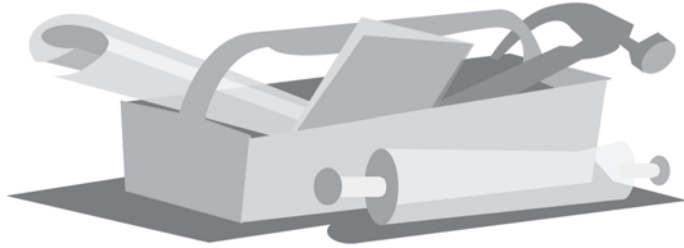


The Work of the Prophets



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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hosea 12:13*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: The role and purpose of the prophetic office.

Feel: Convicted to change our lives in response to the correction God gives us through His Word.

Do: Share the assurance that God gives us about the future.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Prophet's Job Description (*Isaiah 53*)

A Why is the preaching of the gospel important to God's purpose in ancient as well as modern times?

B What are some examples of the way in which God used prophets to guide His people?

II. Reproving Sin (*Isa. 1:15–17*)

A How else has God used prophets to correct and reprove sin?

B How would you feel if you were confronted with a message from God that something you are doing is wrong?

C How can we be more responsive to the correction provided by God's Word?

III. Predicting the Future (*Dan. 9:24–27*)

A How does it make you feel to know that God has revealed important truths about the future through His prophets?

B How can prophecy be used appropriately to lead people to believe in God and accept Jesus as their Savior? What are the benefits of using prophecy in evangelism? What are the risks?

C How can you let others know that God has the answers to your future and theirs?

► **Summary:** Prophets carried out various functions, including proclaiming the gospel, giving divine guidance, correcting sin, and predicting the future, so that God's people might understand and accept His plan of redemption for the human race.

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?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The work of a prophet is to deliver to the people messages from God concerning the gospel, the church, and the future.

If you were asked to give a definition of a prophet, what would you say?

- A. Someone called by God
- B. Someone appointed or elected by the church
- C. Someone who chooses to make his or her living by prophesying

What would you say was the work of a prophet?

- A. Predicting the future
- B. Giving messages from God to the people
- C. Interpreting God's will to the people
- D. Giving religious instruction to the people
- E. All of the above

“The prophet was chiefly a teacher of righteousness, spirituality, and ethical conduct, a moral reformer bearing messages of instruction, counsel, admonition, warning, whose work often included the prediction of future events.”—*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, p. 903.

A prophet's work never has been easy or simple. Many prophets have been martyred because they prophesied what the people did not want to hear. Sometimes prophets have been deprived of food, housing, friends, and even loved ones.

Consider This: If a prophet is someone called by God who is doing what God had asked them to do, why do you think he or she still would experience difficulty, hardship, disbelief, and rejection?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Prophet and Preaching the Gospel

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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 reproving 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, reproving 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Isaiah and John the Baptist had more than a few things in common. Isaiah is a major prophet from Old Testament times. John is one of the greatest prophets of the New Testament. Both proclaimed the coming of Jesus. John was called the new Elijah, and in a similar sense, one could say that Isaiah was the Old Testament's version of John, given that they both had a special work and a specific message from God to preach.

Consider This: Ask someone to read Isaiah 53:1–5 and John 1:29. What message did they give? To whom was it given? How did Isaiah's message differ from John's? Why was it different?

II. The Prophet and the Church

Early on, God chose a number of people to be His prophets. Each one had a different work to do, but each preached repentance and salvation.

While Jesus lived here on earth, He lived and died that same message. By His death and resurrection, Jesus finished His work of redemption on earth.

When Jesus returned to heaven, the early Christian church was in its formation stage. It needed much special guidance, counsel, and encouragement. God saw what His people needed. Again, God sent a special messenger to carry His word to a fledgling church.


Consider This:

1. Why did the early Christians need this extra help? Why did His people need correction and direction?
2. Whom did God use to give them help? Have someone read Acts 6:1–4 to find the answer.

III. The Prophet and Guiding God's People

Consider This: Prepare the following texts by writing them out in advance. Divide the class into groups. Give one text to each group of two or three. Ask the groups to read the texts and be prepared to tell how each relates to life today: 1 Kings 18:21; Jeremiah 23:36; Malachi 3:8–10; Matthew 6:24; Matthew 7:1.

The prophets wrote advice in the Bible regarding the everyday lives of people. Jesus spoke on everyday living. Read and discuss the text given to you and be ready to share with the class how the guidance of the past is still relevant today.

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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.**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**IV. The Prophet and Future Predictions**

When we think about prophets and what they do, future predictions are generally the first work that comes to mind. As we have been discovering, there is much more to being a prophet than prophesying the future.

Consider This:

1. Which prophets and their prophecies can you share with the group? List a few.
2. What prophecies can you cite that were conditional prophecies—those that would happen only if the people did not repent of their sins?
3. Which of Ellen G. White’s prophecies do you know of that has been fulfilled or appears to be happening?


► STEP 3—Practice

Through the years questions, problems, and controversies have arisen within the church over the gift of prophecy. Additionally, there have been disagreements among both members and leaders on Bible interpretation, the Spirit of Prophecy, and even traditional biblical issues.

Consider This: Should the church be open to discussion on whatever issues arise? Why, or why not? Are there limitations on what should be discussed? Why, or why not?

Thought Questions:

- 1 Who is responsible for church unity—individuals or leadership? Why?
- 2 If we disagree with some of the decisions of the church, what do you think is the most beneficial course to follow?
- 3 When a problem arises in the church, what is our usual reaction?
 - A. keep quiet and stew in our mind over our disagreement until it affects our relationship with the Lord and the church,
 - B. leave the organized church and start one of our own,
 - C. discuss it with our leaders, pray about it, and trust that the Lord will lead in the situation,
 - D. write, publish, and distribute our personal views or grievances?
 Which is the most effective way to enhance God’s work? Why?

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Witnessing**

If someone you know is disgruntled about something that is happening or being taught in your own church or in the church at large, what should you do? What can you say or do to help the individual?

► STEP 4—Apply

For many people, change is difficult. Some believe that any change is wrong. Others may want change simply from boredom. In some cases tradition has become accepted as biblical truth.

Times do change. Different ages and cultures often see things in different ways. Methods of teaching and preaching will change as we learn new and better ways. The old saying “What was good enough for me is good enough for my kids” is not only false but could be dangerous to their spiritual and physical well-being. The one thing that never changes is God’s Word. It is important that we do not confuse what is changeable with what is not. Understanding the principle involved is imperative.

Thought Questions:

1 Suppose God called you to be one of His prophets. How would you respond? What would be the most difficult or hardest part of your call?

2 How do you respond to a correction or a suggested change of direction made to you by (a) an individual you highly respect, (b) the local church, or (c) the church at large?

3 When you read your Bible, do you ever feel rebuked by God’s Word? How do or did you respond?

4 How should we relate to change in the church?

5 How do you or should you respond to changes the church at large or your local church makes in regard to the order of service? Evangelism methods? Music? Methods of teaching?

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?