

Testing¹ the Prophets²



SABBATH—JANUARY 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 18:6–10; Jonah 3; Jonah 4; Matthew 7:20; Galatians 2:11–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “Don’t [Do not] treat prophecies³ as if they amount to nothing. Put everything to the test. Hold on to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NlrV).

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF⁴ NUMBER 18 says, “One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is one of the marks of the remnant church.⁵ It was shown in the ministry [work done for God] of Ellen G. White. Her writings are truth. Her writings also make clear that all teaching and experience must be tested by the Bible.”—Adapted from *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005 edition, page 247. (Read Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14–21; Hebrews 1:1–3; Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10.)

Mrs. White never called herself a prophetess.⁶ But the church has recognized her as one. In 1905, she wrote, “Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never claimed to be one.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 36.

THE WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: How did God communicate (speak) to His prophets? What are the Bible tests of a true prophet? What is conditional⁷ prophecy? Are prophets perfect and sinless? Why do we believe that Ellen G. White's visions⁸ and prophetic⁹ dreams were from God?

1. testing—proving something to be true or false, good or bad, right or wrong.

2. prophets—men or women who are spokespersons for God. God gives His prophets special messages to give His people. Prophets also speak to God on behalf of His people. God may also give prophets warnings about what will happen in the future.

3. prophecies—special messages from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

4. fundamental belief—one of the 28 basic beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

5. remnant church—a small group of faithful believers; Seventh-day Adventists believe that they are members of the remnant church.

6. prophetess—a woman who is a spokesperson for God. God gives a prophetess special messages to give to His people. A prophetess also speaks to God on behalf of His people. God may also give His prophetess warnings about what will happen in the future.

7. conditional—depending on a condition; when something is necessary (needs to happen or take place) so that something else might appear or happen.

8. visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God's will (plan).

9. prophetic—having the ability to receive special messages from God and/or foretell future events.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 1**DREAMS AND VISIONS (Joel 2:28)**

According to Genesis 15:1; Numbers 12:6–8; Daniel 7:1; and Joel 2:28, how did God communicate (speak) with persons who were His prophets?

In the Bible we learn that God used dreams and visions to communicate with His messengers. Prophetic dreams played an important role from early times in the work of Bible leaders, such as Abraham (Genesis 20–41).



God spoke to Daniel in visions and dreams.

Ellen G. White's ministry lasted for 70 years, from 1844–1915. During this time, Ellen G. White received about 2,000 visions and prophetic dreams. "At times I am carried far ahead into the future. I

am shown what is to take place. Then again I am shown things as they have happened in the past. After I come out of vision I do not at once remember all that I have seen. Often the matter is not so clear before me until I write. Then the scene rises before me as was shown in vision. And I can write freely."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 36.

Often her visions were given while she was with a group of people. The people saw that certain things hap-



Often Ellen G. White was shown things in vision that would take place far in the future.

pened to Mrs. White's body while she was in vision. She did not breathe. She had super strength (no one could move her arms or legs). And she was unaware of what was happening around her. Adventists and non-Adventists have spoken about the divine (from God) power of her visions. At the General Conference Session (meeting) in 1893,

J. N. Loughborough¹⁰ said, “I have seen Sister White in vision about 50 times. She has been examined while in vision by skillful doctors. And we have testimonials¹¹ from these doctors. But they cannot understand what causes her visions.” —Adapted from *General Conference Daily Bulletin* (a short newsletter), January 29, 1893.

What has been your experience with Ellen G. White’s writings? In what ways have they influenced¹² your spiritual (having to do with God; holy) life? Put aside any ideas or feelings you might have against her writings. Just read some of them. What do they tell you about the author?

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 2

AGREEMENT WITH THE BIBLE (Isaiah 8:20)

What does Isaiah 8:20 say about one of the most important tests of a true prophet? Why is this test so important?

What a prophet says must agree with what God has made known to us already. Later prophets may reveal (make known) additional gems of wisdom about the plan of salvation.¹³ But what they say will not differ from what God has said before. If the messages of later prophets disagree with the writ-

ings of earlier Bible prophets, then that would falsely suggest that God changes and cannot be trusted. But as Malachi 3:6 teaches, God does not change. And we can trust Him to keep His word.



Hananiah was a false prophet. His words did not agree with what God already told Jeremiah.

So, one of the tests of a true prophet is whether what he or she says agrees with what God already has made known. An example of this test of a true prophet is given in Jeremiah 28. Jeremiah prophesies¹⁴ that Israel will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). A few years into the 70 years, Hananiah, the son of Azzur, claims that Jeremiah is wrong (Jeremiah 28:1–4, NIV). What Hananiah says does not agree with

10. J. N. Loughborough—a leader and preacher of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He lived from 1832 to 1924.

11. testimonials—the statements (stories) that people make or tell to others about events they have experienced firsthand.

12. influenced—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

13. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

14. prophesies—to say what will happen in the future; foretell.

what God told Jeremiah before. So, God gives another message to Jeremiah, saying that Hananiah lied to the people (Jeremiah 28:15–17, NIV).

Ellen G. White's message agrees with the message of the Bible.

Why must everything we believe about God be tested by the Bible? Why must the Bible have the final word, especially in spiritual and religious matters?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 3

PROPHECY THAT COMES TRUE (Jeremiah 18:6–10)

What important principle (rule) about prophecies that come true is found in Jeremiah 18:6–10?

The prophecies of a true prophet come true. This proof is the test of a true prophet. (Read 1 Samuel 9:6; Jeremiah 28:9; Lamentations 3:37). At the same time, not all prophecies are fulfilled. Some prophecies are not fulfilled when the people involved have a change of heart. This kind of prophecy is called *conditional prophecy*.¹⁵ Conditional prophecy is important for us to understand.

According to Jonah 3 and 4, how can we decide that a prophecy has been fulfilled or come true?

Most prophecies depend on the

actions and attitudes (feelings) of the people involved. In Jonah 3 and 4, Jonah gives a clear-cut warning from God to the people of Nineveh. In 40 days Nineveh would be “‘destroyed’” (Jonah 3:4, NIV). Yet, the city is not destroyed when Jonah says it would be. Is Jonah a false prophet? Of course not. Instead, the prophecy is conditional. Whether or not it comes true depends on how the people will act after receiving the message God has given them.

This principle may explain why a prophecy made by Ellen G. White in 1856 was not fulfilled. In 1856, Mrs. White announced, “I was shown the company [group] who were at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some of these people will be food for worms. Some will suffer the seven last plagues. Some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated¹⁶ at the coming of Jesus.’”—Adapted from *Testimonies*¹⁷ for the Church, volume 1, pages 131, 132.

All who were alive way back then are now dead. How do we explain what happened? The answer is conditional prophecy. We must remember that Ellen G. White was told God's kingdom *could have* come in her lifetime. In 1896 she wrote, “Suppose those who claimed to have a living experience in the things of God had done their work as the Lord commanded. Suppose the whole world would have been warned before this time. Then the Lord Jesus would have come in power and great glory.”—Adapted from *Review and Herald*, October 6, 1896.

15. conditional prophecy—prophecy (warning; message) that can be changed if people repent of (feel sorry for) their sins and change their ways.

16. translated—being alive when Jesus comes and going to heaven without dying.

17. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 4**BELIEVING IN JESUS, THE GOD-MAN (John 4:1, 2)**

According to 1 John 4:1, 2, what was one of the problems John faced in his time? And what does he say is another mark of a true prophet?

One of the problems in John's day was the question over the human nature¹⁸ of Christ. Was He really flesh and blood? Or did He, as some taught, only appear to have a body? To understand and confess (believe) that Jesus was truly human¹⁹ became very important to John. He declared this belief to be a test of a true prophet.

This test is more than just believing Jesus became a human being (person). It includes believing everything the Bible teaches about Jesus. Jesus took on human form for a purpose. He became man in order to live a sinless life. He died for sinful humans. But more than that, Jesus became man so that He could work for us as our High Priest. He became our High Priest after His return to life from the dead. He works for us in the heavenly

sanctuary.²⁰ Jesus, our High Priest, understands us. He can understand our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way humans are tempted (Hebrews 4:14, 15). This experience helps Him to know what we need.

Every true prophet will point people to Jesus, the God-man. Jesus is the Savior and example of all humans. Ellen G. White devoted her life to teaching these truths.

According to Acts 4:12, why is it so important that true prophets glorify²¹ Jesus Christ?

The ecumenical²² movement and postmodern thinking²³ have influenced (changed) almost all Christian churches today. Both ways of thinking erode (slowly destroy) belief in the idea that the Christian faith is special. And neither of these ideas place importance on Jesus as Savior of the world. But Ellen G. White writes, "The only hope for fallen men and women is to look to Jesus and receive Him as the only Savior."—Adapted from *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 367. "Let us lift up Jesus, the Savior of men. Talk of his love, tell of his power."—Adapted from

18. human nature—any of the qualities or aspects of humans (men, women, and children) that make us who we are. Without God, our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

19. human—like us; having to do with men, women, or children.

20. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

21. glorify—to praise, honor, respect, and exalt (to think of someone as great).

22. ecumenical—agreement or cooperation (working together) among Christians from different denominations (groups such as Lutherans, Baptists, and so on); tending toward worldwide Christian unity (having the same beliefs) or cooperation. For many Catholics the ecumenical movement means bringing all Christians into one faith: Catholicism (the Roman Catholic Church). But for many Protestants the ecumenical movement means learning to respect differences between Christian groups and getting along better.

23. postmodern thinking—a recent movement of ideas or way of thinking. Michel Foucault, one postmodern thinker, says that knowledge is always changing. So what was true in the past may not be true today. Other postmodern thinkers claim truth is a product of people and culture (different ways of life). Because people always change, these thinkers believe truth must always be changing too. So, they would say that all this change keeps us from knowing if what we believe is true.

Signs of the Times, March 18, 1889.
Read also Friday's study.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 5

THE ORCHARD TEST (Matthew 7:20)

According to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:20, how can true prophets be recognized?

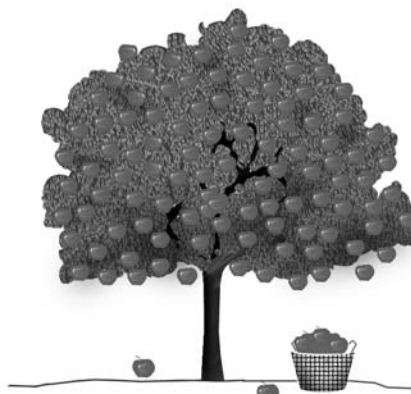
Jesus warns His disciples (followers) not to be fooled by false prophets (Matthew 7:15). A good tree bears good fruit. Jesus used this principle (rule) or test to teach His followers how a prophet should live. What kinds of fruit does the lives of the prophets bring forth? What influence²⁴ does their teaching have on other people?

What do Genesis 12:12, 13; Jonah 1:1–3; Acts 15:36–39; and Galatians 2:11–14 tell us about the character flaws²⁵ of some of those who had the gift of prophecy?²⁶

Being a prophet, of course, does not make a person perfect or sinless. Ellen G. White made mistakes. She had character weaknesses as other people did. But she tried to live her life the way Jesus wanted. When she died, the writer of a local non-Adventist newspaper wrote, "The life of Mrs. White is an example that all should follow. . . ."

She was a humble, faithful disciple of Christ. She always went about doing good. . . . Her life of almost ninety years overflowed with good deeds, kind words and heartfelt prayers for all people."—Adapted from "Called to Her Reward," *St. Helena Star* (California), July 23, 1915.

Some people find it hard to accept Ellen G. White's work as a prophetess. They have trouble with certain details of her writings. But they fail to understand three important things about her: (1) God used her to raise up this church. (2) God gave her many wonderful messages. And (3) she gave many wonderful gifts to this church.



A good tree bears good fruit. Jesus used this rule to teach His followers how a prophet should live.

What are the great advantages²⁷ of having the gift of prophecy among us? What possible challenges does it bring?

24. influence—the power to change persons or things.

25. character flaws—the weaknesses that a person has, such as a bad temper, fear, laziness, having no patience, jealousy, hate, and so on.

26. gift of prophecy—the ability to receive special messages from God and/or foretell future events.

27. advantages—things, events, or conditions (the way things are; a state of being) that can help a person gain what he or she wants.

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Bible Prophets Wrote for Our Time,” pages 338, 339, in *Selected Messages*, book 3; Arthur L. White, “Make It Known to Others,” pages 60–72, in *The Early Years: 1827–1862*.

“As the subject was presented [shown] to me, the period of Christ’s high-priestly work seemed almost finished. Am I accused of lying because time has continued longer than my testimony²⁸ seemed to show? So then, what about the testimonies of Christ and His disciples? Were they deceived [fooled]? Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘Brothers and sisters, what I mean is that the time is short. From now on, those who have a husband or wife should live as if they did not. Those who are sad should live as if they were not [sad]. Those who are happy should live as if they were not [happy]’ (1 Corinthians 7:29, 30, NIV). . . .

“The angels of God in their messages to men make it clear that time is very short. This is what God has always shown to me. It is true that time has gone on longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our

Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and warnings of God are conditional.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 67.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Why have some Seventh-day Adventists lost faith in Ellen G. White’s work as a prophetess? Could part of the problem be with how her work has been used? Discuss.
- ❷ Read some of your favorite quotes from the writings of Ellen G. White. What is it about them that you liked so much? What message is she giving in the quotes you have chosen? Bring your choices to class and share them.
- ❸ Some people use the writings of Ellen G. White as the final authority²⁹ on every point. Why is that wrong? What are the dangers of such an attitude (thought or feeling) to the church? What are some ways this wonderful gift has been, and still is, abused in the church? What have been some of the results?

28. testimony—the truth God makes known to us about Himself.

29. authority—source of truth.