

# The Prophetic Gift



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 20:7, Exod. 15:20, Deut. 18:15, Matt. 11:11, John 6:14, Heb. 11:24–26.*

**Memory Text:** “Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; and I speak to him in a dream’ ” (*Numbers 12:6, NKJV*).

All through history, and even up to the present, we can find examples of people uttering predictions about the future. In most cases, these things never come true. When they do come true, a number of factors could be involved. Could it be sheer luck? Maybe the Lord was in it? Or perhaps the enemy of souls was working to deceive as many as he could?

Sure Satan uses false prophecies and prophets to mislead people. But we can take comfort in knowing God has His true prophets to make known His will.

In Scripture, individuals whom God endowed with the gift of prophecy were people who walked with God. Not that they were sinless, but they strove to live in harmony with God's revealed will. They had a personal relationship with God, and in that context the Lord was able to use them in a special way.

This week we'll take a look at how He used them.

**The Week at a Glance:** Were the Old and New Testament prophets saints or just ordinary men and women? What role did women prophets play in Israel? What were the differences between apostles and prophets in the New Testament?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.*

## Patriarch and Prophet

**In** Genesis 20:7 we find the first mention of the word *prophet* (Heb. *nabi'*) in the Bible. What was the context in which it was used? What can we learn from the context about what a prophet was and how he or she functioned?

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In the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the word *prophet* describes the recipient of divine revelation. During the time of the judges the word *seer* (in Hebrew *ro'eh*) appears to have come into use (1 Sam. 9:9, 11, 18, 19); then, later, the usage reverted to the older term again.

Prophets were not only spokespersons for God but on occasion were also intermediaries between God and the people. Abraham in Genesis 20 was the intermediary between God and Abimelech—he was to pray to God on behalf of Abimelech.

Abraham is a towering figure in the Old Testament. Three times in Scripture he is called God's friend (2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8, James 2:23). When he was 99 years old, God told him, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (Gen. 17:6, NKJV), a promise that, humanly speaking, seemed impossible. Because Abraham believed God in spite of what human reason told him, he became "the father of all those who believe" (Rom. 4:11, NKJV).

Considering that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son in response to God's command (Genesis 22), it seems incredible that Abraham should have lied to Abimelech concerning Sarah (Gen. 20:2). However, the situation is only too true to life. "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man" (Prov. 27:19, NIV). The occasional manifestation of the remaining old nature in the believer, the backsliding of God's children in all ages, and our own sad departures from the path of righteousness are sufficient to explain the deplorable conduct of the "father of all those who believe." How human Abraham was—moments of great faith, moments of deep lapses. What follower of Abraham's God can't relate?

**What encouragement can you take for yourself from the fact that, despite Abraham's mistakes and lack of faith, God used him anyway, even mightily? How can we learn not to let our lapses turn us away from continuing to press on ahead in faith?**

## The First Named Prophet of Israel

The first person of the nation of Israel called a prophet was Moses. Concerning his death, the statement is made, “since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (*Deut. 34:10, NKJV*). Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel, but Moses was the first prophet in Israel’s history—an example for all the prophets who followed him.

**What** do the following texts tell us about Moses’ personality and character? *Exod. 4:10; 32:11–13, 32; Num. 12:3; 20:10–12; Heb. 11:24–26.* How do some of these traits help us understand how he fit into his role as a prophet?

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Through his upbringing in Egypt, his strong faith in God, and his personal experience with the Almighty at the burning bush (*Exodus 3*), Moses was well equipped to lead the people of Israel. From Scripture, we know that because of Israel’s repeated failure to have faith in God, Moses constantly was interceding with God for the nation (*Exod. 32:11–13, Num. 14:13–19, 16:46–50*), while at the same time admonishing the Israelites to be faithful.

Following the golden-calf episode at Mount Sinai (*Exodus 32*), Moses spent 40 days with God on the mountain. When he returned from the mountain, his face shone (*Exod. 34:28–35*). The radiant face of Moses was but a reflection of divine glory (*2 Cor. 3:7*). Considering the fact that Moses had the unique privilege of seeing the glory of the Creator, it is small wonder that his face shone after such an experience, but this was not the only reason. The golden-calf rebellion was directed not only against God but also against Moses. The evidence of his communion with God was instrumental in restoring him to his rightful place of leadership. When the people realized where he had been, his role of leader and mediator that had been questioned was restored.

Anyone filled with the Spirit of God will in some way reflect the glorious character of God. Those who live close to God will have a telling effect on the lives of others, though they may not know it themselves.

**Who is someone who seems to have a close relationship with the Lord? How is that closeness revealed in their lives? What character traits do they manifest? How can you learn to walk closer to the Lord? What things in your life are holding you back from that closer walk?**

## Prophets in Israel

Prior to his death Moses told the Israelites: “ ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear’ ” (*Deut. 18:15, NKJV*). The context indicates that this prophecy had an immediate application to the prophetic leadership of Israel in the years following the death of Moses (*Deuteronomy 18; 34:9, 10; Hos. 12:10*). The prophets from Joshua to Malachi were partial fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

Christ, however, fully could meet the conditions set forth in Moses’ prediction (*see John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40*). He came as the Second Moses, not to free His people from the power of earthly rulers but to free them from the power of sin.

The writings of the prophets of the Old Testament from Isaiah to Malachi are well-known. In addition, there were many other prophets in the history of Israel. Samuel lived during the period of the judges (*1 Sam. 3:20*). Gad and Nathan continued his work (*2 Sam. 12:1, 24:13*). After the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. we find the prophets Ahijah (*1 Kings 11:29*), Elijah (*1 Kings 18:1*), and Elisha (*2 Kings 2:9–14*) ministering to the people of God.

Prophets came from all walks of life: Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests, Isaiah and Zephaniah were of royal blood, Daniel was prime minister of Babylon, Samuel was a judge, Elisha was a farmer, and Amos a shepherd. Whatever their backgrounds, all of them were God’s messengers through whom God tried to keep Israel from falling into sin. Some prophets wrote books (*1 Chron. 29:29, 2 Chron. 9:29*), others did not (*1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 2:15*); some were counselors to kings (*Jer. 38:14*), others preached to the people (*Ezek. 3:17*). After four centuries of prophetic silence, John the Baptist appeared as the last of the prophets of the Old Covenant period (*Matt. 3:1*).

All through the sacred Scriptures we see the Lord speaking to His people through His servants, the prophets. The whole Bible itself is the work of these prophets, delivering the messages that God gave them. No matter how diverse their backgrounds, education, temperaments; no matter the flaws in their characters (with the radical exception of Jesus), these human beings, flesh and blood like us, were used by the Lord to proclaim His messages, messages that still are being proclaimed today in almost every country in the world and will continue until the close of time.

**Which prophet can you relate to the most? Which prophet speaks the clearest to you, and why? What have you taken from that prophet’s life and message? How are you able to apply what you’ve learned from them to your life in a way that changes you for the better?**

## Prophetesses in Israel

**Scripture** mentions a number of prophetesses. Who were they? What do the following texts tell us about the role they played in the history of Israel? *Exod. 15:20, 21; Judg. 4:4–10; 2 Kings 22:11–20.*

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Miriam, the sister of Moses, is called a prophetess. She is described as leading the women in the Song of Moses and Miriam (*compare Exod. 15:1 and 15:21, NIV*). Moses was the appointed leader of the people of Israel, but his dealings would have been primarily with the men, who were considered the heads of their families. Miriam's task was, perhaps, with the Israelite women. She must have been several years older than Moses (*Exod. 2:1–8*), and according to Josephus she married Hur, who together with Aaron had held up the arms of Moses in the battle with the Amalekites.—*The Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher), p. 98.

That she was an important person in Israel is seen in the fact that all Israel had to wait seven days until God took away her leprosy after the unfortunate incident with her brother Moses and his wife (*Num. 12:1–15*).

Deborah (*Judges 5*) must have been an extraordinary person. In a society dominated by men, she became a political and spiritual leader, something few women achieved in those days. Deeply spiritual, she ascribed all praise for the victory over the Canaanites to God (*vss. 3–5, 13*); she did not take any glory for herself or Barak.

As a “mother in Israel” (*vs. 7*), she watched over the people with maternal care, counseling and aiding them in procuring justice.

**Read Judges 4:1–8.** What does this tell us about how highly respected this woman was in Israel at that time?

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Another prophetess in Israel was Huldah (*2 Kings 22:14–20, 2 Chron. 34:20–28*). When King Josiah asked her concerning God's will, she prophesied judgment and disaster upon Jerusalem and its people but not in Josiah's day; his eyes were not to see the evil because he humbled himself before the Lord. It is interesting that Huldah was consulted although both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were living at the same time.

## New Testament Prophets

The Old Testament prophetic period came to an end about four hundred years prior to the birth of Christ. During the period between that end and the birth of Christ, many Jewish books were written, but none were accepted as inspired.

**The** life of Christ ushered in a new era, in which God again called individuals to function as His spokespersons. Who were some of these New Testament prophets, and what was the difference between them and the apostles? *Luke 1:67; John 1:6, 7; Acts 11:27, 28; 13:1; Rev. 1:1–3.*

In New Testament Greek, the word *apostle* was used of persons in the sense of ambassador, envoy, or delegate. Josephus, for example, used this word when speaking of the ambassadors whom the Jews sent as their representatives to Rome.—Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, p. 11.

In the New Testament, *apostle* carries the concepts of mission and representation. The term appears in the context of Jesus' ordaining and sending forth His disciples on an evangelistic mission (*Matt. 10:2–6*). The apostles were those with special authority from the risen Lord; they had seen for themselves His death and resurrection, something that all the previous prophets hadn't. Some of the apostles, such as John and Paul, were also prophets, but not all apostles were prophets. According to Ephesians 2:20, apostles and prophets together provided the foundational interpretation of what God had done in Christ for humanity.

**Read** Matthew 11:11. Why was John the Baptist greater than all the Old Testament prophets? What does Jesus mean when He says, "But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (*NKJV*)?

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet in the sense that it was his privilege to announce the coming of Christ, to whom all the prophets had borne witness (*see Luke 24:27; John 5:39, 46*). Like Abraham, all the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day the Messiah would come (*1 Pet. 1:10, 11*), but John saw Him in the flesh. Hence, in some sense, the prophetic office in the Old Testament reached its climax in John. At the same time, John the Baptist was only at the door of the kingdom of grace, looking in, while the least follower of Jesus can look back and rejoice in the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies through Christ.

**Dwell on some of the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Jesus as Messiah. How can they help strengthen your faith?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155; “Moses,” pp. 241–256, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection. In concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, he betrayed a distrust of the divine care, a lack of that lofty faith and courage so often and nobly exemplified in his life.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 130.

“Moses had been instructed in regard to the final reward to be given to the humble and obedient servants of God, and worldly gain sank to its proper insignificance in comparison. The magnificent palace of Pharaoh and the monarch’s throne were held out as an inducement to Moses; but he knew that the sinful pleasures that make men forget God were in its lordly courts. He looked beyond the gorgeous palace, beyond a monarch’s crown, to the high honors that will be bestowed on the saints of the Most High in a kingdom untainted by sin. He saw by faith an imperishable crown that the King of heaven would place on the brow of the overcomer.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 81.

“The glory reflected in the countenance of Moses illustrates the blessings to be received by God’s commandment-keeping people through the mediation of Christ. It testifies that the closer our communion with God, and the clearer our knowledge of His requirements, the more fully shall we be conformed to the divine image, and the more readily do we become partakers of the divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 330.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1** Discuss some of the character flaws found in various prophets and apostles in the Bible. What hope can you take from these for yourself? At the same time, what are the good characteristics seen in many of these people? What hope and promise can you find there, as well?
- 2** What about some of the so-called “prophets” today, those making all sorts of predictions, many of which are reported in the local newspaper? How should we relate to them? What kind of people are they; what kind of predictions do they make? What can we learn from the contrast between them and the prophets seen in the Bible?
- 3** In what ways can we, as a church, act in the role of the prophets? In what ways are we called to do just that? How can we better fulfill that role?

# Keeping the Faith on Sabbath

by MUHINDO KABWE

Schools in French-speaking countries hold classes on Sabbaths. Getting schools to accommodate Adventists is difficult. It's no different where I live in Congo.

After secondary school, I enrolled in a government school to study business. I knew that Sabbath would be a problem, but I was one of four Adventists in the school, and we helped one another stay faithful to God.

Three other Adventist students, who were older than I, told me that exams were scheduled for Sabbath, and rescheduling them was difficult. We had no option but to pray for God's will and request permission to take our exams on another day. But several teachers refused.

We fasted and prayed, then we went to the school administration. The administration told us that all exams are scheduled for Saturday, no exceptions. But we weren't ready to give up. We prayed for two more days and returned to plead our case. To our surprise the director decided to write a letter to the teachers stating that no exams would be scheduled on Saturday. And he even allowed us to make up the exams we had missed because they were given on Sabbath. We were overjoyed!

Then just before the end of my second year at the school, a new director was elected. He changed the exam policy so exams fell on Saturdays again. We appealed, but we were denied. Final exams came, and several fell on Sabbath. We faced failure. Instead of letting us take our exams on another day, the director offered to let us withdraw from school.

I decided to stay at the school. I fasted and prayed about the exam schedule, but the teachers could do nothing without the director's permission. It was a difficult situation, but by trusting God and praying much, I was able to take enough exams to pass on to the third year.

By this time my Adventist friends had finished their studies. I was the only Adventist still at the school. I held evangelistic meetings to introduce teachers and students to Adventist beliefs, especially about the Sabbath. The meetings focused on Jesus and drew about eighty people, including two teachers. After that, it was easier to get Sabbaths off. Two students wanted to know more about Adventists and why we are so firm in our beliefs. I explained the Sabbath from before Creation right through to Revelation and invited them to church. Both of them have since been baptized.

I completed my studies at last, and the new Adventists who now attend this school are able to get Sabbaths off because of the groundwork we laid for them.

Your mission offerings brought the news of Jesus to my country and to me. Now we share that news with others. Thank you for your help.

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