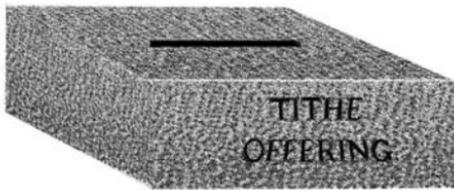


Confidence in the Prophetic Gift



“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 Chron. 20:20, NKJV).

Getting Help With Life's Exam

INTRODUCTION

2 Tim. 2:15

“Didn’t you get the study guide?” Just a question from my roommate, trying to help, and I definitely was in need of plenty of that. It was my sophomore year in college, and I was completely stumped as I tried to plough through my accounting textbook. My anti-number-crunching brain was struggling to grasp the details of the general ledger, and my debits and credits were definitely starting to blur together. When I had visited the bookstore to pick up the *War and Peace*-sized textbooks for each class, the extra study guides seemed to be unneeded fluff, just more weight in my book bag. But now in my dorm room, I was really wishing I had picked up the study guide for this particular subject, something to bring clarity to all the info I was trying to soak in.

Sometimes when I sit down to read the Bible, it reminds me of that old accounting textbook—packed with nuggets of truth, but sometimes difficult to completely comprehend. Thankfully, God doesn’t expect me to understand His deep, incredible truths the first time through. In my quest to find the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, God has promised me study guides. One of the most comforting Bible verses I know is John 16:13, where Jesus said that “‘when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth’” (NIV).

**I was completely stumped
as I tried to plough through
my accounting textbook.**

Both the Holy Spirit and prophecy are meant to be study guides in understanding God’s Word. How do we know if we have a reliable study guide? How can we have confidence that we are listening to the right source? Something I always keep in mind is that a study guide doesn’t tell a different story than the textbook; it only helps us to understand the textbook better. A study guide is never a substitute, but always a tool to clarify and better explain the truths that already exist.

In this week’s lesson, we seek to learn more about God’s truths to us, and how we can ensure that we have the right study guides to help us along the way.

Open Hearts and Opened Doors

LOGOS

Ps. 41:9; Isa. 53:4–6; Matt. 23:27–32; John 5:39; Acts 10:9–16, 44–48; 17:11

Persecuting the Prophets (Matt. 23:27–32)

This passage is the last of “seven woes” with which Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. In these verses, He says that they show honor and respect for dead prophets, even building and preserving their tombs, while showing contempt for the messages of living prophets. By their actions, they show that they are following the example of their fathers, who persecuted the prophets. Jesus here picks up on a tradition that appears throughout the Old Testament—that the leaders of Israel had killed the prophets sent to them (1 Kings 19:10, 14; 2 Chron. 24:18–22; 36:15–17; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 2:30; and 26:20–24). This passage in Matthew serves not only as an exhortation to heed the words of the prophets but to remind us that we should not be surprised when prophets are ignored or rejected.

We must have a degree of skepticism.

The Suffering Servant (Ps. 41:9; Isa. 53:4–6)

When Jesus reprimanded the scribes and Pharisees for rejecting the prophetic word in their own day, He was chastising them for rejecting both His messages and the messages of John the Baptist. The reception Jesus received was not unusual and was predicted by those earlier prophets who testified of Him (John 5:39), portraying Him as a “suffering servant,” “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3–6)—rejected even by a close friend (Ps. 41:9). Earlier, in Matthew 5:10–12, Jesus told the disciples to expect persecution and to rejoice in it, because that is the same fate the prophets met. It’s also sharing in His own sufferings.

The Priority of Scripture (John 5:39; Acts 17:11)

The scribes and Pharisees claimed to be honoring the prophets of old, but in failing to recognize Jesus, they showed they were not heeding that prophetic witness; they searched the Scriptures, thinking that in the bare words they had eternal life, failing to see that the Scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39, NIV).

It’s possible to be diligent in reading the Bible yet miss the point! The prophetic message points to Jesus; if we are reading it and not finding Him in it, we’re not reading it correctly. If we read it and see only the law, and not the gospel, we’re not reading it correctly. That greatest of prophetic books in the New Testament, the

book of Revelation, is the “revelation of Jesus Christ”—it both comes from Him and reveals Him. It shows Him in glory, as the One who has been given all authority, as the One who will come again to put an end to sin and to create a new heaven and a new earth. If we read Revelation and get absorbed in timelines and beasts and numbers and don’t see Jesus as the heart of the book, we’re missing the point.

We can say that is also a test for later prophets. Do they preach Jesus? If they stand in the tradition of biblical prophets, they must. He must be the focal point of their message, and what they say about Him must be consistent with Scripture. The Bible must be the test of any prophetic word in two ways. First, because of the normative value of Scripture, it alone is our creed. It alone is the standard by which all teaching must be judged. Second, because of the Christocentric principle just laid out—that Jesus is at the heart of Scripture—He must be at the heart of any prophet’s message.

Jesus said one of the signs of the end would be the appearance of many false prophets (Matt. 24:24), and that’s certainly true of our day. Clearly, we must have a degree of skepticism. We can’t believe everyone who claims to be a prophet. We must search the Scriptures, and test would-be prophets by it. While prophets need to expect persecution, as we’ve already seen, true prophets always will welcome that skepticism which is rooted in a commitment to test everything by Scripture (Acts 17:11).

The Purpose of Prophecy (Acts 10:9–16, 44–48)

What then is the purpose of prophecy? It will always point to Jesus, and preach a message about Him that is consistent with the Bible. In that sense, it never will tell us something we shouldn’t already know. Rather, it will open up new horizons and new implications. It will help us apply the teachings of Jesus to new situations. The vision of Peter given in Acts 10:9–16, 44–48 gives us an example of how this can work. Up to this point, the apostles were faithfully witnessing about Jesus, but their witness was limited to the people of Israel. Jesus had told them that they must be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), but years had gone by and they hadn’t progressed much beyond the area that Jesus Himself had traveled. Peter’s vision changed all that. It was a vision of unclean foods lowered to him on a sheet. A Voice said, “Get up and eat!” He replies, three times, “I’ve never eaten anything unclean!” He woke up, went down stairs, and greeted the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Suddenly, the vision made sense. “I must not call any man unclean.” The gospel message could not be limited to the people of Israel. It must go to all the world. It broke down the barriers within Peter’s mind and opened up new avenues for ministry.

REACT

1. Why must prophetic claims be tested by Scripture?
2. How has the prophetic gift opened your eyes to new challenges?

Hold Tightly

TESTIMONY

Heb. 10:23

“We must cherish and cultivate the faith of which prophets and apostles have testified—the faith that lays hold on the promises of God and waits for deliverance in His appointed time and way. The sure word of prophecy will meet its final fulfillment in the glorious Advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords. The time of waiting may seem long, the soul may be oppressed by discouraging circumstances, many in whom confidence has been placed may fall by the way; but with the prophet who endeavored to encourage Judah in a time of unparalleled apostasy, let us confidently declare, ‘The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.’”¹

“We must have a knowledge of the Scriptures, that we may trace down the lines of prophecy and . . . see that the day is approaching, so that with increased zeal and effort we may exhort one another to faithfulness. . . . Give up our faith? lose

“Give up our faith? lose our confidence? become impatient? No, no.”

our confidence? become impatient? No, no. We will not think of such a thing. . . . See how the specifications of the prophecies have been and are fulfilling. Let us lift up our heads and rejoice, for our redemption draweth nigh. It is nearer than when we first

believed. Shall we not wait patiently, filled with courage and faith? Shall we not make ready a people to stand in the day of final reckoning?”²

“Old controversies will be revived, and new theories will be continually arising. But God’s people, who in their belief and fulfillment of prophecy have acted a part in the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages, know where they stand. They have an experience that is more precious than fine gold. They are to stand firm as a rock, holding the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end.”³

REACT

What do you do to sustain your trust in God each day? What challenges do you face in your endeavor?

1. *My Life Today*, p. 55.

2. *That I May Know Him*, p. 348.

3. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 109.

Primo's Plague

EVIDENCE

2 Tim. 3:16

"Prophets are the plague of today, and perhaps of all time, because it is impossible to tell a true prophet from a false one," wrote Primo Levi.¹

I understand what Levi is saying. Growing up when David Koresh, the self-proclaimed prophet of God, was making Waco, Texas, infamous, caused me to be skeptical about all things prophetic. So can we have confidence in prophetic gift? Read 2 Timothy 3:16.

God's breath, His Word, creates miracles. From giving Adam life to waking the dead to revealing Himself to us through a solitary preacher on Patmos, God is actively present through His Word. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11, God through Paul designates the spiritual gift of prophecy as part of the body of Christ. But can we all prophesy?

Os Guinness divides prophets into small *p* prophets and capital *P* Prophets. To understand the difference between the two, the prophecy's intent must first be revealed. "The intent of revelation is not to inform us about God but to involve us in God."² By that definition, we are all called to be God's prophets "interpreting events from the perspective of faith and under the aspect of eternity, and always with an eye to what we should do, not simply know."³ Thus, the gift of prophecy engages our imagination and challenges us with the present righteousness of Christ. But who has the authority to speak for God?

**God's breath, His Word,
creates miracles.**

The capital *P* Prophets are those "who have heard a direct, explicit, supernatural word from God and can legitimately say, 'This is the Word of the Lord.'"⁴ The Bible is the source to understanding the validity of a Prophet. Some criteria to consider include (1) does the prophet's message glorify God (John 16:14; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 John 4:1, 2)? and (2) does the prophet's message agree with the Bible (Isa. 8:20)?

This list is not exhaustive. So this week as you study, fill out the list and solidify your confidence in the prophetic gift. While you do, know that Christ is working out His prophecy in your life. Read Jeremiah 29:11.

1. Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), pp.20, 21.

2. Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), p.13

3. <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/prophet>

4. Guinness, *Prophetic untimeliness*, p.21
Derek Cummings, Celebration, Florida, U.S.A.

Developing Confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy

HOW-TO

2 Tim. 3:16, 17

My wife and I have four-year-old twin boys who, like many twins or multiples, created their own audible language which only they could understand. During the week that I was writing this section of the lesson study, I heard them use the word *ketchercation*. According to them, it means both “you do what you do” and “you don’t do what you don’t do.” *Ketchercation* is a perfect place to begin talking about how to develop and foster confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy (SOP).

Don’t do what you’re not supposed to do:

1. *Don’t bludgeon people over the head with E. G. White quotations.* If a child was repeatedly beat with a canoe paddle by parents attempting to break the rod rather than spare it, imagine the feelings that surface when the child learns that he

or she needs to embrace his or her bottom’s number one enemy as an agent of good. Likewise, it would be difficult for anyone to have confidence in the redeeming features of an item if their predominant experiences with it brought pain.

2. *Don’t use the SOP as a measuring stick to determine others’ shortcomings.* Instead, apply the lessons to your own life and become consumed

***Ketchercation* is a perfect place to begin talking about how to develop . . . confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy.**

with simply and truly loving God and other people.

3. *Don’t study the SOP instead of the Bible.* While studying a certain topic or event in the Bible, be sure to read enough before and after the section to help you establish context and perspective. Ask the Holy Spirit to supply you with insight to grasp the complete message. Be still and wait for your mind to process what the Spirit is attempting to impress. Once you feel you have an understanding, refer to the SOP to see if it shares a similar insight. Most likely, its viewpoints will be in sync, while providing additional food for thought. Each time this experience is repeated, confidence in the SOP grows.

4. *Don’t keep the SOP to yourself.* Share the process in number 3 with others, and practice *ketchercation*.

“Prophet’s Message Cost Baby His Life”

Thursday
March 26

OPINION

2 Tim. 2:15

A little boy in New Zealand should be turning nine this year [2009], but he died at six months of age on March 29, 2001. This precious little baby didn’t die in a car accident. He didn’t die of some common childhood illness. He died from misdirected zeal. Despite his ongoing illness, his vegan parents refused any medical treatment and ignored counsel to vary his diet. Instead they relied on herbal and other remedies. Medical experts said the baby died due to complications from a vitamin B₁₂ deficiency.

According to Adventist News Network, his parents were charged with manslaughter on June 13, 2002, and sentenced to five years in jail. The couple regularly attended a Seventh-day Adventist Church in New Zealand, where the wife was a member.

At the time, an Adventist pastor said the couple seemed to experience great grief at the loss of their child.

According to Adventist News Network, “They told the court that their actions were based on their religious beliefs and their interpretation of the writings of Ellen White.” The

New Zealand Herald ran a shocking headline: “Prophet’s Message Cost Baby His Life.”

**This precious little baby . . .
died from misdirected zeal.**

When jailed in 2002, the mother was six months pregnant and later gave birth to a baby girl in prison. In October 2005, the couple was released from prison and reunited with their three-year-old daughter, who had been living with the mother’s sister. Although their deep pain remained, they had a fresh start.

Over the years many people have misread Ellen White’s life-affirming, Christ-promoting writings. It’s possible to string together out-of-context sentences from her writings to support almost anything. Of course, people have done the same sort of thing with the Bible, which has been used to justify everything from the Crusades to anti-Semitism to slavery. The church has a vital responsibility to promote a balanced and informed reading of Ellen White. From Waco, Texas, to the North Island of New Zealand, we can see a shocking price being paid for “Adventist” extremism. And it’s a price that shouldn’t be paid.

Friday
March 27

Prophecy Uplifts Jesus

EXPLORATION

John 3:14, 15

CONCLUDE

The purpose of all prophecy is to lift up Jesus and through Him, provide salvation to all who believe. Whether it be prophecy from long ago or more recently, if it does not lift up Jesus as the one and only Way, it is not from God. Sometimes false prophets try to obscure the issues and undermine our faith, but sincere Bible study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will clarify the source and the issues we face on a day-to-day basis.

CONSIDER

- Diagramming the major prophets from the Old Testament. Under each name write a text that indicates they were uplifting Jesus and His grace.
- Designing a board game that moves the player from this current life to heaven. Along the way, place “traps” of false prophets and “extra help” from true prophets. Print Bible texts for the players to read if they land on a “trap” or “extra help.” Make a spinner or use die to calculate the moves. Find someone to play the game with you.
- Interviewing five people about their belief in prophets both from the past and the present. Ask why they do or do not believe in prophets/prophecy. How do they determine who and what to believe? In their opinion, what is the most important prophecy of all time?
- Searching on the Internet for the word *prophet* or *prophecy*. Reflect on your findings.
- Getting a group together to play charades. Prepare a list of prophets. Divide into small groups and give one prophet to each group. Tell them to pantomime something about the prophet that will help the others guess who it is.

CONNECT

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 232–235.

Fascinating Stories of Forgotten Lives, “The Boy Who Heard God’s Voice,” pp. 91–130, www.wpublishinggroup.com; *God’s Message for Each Day*, p. 221, by Eugene Peterson, www.Thomason.com.

Barbara L. Manspeaker, Luray, Virginia, U.S.A.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Walking the Walk: The Christian Life

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2009, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Love

Logos: Isaiah 53; Matt. 22:37–39; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3; 1 John 4.

Memory Text: “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13, NIV).

It is only fitting that a study guide dealing with key concepts of the Christian faith should start with the topic of love. The apostle Paul points out that however important faith and hope and other elements of Christianity are, it all starts with love. Without love, we are as he said, “nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2).

Some five centuries before Christ was born, the greek philosopher Sophocles said, “One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life. That word is love.” True as these words are, this Greek sage still was ignorant about the depth of love that was to be proclaimed and modeled by our Savior.

God is love. Whatever else God is, and whatever He has done, is doing, and will do—everything is a manifestation of His love. This love is as comforting as it is difficult to comprehend. God’s love far exceeds what human beings usually label as love, which is sometimes a mere shallow feeling or temporary infatuation that’s often mixed with selfishness and greed. God does not just have love or show love. He is love.

The Week at a Glance: God’s love for humanity has been revealed in numerous ways, the greatest being the Cross. As followers of Jesus, we respond to His love by loving others as Christ loved us.

Lesson 2: Faith

Logos: Eph. 6:10–18; Hebrews 11; James 2:18, 19; 1 Pet. 1:3–8.

Memory Text: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV).

Faith is not to be confused with rational conviction. Faith in the biblical sense is not based primarily on our reason (even though it is not unreasonable or irrational!); nor is it based on our emotions (though emotions do play a role). Faith is a deep-rooted assurance that affects the entire person. Faith is a principle that governs the

life. Faith is the means by which we reach out and grab hold of the promises of a God we can't see yet we know is there.

Hebrews 11:1 speaks about the "substance" of our faith. William G. Johnsson, an expert on Hebrews, suggests that the best translation is: "Faith is the title deed to what we hope for, the certainty of what we do not see" (*The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: Hebrews* [Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994], p. 204).

The Week at a Glance: Faith is the guiding principle in the life of a Christian. It's how we are to live and to relate to God and to others. However important an intellectual assent to doctrines is, faith is so much more than just that. This week we'll look at how much more.

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