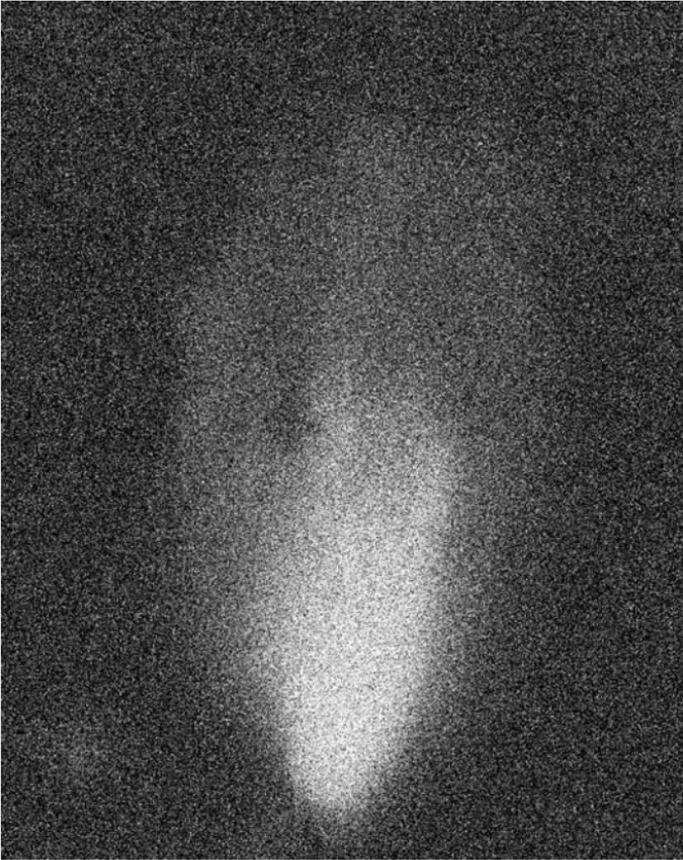


Testing the Prophets



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

The God Who Speaks

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 8:20; Amos 3:7

In his poem “The Hound of Heaven,” Francis Thompson wrote of God’s irrepressible and unquenchable love, which follows us all of our lives. Sinners attempt to hide from God and to look for fulfillment apart from Him. But God pursues them. Then comes the moment of encounter, when God catches up with a sinner, who then asks a question. Also note below God’s answer.

Halts by me that footfall?
Is my gloom after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
Ah, foundest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest!
Thou drawest love from thee, who dravest me.*

**We believe the last word rests
with Jesus.**

In the prophets of the Bible, we hear the voice of God speaking. While God speaks to nations, kings, rulers, and society, He also speaks to us individually. It is

when we hear God’s voice speaking to us personally that Scripture comes alive. It is then that our faith expands and deepens.

Seventh-day Adventists are a people of prophecy. It was the understanding of prophetic time that brought our church into existence. It is the word of prophecy that directs our lives in the present and the future. We believe the last word rests with Jesus—not death, the grave, the demonic, or earthly powers.

Jesus’ promise to return is the goal to which our lives are directed. The prophetic word in this regard is positive and optimistic. Prophecy foretells a better world—a world of God’s designing, a world into which all are invited (Rev. 22:17).

For Seventh-day Adventists, the writings of Ellen White are important. While not meant to replace Scripture, they are similar to Scripture in that they speak to all of life. The reading of *The Desire of Ages*, which is possibly the best book Ellen White wrote, brings one near to Jesus. It is a book that after repeated readings retains its freshness and makes Jesus more and more precious. In reading her writings in the light of Scripture we can prove her writings for ourselves.

Our study this week is an opportunity to once again examine the foundation and trustworthiness of the prophetic word in both Scripture and Ellen White.

**The Poems of Francis Thompson* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1947), p. 106.

Majesty in the Moments of Humankind

Sunday
February 1

EVIDENCE

Jer. 18:6–10

We live in a symphony of space and time, of human free choice and divine foreknowledge, of action and reaction. Marie Beyon Ray writes, “We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand . . . and melting like a snowflake.”* This is our lot. Yet our eternal God lives in active relation to our finite, time-restricted condition. He seems content to deal with us in our moments, and to respond to our choices and actions. As such, prophecy does not live in a vacuum but depends upon the God who gives it, delivered by humans to humans in full possession of free choice who dwell in space and time. Some prophecies are unconditional, such as the great messianic prophecies fulfilled in the person of Christ and the promise of His second coming. But at the same time, there are some conditional prophecies that depend on human reactions to God’s communication. An example would be the story of Jonah, where God seems to change His mind in response to the repentance of the city of Nineveh. This doesn’t make Jonah a false prophet. He fulfils God’s command to preach God’s message to Nineveh.

In our text above, God tells the prophet Jeremiah to go to the potter’s workshop in order to hear

We are left with a choice. . . .

God’s message. Once there, he sees a potter at work. The pot being shaped has a flaw. In response, the potter remakes the pot as he likes it. God then equates the potter to Himself and the clay to Israel. He tells Israel they need to change their mind about their present condition. However, Israel no longer sees how change is possible, indicating that they have completely lost sight of their Potter.

We are sometimes like Israel. We despair about our condition, our seeming inability to change. But in focusing on our flaws, we lose sight of God’s majestic hands, hands that have the ability to reshape us into a pleasing, useful design. God is qualified and ready to shape us thusly. We are left with a choice: will we allow God’s majesty into the moments of our lives?

REACT

1. Is Jeremiah’s prophecy conditional or unconditional, and why?
2. How does Israel’s attitude to God’s message shape the outcome?

* Michael Moncur, The Quotations Page. “Marie Beyon Ray Quotes,” http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Marie_Beyon_Ray/. Retrieved November 18, 2007.

The God Who Speaks in Jesus

LOGOS

Isa. 8:20; Jer. 18:6–10; Jonah 3; 4; Matt. 7:15–20; Gal. 2:11–14

A boy was looking at a photograph of his father, who was a soldier in a distant country. He said, “I wish my dad could step out of the photograph and be with me.” That is what Jesus did in the Incarnation. He stepped out of eternity into time. In Jesus, God became man, one with us. In Jesus, God spoke the fullest, richest, clearest, most convincing and compelling message of His love for humanity. It is a message delivered personally by Jesus—the human manifestation of God.

The Incarnation (1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 11:3)

It is important to understand that the truth of the Incarnation is a *revealed* truth. It is God revealing to us His will and purpose through the prophets and apostles (Amos 3:7). There are truths we cannot know apart from God revealing them to us: Creation, the origin of sin, the Second Coming, the Trinity. Such truths are supernaturally made known to us by divine revelation. Accepting them by faith, we come to the place of understanding (Heb. 11:3).

**Truth is progressive and
expanding.**

God Speaks in the Logos

(John 1:1–3, 5, 18)

John 1:18 tells us that Jesus the Logos explains who God is. John 1:1, 2 tells us that Jesus the Logos is divine, eternal, and that what God is, the Logos is. John 1:3 tells us that Jesus the Logos is the Creator of all things. John 1:4 tells us that Jesus the Logos is the Source of life. John 1:5 tells us there is a conflict between light and darkness and that the Light is inextinguishable.

John makes several vital points that amplify and confirm the Incarnation of Jesus:

1. The Incarnation is attested by prophecy. John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. Read Isaiah 40:3, 5.

2. It is a historical fact. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NIV). “At the heart of the Christian message was a new fact: God had acted—and let us remember that the original meaning of ‘fact’ is the Latin *factum*, ‘Something done.’ God had acted in a way that, if believed, must henceforth determine all our ways of thinking.”*

Our study this week not only tests the prophetic word, but brings us face-to-face

with what it reveals to us of the nature, character, love, will, and purposes of God.

The Logos Speaks (John 1:12–14, 16)

Scripture and prophecy are not simply information transfer agents. Though prophecy reveals God's will and purpose, its primary aim is salvation—to show how weak sinful humans can be united to a holy God.

In Jesus the Logos, we receive power to become God's children (John 1: 12, 13). In Jesus the Logos, we receive grace and truth in their fullness and blessing heaped upon blessing (John 1:14, 16).

The use of the term *Logos*, which means "Word," is intended to convey the most positive and optimistic message possible. Jesus is the Living Word of God. It was God's *spoken* word that brought the earth into existence. "God said" . . . and it happened (Gen. 1:3). By the Word of God were the heavens made (Ps. 33:6).

In God's written Word, there is the same divine power to re-create sinful people and make them new creatures (James 1:18). He chose to give us birth through the word of truth (1 Pet. 1:23).

Our study of the prophets is designed to bring us into a growing and developing experience with Jesus, who is the object of prophecy (1 Pet. 1:10–12). When we test the prophecies of Scripture, we find anchors for our faith; but more than this, we enter into a deep and fulfilling fellowship with Jesus.

Peter makes the point when he calls us to pay attention to the prophetic word as a light shining in a dark place. He says to keep on studying until Jesus returns. Truth is progressive and expanding. Our continued study will not exhaust its meaning or its benefits (2 Pet. 1:19).

REACT

1. John 1:10, 11 tells us that when Jesus came to earth He was not recognized by His chosen people. How could ignorance of the Old Testament prophecies be a reason for His rejection?

2. What application does Hebrews 2:1–3 have for to us today?

3. What danger is there in believing in Bible prophecy without testing it?

4. How can we know we are not substituting knowledge for experience?

5. When we prove prophecy to be reliable, what is the next step?

* Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence* (London: S.P.C.K. 1995), p. 5.

Tuesday
February 3

“For the Comfort of His People”

TESTIMONY

Gal. 2:11–14; 1 Pet. 1:17, 22–25

From the time of the early church, people have needed guidance. Ellen White uses Peter’s experience to give us clear guidance about how we should use her writings: “I recommend to you, dear reader, the word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that word we are to be judged. God has, in that word, promised to give visions in the ‘LAST DAYS’; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth. Thus God dealt with Peter when He was about to send him to preach to the Gentiles.”¹

White explains her role as follows: “My Saviour declared me to be His messenger. ‘Your work,’ He instructed me, ‘is to bear My word. Strange things will arise, and in your youth I set you apart to bear the message to the erring ones, to carry the word before unbelievers, and with pen and voice to reprove from the Word actions that are not right. Exhort from the Word. I will make My Word open to you. It shall not be as

“ ‘Give the light I shall give
you.’ ”

a strange language. In the true eloquence of simplicity, with voice and pen, the messages that I give shall be heard from one who has never learned in the schools. My Spirit and My power shall be with you.

“ ‘Be not afraid of man, for My shield shall protect you. It is not you that speaketh: it is the Lord that giveth the messages of warning and reproof. Never deviate from the truth under any circumstances. Give the light I shall give you. The messages for these last days shall be written in books, and shall stand immortalized, to testify against those who have once rejoiced in the light, but who have been led to give it up because of the seductive influences of evil.’ ”²

REACT

1. How should we react when someone confronts us when we have done something wrong?

2. Ellen White’s messages to the church are to help us stand against “the seductive influences of evil.” How can we make sure that we receive the maximum benefit from these messages?

3. How would you explain Ellen White’s role and significance to a non-Seventh-day Adventist?

1. *Early Writings*, p. 78.

2. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 32.

Ellen White and Prophecy—How to Test Her Writings

Wednesday
February 4

HOW-TO

1 Thess. 5:19–21

God is against ignorance. Truth is against ignorance. Christians must be against ignorance especially as it relates to faith and salvation. It is often ignorance that makes unwarranted assumptions concerning the Bible and the Christian faith. A clear example is the book by Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, which has sold millions of copies. While Dawkins writes well and rightly denounces religious superstition, his prejudice gets in the way of facts. Attacks on the Bible are as old as the Bible itself. What is frustrating is how these claims are often uncritically accepted without being tested.

Christians are required to know the basis of their faith and to be able to challenge criticisms of it. Paul says, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything” (1 Thess. 5:20, 21, NIV).

Criticisms of Christian faith are not wrong. We can hold ideas that are erroneous and need correction. Truth does not fear investigation. The more deeply we study the truth of Scripture and test it, the brighter it shines.

Note Ellen White’s counsel. “It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light, and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought, and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help, we are to form our opinions for ourselves, as we are to answer for ourselves before God.”*

Truth does not fear investigation.

Know what you believe. Paul’s counsel to Timothy to study God’s Word so that he will not be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:15) has equal relevance to what Seventh-day Adventist believe about Ellen White. The acid test is to read her books. A superficial understanding will crumble in a time of stress. As you read her writings, ask the following questions: (1) Is Ellen White subject to the Scriptures? (2) Does she support the divinity of Jesus? (3) Does she affirm Jesus as our Savior? (4) Does she uphold God’s law?

There is no alternative for personal study to test her writings in the light of Scripture.

* *The Great Controversy*, p. 598.

Thursday
February 5

True Prophets Point Us to God

OPINION

Jonah 3:4

Near where I grew up is a steep hill. My mother knew how my brother and I loved to run down it, and every time she would tell us to be careful not to trip. This time was no different. We took off at a fast pace. But my legs couldn't keep up with my speed, and I found myself hurtling headfirst toward the pavement. My face felt the full brunt of the impact and looked as if I had tussled with a cheese grater. Typically, I wished I had listened to my mother!

God told the prophet Jonah to preach a message to Nineveh (Jonah 3:4). Often we interpret this verse to mean that God intended to destroy the city, and it certainly seems as if the Ninevites took it that way. Yet the Hebrew word for "overturned" comes from the root word *haphak*, which can also be translated as "changed," "turned around," or "repented."* God wanted to turn the city of Nineveh around. He desperately wanted to show them a better way to be human.

This was what Jonah feared most, because being a Hebrew, he was prejudiced against Israel's enemies. In Jonah 4:1–3, we discover just how displeased he became because of God's grace. But despite Jonah's wanting the worst for the city, his preaching pointed them toward

I found myself hurtling headfirst toward the pavement.

God. This is one of the ways we can test prophets. If they point us toward God and His way, their message is from God.

It's like my hillside story. My mother wanted me to enjoy myself. She gave me good advice. She reminded me to be careful, and she was there to pick me up and cuddle me when I fell. God also wants the best for us. He wants us to have fun. He also wants us to be safe. Sometimes He sends people our way to give us advice. Sometimes those people are prophets. How can we tell whom to listen to, or whom to ignore? The ones who point us toward God are the true prophets of our lives.

REACT

Take time to think about your life. What advice has come your way? Is that advice pointing you toward God?

*James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible

Authenticity

EXPLORATION

Amos 3:7

CONCLUDE

As archaeology lends its weight to prove the authenticity of the Bible, Bible prophecy identifies and gives authenticity to Jesus' birth and purpose on earth. It stamps His identity as the Creator and Redeemer of humankind. Prophecy sheds light on God's will for us and for His world. It prepares us for what is coming upon the earth by outlining for us what has happened in the past. All prophecy should be tested carefully for its authenticity and truth—that it points to Jesus, the one and only Savior of this world.

CONSIDER

- Making a timeline of the 2,300-day prophecy according to Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. How does this prophecy prove that Jesus came, lived, and died on time?
- Perusing an archaeological Bible for “digs” that prove various Bible prophecies.
- Inviting a friend or neighbor to watch a DVD about one of the Bible prophets.
- Reading portions from *Early Writings* or from one of the biographies of Ellen White. Meditate and pray about what you read. Does she or does she not point to the Bible and Jesus above all else?
- Asking your children's Sabbath School department if they have a set of Ellen White felts. If so, offer to tell one of the stories to the children (or church) about some part of her life that you feel is relevant to her position in the church.
- Comparing Ellen White's predictions, Bible prophecy concerning the end of time, and current “prophets.” What are significant factors that prove one true and another false?
- Perusing the Adventist hymnal section titled “Second Advent.” Play or sing some of the hymns that tell about Jesus' return. How do they collaborate with Bible prophecy about His coming?

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*.

Norma J. Collins, *Heartwarming Stories of Adventist Pioneers*; Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day by Day*.

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