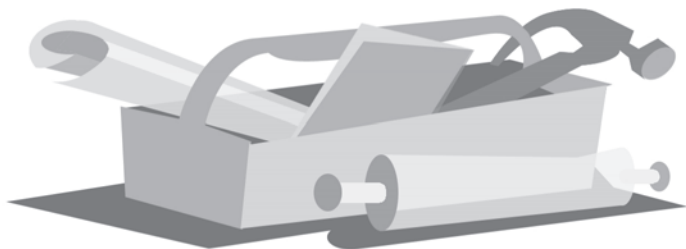


The Work of the Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 22:1–14, Isaiah 53, Matt. 3:7–10, 1 Cor. 5:1–5.*

Memory Text: “By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved” (*Hosea 12:13, NKJV*).

As the Bible amply shows, the life of a prophet was never easy. Ellen White's was no exception, and though she didn't face the same kind of trials that many of the Bible prophets did (jail, stoning, etc.), she had plenty of trials just the same. In the early years, besides struggling with illness and various assaults of Satan, she and James were very poor and had to depend on others for living quarters and furniture. Two of their four children died young, and James wore himself out with traveling, preaching, writing, and guiding the fledgling church until 1881, when he died at the age of 60. For the last 34 years Ellen White continued to labor in an environment that was at times hardly friendly. This week we'll look at some of her work and how it paralleled the biblical prophets.

The Week at a Glance: Does the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament differ from the proclamation of salvation in the Old Testament? Why were the early Seventh-day Adventists, who came out of the Millerite movement, opposed to church organization? What were some ways prophets delivered God's messages to His people?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.*

Preaching the Gospel

Where do we find the gospel of salvation in the Old Testament? *Gen. 22:1–14, Lev. 4:27–31, Isaiah 53.*

The plan of salvation was explained to Adam and Eve as soon as they had sinned; it graphically was illustrated in Abraham's test on Mount Moriah and in the sanctuary service instituted by Moses. The sanctuary rituals were designed for an agricultural people who lived closely with their animals. The sacrificed animals symbolized Christ's death on the cross, and the priest's services illustrated His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Does the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament differ from the proclamation of salvation in the Old Testament? *John 1:29, Rom. 3:21–26.*

While the Old Testament people looked forward by faith to the Messiah, the New Testament looks back to the accomplished salvation through Jesus Christ. In both testaments the focus is on what God has done to remedy humanity's fall into sin.

It's the same with the writings of Ellen White, where we find more than eight thousand references to the gospel and about six thousand references specifically to Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. The Christ of the Cross and the cross of Christ were the focus of her message. She admonished Seventh-day Adventists to uplift Jesus Christ before the world. "Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 156. "Christ as manifested to the patriarchs, as symbolized in the sacrificial service, as portrayed in the law, and as revealed by the prophets, is the riches of the Old Testament. Christ in His life, His death, and His resurrection, Christ as He is manifested by the Holy Spirit, is the treasure of the New Testament."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 126. "The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. . . . This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.

How much time do you spend thinking about Jesus, focusing on His life and what He's done for you? How much stronger would your faith be if you were to dwell more on Christ and His sacrifice in your behalf?

Guiding God's People

Jesus appointed Paul and the Twelve Apostles, some of whom also had the prophetic gift, to lead and guide the early Christian church. What are some of the specific areas in which Paul and the apostles provided counsel and guidance for the church? Acts 6:1–7, 1 Cor. 5:1–5, 7:10–16, Titus 1:5, 1 John 4:1–3.

The leaders of the early church faced many problems. Questions of immorality, apostasy, church organization, and a host of other matters occupied the time and attention of the early church. Prophets and apostles guided and directed the people of God in accordance with the Lord's revealed will.

The early days of our church had numerous struggles, as well. During the first 20 years of our church, there was no church organization, so there also was no paid ministry; preachers worked at other jobs to make a living. Anyone could preach if he felt called, and, as a result, heresies prospered. Furthermore, church buildings and the Review and Herald press were in the names of individuals, which created the potential for many problems. For years James White urged organization but with little success.

Then in 1854, Mrs. White published an article concerning church order. "The Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected. Formality should be shunned; but, in so doing, order should not be neglected. There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles. . . .

"The danger of those traveling whom God has not called was shown me. . . . I saw that this door at which the enemy comes in to perplex and trouble the flock can be shut. I inquired of the angel how it could be closed. He said, 'The church must flee to God's Word and become established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected.'" —Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 97, 100.

It took another six years until a church name was adopted in Michigan. In 1861 the Michigan Conference was established, and in 1863 the General Conference was established.

People sometimes talk about not wanting to be part of an organized church. What are the advantages of being part of an organized structure? How can you better serve the organized church and help remedy aspects of it that you believe could use improvement?

Reproving Sin

What were some of the evils the prophets spoke against, and what parallels can you see to our own days? *1 Kings 18:21, Isa. 1:10–14, Amos 5:12, Mal. 3:8–10, Matt. 3:7–10.*

Prophets were commissioned by God to resist social injustice, root out idolatry, protest against immorality, and condemn formalistic worship and hypocrisy. At times it seemed to them that their voices were the only dissenting cries (*1 Kings 19:14*); yet, their protests were God's protests and were delivered regardless of the consequences.

How did Ellen White deal with messages of reproof for individuals?

Like the prophets of old, Ellen White had to reprove sins known only to the individual and God. It was a work she did not enjoy. "I bore my testimony and related things which had been shown me in the past history of some present, warning them of their dangers and reproofing their wrong course of action. I stated that I had been placed in most disagreeable positions. When families and individuals were brought before me in vision, it was frequently the case that what was shown me in relation to them was of a private nature, reproofing secret sins. I have labored with some for months in regard to wrongs of which others knew nothing. As my brethren see these persons sad, and hear them express doubts in regard to their acceptance with God, also feelings of despondency, they have cast censure upon me, as though I were to blame for their being in trial. . . . It has been the disagreeable work assigned me to reprove private sins. Were I, in order to prevent suspicions and jealousy, to give a full explanation of my course, and make public that which should be kept private, I should sin against God and wrong the individuals. I have to keep private reproofs of private wrongs to myself, locked in my own breast. Let others judge as they may, I will never betray the confidence reposed in me by the erring and repentant, or reveal to others that which should only be brought before the ones that are guilty."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 584, 585.

If the Lord gave Ellen White a message for you, what do you think it would say, and why? Most important, how would you respond?

Communicating God's Will

What were some of the ways the prophets delivered God's messages to His people? *Num. 9:1–5; Jer. 37:16, 17; Ezek. 4:1–6; Col. 4:16.*

Prophets were charged by God to deliver to the people the messages that they received from Him. At times they proclaimed God's words in a discourse before a company of people. At other times they delivered their testimonies in private interviews. Frequently, prophets were told to write out the messages received so that not only the people living at that time but also all future generations would hear what God had to say.

When Ellen Harmon (Ellen G. White's maiden name) received her second vision in December 1844, she was told that she must go and relate to others what had been revealed to her. For several days, she prayed that this burden might be taken from her, but the words of the angel sounded continually in her ears, " 'Make known to others what I have revealed to you.' "—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 69.

During 1845, therefore, Ellen Harmon, accompanied by her sister Sarah or other friends, visited former Millerites in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, who had experienced the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844, and shared her early visions with them. James White, a former Millerite preacher, became convinced that her visions were genuine and began to travel with her and her companions, and in 1846 James and Ellen were married.

Early in her ministry, Ellen White also was told to write out the things revealed to her. Messages to individuals frequently were communicated to their recipients through letters (often called testimonies). Thousands of such communications were mailed from her home over the years. Of these she wrote, "In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 67. When Ellen White died, she left behind about one hundred thousand pages of published and unpublished material.

What do the writings of Ellen G. White mean to you personally? Discuss your answer in class.

Predicting the Future

What were some of the Bible prophecies that have been fulfilled?

Isa. 44:28, Jer. 25:11, Dan. 9:24–27.

About one hundred fifty years prior to the time of Cyrus, Isaiah prophesied that a king by the name of Cyrus would bring back the Jews from Babylon and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Ezra 1:1–4.

Jeremiah predicted the length of the Babylonian captivity, and Daniel predicted the time of the appearance of the Messiah almost six hundred years before Jesus was born. Both prophecies provide evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures.

And with Ellen White, too, we can find many of her predictions fulfilled. For instance, on January 12, 1861, three months before the outbreak of the American Civil War, Mrs. White received a vision in the Parkville, Michigan, church in which she was shown battlefields covered with the dead and dying. As she related what she had seen, she told her listeners, “There are men in this house who will lose sons in that war.”—*Pacific Union Recorder*, March 7, 1912 (Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years*, vol. 1, p. 463). No less than five families in the room that day lost sons in the Civil War.

In 1885, Ellen White predicted: “When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism . . . then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 451.

At the time she wrote those words, Protestants and Catholics were all but at war with each other. In 1885 the ecumenical movement was still a long way in the future, but times have changed greatly. Just one example: On March 29, 1994, 39 leading evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics signed a document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”—a stunning fulfillment of prophetic trends.

Further Study: Read Arthur L. White, “The Messenger of the Lord at Work,” pp. 73–89, in *The Early Years: 1827–1862*; Ellen G. White, “God’s Law Immutable,” pp. 433–450, in *The Great Controversy*.

“When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 445.

For more than one hundred fifty years, Adventists have been warning the world about the coming *reconciliation* between Catholics and Protestants—even when all political and religious indications made such a reconciliation seem impossible. Today, of course, the impossible has become all but inevitable, as time and again Catholics and various Protestants are coming together on a whole host of issues. Most interesting, and again in line with what Ellen White wrote more than a century ago, the Protestants are the ones who are making the most incredible compromises, all in order to bring about this unity with Rome. Though there’s still much to unfold, these events are leading to an amazing fulfillment of prophecy and are another powerful vindication of Ellen White’s prophetic gift.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ To whatever degree possible, do a little research about the religious climate in America in the 1800s, particularly regarding Catholic-Protestant relations. Bring what you learn to class on Sabbath, and then discuss the predictions she made during that time regarding Protestants and Rome.
- ❷ Talk about the hostility that some people have toward organized religion. What are their complaints? Are those complaints often valid? If so, what can we do, as an organized church, to solve as much as possible some of those things that cause this hostility?
- ❸ What are ways that Ellen G. White’s writings can be abused? What kind of principles can we follow in order to protect ourselves from misusing this wonderful gift?

Wendy's Prayers

Wendy lives in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. As the eldest child in her family, it was her job to care for her younger sisters. Even before she started school, she carried the youngest child on her back.

Wendy often heard the children next door singing songs about Jesus. One day she asked the children to teach her the songs. Her neighbors did, and they invited her to go to Sabbath School with them. Wendy wasn't sure whether her mother would let her go to Sabbath School, so on Sabbath morning she hid until her neighbors walked by her house. Then she followed them to church.

Wendy's mother learned that Wendy was going to church and gave her permission to go—as long as she took her sisters with her. So every Sabbath morning Wendy washed and dressed her little sisters and took them to church. They had to climb a steep hill, and Wendy could not carry her baby sister all the way. So her other sisters helped her. Wendy loved church and often invited her mother to come with her. Sometimes her mother came, but just to visit.

When Wendy was eight, a huge argument broke out at home. Her father had taken a second wife, which angered her mother so much that she and her children returned to her home village. Wendy missed her father, but she was delighted to find an Adventist church near their new home. Every Sabbath morning Wendy hustled her little sisters to church.

Wendy's aunt lived in the village. She was also an Adventist, and she often invited Mother to attend church. When Mother decided to give her heart to God, Wendy was thrilled.

Wendy's aunt was moving to an isolated village high in the mountains and wanted Wendy to go with her. Wendy loved living with her aunt. She loved family worship when the family prayed for her family. Wendy's prayer was always that her mother would stay faithful to Jesus and her father would give his heart to God.

When Wendy returned home, she was thrilled to learn that her father was attending church with Mother! He was even bringing his other wife and their children! It was quite a sight: one man, two wives, and 11 children sitting together in church. In time Father's second wife gave her heart to Jesus and became an Adventist, but Father could not join the church because he had two wives. Still he faithfully attended church. Then one day Father said that he had sent his second wife home to her village and had asked the pastor to baptize him.

"God has answered so many of my prayers," Wendy says. "He helped me find Jesus, then led my whole family to God." Your mission offerings help reach people at home and in the uttermost parts of the earth for the Savior. Thank you for having a part in telling the world about God's love.

WENDY lives in Goroka, Papua New Guinea.