry divine authority, for they, too, were given through divine inspiration.

REACT

1. How would you respond to individuals today who claim to be prophets?
2. How do you regard someone who speaks authoritatively from the Bible? Does that person have prophetic authority?
3. How would you expect a modern-day prophet to manifest his or her authority?

Why Believe the Prophets?

TESTIMONY

1 Thess. 5:20, 21

“Prophecy has been fulfilling, line upon line. . . .The more fully we accept the light presented by the Holy Spirit through the consecrated servants of God, the deeper and surer, even as the eternal throne, will appear the truths of ancient prophecy; we shall be assured that men of God spake as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost These messages were given, not for those that uttered the prophecies, but for us who are living amid the scenes of their fulfillment.”¹

“God chose prophets whom He commissioned to call the people to repentance, and to warn them of the evils that their course would surely bring upon them. ‘The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place’ (2 Chron. 36:15).”²

“To the end of time, men will arise to create confusion and rebellion among those who claim to be representatives of the true God. Those who prophesy lies will encourage men to look upon sin as a light thing. When the terrible results of their evil deeds are made manifest, they will seek, if possible, to make the one who has faithfully warned them, responsible for their difficulties, even as the Jews charged Jeremiah with their evil fortunes. But as surely as the

“Those who prophesy lies will encourage men to look upon sin as a light thing.”

words of Jehovah through His prophet were vindicated anciently, so surely will the certainty of His messages be established today.”³

“The world has never been left without witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. And in the closing scenes of this earth’s history, when iniquity will have reached a height never before attained, it will still be possible to say of the remnant people who have remained true to God, ‘Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’”⁴

1. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 114.

2. *Christian Experience and Teachings*, p. 239.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 442.

4. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 102.

Validating a Prophet

HOW-TO

Isa. 8:20; Jer. 28:9; Matt. 7:20; 1 John 4:1–3

God's plan for reaching the minds of men and women through the messages of His prophets has been counterfeited by Satan in the form of false prophets. Persons claiming to be prophets make their predictions to governments and the general public, advising them regarding the outcomes of various situations. Scenarios include prophecies concerning national events, who will be married to whom, and what natural disasters will take place. How can we measure the authenticity of such prophets?

Test 1: Read Isaiah 8:20. The "law and testimony" are clearly references to the divinely inspired instructions given through the prophets. If any teaching or action deviates from the pattern prescribed in the revealed standard of truth, it is to be recognized as coming from the realm of darkness.¹

Test 2: Read Matthew 7:20. Here, Jesus presents another test to be applied to prophets. Does the so-called prophet bear the fruit of the Spirit? What influence does the prophet's teaching have on others?²

Test 3: Read 1 John 4:2. This test is broader than simply claiming to believe that Jesus Christ lived. It is the recognition that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.³

How can we measure the authenticity of such prophets?

Test 4: Read Jeremiah 28:9. Prediction is not the major work of the prophet, but in many instances the prophet claimed that by divine inspiration he or she had been given insight into the future. Part of the testing of a prophet is observing whether or not predictions are fulfilled.

The Bible says that in the end times, many false prophets will emerge. This end is fast approaching, and many are claiming the gift of prophecy. As Christians, we must follow the standards of the Bible and allow God's words to direct us.

REACT

Contrast prophets/prophecy from the Bible with more modern prophets/prophecy (for example, Nostradamus). How authentic are today's prophets?

1. T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You*, pp. 100, 101.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

OPINION

Isa. 44:24–26; Rev. 22:18, 19

A prophecy is not just a good guess. Who hasn't heard of Nostradamus, one of the world's famous publisher of prophecies? In biblical times, soothsayers often claimed to be from God, bringing predictions of the future. In modern times, we often access the opinions of those claiming to have signs of the future without realizing the seriousness of doing so.

Chinese fortune cookies seemingly have a unique message for the reader, but these are actually random messages put in for entertainment. The recipients of the cookies are the ones who put the importance and accuracy to its content. The same goes for horoscopes, including yearly Chinese astrology charts. Many of these "predictions" go to press at least six weeks before the magazine hits the stands, but still attract quite a following. Some persons compare predictions in monthly magazines with others in the daily or weekly newspapers, giving credence

to individuals who claim to be predictors of the future.

**It's not 85 to 90 percent sure.
It's fully assured!**

According to the Bible, God is the only one who knows the future, and when He sees fit, He appoints a prophet to speak to His people.

Isaiah 44:24–26 points out that when He gives a message, it will come true. It's not 85 to 90 percent sure. It's fully assured! Read Isaiah 44:25.

At times, certain individuals have "predicted" a particular happening, and from all appearances it came true. This oftentimes encourages further research into all predictions made by this individual in an attempt to give credence to that person.

God, the designer and teller of the future, promised, not predicted, the first coming of Jesus. He allowed His prophets to pinpoint the time and revealed His will to the wise men for them to see His promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. All of this was to help us have a glimpse of His undying love for us. He also has promised that Christ will return to claim His own. Hold on to His promise (John 13:1–3; 1 Thess. 4:16–18).

REACT

1. What importance should be given to the prophecies outlined in the Bible?
2. How should we relate to those who claim to be all-knowing?
3. What are the characteristics of a true prophet?

In the Spirit of Prophecy

EXPLORATION

Rev. 19:10

CONCLUDE

Fortune-telling is comprised of human predictions and is demon-inspired and unreliable. But God's prophecies, foretold through chosen human agents, have been fulfilled, or are happening before our very eyes. The Bible speaks volumes about the prophetic gift. It shows how God uses His prophets in different ways, and how He gives them authority and even supernatural powers. In advising us to "test the spirits," Scripture tells us that it is our duty and privilege to study for ourselves to determine which prophecies meet the requirements of God.

CONSIDER

- Reading or rereading a book, chapter, or article by Ellen G. White. Also read one about her or about the Spirit of Prophecy, written by someone else in the church. (See publications listed below.)
- Reflecting on and praying about your personal attitude toward prophecy, including whether you find yourself doubting or even despising it.
- Writing an essay, poem, or song about Ellen White's last public appearance and its importance to the youth of the church. (See C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World*, page 204.)
- Drawing or painting some aspect of the scene on Mount Carmel involving Elijah and the false prophets (1 Kings 18:17–46).
- Writing a letter to an imaginary Christian friend who says he or she does not want to do one of the "lesser" ministries (like singing or helping with fellowship dinners) because he or she prefers to be a prophet.
- Listing the signs of prophecy being fulfilled in your lifetime, arranging them from the most to the least dramatic.

CONNECT

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, pp. 873, 876, 877. (See note on Revelation 9:10 and "Additional Note on Chapter 19.")

C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists*, "Inspired to Save Souls," especially chap. 25; F. D. Nichols, *E. G. White and Her Critics*.