

# The Blessings of the Prophetic Gift



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 17:14, 34:27, Lev. 11:1–8, Deut. 6:4–7, Isa. 44:8, 49:6.*

**Memory Text:** “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NKJV*).

All through biblical history, the Lord worked through the prophets (including those who wrote no books of the Bible) in order to encourage, uplift, and warn God's people. However unpopular at times their messages, or however often their motives were misunderstood, these people all had one goal in mind: to bless and benefit God's church. And it was certainly no different with Ellen White and her prophetic gift.

This week we are going to look at some of the blessings that come to God's people through the prophetic gift. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, certainly as we know it today, would probably not exist had it not been for the guidance God gave this movement through the Spirit of Prophecy.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why and for what purpose did God elect Israel as His special people? How were the young people in Israel educated in Old Testament times? What were some of the counsels on health that God gave the Israelites? Why did the Israelites write God's Word on the doorframes of their houses? How has the Lord used the gift of prophecy to benefit the church?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.*

**Why** did God elect Israel as His special people? *Deut. 7:7, 8; Isa. 44:8; 49:6.*

God chose Israel to be His witnesses. All nations of the earth were to share in the blessings that He was to bestow on His people. Israel was to show forth His praise (*Isa. 43:21*), declare His glory among the nations (*Isa. 66:19*), and be a light to the Gentiles.

**What** is the mission of the Christian church, and how well is it carrying out this mission? *Matt. 28:19, 20.*

The Christian church experienced two great periods of expansion in its history. The first period was the time of its establishment in the first and second centuries; the second was during the nineteenth century, also called the century of mission. Following the great revivals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Christian church established many Bible and missionary societies in Europe and America, and within 100 years it increased from 18 percent of the world population in the year 1800 to 34 percent in 1900.

In the early decades of Seventh-day Adventist history, it was believed that the church was fulfilling God's command to teach all nations simply by preaching to the immigrants in North America. However, Ellen White in 1871 wrote, "Young men should be qualifying themselves by becoming familiar with other languages, that God may use them as mediums to communicate His saving truth to those of other nations."—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 204.

Then in 1874 she had an impressive dream of giving the third angel's message to the world. In the dream she was told: "You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time. . . .

"The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea, to all nations, tongues, and peoples. . . . Your faith is limited, it is very small. Your conception of the work needs to be greatly enlarged."—Pages 208, 209.

In the same year J. N. Andrews became the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary. He and his children went to Switzerland, and three years later the John G. Matteson family was sent to Scandinavia. Today, out of 229 countries of the world recognized by the United Nations, Seventh-day Adventists have an established work in more than two hundred of them.

**How do we strike the balance between working for souls overseas while at the same time not neglecting the mission field in our own backyard?**

**How** were the young people in Israel educated in Old Testament times? What important principles can we take from these texts regarding the spiritual aspect of all proper education? *Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:4–7, 20–25.*

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Through the father's instructions Hebrew children were taught what God had done for His people in the past, how they were to live in His presence, and what God's promises were for the future. They also were taught the skills they would need to be successful members of their community. It was, therefore, both an education in practical skills along with spiritual and religious instruction.

In the earliest days of the Adventist movement, private initiatives among our pioneers led to several attempts to establish a school for Adventist children, but none of them lasted long.

Then at the beginning of 1872, Ellen White received a vision on the proper principles of education. On the basis of this vision she wrote 30 pages on those principles. Among other things she wrote, "We need a school where those who are just entering the ministry may be taught at least the common branches of education, and where they may also learn more perfectly the truths of God's word for this time." —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 45, 46.

In May 1872 the General Conference committee agreed to assume responsibility for a locally operated church school in Battle Creek, Michigan, and on June 3 the first official Seventh-day Adventist school opened its doors. Two years later 100 students were enrolled in the newly established Battle Creek College.

Today more than six thousand Adventist schools, colleges, and universities serve more than one million students around the world.

**What should an Adventist school be like today? How should it be different from other schools? Make a list of specific characteristics and discuss them in class.**

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## Health

**God told the Israelites: “If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight . . . I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians’ ”** (*Exod. 15:26, NKJV*). **What were some of the counsels on health given to them by God?** *Lev. 7:22–26, 11:1–8, 13:46.*

For centuries, leprosy and the Black Death spread fear and terror among medieval humanity. It was only when church leaders remembered that people afflicted with leprosy in the Bible were segregated and excluded from the community, and they applied this principle to the victims of leprosy and the bubonic plague that these scourges were stopped.

Most Seventh-day Adventist pioneers were anything but health reformers. At the 1848 Sabbath Conferences, they most likely sat together eating pork chops for lunch. In a vision in 1848, Ellen G. White was shown that tobacco, tea, and coffee are harmful, but it took several years to convince the membership.

On June 6, 1863, Ellen G. White received a vision in which she was shown the need for health reform. “I saw that it was a sacred duty to attend to our health, and arouse others to their duty.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 280. Two years later, on December 25, 1865, she was shown that Seventh-day Adventists should establish a health institute. The Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, which opened its doors in 1866, was the first of a network of more than three hundred hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries that the church operates today.

**What** can we say to those who claim that Ellen G. White copied the health message from other health reformers of her time?

Recent research into Ellen G. White’s health message has revealed that there is a vast difference in quality between Ellen G. White’s principles of health and those advocated by other health reformers in her time. “Modern medical science has verified a high percentage of her health principles . . . while the sources from which she supposedly copied had a low percentage of health principles that have been verified. This difference indicates that Mrs. White had health information that could not have come from any human source available anywhere at the time she lived.”—Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 87, 88.

**The health message is a wonderful gift from God to us. Like all of His gifts, it can be, and indeed, has been abused. How can we avoid turning this gift into a curse?**

## Publishing

According to Scripture, Moses was the first one to write down God's words (*Exod. 17:14, 34:27, Deut. 31:24*). Today, the Bible is the most published and most read book in history.

**Where** were the Israelites to write the words of the law? Why do you think that command was given? *Deut. 6:1–9, 11:18–20*.

To inscribe important sayings or statements in conspicuous places on their dwellings was a custom widely prevalent in the ancient Near East. It is evident in Muslim countries and even among Western nations. In the British Isles, as well as in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, inscriptions can be seen on houses.

In Israel the purpose of writing God's Word on the doorframes of their dwellings was to keep God's instructions constantly in view and in mind, thereby reminding them continuously to keep God's commandments.

**What** role did publishing play in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

The publishing work in our church did not originate from human wisdom. In 1848, Ellen G. White had a vision in the home of Otis Nichols in Dorchester, Massachusetts. When she came out of it, she said to James, "I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world."—*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 125.

"Streams of light that went clear round the world"! How could that be? Jesus was coming soon. The number of Adventists were so few. There were no wealthy persons or great scholars among them. The world was unbelieving. *And yet, here was a young woman who predicted that a work of publishing, to be started by her penniless husband, would grow until it would encompass the globe?* More than six months went by before James White could make even the smallest beginning, arranging on a charge account for the printing of 1,000 copies of an eight-page paper. Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church owns more than fifty publishing houses, and the message is being printed and proclaimed in more than two hundred twenty languages.

**What has been the impact of the printed page in your own spiritual experience?**

## Theology

All through biblical history, God has used the prophetic gift to protect His people from theological errors. It was no different with the ministry of Ellen White. In the early days of our church she had to combat fanaticism of various kinds. Some people claimed to be perfect, others stated that no more work should be done, and some kept on setting times for Christ's return. During the Kellogg crisis at the turn of the century, her counsel saved the church from pantheism. At the same time, almost single-handedly she led the church from a semi-Arian (a belief that Jesus was not God) to a Trinitarian position. When A. F. Ballenger tried to change the sanctuary teaching, she took a strong stand against it. Ellen White also had a strong role in keeping the church of her day from falling deep into legalism; along with A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, she was a great proponent of salvation by faith in Christ alone, without the deeds of the law.

After her death, her writings continued to give guidance to the church. In more recent times, her writings provide clear direction on the issue of Creation, which is coming under attack even from within our own ranks.

**What** does the Old Testament teach about origins of human life? *Gen. 1:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11, Ps. 33:6, Isa. 42:5.*

According to the Old Testament, the Lord created life on our earth in six days. The Hebrew word translated *day* in Genesis 1 is *yom*. Whenever this word in the historical books of the Bible is accompanied by a numeral, it always refers to a literal 24-hour period (see *Gen. 7:11, Exod. 16:1*). In resting on the seventh day of the Creation week, God established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. In short, we are on immovable biblical ground by adhering to a literal six-day Creation, despite voices, even among us, that would argue for something else.

And though Ellen White has been dead for almost a century, here, too, her words give us a strong affirmation of this great Bible truth: “I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 90.

**Despite the clear testimony of the Bible, despite the strong affirmation of Ellen White, some among us still insist that God used millions of years of evolution to create human life. What examples can you find from the Bible of people getting so caught up in the trends of their time that they lose sight of important truth? How can we protect ourselves from falling into the same tired, old trap?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” pp. 139–160, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Source and Aim of True Education,” pp. 13–19; “Relation of Education to Redemption,” pp. 28–30, in *Education*.

Many of the principles of healthful living found in the writings of Ellen White already were taught in a limited way by other health reformers of her day. But in their teaching we find many errors and extremes that Ellen White avoided because of the instructions she received from God. For example, Sylvester Graham and James Jackson, two prominent health reformers in Ellen White’s day, both taught, “Don’t eat salt.” Ellen G. White, however, wrote, “I use some salt, and always have, because salt, instead of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 162.

Other errors that were taught by health reformers in the nineteenth century and that Ellen G. White avoided included: Do not cut your hair; do not drink water—get your liquids from fruit only; when eating meat, eat mostly the fat; overweight people are healthy people; do not use soap, etc.—Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 77, 78.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, go over your answer to Monday’s final question.
- ❷ We now live in the day and age of science, where for many people science is the only way to know truth. How interesting that of all the things we teach (the Second Coming, salvation by faith, the state of the dead, etc.), only one can be verified scientifically: our health message. Dwell on the implications of that thought.
- ❸ As Seventh-day Adventists we insist, and rightly so, that all our doctrines need to come from the Bible and the Bible only. At the same time, if we believe that Ellen White manifested the gift of prophecy, shouldn’t weight and credence be given to her writings on doctrine, as well? How do we find the right balance in how we use her writings to deal with theological issues?
- ❹ As with the Bible, there are things about Ellen White’s writings that we don’t understand. How can we protect ourselves from getting into the deadly mode of focusing only on the problems or concerns, and missing the greater picture?

# Moans in the Night

by JAMES APPEL

Wails and moans cut into the evening's silence. These sounds of mourning come from just beyond the hospital wall. Allawaye lives there. His third wife's baby was recently hospitalized for meningitis. After a course of antibiotics he was sent home eating and with no fever. But three days later Allawaye brought him back, feverish again. The bacteria in his body is resistant, and we have no other antibiotics to treat it.

The next morning Allawaye returned to the hospital. The baby is better, but not well enough to go home. I explain that the baby is still sick and could still die. One of Allawaye's wives speaks in a low, threatening tone. "We will take the baby home. Your treatments have not worked, and it's time to consult a witch doctor." I explain why the child must stay in the hospital, and Allawaye agrees to finish the treatment.

I offer to pray for the baby, and the family agrees. I plead with God to prove that it's not witchcraft that has made the child sick and ask Him to heal the child. We've done all we can with our limited medical supplies, and now we need a miracle.

The wails next door tell me that God has not intervened.

Most people in this area believe that disease is caused by witchcraft, that someone has cast a spell on them. They seek treatment from the "traditional" healers—the witch doctors—and come to the hospital only when the patient is nearly dead. Then, if the patient dies, it's our fault.

My frustration rises with the wailing. How does one fight, not just against the forces of physical disease in a resource-poor setting, but against the forces of ignorance and evil? I've tried to give patients hope, to encourage them to fight, only to hear family members tell them that they are going to die. The sick person loses hope and eventually dies, at least in part because of the psychological attacks of their family. Nothing I've experienced in Tchad even comes close to that for discouraging.

I light my kerosene lamp and open my Bible to John 3:19. "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (NIV).

I understand God's dilemma. He can't mess with free will. Satan can use fear, superstition, manipulation, coercion, and brutality, but God won't. And because I've aligned myself on God's side, I can't use force either. Sometimes I'd like to shake parents who wait to bring their child to the hospital half dead instead of when they first get sick.

It's true: People do love the darkness rather than the light. There's nothing we can do except continue to fight, continue to pray. Maybe one or two will see the light and come out of the darkness.

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