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Introduction

The Gift

“ ‘I tell you, no one more important than John has ever been born. But the least important person in God’s kingdom is more important than he is’ ” (Luke 7:28, NIV).

No prophet¹ greater than John? That would include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, even Moses. But Jesus said that *John was the greatest of them all*? How interesting! What makes it even more interesting is that the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Moses are included in the Holy Bible. But none of the writings of John the Baptist are. Yet John was a greater prophet than all of them.

What is the point? The gift of prophecy² was not limited only to the prophets whose writings are in the Bible. No, the prophetic gift³ included those who did far more than just write books of the Bible.

The whole question of the prophetic gift and of inspiration⁴ has been discussed and argued throughout church history. How were the prophets inspired?⁵ How do inspiration and revelation⁶ work? How much of culture⁷ and personal views show up in the writings of the prophets? If these questions still stir up discussion among Christians after all these years, how can we solve them all in the adult Bible study guide this quarter? But we will do our best to try.

Just what is the prophetic gift? And what is inspiration? These questions have been very important to Seventh-day Adventists. In the book of Revelation, God promised that there will be a special outpouring of the prophetic gift at the time of the end⁸ (Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:8, 9). Seventh-day Adventists believe that the gift of prophecy⁹ has been shown in the ministry (work) of Mrs. Ellen G. White (1827–1915). For seventy years, Ellen G. White gave advice and messages of warning to our church. She died in 1915, but her books have been a great blessing to millions of Christians ever since and will continue to be. We truly have been given a gift.

But questions remain. What part does the prophetic gift play? If we claim the Bible

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

2. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

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

4. inspiration—the process by which the Holy Spirit influenced (caused) the prophets to have certain thoughts or feelings.

5. inspired—to be caused, urged, or influenced to do something; to be caused to have a certain feeling or thought; to be led by the Holy Spirit.

6. revelation—the act of making known what was hidden or secret.

7. culture—the way people live, dress, think, eat, and socialize with one another.

8. time of the end—the time or period in earth’s history just before Jesus’ second coming.

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

as the final source of truth, what authority (power) should the Spirit of Prophecy¹⁰ have in our lives? How should these writings be used to guide the church? This gift has been a blessing. But in what ways has it been wrongly used?

More than 30 years have gone by since we last studied the gift of prophecy in Sabbath School. Since then the church has grown from 2.5 million (2,500,000) members to more than 14 million (14,000,000)—as of this writing. There are questions about the spirit of prophecy¹¹ (and the prophetic gift) that remain unanswered. But we believe we have more than enough reasons to believe in this special outpouring of the gift of prophecy among us.

But the true purpose of this lesson is not just the gift but the Gift-Giver (Jesus). As we study the question of inspiration and revelation, we will learn about the Lord Jesus who loves this world so much He gave Himself as the Sacrifice¹² for our sins. He was God and the Creator who was without sin, but He became a human being (person). And He took (accepted) upon Himself the punishment¹³ for our sins as the only way that we, as sinners, could be forgiven and made righteous (holy).

That is the God we serve, and that is the God we will meet in this quarter's Bible study guide.

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10. Spirit of Prophecy—the writings of Ellen G. White. Some of her writings are the books *Steps to Christ*, *The Desire of Ages*, and *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

11. (the) spirit of prophecy—read Revelation 19:10. The spirit of prophecy is the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7–11, 28; Ephesians 4:11–13). God gave the gift of prophecy to Ellen G. White.

12. sacrifice—something or someone of value, such as a life, that is given up to save or to help someone or something else.

13. punishment—a penalty (price to be paid) for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.