

The Blessings of the Prophetic Gift



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 17:14, 34:27, Lev. 11:1–8, Deut. 6:4–7, Isa. 44:8, 49:6.*

Memory Text: “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NKJV*).

All through biblical history, the Lord worked through the prophets (including those who wrote no books of the Bible) in order to encourage, uplift, and warn God's people. However unpopular at times their messages, or however often their motives were misunderstood, these people all had one goal in mind: to bless and benefit God's church. And it was certainly no different with Ellen White and her prophetic gift.

This week we are going to look at some of the blessings that come to God's people through the prophetic gift. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, certainly as we know it today, probably would not exist had it not been for the guidance God gave this movement through the Spirit of Prophecy.

The Week at a Glance: Why and for what purpose did God elect Israel as His special people? How were the young people in Israel educated in Old Testament times? What were some of the counsels on health that God gave the Israelites? Why did the Israelites write God's Word on the doorframes of their houses? How has the Lord used the gift of prophecy to benefit the church?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.*

Why did God elect Israel as His special people? *Deut. 7:7, 8; Isa. 44:8; 49:6.*

God chose Israel to be His witnesses. All nations of the earth were to share in the blessings that He was to bestow on His people. Israel was to show forth His praise (*Isa. 43:21*), declare His glory among the nations (*Isa. 66:19*), and be a light to the Gentiles.

What is the mission of the Christian church, and how well is it carrying out this mission? *Matt. 28:19, 20.*

The Christian church experienced two great periods of expansion in its history. The first period was the time of its establishment in the first and second centuries; the second was during the nineteenth century, also called the century of mission. Following the great revivals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Christian church established many Bible and missionary societies in Europe and America, and within 100 years it increased from 18 percent of the world population in the year 1800 to 34 percent in 1900.

In the early decades of Seventh-day Adventist history, it was believed that the church was fulfilling God's command to teach all nations simply by preaching to the immigrants in North America. However, Ellen White in 1871 wrote, "Young men should be qualifying themselves by becoming familiar with other languages, that God may use them as mediums to communicate His saving truth to those of other nations."—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 204.

Then in 1874 she had an impressive dream of giving the third angel's message to the world. In the dream she was told: "You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time. . . .

"The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea, to all nations, tongues, and peoples. . . . Your faith is limited, it is very small. Your conception of the work needs to be greatly enlarged."—Pages 208, 209.

In the same year J. N. Andrews became the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary. He and his children went to Switzerland, and three years later the John G. Matteson family was sent to Scandinavia. Today, out of 229 countries of the world recognized by the United Nations, Seventh-day Adventists have an established work in more than two hundred of them.

How do we strike the balance between working for souls overseas while at the same time not neglecting the mission field in our own backyard?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Amos 3:7*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: How the prophetic gift has enriched the Adventist Church, just as it did God's people of old.

Feel: Gratitude and pride for how God has led our church.

Do: Become more involved in the progress and development of our church.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Mission (*Matt. 28:19, 20*)

A To what extent can Ellen G. White be credited with our growth as a denomination?

B Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. In what ways have Christian education and publishing benefited our church?

II. Health (*Lev. 13:46*)

A What was the practical benefit of the hygiene and dietary laws for the Israelites? How have we as a church benefited from prophetic guidance on such matters?

B Why do you think healthful practices are declining among Adventists? How does this make you feel? What can we do as individuals to reverse this decline?

C What can we do to promote innovative medical and lifestyle practices that are relevant today?

III. Theology (*Ps. 33:6*)

A What should be the relationship of Ellen G. White's writings to new insights in theology, medicine, or science? Does Ellen G. White limit the expansion of our understanding in any way? Explain your answer.

B How can we become more involved in furthering the work of the church in blessing others?

► **Summary:** Through the gift of prophecy, working in harmony with the other spiritual gifts, God graciously has blessed our church. Our commitment to world mission, education, publishing, health and medical work, and scientific and theological discovery that affirm God's Word find their inception in the writings of Ellen G. White. We can be grateful for God's leading.

How were the young people in Israel educated in Old Testament times? What important principles can we take from these texts regarding the spiritual aspect of all proper education? *Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:4–7, 20–25.*

Through the father’s instructions, Hebrew children were taught what God had done for His people in the past, how they were to live in His presence, and what God’s promises were for the future. They also were taught the skills they would need to be successful members of their community. It was, therefore, both an education in practical skills along with spiritual and religious instruction.

In the earliest days of the Adventist movement, private initiatives among our pioneers led to several attempts to establish a school for Adventist children, but none of them lasted long.

Then at the beginning of 1872, Ellen White received a vision on the proper principles of education. On the basis of this vision she wrote 30 pages on those principles. Among other things she wrote, “We need a school where those who are just entering the ministry may be taught at least the common branches of education, and where they may also learn more perfectly the truths of God’s word for this time.” —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 45, 46.

In May 1872, the General Conference committee agreed to assume responsibility for a locally operated church school in Battle Creek, Michigan, and on June 3 the first official Seventh-day Adventist school opened its doors. Two years later, 100 students were enrolled in the newly established Battle Creek College.

Today more than six thousand Adventist schools, colleges, and universities serve more than one million students around the world.

What should an Adventist school be like today? How should it be different from other schools? Make a list of specific characteristics and discuss them in class.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God has given us blessings and gifts so that we might be a blessing to others.

In, perhaps, the most famous mutiny of all time, the H.M.S. *Bounty* is wrested from Captain William Bligh while sailing the seas of the South Pacific. Nine of the mutineers and a company of Tahitians flee to uninhabited Pitcairn Island to escape capture and punishment. A sordid tale of tragedy follows. “By 1800, through drink and fighting, all the men were dead except Alexander Smith. . . . With him were 11 women and 23 children. Shortly after this he was converted through reading the *Bounty Bible* and immediately began to teach the children from the Bible.”—*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1966), vol. 11, p. 998.

The social atmosphere of the island changed overnight! Where there had been violence, there was peace. Where drunkenness had reigned, sobriety now ruled. Spirited passion was replaced by passion for the Spirit. Why? Because one person found a Bible, was changed and blessed by the prophetic gift, and then shared those blessings with all those around him. How many homes, families, cities, and even nations can testify to the blessings of following the counsels of God!

Consider This: How is it where you live? Like Alexander Smith, what can you do to influence positively those around you? How can you change their situation for the better?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

I. Mission (*Deuteronomy* 7:7, 8; *Isaiah* 43:21; 44:8; 49:6; 66:19; *Matthew* 28:19, 20)

Read Acts 16:6–10. Paul and Silas were expanding their work to include unreached areas in Asia minor. Many places within that region were

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Health

God told the Israelites: “ ‘If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight . . . I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians’ ” (*Exod. 15:26, NKJV*). **What were some of the counsels on health given to them by God?** *Lev. 7:22–26, 11:1–8, 13:46.*

For centuries, leprosy and the Black Death spread fear and terror among medieval humanity. It was only when church leaders remembered that people afflicted with leprosy in the Bible were segregated and excluded from the community, and they applied this principle to the victims of leprosy and the bubonic plague that these scourges were stopped.

Most Seventh-day Adventist pioneers were anything but health reformers. At the 1848 Sabbath Conferences, they most likely sat together eating pork chops for lunch. In a vision in 1848, Ellen G. White was shown that tobacco, tea, and coffee are harmful, but it took several years to convince the membership.

On June 6, 1863, Ellen G. White received a vision in which she was shown the need for health reform. “I saw that it was a sacred duty to attend to our health, and arouse others to their duty.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 280. Two years later, on December 25, 1865, she was shown that Seventh-day Adventists should establish a health institute. The Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, which opened its doors in 1866, was the first of a network of more than three hundred hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries that the church operates today.

What can we say to those who claim that Ellen G. White copied the health message from other health reformers of her time?

Recent research into Ellen G. White’s health message has revealed that there is a vast difference in quality between Ellen G. White’s principles of health and those advocated by other health reformers in her time. “Modern medical science has verified a high percentage of her health principles . . . while the sources from which she supposedly copied had a low percentage of health principles that have been verified. This difference indicates that Mrs. White had health information that could not have come from any human source available anywhere at the time she lived.”—Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 87, 88.

The health message is a wonderful gift from God to us. Like all of His gifts, it can be, and indeed, has been abused. How can we avoid turning this gift into a curse?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

untouched by the gospel. We would consider Paul and Silas to be visionaries; but their vision apparently was not broad enough! God was calling them to Europe. Circumstances orchestrated by the Holy Spirit prevented them from executing their travel plans. However, it was in vision that Paul clearly was shown God's direction.

Consider This: Discuss God's leading of the church into a broader understanding of His mission or share how God has led class members into unexpected witnessing opportunities.

II. Education (*Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:4–7, 20–25*)


Read 2 Kings 6:1, 2; Proverbs 22:6; 2 Timothy 1:5, 6. While the home held the ultimate responsibility for educating the young in the ways of God, the broader community also shared that responsibility. Prophetic schools were established so that the prophets could educate leaders in the counsels of God. Samuel, Elisha, and others are considered *founders* of these early educational *institutions*.

Consider This: Invite class members to share how God has used Christian education to bless them or their families. Discuss the importance of passing on the torch of faith to future generations.

III. Health (*Exodus 15:26, Leviticus 7:22–26, 11:1–8, 13:46*)

Read Proverbs 17:22, John 5:1–9, 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, Titus 1:12, 3 John 2. The Bible shows a clear association between spiritual and physical health. It is neither accidental nor incidental that dishonesty and cruelty were associated with gluttony. Sexual abuse of the body had spiritual consequences, because the body is God's temple. Jesus first healed the man by the pool of Bethesda and later instructed him to stop sinning. On the positive side, spiritual health contributes to physical health. A carefree, guilt-free "heart" is a powerful medicine.

Consider This: Discuss the interrelationship of physical and spiritual health. Why should a spiritually minded person be interested in a

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Publishing

According to Scripture, Moses was the first one to write down God's words (*Exod. 17:14, 34:27, Deut. 31:24*). Today, the Bible is the most published and most read book in history.

Where were the Israelites to write the words of the law? Why do you think that command was given? *Deut. 6:1–9, 11:18–20*.

To inscribe important sayings or statements in conspicuous places on their dwellings was a custom widely prevalent in the ancient Near East. It is evident in Muslim countries and even among Western nations. In the British Isles, as well as in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, inscriptions can be seen on houses.

In Israel the purpose of writing God's Word on the doorframes of their dwellings was to keep God's instructions constantly in view and in mind, thereby reminding them continuously to keep God's commandments.

What role did publishing play in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

The publishing work in our church did not originate from human wisdom. In 1848, Ellen G. White had a vision in the home of Otis Nichols in Dorchester, Massachusetts. When she came out of it, she said to James, “ ‘I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world.’ ”—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 125.

“ ‘Streams of light that went clear round the world’ ”! How could that be? Jesus was coming soon. The number of Adventists were so few. There were no wealthy persons or great scholars among them. The world was unbelieving. *And yet, here was a young woman who predicted that a work of publishing, to be started by her penniless husband, would grow until it would encompass the globe?* More than six months went by before James White could make even the smallest beginning, arranging on a charge account for the printing of 1,000 copies of an eight-page paper. Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church owns more than fifty publishing houses, and the message is being printed and proclaimed in more than two hundred twenty languages.

What has been the impact of the printed page in your own spiritual experience?

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healthy lifestyle? How can an interest in health lead a person toward a quest for spiritual wholeness?

IV. Publishing (*Exodus 17:14, 34:27; Deuteronomy 6:1–9, 31:24*)

Read Luke 1:1–4 with Acts 1:1; John 21:24, 25; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Revelation 1:1, 2. God knows the power of a recorded revelation in the work of spreading the gospel. Many prophets not only spoke the message but also wrote the message, providing an enduring record of God’s interaction with humankind that could be shared from generation to generation.

Consider This: In this age of technological explosion, publishing the good news may go far beyond the printed page. Discuss what technologies might be included in *publishing* today.


V. Theology (*Genesis 1:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 42:5*)

Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 4:3, 4; and 2 Peter 1:19–2:3. Scripture leads us to salvation that comes through trusting Christ. It shows us what is true and right and prepares us for a complete life in Him. Error-filled theology, as in error-filled thinking, leads to sin-filled living. Should we be surprised that God considers truth to be important?

Consider This: Discuss the concept that truth is relative—what is truth for you may not be truth for me. If everything is true, even opposing ideas, can anything be true? What is meant by the phrase “truth is exclusive”?

► STEP 3—Practice

If your meeting space, class size, and the personality of your class allows, divide into groups of five to seven. Let each group concentrate on one or two of the special blessings studied in the lesson. One variation would be

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Theology

All through biblical history, God has used the prophetic gift to protect His people from theological errors. It was no different with the ministry of Ellen White. In the early days of our church she had to combat fanaticism of various kinds. Some people claimed to be perfect, others stated that no more work should be done, and some kept on setting times for Christ's return. During the Kellogg crisis at the turn of the century, her counsel saved the church from pantheism. At the same time, almost single-handedly she led the church from a semi-Arian (a belief that Jesus was not God) to a Trinitarian position. When A. F. Ballenger tried to change the sanctuary teaching, she took a strong stand against it. Ellen White also had a strong role in keeping the church of her day from falling deep into legalism; along with A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, she was a great proponent of salvation by faith in Christ alone, without the deeds of the law.

After her death, her writings continued to give guidance to the church. In more recent times, her writings provide clear direction on the issue of Creation, which is coming under attack even from within our own ranks.

What does the Old Testament teach about origins of human life? *Gen. 1:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11, Ps. 33:6, Isa. 42:5.*

According to the Old Testament, the Lord created life on our earth in six days. The Hebrew word translated *day* in Genesis 1 is *yom*. Whenever this word in the historical books of the Bible is accompanied by a numeral, it always refers to a literal 24-hour period (*see Gen. 7:11, Exod. 16:1*). In resting on the seventh day of the Creation week, God established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. In short, we are on immovable biblical ground by adhering to a literal six-day Creation, despite voices, even among us, that would argue for something else.

And though Ellen White has been dead for almost a century, here, too, her words give us a strong affirmation of this great Bible truth: “I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 90.

Despite the clear testimony of the Bible, despite the strong affirmation of Ellen White, some among us still insist that God used millions of years of evolution to create human life. What examples can you find from the Bible of people getting so caught up in the trends of their time that they lose sight of important truth? How can we protect ourselves from falling into the same tired, old trap?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to allow the groups to be self-selecting. Those with an *education* story could form group one, those with a *health* story group two, and so on. Then have these smaller groups explore answers to the following questions:

1. How would my life be different if God had not used publishing, education, healing, and so forth to make a difference in my family or my personal life?
2. What benefits have I or those around me received through the special blessing provided through God's guidance using the means shared in the preceding question?
3. What do I believe God may be calling me to do to extend the blessing He has given me to others?

► **STEP 4—Apply**

Start an ongoing personal or class project that grows out of this lesson. It is not enough to receive the blessings provided by the prophetic gift. We are given God's gifts only so that we can share them. These suggestions are not exhaustive but may prime the pump of discussion.

Mission: Select a missionary in another country and contact him or her. Offer prayer and even financial support through certified groups, such as Gospel Outreach and Adventist Frontier Missions. Other ways to assist might include supplying literature. Reach out locally to overlooked groups, such as prisoners.

Education: Find a young person in your church who cannot afford a Christian education. Provide finances and earning opportunities so that he or she can attend a Christian school.

Health: Start a health-based ministry to reach your community. Your conference office or national organizations such as the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP) can help guide you.

Publishing: Distribute literature door-to-door or begin a *Signs of the Times*[®] newspaper box program.

Theology: Engage your neighbor through Bible studies.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” pp. 139–160, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Source and Aim of True Education,” pp. 13–19; “Relation of Education to Redemption,” pp. 28–30, in *Education*.

Many of the principles of healthful living found in the writings of Ellen White already were taught in a limited way by other health reformers of her day. But in their teaching we find many errors and extremes that Ellen White avoided because of the instructions she received from God. For example, Sylvester Graham and James Jackson, two prominent health reformers in Ellen White’s day, both taught, “Don’t eat salt.” Ellen G. White, however, wrote, “I use some salt, and always have, because salt, instead of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 162.

Other errors that were taught by health reformers in the nineteenth century and that Ellen G. White avoided included: Do not cut your hair; do not drink water—get your liquids from fruit only; when eating meat, eat mostly the fat; overweight people are healthy people; do not use soap, etc.—Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 77, 78.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answer to Monday’s final question.
- 2 We now live in the day and age of science, where for many people science is the only way to know truth. How interesting that of all the things we teach (the Second Coming, salvation by faith, the state of the dead, etc.), only one can be verified scientifically: our health message. Dwell on the implications of that thought.
- 3 As Seventh-day Adventists we insist, and rightly so, that all our doctrines need to come from the Bible and the Bible only. At the same time, if we believe that Ellen White manifested the gift of prophecy, shouldn’t weight and credence be given to her writings on doctrine, as well? How do we find the right balance in how we use her writings to deal with theological issues?
- 4 As with the Bible, there are things about Ellen White’s writings that we don’t understand. How can we protect ourselves from getting into the deadly mode of focusing only on the problems or concerns, and missing the greater picture?