

Confidence *in the* Prophetic Gift



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ps. 41:9; Isa. 53:4–6; Matt. 23:28–31; John 5:39; Acts 10:9–16, 44–48; 17:11.

Memory Text: “Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper’” (2 Chronicles 20:20, NKJV).

Some folk were interested in joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They had come to accept the teachings of the church through their study of the Bible but had questions about Ellen White. After all, with so many false prophets and false teachers out there, they wanted to be careful. Knowing their concerns, and understanding them, the minister said to them: “This is something you have to come to on your own, through a personal conviction of the Holy Spirit. Take time to read her writings. Some things will resonate clearly with you right away; other things you might have questions about. But just read the books yourself and then come to your own conclusion about them. In the end, her writings are really the best and ultimate testimony regarding their origins.”

The Week at a Glance: Why must the Bible be our final doctrinal authority? How important is Bible study in our lives today? What happens when people ignore the prophetic word? What role should miracles have in establishing our faith? Why do people rebel against the prophetic gift?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.

Biblical Authority

What parallels do you see between the experience of the disciples after the Crucifixion and the early Advent believers after the Great Disappointment in 1844? *Luke 24:13–27; Acts 10:9–16, 44–48.*

The disciples experienced their great disappointment at the Crucifixion. They had hoped Jesus would *redeem* Israel; as they watched Him ride a donkey into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, they were certain that He would set Himself up as their king, drive out the Romans, and establish God's kingdom on earth. Only after His death, when He had "opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (*Luke 24:45, NKJV*), did they see for the first time that He had come for a different purpose. In other words, even with all those years of Jesus being in their midst, even with His plain testimony, they made mistakes; they still didn't understand what the Scriptures had taught. Jesus pointed them to the Bible, and on that they were to base their beliefs.

Read *Acts 1:6. What does this say about how, even after Jesus was with them after the Resurrection, they still were carrying false ideas about what His coming meant?*

The early Advent believers also experienced a great disappointment because of William Miller's mistaken view that the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 was the earth. And just as Bible study and God's supernatural interventions had helped the disciples to shed their mistaken views, so, too, did the early Advent believers come to a new understanding of the sanctuary truth through their study of Scripture and by God's guidance in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

In the end, however helpful the prophetic gift was, our pioneers were determined to base doctrines on the Bible without using the prophetic gift as a doctrinal authority.

Today, too, the strength and certainty of what we believe as Seventh-day Adventists must be based on the Word of God alone. Once we are certain of our doctrines from the Bible, and work from that firm base, we truly can have confidence in the prophetic gift.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** 2 Chronicles 20:20

► **The Student Will:**

Know: The Bible can be trusted to give us understanding.

Feel: Desire to study God's Word more purposefully.

Do: Uphold the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Responding to Disappointment (*Luke 24:13–27*)

- Ⓐ How does this parallel our pioneers' experience? How do the Bible and prophetic guidance help people move through crises?
- Ⓑ What role did Jesus' miraculous appearances play for the disciples? How did these miracles relate to His exposition of the Scriptures?
- Ⓒ Why were the Scriptures so important to the disciples and our pioneers? Read John 5:39. How has Ellen G. White helped to emphasize Jesus as the central theme of our denomination?

II. Responding to Critics (*Matt. 23:28–31*)

- Ⓐ How do you feel when people attack the Bible or Ellen G. White's writings? How should we respond to critics?
- Ⓑ How have you grown in your understanding of the Bible or Ellen G. White's writings? What was that journey like? How might it benefit others?

III. Responding to the Future (*Acts 1:6*)

- Ⓐ In what areas do you personally need more understanding? How does our denomination need to grow in understanding?
- Ⓑ Why must we be like the Bereans (*Acts 17:11*)? How can we ensure that the Bible remains the foundation of our doctrine and practice?

► **Summary:** There always will be critics of the Bible and of Ellen G. White's writings. Jesus upheld Scripture, and Scripture points to Him. Ellen G. White also directs our attention to Jesus. We can be confident about the future because of what the Bible reveals about Him.

Into the Word

Why did the Bereans study the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true? Why did they not trust his words? *Acts 17:11.*

Because Paul preached Christ from Scripture, showing that He was the promised Messiah, those who heard him with an open mind were driven to study the Scriptures for themselves to see if these things were indeed so. In other words, even Paul's words weren't good enough. They had to be confirmed by the Bible.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of the study of Scripture? *Prov. 2:1–6, Isa. 34:16, Matt. 4:4, Rev. 1:3.*

Ellen White consistently lifted up God's Word and encouraged church members to study it. "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice," she wrote in *Early Writings* (p. 78). In the introduction to *The Great Controversy* she wrote, "In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience."—Page 9.

Why did the prophets throughout history admonish God's people to read and study God's Word? The reason is simple: God "gave His word to men as a revelation of Himself. Every new truth discerned is a fresh disclosure of the character of its Author. The study of the Scriptures is the means divinely ordained to bring men into closer connection with their Creator and to give them a clearer knowledge of His will. It is the medium of communication between God and man."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 69.

Ellen White's writings are never to be used in place of the Bible; on the contrary, she spent her life trying to get church members to read the Bible and make it the rule of faith for their lives.

What are ways that you can get more out of your own Bible study? How can you make your time in the Bible more profitable than it is now?

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God assures us that we can have complete confidence and trust in the prophetic truths of His Word.

On December 20, 1995, 159 people perished when American Airlines Flight 965 crashed near Cali, Colombia. The cause was an incorrectly programmed flight management computer. It's a sobering thought that aircraft instruments can preserve life or cause death. The pilot must be able to trust the aircraft's instruments; otherwise, disaster may result.

When an airplane enters a storm center, the pilot no longer sees the ground or the horizon and may experience *spatial disorientation*. Because the points of reference that guide our senses no longer can be seen, perception becomes unreliable. However, if the pilot completely trusts the cockpit instruments to reveal the plane's location, he or she successfully may guide it to its destination. No wonder flight instructors stress the importance of trusting instruments and reading them correctly!

Consider This: Life is our vehicle from birth into eternity. Prophetic writing, in Scripture, is our guiding instrument. As we fly, do we place more confidence in our feelings or in our guiding instrument?

► STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Biblical Authority (*Luke 24:13–27, 45; Acts 1:6; 10:9–16, 44–48*)

While members of the early church received the messages of the apostles as divinely originated, they did not do so uncritically. Newer messages faithfully were compared with the older record of God's revelation, the scriptures now referred to as the Old Testament. There were many false teachers claiming that they had new revelations through dreams. Had early Christians not tested these claims against the standard of accepted revelation (*1 John 4:1*), the church likely would have disintegrated before the third century.

Consider This: Read the following and then answer the questions: Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:19–21, 3:15, Jude 8, Revelation

C O N T I N U E D

Pointing to Jesus

Jesus said: “‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (*John 5:39, NKJV*). What do the following Old Testament texts tell us about Jesus? *Pss. 16:9, 10; 41:9; Isa. 53:4–6; Mic. 5:2.*

Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day” (*John 8:56*), “Moses . . . wrote about Me” (*John 5:46, NKJV*), and “David [called Me] Lord” (*Matt. 22:45*). He began His ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth with the words of Isaiah, “‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, / Because the Lord has anointed Me / To preach good tidings to the poor’ ” (*Isa. 61:1, NKJV*). Jesus then said, “‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ ” (*Luke 4:21, NKJV*). Jesus knew that the Old Testament was replete with references to Him. He was the central figure in Israel’s hope.

The biblical authors from Moses to the apostle John directed their readers to the One who would come first to save His people from their sins (*Matt. 1:21*) and a second time to deliver them from the presence of sin (*Rev. 21:4*).

Following in the footsteps of the biblical prophets, Ellen White consistently pointed people to their Savior Jesus Christ. “Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 9. And she admonished ministers to make Christ the center of everything. “Put Christ into every sermon. Let the preciousness, mercy, and glory of Jesus Christ be dwelt upon until Christ is formed within, the hope of glory.”—*Evangelism*, p. 186.

Repeatedly she emphasized that Jesus was very real to her. “I know my Saviour loves me, and I love my Jesus. I rest in His love, notwithstanding my imperfections.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 245. Jesus was the center of her ministry. “The object of all ministry,” she said, “is to keep self out of sight, and to let Christ appear. The exaltation of Christ is the great truth that all who labor in word and doctrine are to reveal.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 155.

Forgetting for a moment about doctrine and theology, ask yourself this basic question: How well do I know Jesus? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your spiritual life? What changes might you need to make?

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1:1–3. Who originated the messages spoken by the prophets? How did early believers receive the messages delivered by the apostles? With what did some Christians compare the newer messages presented by the apostles? What did false teachers in the first century claim as the source of their message and thus their authority?

II. Into the Word (*Proverbs 2:1–6, Isaiah 34:16, Matthew 4:4, Acts 17:11, Revelation 1:3*)

Proper Bible study is comprehensive, accounting for all of God's counsel (*Acts 20:27*). Beware of the teacher who loves Paul but hates James! God made no mistakes in His messages or His choice of writers. Jesus Himself exemplified this approach to Scripture. Like Jesus, Timothy was educated in the Scriptures from infancy. Paul, imprisoned and facing death, still studied. How important, then, is a systematic study of the Bible throughout life?

Consider This: Read also Luke 24:27, 32; John 5:39; 20:30, 31; 2 Timothy 3:14, 15; 4:13. What is Scripture's central message? What does this message suggest about the importance of studying the Bible? How early should a person start learning the message? How does the Bible fortify us against temptation?

III. Pointing to Jesus (*Psalms 16:9, 10; 41:9; Isaiah 53:4–6; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:21; 22:45; Luke 4:18, 21; John 5:39, 46; 8:56; Revelation 21:4*)

Other books point to successful living. Some offer peace and contentment. Some claim to bring relief from guilt and shame. Still others promise personal advancement and fame.

Consider This: Why do you suppose the Bible simply points to Jesus?

IV. The Blood of the Prophets (*Matthew 23:28–31*)

Consider This: Matthew 21:33–39, 45. Who is represented by the landowner in the parable? Who is represented by the servants? Who is represented by the son? What did the servants' treatment by the tenant farmers reveal about their attitude toward the landowner? To what did the ill-treatment of the landowner's servants lead? What does our treatment of the prophets reveal about our attitude toward God and His Son?

C O N T I N U E D

The Blood of the Prophets

“ ‘Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets’ ” (*Matt. 23:28–31*).

What do Jesus’ words have to say about the attitude that many have had toward the prophets? What lesson can we draw from these words for ourselves?

Despite all the evidence for the integrity and validity of Ellen White’s ministry, even among us there are those who are, in a sense, spilling “the blood of the prophets.” Among us, as in ancient Israel, there are those who in various ways, subtle and sometimes not so subtle, are working to destroy confidence in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. It has been that way from the beginning, and we can be sure it will be right up to the end, as well. Just about every charge leveled against her and her works are similar to the charges leveled against the prophets of old and against the Word of God itself.

Reasons for these attitudes vary (see Friday’s lesson). Some people have elevated her writings to a level that is inappropriate, and so others have reacted to that, sometimes going too far in response. Others have a false understanding of how inspiration works, and because her writings do not fit that understanding, they have turned against them. Some speak, perhaps, out of ignorance; others, perhaps, from mean-spirited hostility. Fortunately, we aren’t to judge motives or hearts. We simply have to be able, as Peter wrote, “to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15*). In the end, each one of us will have to make a choice, regarding the voices we listen to and believe.

What is your own attitude about the writings of Ellen White? Why do you hold them? Think through your reasons for those attitudes. Are you open to change, if need be?

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V. The Gift and Miracles (*Matthew 4:24, 14:14–21, Luke 24:13–27; John 2:1–11, 11:1–45*; Read also *Exodus 7:10, 11; Isaiah 8:20; and Acts 12:21–24*.)

Miracle working is no sure evidence of speaking for God. Aaron's staff-to-snake miracle successfully was imitated by Pharaoh's magicians. Neither is eloquent speech the barometer by which to gauge truth. Herod's eloquence and pride led to his death, but the Word of God increased. There is a measuring stick for modern-day manifestations and utterances—"the law and the testimony." If a person says something that contradicts Scripture, he or she is worse than a dead-end tunnel.

Consider This: What biblical guidelines has God given us for interpreting Scripture? How do we approach scriptures that are hard to understand? What guidance does God's Word offer us in this instance?

► STEP 3—Practice

Dramatized Parable: *Read the following and then discuss.*

Skeptic: Ha! So you really think that you have been talking to another intelligent being all this time?

Believer: As a matter of fact, I do.

Skeptic: So you just talk, and magically your voice rises into the heavens to be beamed on to someone who anxiously awaits your call?

Believer: Exactly.

Skeptic: Well, your naïveté is touching, but, really, isn't it time to come down to reality?

Believer: Well, how do you explain the fact that I hear a voice on the other end whenever I call?

Skeptic: Every time?

Believer: Well, often enough—and I leave a message at other times.

Skeptic: Really? Well, I'm sure that its comforting to believe that there really is someone out there who hears you and cares about you and answers when you call—but it's all just wishful thinking.

Believer: Wishful thinking?

Skeptic: I'm not saying that it's bad. Some of us just never have outgrown our security blankets. So, if it makes you feel better and

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The Gift and Miracles

“And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them” (Matt. 4:24).

Think about the ministry of Christ when He was here in the flesh. Time and again, Jesus performed miracle after miracle. Whether turning water into wine (*John 2:1–11*), feeding the 5,000 (*Matt. 14:14–21*), healing the sick (*Matt. 4:24*), or raising the dead (*John 11:1–45*), Jesus punctuated His time here on earth with miracles, a powerful testimony to His divine power.

Read Luke 24:13–27, the story of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. What did He point them to in order to persuade them that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, the Messiah? Why is that answer so important to us, particularly in the context of the prophetic gift?

Despite all the miraculous things that Christ did while here, He pointed the two disciples to the Word of God and from the Bible alone worked to teach them the truth about His death and resurrection and what it all meant.

This point shouldn't be overlooked. Over the years, there have been numerous accounts of the miraculous ways in which the Lord worked through the ministry of Ellen White. Some of these accounts are more easily verifiable than others. Either way, in the end, our belief in the manifestation of the gift should not rest on accounts of miracles and so forth. Though they might have a role, the ultimate test always must be the Word of God and how the gift harmonizes with the Bible. Miracles are fine, but they are hardly the final test and mean nothing if the teachings are unbiblical.

As with the inspiration of the Bible, questions remain about the manifestation of the prophetic gift in the life of Ellen White. Yet, the gift speaks for itself and gives the best testimony and witness regarding itself. There's little that we, or accounts of miracles, could or should add. More than enough evidence has been given for anyone to make an informed decision regarding the gift, regardless of the unanswered questions that we who “see through a glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*) might still have.

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more assured, I'll not object—to your fantasy!

Believer: This is no fantasy.

Skeptic: Just a piece of imagination. . . . Tell me, have you ever seen, touched, or held—

Believer: Touched or held? No; but up there beyond what we now can see with our eyes is something that is real. I've read about this from those who actually saw and touched for themselves before losing sight of the ascent into the heavens.

Skeptic: Fairy tales, fairy tales. Where's your proof? Apart from the claims of a few visionary dreamers whose ideas can't be trusted, you have nothing. Your confidence is built on false hope.

Believer: So, how do you explain the book? Why would so many people have their names in the book if, as you say, such communication doesn't exist?

Skeptic: Lies, lies, lies! Your invisible world defies reason. If I can't see it, touch it, hold it, and explain it, it isn't real. Every thinking person agrees on that. You've just been parking your head in the brainwash too long. I'd have to be a fool to believe in *satellite phones!*

Discuss: Although we can't see satellites, we wouldn't hesitate to use a satellite phone. So why, then, is it so hard to believe that an invisible God exists? He was once visible in the person of Jesus, who ascended to heaven. He receives our messages and communicates hope to us. Isn't there abundant, albeit invisible, evidence?

► STEP 4—Apply

Activity: Have the class develop a list of things on which they depend on a regular basis. Answers might include such things as family, the bank, the phone company, the car or the transportation system, the sources of news, electricity, other utilities, or traffic lights. Ask the class why they put their confidence in these things. Do we sometimes take these things for granted because they happen with such regularity? How do we react when something that is usually reliable fails? When there is an occasional interruption of service with our electricity or phone, do we get angry and refuse ever to use a phone or an electrical appliance again? Do we say during those brief interruptions of service, "I knew it! There is no such thing as electricity. I should have known better. The whole thing was a figment of my imagination"? Apply these principles to our relationship with God and the prophetic gift.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Attitudes Toward the Testimonies,” pp. 40–48, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

Opposition or indifference to the writings of Ellen G. White usually is the result of (1) a failure to read enough of her writings to recognize and understand her overall and well-balanced instructions; (2) a failure to understand the proper relationship of her writings to Scripture; (3) a failure to recognize the true nature of divine inspiration; (4) a failure to recognize the principle of time and place in connection with the counsel she has given; (5) a failure to acknowledge that her counsels are still relevant today; (6) a failure to recognize that while sufficient evidence is given to convince the honest in heart, the Lord does not remove the opportunities for doubt; (7) an unwillingness to make a personal sacrifice of some cherished habit or practice that seems out of harmony with the counsels given in the writings of Ellen G. White.

Most opposition to the Spirit of Prophecy would disappear (1) if people would stop using some pet sentence or paragraph as a club with which to hit somebody else; (2) if everyone would apply the counsels to themselves instead of trying to apply them to someone else; (3) if we would not quote her without knowing where the quote is found (there are too many apocryphal sayings in existence); (4) if we would not discuss something she wrote without having studied everything she wrote on a particular topic (partial knowledge can be more dangerous than no knowledge at all); (5) if we would recognize that people’s failure to live up to or carry out the counsels that Ellen White has given has nothing whatsoever to do with the reliability of the visions and instructions.—Based on Denton E. Rebok, *Believe His Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: The Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1956), pp. 309–312.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about the blessings the Adventist Church has received from the ministry of Ellen White. What are some favorite quotations? How has her writing personally impacted each member’s spiritual growth? At the same time, what struggles have people sometimes had with her writings? What was the cause of those problems, and how can we help folk work through them?
- ❷ Many new people coming to the Adventist Church have questions regarding Ellen White. What are some approaches we could take in helping them come to a balanced understanding of the gift?
- ❸ What have you learned this quarter that helps you better understand the role of the Spirit of Prophecy? What positions have you had to change? What new insights have you gained? What questions still remain?