

The Integrity of the Prophetic Gift



“ ‘As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak’ ” (2 Chron. 18:13, NKJV).

The Cost of Future Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

1 John 4:1, 2

The Bible is full of prophecies, many of which have come to pass and many of which are unfulfilled. The prophecies in the Bible that have been fulfilled indicate that the Bible is God's infallible Word. He gives us these prophecies not as a way to see the future in our individual lives, but as a way to see into our spiritual future by pointing to our Savior.

There are many other prophecies in the world today in addition to the ones predicted in the Bible. Of these prophecies, which ones can we believe? Prophecy is big business. We see this while going about our everyday routines. Prophecies are predicted in the tabloids located at the supermarket checkout stands, and there are places in neighborhoods where so-called prophets or psychics will tell you your future for a fee. We can even make a phone call from the comfort of our own home to get someone's prediction. Of course, we need to have a credit card to get that information. People want to know the future and are willing to spend their money for a glimpse of it. That is why there are so many prophecies today.

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There are also people in churches who claim to have the gift of prophecy. How do we know if these people are actually foretelling something that will happen in the future or if their predictions are false? There is only one way to know for sure which prophecies are true, and that is by studying the Bible. First John 4:1, 2 states, "Dear friends, 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" (NIV).

The Bible is the only source we should use when deciding which prophecies to believe. Only God is omniscient. Therefore He is the only one who can actually see into the future. If we test prophecies by His Word, then we can know which ones will be fulfilled and which ones are counterfeit. The Bible gives definite ways to test all the prophecies.

God wants us to know some of what will happen in the future, so we will be prepared for them. We must always remember that it is God's will that is being fulfilled when we read these prophecies.

What He Said . . . Not What I Said

LOGOS

2 Sam. 7:1–7; 1 Kings 22:10–34; Dan. 8:27

Getting It Right the Second Time (2 Sam. 7:1–7)

When David sought permission to build the Lord a temple, the prophet Nathan said, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you” (2 Sam. 7:3, NIV). Later Nathan returned to David to tell him the Lord did not approve the plan. He was, in essence, saying, “I was wrong, forget what I said. God Himself told me what He really wants.”

There are times when a prophet’s humanity is evident, but that does not erase the fact that he is, indeed, God’s messenger. Nathan, with the grace that only a man of God could have, turned himself around and went back to David. A prophet doesn’t have the luxury of putting his or her own thoughts and opinions into a “Thus saith the Lord” moment. However, it’s comforting to know that when that does happen, God works to keep His message pure, even telling His prophets that they got it wrong.

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Not What You Want Me to Say (1 Kings 22:10–34)

The prophet Micaiah was told to prophesy a great victory for King Ahab of Israel. The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah told him to prophesy in agreement with the other four hundred or so prophets who had assembled before the king. Micaiah followed this instruction and also predicted an overwhelming victory for the king. Ahab, however, was convinced that Micaiah was not speaking the words of God and asked him for the real message. Micaiah then delivered the news that, if they went into battle, Ahab would die. For this prophecy, Micaiah was turned over to the ruler of the city and put in prison until Ahab returned.

For some reason, unspecified in the biblical narrative, Ahab does not believe Micaiah is telling the truth when a victory is predicted. Ahab believes Micaiah’s prophecy of defeat and death but continues out into battle, during which even his disguise does not prevent him from being fatally wounded.

Not What They Said (1 Kings 22:10–18)

With about four hundred “prophets” of God prophesying victory for Israel, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, still felt a need to inquire of a prophet of the Lord. As

Micaiah was brought to the king, the messenger informed him of the prophecy of victory, telling Micaiah to agree with the other four hundred men and to speak favorably to Ahab. Micaiah's reply is, "I can tell him only what the Lord tells me." Apparently, Jehoshaphat was not the only person to doubt the prophetic skills of the four hundred men. The messenger sent to summon Micaiah felt it was necessary to tell this prophet of God the answer to King Ahab's question.

Micaiah understood that it doesn't matter what four hundred men are saying. What matters is what the one and only God is saying. And sometimes clinging to the words of God has you going against popular consensus. But Micaiah's thoughts were not about being different from everyone else. Rather, his thoughts were about being on the same side as God.

A Look Behind the Scenes (Dan. 8:27)

Daniel narrates the extent of the exhaustion he felt after seeing a particularly appalling vision. He was so drained of strength that he lay ill for several days before he was finally able to return to work. This exhaustion that Daniel feels comes right after the vision, when he is alone, even before he has had the time to tell anybody or even to write it down. When given a vision, prophets are not offered the option of choosing whether they want to hear the good news or the bad news first. The message is just delivered, and then, if necessary, explained in further detail.

"It was beyond understanding" (Dan. 8:27, NIV). If you have ever traveled to another country and plugged a 110-volt electrical appliance into a 220-volt socket, you have a partial understanding of how it must feel for a fallen human mind to be plugged into God's divine knowledge and wisdom. And yet, there is very little that God's true prophets have not been willing to endure.

Conclusion

A prophet's integrity must be questioned in order to find a true prophet of God. This questioning of authority does not hinder the prophet's message, but rather enhances it. The good news for the prophet, at least, is that it does not take a good person to recognize one of God's prophets. And the good news for the rest of us is, once we have found a true prophet of God, we can be certain that God is working through him or her and that He is actively monitoring the delivery of His messages to us.

REACT

1. If it's so tough being a prophet, why be one?
2. What might be some factors that keep prophets motivated?
3. What advantages are there to being a true prophet of God?
4. Why does God need to use prophets?
5. How can prophets and their messages motivate us to strengthen our relationship with God?

A Priceless Gift Yet Worthy

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 14:29, 37

“The gift of prophecy was used to prepare the way for Christ’s first advent. ‘Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.’ Hebrews 2:17. To work out the plan of salvation it was essential that God become man, partake fully of his nature, live among men, be tempted in all points as other men are, and in human flesh gain complete victory over sin. To bring man’s thinking and living back into harmony with God’s, a revelation had to be given through a life. Choosing men to work for other men and to pass on to them special messages from God is obviously the most effective general method that could have been chosen. Thus, through prophets the Creator accomplished the preparation needed before Jesus came to earth.

“Prophets stood before the people as representatives of the Lord. Their very presence showed the people that God was sufficiently interested in them and close enough to them to choose men from among them to represent Him. They were men ‘subject to like passions’ as their neighbors; not visitors from another world, but men among men.

“Through prophets the Creator accomplished the preparation needed before Jesus came to earth.”

While the plan was subject to dangers because of the weakness of humanity in the persons selected, yet it possessed inherent possibilities for success not present in any other method.”¹

“Prophets kept men constantly aware of God’s instruction to them. They must never entertain the idea that they had no access to divine counsel.”²

The prophetic gift is still used today to prepare for the second coming of Jesus Christ. If we look at the prophets before Christ’s first advent, we see they said what God told them to say. They never gave polished, wordy speeches. They were upright and honest. They used their gift as they were moved by the Spirit. When Nathan came to David, he said what God told him to say. He did not add or deduct anything. David also heard God’s message loud and clear, because he heard God through His messenger (2 Sam. 12:1–16).

1. *A Prophet Among You*, p. 24.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Old, but Still Valid

EVIDENCE

Jer. 29:11; 1 Thess. 5:19–22

The gift of prophecy not only helps us to focus on the future but reminds us now and again to remember how God has led His people in the past and that He has a plan for us here and now (Jer. 29:11).

An important requirement of effective leadership is to earn the trust of other people, for without trust, no one will consent to follow. Trust is the conviction that leaders mean what they say. It is a belief in something that in these days seems to be rather old-fashioned—integrity, which is only given from above.¹ The solution is not to reject or betray all prophecy, but rather to test all prophecy (1 Thess. 5:19–22).

Prophets must humbly accept the truth that they see only through a glass dimly and that they know only in part (1 Cor. 13:12). Mature prophets urge everyone to whom they prophesy to judge, test, and compare with Scripture everything they say or write. They are not offended when people are careful.

“Prophecy will confirm and broaden the vision; it cannot create one if nothing is there. Vision is created through prayer. . . . If these things are absent; we need to be restoring people to God, not creating vision for empty hearts.”²

People become fearless when
there is no integrity.

People become fearless when there is no integrity. This truth is written in the history of humankind. The fact that there is little integrity can be partially attributed to an escapist mentality that has encouraged many sincere Christians to be passive and pessimistic about their role on earth.

The prophet Micaiah would have asked the people of his time, “Does our past really embarrass us? No. Our past is old, but still valid.”

REACT

1. How do you behave when the history of the Christian church is brought before you?

2. Does your past embarrass you in the light of the gift of prophecy? If so, what can you do about it?

1. Graham Cooke, *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting* (Elle, U.K.: Sovereign World, 1994), p. 80.

2. Arthur Patrick, “Does Our Past Embarrass Us?” *Ministry: International Journal for Clergy* (April 1991), p. 7.

Believing in the Prophetic Gift

HOW-TO

Joel 2:28–31; 2 Pet. 1:21

Even though sin ended face-to-face communication between God and humans, He did not end His intimacy with humanity. Instead, He developed other ways of communicating with us. He sent His messages of love, encouragement, and warning through the prophets, of whom Ellen G. White was one.

How does one believe in the integrity of the prophetic gift? The Bible gives us specific guidelines by which we can distinguish and test the integrity of a prophet.

1. *Agreement with the Bible.* “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20, NKJV). This means that the message of a prophet of integrity should agree with the Bible.

2. *Fulfillment of predictions.* The accuracy of a prophet’s predictions must be demonstrated.

**Our problem is that we doubt
a lot.**

3. *The incarnation of Christ.* “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ

has come in the flesh is not of God (1 John 4:2, 3, NKJV). After all, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10, NKJV).

4. *A prophet’s “fruit.”* A prophet of integrity bears good fruit. (See Matthew 7:20.) This doesn’t mean that prophets must be absolutely perfect. But it does mean that they should be developing the fruit of the Spirit in their walk with Christ.

The writings of Ellen White are not a substitute for Scripture. Ellen White herself believed and taught that the Bible was the ultimate norm for the church. She wrote, “The holy scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will. They are the standards of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.”*She saw her work as that of leading people back to the Bible, helping them to understand and to apply biblical principles to their lives.

Our problem is that we doubt a lot. Why? Because we lack faith. I pray that our hearts will be ever open to accept this gift and not only the gift, but the Giver of the gift as well.

REACT

If we believe in the Creator God who loves us so much that He gave His life for us, why is it so hard to accept that He would give us prophets?

**God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 198.

What to Do With Ellen White

OPINION

Rev. 12:17; 19:10

Early in my high school years, I developed an appreciation for the writings of Ellen White. Before that I had known who she was but hadn't read any of her books. Her writings showed me Christ's love and made it more tangible to me. At other times, when my busy life left nothing but a few minutes for spiritual things, I'd notice my spiritual strength and appetite waning. In my busyness, I'd stop reading the Bible regularly. For me, reading *Steps to Christ* would reignite that hunger for a connection with God and for the Bible again. It always helped me to return to an enjoyable daily walk with God.

I believe Mrs. White's writings are also important to the church as a whole. In reading through the Bible, we see that God has provided guidance and instruction through individuals from the very beginning of sin. Moses was used to help lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Noah built a boat and tried to get the world in it. John the Baptist readied everyone for the King of the universe to walk among us. So wouldn't God also use individuals to share the final proclamation of the world's closure? Seeing how He's worked in the past, we can be certain He'd be just as involved in the future. Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 let us know that

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this final campaign will be accompanied by the gift of prophecy given by the Spirit of God. I believe Ellen White was given this gift.

Each of us has to decide what to do with Ellen White. If her writings are from God, though, shouldn't we treat them as such? God would have sent the messages for a reason, right? And for those who aren't sure if she's legit, shouldn't they find out? If she's really God's messenger, we'll need and want to learn what He sent her to say, right? He's God whether He's spoken to us directly or through the gift of prophecy, so we always need to be ready and willing to accept His message.

REACT

What would be the risk in not recognizing or acknowledging a messenger from God, especially in these last days?

A Perfect Message of Hope

EXPLORATION

2 Chron. 18:13

CONCLUDE

In order to reach all of His children, God often chooses regular individuals to act as His prophets and carriers of His message. Many prophets were imperfect, their shortcomings obvious. However, God's message was, and continues to be, perfect. Because His message is perfect, any individual He chooses He will enable to share the message. Due to the inevitable human characteristics inherent in prophets, hearers of their message must question their authority and authenticity. There are biblical criteria to accomplish this. When the criteria are met, the prophets' integrity is emboldened, rather than diminished, by the scrutiny. Ellen G. White is a prophetess who met the strict biblical criteria designed for prophets. Her strict adherence to the Word of God separates her from modern-day fortune-tellers and visionary quacks.

CONSIDER

- Writing a list of characteristics for a prophet based on the Bible and seeing if any modern-day prophets and/or televangelists live up to the scrutiny.
- Drawing a picture of a biblical disaster that was prophesied.
- Researching on the Internet to see how many religions or sects have a prophet or prophetess and finding out if they meet the biblical requirements.
- Reading a book such as *1984*, *Brave New World*, or *Fahrenheit 451* and summarizing whether the future scenarios these authors imagined are occurring in our time.
- Asking a doctor about what equipment and methods are used to predict a baby's gender and how reliable they are.
- Tossing a coin in the air ten times, predicting the probability of how many times it will land with a particular side up, and then calculating the percentage of times you were right.
- Praying with a friend or neighbor regarding an imposing problem and following up with them later on to see how the situation turned out.

CONNECT

Marvin Moore, *The Crisis of the End Time*; Steve Wohlberg, *End Time Delusions*.