## Contents

1. **Heaven’s Means of Communication**—December 27–January 2——5
2. **The Prophetic Gift**—January 3–9——17
3. **Spiritual Gifts and Prophecy**—January 10–16——29
4. **The Gift of Prophecy and God’s Remnant Church**—January 17–23——41
5. **The Inspiration of the Prophets**—January 24–30——53
6. **Testing the Prophets**—January 31–February 6——65
7. **The Work of the Prophets**—February 7–13——77
8. **The Authority of the Prophets**—February 14–20——89
9. **The Integrity of the Prophetic Gift**—February 21–27——101
10. **The Message of the Prophets**—February 28–March 6——113
11. **Interpreting the Prophetic Writings**—March 7–13——125
12. **The Blessings of the Prophetic Gift**—March 14–20——137
13. **Confidence in the Prophetic Gift**—March 21–27——149

---

**Editorial Office** 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our Web site at [http://www.absg.adventist.org](http://www.absg.adventist.org)

**Principal**
Gerhard Pfandl

**Editor**
Clifford R. Goldstein

**Associate Editor**
Soraya Homayouni

**Publication Manager**
Lea Alexander Greve

**Editorial Assistant**
Tresa Beard

**Pacific Press® Coordinator**
Paul A. Hey

**Art Director and Illustrator**
Lars Justinen

**Concept Design**
Dever Designs

The following teachers edition components were written by the following:

1. **The Lesson in Brief**: Damien Rice, lead pastor, Maitland Church, New South Wales, Australia.
2. **The Learning Cycle, lessons 1–4**: Albert A. C. Waite, freelance writer, Riseley, U.K.
3. **The Learning Cycle, lessons 5–8**: Barbara Manspeaker, freelance writer, Luray, Virginia, U.S.A.
4. **The Learning Cycle, lessons 9–13**: Dan Solis, associate pastor, Village Seventh-day Adventist Church, College Place, Washington, U.S.A.

The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

No greater prophet than John? That would include, apparently, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, even Moses. Yet, according to Jesus, John was the greatest of them all? How fascinating, especially because, unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Moses—John the Baptist had no writings in the Bible, and yet John was a greater prophet than all those who, at least before him, did!

The point? The prophetic gift wasn’t limited only to the prophets whose writing became Scripture. No, the prophetic gift included those whose work for the Lord involved something other than writing books of the Bible.

The whole question of the prophetic gift, and of inspiration in general, has been a source of discussion and debate throughout church history. How were the prophets inspired? How do inspiration and revelation work? How much, if any, of culture and personal views appear in the writings of the prophets? If these questions still generate discussion within Christendom after centuries of debate, we’re hardly going to solve them all in the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide this quarter. But we sure will do our best to try.

Issues regarding the nature of the prophetic gift and inspiration have been especially important to Seventh-day Adventists. In the book of Revelation, God promised that there will be a special manifestation of the prophetic gift at the time of the end (Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9). Seventh-day Adventists believe that the gift of prophecy has been manifested in the ministry of Mrs. Ellen G. White (1827–1915). For seven decades she gave messages of counsel and warning to our
church; and though she died in 1915, her books, full of spiritual insights and counsel, have been a source of tremendous blessing to countless millions whose lives have been, and continue to be, spiritually and theologically enriched through them. We truly have been given a gift.

Yet, questions remain. What is the role of the prophetic gift? If we claim the Bible as our final authority, what authority (if any) should the Spirit of Prophecy have? How should these writings be interpreted? Though this gift has been a blessing, in what ways has it been misused?

More than three decades have gone by since we last studied in Sabbath School the topic of the gift of prophecy. Since then the church has grown from 2.5 million members to more than 15 million (as of this writing). And though questions about the Spirit of Prophecy (along with the prophetic gift in general) remain unanswered, we believe we’ve been given more than enough reasons to believe in this special manifestation of prophecy among us.

However, the real focus of this lesson isn’t just on the gift but on the Gift-Giver. As we study the question of inspiration and revelation, we’ll learn about the Lord who loves this world so much He gave of Himself, in the person of Jesus, as the sacrifice for our sins. Though God, though sinless, though the Creator Himself, He became a human being, and in that humanity took upon Himself the punishment for our evil as the only way that we, as sinners, could stand pardoned and justified before Him.

That’s the God we serve, and that’s the God we seek to reveal in this quarter’s lessons.

Gerhard Pfandl, a native of Austria, has been associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference since 1999.
How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Practice, and Apply

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, practice, and apply. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Practice); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Practice:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Apply:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
There are two basic ways in which God has revealed Himself to humanity: general and special revelation. General revelation is God’s revelation of Himself to all people through nature and conscience (see Ps. 19:1, Rom. 1:20). God’s revelations through the prophets as recorded in Scripture, especially His revelation through Jesus Christ, is special revelation. Through this means, God appeared to the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets in order to make His will known. He revealed His power and purpose through Israel’s history. Then later, He sent His Son, who, in the garb of humanity, revealed the Father in a unique and powerful way.

This week we’ll look at both types of revelation.

The Week at a Glance: What is general and special revelation? What can nature teach us about God? What can it not teach us? How does the revelation through Jesus Christ differ from God’s other revelations?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.*
In the Beginning

In the Garden of Eden God spoke with Adam and Eve face-to-face. “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). However, after that fateful day, when they blatantly disobeyed their Lord, they no longer were allowed to enjoy His presence (Gen. 3:23, 24), and their face-to-face communion with Him ended.

What do the following texts tell us about face-to-face encounters with God? Gen. 18:1–15; 32:30; Exod. 33:11; Judg. 6:22; 13:2, 3.

Frequently the Old Testament identifies the Angel of God or the Angel of the Lord as God Himself. Jacob refers to God and the Angel in the same way (Gen. 48:15, 16); the Angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush; yet, it is God who speaks to him (Exod. 3:2–6); the Angel who appeared to Gideon is identified with God (Judg. 6:11–14); and the same is true of the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:11–22). Whenever God manifested Himself to human beings in a bodily form, it was always in a humanlike manifestation.

In John 1:18 John says, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” The Divine Being, therefore, who appeared to the people in the Old Testament must have been Jesus, not the Father. Ellen G. White tells us that “after the transgression of Adam, the Lord spoke no longer directly with man; the human race was given into the hands of Christ, and all communication came through Him to the world. It was Christ who spoke the law on Mount Sinai.”—Fundamentals of Christian Education, pp. 237, 238.

What has been your own experience regarding what sin and rebellion do between you and God? That is, when you do something that you know is wrong, that you know is sinful, how does that impact your relationship with God? In what ways do you feel a separation from Him? How does guilt drive you away from Him, away from the desire to pray and commune with the Lord? How does this experience help you better understand what happened in Eden?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Psalm 19:1–6

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** That God reveals Himself through general revelation (creation, our conscience) and special revelation (prophets, the Bible, the Incarnation).
- **Feel:** A sense of gratitude and responsibility for God’s self disclosure.
- **Do:** Seek to know God and His will by studying His various means of revelation.

**Learning Outline:**

I. The Need for Revelation  *(Ps. 19:1–6)*

- **A** In what ways has God revealed Himself in creation? What would it have been like to commune with God in Eden?
- **B** How has sin limited God’s revelation to us through creation? Our conscience? The Bible and other prophets? His son Jesus?

II. Revelation and the Prophets  *(Exod. 4:10–17, Isa. 6:5–8)*

- **A** Why did Moses and Isaiah feel inadequate to the task of speaking for God? Why does God choose imperfect people to speak for Him?
- **B** How do you feel about the possibility that God may have something to say to or through you? Or that like Aaron, you may be called to reiterate the truth about God?

III. Revelation and Jesus  *(Col. 1:15, 2:9)*

- **A** What is the significance of Jesus’ role in revealing God? How can knowing more about Jesus lead to a deeper understanding of God?
- **B** What can you do this week to focus more on Jesus as God’s supreme revelation to you?

**Summary:** Scripture records God’s unceasing effort to reveal Himself to a race separated from Him by sin. Through Jesus, God not only saves us from that sin but reveals Himself, thus enabling us to have a relationship with Him.
In Nature

What can nature reveal about God? Ps. 19:1–6, 33:6–9, Rom. 1:19–23.

The Bible tells us that the world that God created was perfect in every way (Gen. 1:31). But Scripture also reveals that sin has altered the natural world (Gen. 3:17, 18). Prior to the Fall, only beautiful or useful plants were found upon the earth. God “never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan’s work, the result of degeneration.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 186. Nevertheless, there is still great beauty in the changing of the leaves in autumn, in a vivid sunset, and in the opening of a rosebud on a sunny morning.

Bible writers often refer to the phenomena of nature as a revelation of God’s majesty and greatness (Psalm 8 and 104). Consider the universe! On a clear night one can see with the unaided eye thousands of stars. However, our Milky Way galaxy has about two hundred billion stars—and that’s only one galaxy among several hundred billion galaxies that we now can see. Who knows how many more are beyond our telescopes!

Distances in the universe boggle the mind: Apart from the sun, the nearest star to our earth, Alpha Centauri, is 4.37 light-years away (one light-year is the distance light travels in one year—5.9 trillion miles). A spaceship traveling 100,000 miles per hour would require about 29,000 years to get there. In contrast, our Milky Way has a diameter of 100,000 light-years! The largest galaxy known thus far is Markarian, with a diameter of 1.3 million light-years.

Similar awe-inspiring facts would come to light if we used an electron microscope to study the tens of thousands of genes each individual possesses. Our finite minds are simply unable to comprehend all the wonders of the created world.

Yet, nature alone isn’t enough to reveal the fullness of God’s character (Rom. 1:23). Many of the fundamental questions about God cannot be answered through a study of nature. We will find it hard to see God’s love reflected in how cats and killer whales play with their prey before killing them. And while we can see God’s power and majesty in creation, nature does not tell us always that God is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exod. 34:6, NKJV).

What aspects of nature truly talk to you about the love and power of God? At the same time, what things do you find disturbing; and why? What do your answers tell you about how limited nature is in revealing the fullness of God’s love and character?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Nature, the Bible, and Jesus are God’s chosen means for revealing Himself to us.

How would the sun sound if you could hear it sing?

The psalmist describes the sun as “rejoicing,” with each day “uttering speech,” and the heavens “declaring” the glory of God (Ps. 19:1–3). Obviously the sun does not have vocal cords. But scientists who study the sun may have reason to believe that the psalmist’s description of the sun may be a bit more literal than previously expected.

The sun is filled with sound. By measuring the vibrations on the sun’s surface, astronomers at Stanford University have recorded the pressure of acoustical waves in the sun. Because the solar sound waves are too low for the human ear to hear, scientists speed up the waves and compress the vibrations into solar music that sounds like humming. But that’s not all. Not only does the sun sing, it can do so in a vast range of notes. A piano has 88 keys; the sun has 10 million. That’s one colossal keyboard. —www.noao.edu/education/ighelio.

Now, the words “the heavens declare the glory of God” and “the sun . . . rejoiceth” take on a whole new meaning, quite literally singing to us of the warmth and vast range of His sustaining love.

**Consider This:** How else does the sun teach us about the majesty of God? What does the sun suggest about God’s ability to reach us, though He, too, is physically distant? What are the limits of the analogy?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. God Communicates Through Nature (Read Psalm 19:1–6 and Romans 1:19–23 with your class.)

Nature’s arrangement and beauty powerfully argue for God’s existence. Paul says that God uses the visible things of nature to reveal the invisible things, such as His Godhead and His eternal power. The mind may comprehend
Through Prophets

After the Fall, when God no longer spoke to humanity directly, He communicated with them through men and women whom the Bible calls seers or prophets (1 Sam. 9:9). What do the following texts tell us about these prophets? 2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:5; Hos. 4:1; Amos 7:14, 15; John 1:1–3.

The word prophet (in Hebrew nabi’) means “one called [by God]” or “one who has a vocation [from God].” The prophet is a person who proclaims divine messages. These may relate to the past, the present, or the future and may consist of exhortation, instruction, consolation, or prediction.

The English word prophet comes from the Greek prophetes, a combination of the preposition pro, “for” or “on behalf of,” with the verb phemi, “to speak.” Thus the idea being “to speak for.”

Read Exodus 4:10–17. How does this help us better understand the role of a prophet?

Here Moses objects to God’s call for him to go to Egypt and confront Pharaoh, claiming that he is “slow of speech and of a slow tongue” (vs. 10). Even after God reminded Moses that He had made man’s mouth and would enable him to speak before Pharaoh, Moses still objected. Then God told Moses that He would send Aaron to go with him. “He shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” (vs. 16, NKJV). As Moses was to be the spokesperson for God, so Aaron would be the spokesperson for Moses. Thus, a prophet speaks for someone. The prophet may speak to humankind on behalf of God or vice versa. The primary task of a biblical prophet was not to predict the future but to declare the divine will. Throughout the history of Israel, the prophet’s main task was to guide God’s people. Particularly during the time of the monarchy, when the kings often “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 13:2), the prophetic institution was the guardian of the theocracy. The prophets upheld the law of God and taught it to the people.

Notice the humility of Moses and the sense of his own weakness. Why is that a good attitude for anyone, not just a prophet, to have? What dangers do we face if we get a sense of our own self-sufficiency?
these invisible truths through the help of the created works. Despite being warped by sin, the natural world still witnesses to us God’s power and His love. God’s revelation of Himself through His created works is enough to reveal to us what He requires of us, leaving us without any excuse for neglecting duty.

Paul also says in Romans 1:20–23 that humanity is not content with God’s revelation of Himself in nature. Such minds take what God appoints to reveal Himself and see these things as representing God Himself. So, instead of the ibis and the stars declaring God’s love, they became gods to the darkened mind of the ancient Egyptian. Science is guilty of this today. Strip God completely from the act of Creation, and you are left with evolution.

**Consider This:** Even though nature is exquisitely beautiful and ordered and declares God’s glory, why is it unable to communicate a complete image of God, or the purpose He has for humankind?

**II. God Communicates Through the Prophets** *(Read Exodus 19:7 with your class.)*

A prophet’s main job was to reveal God’s will to the people. One doesn’t wake up one day and decide to become a prophet. It’s a calling from the Lord, as in the case of Moses. Ironically, Moses’ reluctance to speak before Pharaoh reveals a very telling detail about the work of a prophet. The specific work that Moses feared to do is at the heart of a prophet’s work: serving as a divine spokesperson, a voice that articulates Heaven’s will on earth.

**Consider This:** What do the following texts teach us about the work and the tasks of a prophet? *Exod.19:7, Num. 12:6, 1 Sam. 3:10, Dan. 4:23, Amos 7:15, Acts 18:9, 22:18, Rev. 10:4.*

**III. God Communicates Through the Spoken and Written Word** *(Read John 20:30, 31; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21.)*

Paul reminds us that “all scripture” is inspired by God. This does not allow for us to decide which part of Scripture is inspired by God and which is human invention.

But what does it mean to be inspired or “God-breathed”? The word
Through the Word

Basic to the claims of Christianity is that it is a revealed religion, the record of which we find in Scripture. During the first few millennia of humankind’s existence, God revealed Himself to individuals through dreams, visions, or epiphanies (appearances). From the time of Moses (fifteenth century B.C.) and onward, many of these revelations were written down. As a result, we have today 66 books in the Bible, containing all the knowledge necessary for salvation.

What do the following texts tell us about the Bible itself?

Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17; 4:14

John 20:30, 31

2 Tim. 3:16

There are a number of important characteristics of the Bible that should hold our attention. (1) Its unity: The Bible at first sight appears to be merely a collection of ancient literature. However, considering that it was written by approximately forty authors over a period of nearly sixteen hundred years, its unity is amazing. The plan of salvation is revealed progressively from Genesis to Revelation. There is unity in its theme: The Messiah is promised throughout the Old Testament and declared in every New Testament book to have come in the person of Jesus Christ. And there is complete harmony of teaching: The doctrines of the Old and New Testament are the same. (2) The history it portrays: The Old Testament embodies the oldest history of any people in the world. William F. Albright, the greatest archaeologist of the twentieth century, wrote, “Hebrew national tradition excels all other in its clear picture of tribal and family origins. In Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria and Phoenicia, in Greece and Rome, we look in vain for anything comparable. There is nothing like it in the tradition of the Germanic peoples. Neither India nor China can produce anything similar.”—The Biblical Period From Abraham to Ezra (New York: Harper, Torch Book, 1963), p. 27. (3) Its survival: The Bible, compared with other ancient writings, has more manuscript evidence than any other piece of classical literature—in spite of early attempts by Roman emperors to destroy it. For example, there are more than five thousand known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in existence. Homer’s Iliad is second with only 643 manuscripts that have survived. The reason for this phenomenon is the Holy Spirit, the real author of God’s Word, who inspired all the human authors. He ensured that the biblical historians presented an accurate picture, and He watched over the history and preservation of the Bible.
inspired is translated from the Greek theopneustos. We can look back to Adam for a clue. Adam, the first man, was “God-breathed,” meaning that God literally breathed life into him. Thus, Adam’s life was God-inspired; it is the reason he became a living soul. The Bible is called the Living Word of God because it has power to teach, convict, correct, and instruct us how to grow into the fullness of God. The Bible is the thought of God communicated to humanity.

Consider This: What can we learn from the following texts about how the Bible was composed? Exod. 34:27, Ps. 119:105, Heb. 4:12.

IV. Communication—Examples and Teachings—Through Jesus (Read aloud John 1:1, 14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:1–3.)

God’s greatest act of mercy was sending Jesus to die for us. Yet all the aspects of Jesus’ life, not just His death, reveal the plan of salvation at work and communicate God’s truth and grace to us: His perfect life is an example of obedience; His vicarious death allows Him to justify us; our faith in His death frees us from the guilt of sin; His resurrection promises us immortality; His ascension into heaven confirms His promise to return to earth and take us to meet the Father.

Consider This: What do the following texts reveal to us about Jesus as the most perfect revelation of God to man? Matt. 4:17, 23; 10:24; 28:18; Luke 1:77; John 13:15; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. Why should we not accept the teaching of everyone who eloquently preaches and calls upon the name of God? See Jer. 14:14, Mark 13:22, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1.

2. God communicated directly with humans in the Garden of Eden. He communicated directly with humans when Jesus was on earth. Why, do you think, does God not still communicate with humans face-to-face? Read Joel 2:28, 29; Amos 3:7.
Through Christ

The center and substance of God's revelation is the person of Christ, God in human flesh. When in God's plan the time was right, Jesus was “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4, NKJV). He lived for about thirty-three years in Palestine, died on the cross, rose from the tomb, and ascended to His Father.

**What** do the following texts tell us about how God’s revelation through Christ differed from the other revelations discussed this week? *John 1:14; 3:16; 14:8, 9; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:1, 2.*

The Bible far surpasses the revelation of God in nature; yet, no written record can equal the personal presence of the Son of God. The Bible is God’s tool to accomplish His purpose in our lives. However, it has no lasting value if we regard it only as an interesting history book. Unless it leads us to the One it reveals, our study of the Bible will be of little benefit. The Bible was written, above all, to give to us the revelation of God presented to the world through the life and death of His Son, Jesus.

“That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world” (*John 1:9, NKJV*). **What contribution does this text make to our understanding of the revelation of God in Christ?**

The NIV English translation catches the idea best: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” This does not mean that every person receives this light, only that if a person is illuminated at all, it must be from Jesus (*Acts 4:12*). The true light shines on all humankind in the same sense that Jesus died for everyone, but not everyone will be saved. As John goes on to say, many will not accept this light (*John 1:10–12*).

**How well do you know Jesus yourself? If someone were to say to you, “Tell me about Jesus, what He is like and what He can do for me,” what would you say and why? Be prepared to share your answer in class on Sabbath.**
Application Question:
God is not static; He communicates with us as needed, in ways that will meet our needs. With this dynamic paradigm in mind, what methods of communication could help meet the needs of your congregation?

Witnessing
Almost thirty years ago, Swedish nature photographer Kjell B. Sandved found a perfect letter F on the wing of an orange sphinx moth. What if, he wondered, the letters of the entire alphabet could be found in the wing patterns of butterflies and moths? For the next twenty years, he waded through chest-high waters, peered down into exotic flowers, or looked under leaves, hunting for letters all over the world. Using self-designed microscopic lenses, he photographed the letters A–Z and numbers zero to nine—often finding more than one—without capturing or killing a single insect. Thus, The Butterfly Alphabet was born.

Don’t expect butterflies, though, to start lining up any time soon to spell out words, much like the spider did in the fanciful children’s story Charlotte's Web. Butterflies may not be able to spell, but they are part of God’s alphabet that spells out His love for us. Nature is one of God’s appointed means for revealing Himself to us, and its messages of God’s love are written everywhere. It is a universal language that needs no translation into human words, because it speaks to us in the language of the heart. So, what does one of Sandved’s butterflies, and not just the letter on its wing, say to us about our Creator?

Consider This: What has nature taught you about God?

STEP 4—Apply

1 Arrange a Sabbath outing to go into nature. Find a natural object and contemplate how it reveals something about God to you. Share this insight with your class.

2 Paint a picture or write a poem about the object you collected. Show your painting to the class. Share what spiritual truth it teaches you about God. Or describe the object in your poem. End the poem with what the physical description of the object reveals to you about God.

Close the lesson with prayer, asking God to help each one to be both an active and silent communicator for Him.

“Christ came to teach human beings what God desires them to know. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the broad waters of the ocean, we see the handiwork of God. All created things testify to His power, His wisdom, His love. But not from the stars or the ocean or the cataract can we learn of the personality of God as it is revealed in Christ. God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to reveal, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God.”

“Christ revealed all of God that sinful human beings could bear without being destroyed. He is the divine Teacher, the Enlightener. Had God thought us in need of revelations other than those made through Christ and in His written word, He would have given them.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, pp. 265, 266.

“The Bible is a wonderful book. It is a history that opens up to us the past centuries. Without the Bible we should have been left to conjectures and fables in regard to the occurrences of past ages. It is a prophecy that unveils the future. It is the Word of God, unfolding to us the plan of salvation, pointing out the way by which we may escape eternal death and gain eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, October 1, 1892, par. 5.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, compare your answers to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from each other?

2. If God does reveal Himself to us through nature, at least partially, what does this tell us about our need to protect the environment?

3. What are some other ways God communicates with us? How can we be sure it really is God talking to us? What safeguards are there to protect us from deceptions?

4. As a class, plan an outing in nature in which you can look at the revelation of God found there. What things clearly testify to His creative power and love? What things leave large questions still unanswered? Why is nature, however beautiful, still not sufficient to tell us all that we need to know?
The Prophetic Gift

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Gen. 20:7, Exod. 15:20, Deut. 18:15, Matt. 11:11, John 6:14, Heb. 11:24–26.

**Memory Text:** “Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; and I speak to him in a dream’” (Numbers 12:6, NKJV).

All through history, and even up to the present, we can find examples of people uttering predictions about the future. In most cases, these things never come true. When they do come true, a number of factors could be involved. Could it be sheer luck? Maybe the Lord was in it? Or perhaps the enemy of souls was working to deceive as many as he could?

Sure Satan uses false prophecies and prophets to mislead people. But we can take comfort in knowing God has His true prophets to make known His will.

In Scripture, individuals whom God endowed with the gift of prophecy were people who walked with God. Not that they were sinless, but they strove to live in harmony with God’s revealed will. They had a personal relationship with God, and in that context the Lord was able to use them in a special way.

This week we’ll take a look at how He used them.

**The Week at a Glance:** Were the Old and New Testament prophets saints or just ordinary men and women? What role did women prophets play in Israel? What were the differences between apostles and prophets in the New Testament?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.*
In Genesis 20:7 we find the first mention of the word *prophet* (Heb. *nabiʾ*) in the Bible. What was the context in which it was used? What can we learn from the context about what a prophet was and how he or she functioned?

In the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the word *prophet* describes the recipient of divine revelation. During the time of the judges the word *seer* (in Hebrew *roʾeh*) appears to have come into use (*1 Sam. 9:9, 11, 18, 19*); then, later, the usage reverted to the older term again.

Prophets were not only spokespersons for God but on occasion were also intermediaries between God and the people. Abraham in Genesis 20 was the intermediary between God and Abimelech—he was to pray to God on behalf of Abimelech.

Abraham is a towering figure in the Old Testament. Three times in Scripture he is called God’s friend (*2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8, James 2:23*). When he was 99 years old, God told him, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you” (*Gen. 17:6, NKJV*), a promise that, humanly speaking, seemed impossible. Because Abraham believed God in spite of what human reason told him, he became “the father of all those who believe” (*Rom. 4:11, NKJV*).

Considering that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son in response to God’s command (*Genesis 22*), it seems incredible that Abraham should have lied to Abimelech concerning Sarah (*Gen. 20:2*). However, the situation is only too true to life. “As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man” (*Prov. 27:19, NIV*). The occasional manifestation of the remaining old nature in the believer, the backsliding of God’s children in all ages, and our own sad departures from the path of righteousness are sufficient to explain the deplorable conduct of the “father of all those who believe.” How human Abraham was—moments of great faith, moments of deep lapses. What follower of Abraham’s God can’t relate?

What encouragement can you take for yourself from the fact that, despite Abraham’s mistakes and lack of faith, God used him anyway, even mightily? How can we learn not to let our lapses turn us away from continuing to press on ahead in faith?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Numbers 12:6

The Student Will:
Know: That God speaks to us through other people whom we call prophets.
Feel: Respect and openness toward prophets and identify with them as fellow human beings.
Do: Carefully consider the way in which prophets may speak to us and the church.

Learning Outline:

I. The Role of Prophets (Deut. 18:14–22, 34:10)
   A Why did God raise up prophets? What was their function?
   B What is the significance of the face-to-face experience for the prophet, for God, and for us?

II. Prophets Are Human (Judges 5)
   A What does Deborah’s story reveal about the way prophets functioned within their community? Why was it sometimes difficult to be a prophet?
   B What does the human diversity of biblical prophets tell us about God?
   C What mistakes and weaknesses are evident in biblical prophets? What does this tell us about God’s attitude toward us? How do the mistakes and failings of the prophets form our expectations of them and of their writings?

III. Prophecy in the Church (Acts 2:16–21, 21:8–14)
   A What does the prevalence of prophets in the New Testament suggest about the way God speaks to the church?
   B How do you respond to the possibility that God might use someone to speak to us on His behalf? Why?

Summary: Throughout history God has used ordinary people of diverse circumstances to speak on His behalf. These prophets have strengthened, corrected, guided, and encouraged God’s people on their journey toward the Promised Land, where one day we will talk face-to-face with God again.
The First Named Prophet of Israel

The first person called a prophet in the nation of Israel was Moses. Concerning his death, the statement is made, “since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10, NKJV). Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel, but Moses was the first prophet in Israel’s history—an example for all the prophets who followed him.

What do the following texts tell us about Moses’ personality and character? Exod. 4:10; 32:11–13, 32; Num. 12:3; 20:10–12; Heb. 11:24–26. How do some of these traits help us understand how he fit into his role as a prophet?

Through his upbringing in Egypt, his strong faith in God, and his personal experience with the Almighty at the burning bush (Exodus 3), Moses was well equipped to lead the people of Israel. From Scripture, we know that because of Israel’s repeated failure to have faith in God, Moses constantly was interceding with God for the nation (Exod. 32:11–13, Num. 14:13–19, 16:46–50), while at the same time admonishing the Israelites to be faithful.

Following the golden-calf episode at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32), Moses spent 40 days with God on the mountain. When he returned from the mountain, his face shone (Exod. 34:28–35). The radiant face of Moses was but a reflection of divine glory (2 Cor. 3:7). Considering the fact that Moses had the unique privilege of seeing the glory of the Creator, it is small wonder that his face shone after such an experience, but this was not the only reason. The golden-calf rebellion was directed not only against God but also against Moses. The evidence of his communion with God was instrumental in restoring him to his rightful place of leadership. When the people realized where he had been, his role of leader and mediator that had been questioned was restored.

Anyone filled with the Spirit of God will in some way reflect the glorious character of God. Those who live close to God will have a telling effect on the lives of others, though they may not know it themselves.

Who is someone who seems to have a close relationship with the Lord? How is that closeness revealed in their lives? What character traits do they manifest? How can you learn to walk closer to the Lord? What things in your life are holding you back from that closer walk?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Just as prophets served as mediators between God and His people, we, too, may serve God no matter how flawed we are.

Pearls are an accident of nature. Shells stunted in growth and shaped irregularly are most likely to produce pearls. For a pearl to form, an irritant must first enter the mollusk when the valves of the shell are open for breathing and eating. This irritant is less likely to be a grain of sand than to be a shell-boring parasite, decaying plant debris, molluskan egg, small crab, stray piece of food, or even small fish. The mollusk protects itself by depositing nacreous matter that coats the irritant in layers. Over time this imperfection becomes a pearl. —www.fao.org/docrep/field/003/AB726E/AB726E11.htm.

It is hard to imagine how something so flawed can yield something so beautiful. This should give hope to us when our weaknesses, imperfections, and failures threaten to overwhelm us. If God can take something stunted and oddly shaped like a mollusk and use it to create the perfection of a pearl, is He any less capable of bringing beauty and strength out of our flaws? “My grace is sufficient for thee . . . my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). So, the next time you are beset by difficulty or hardship or are overwhelmed by your spiritual deficiencies, remember: without the irritant, there would be no pearl.

**Consider This:** We already have learned that Moses feared to speak in front of Pharaoh because he felt his ability to speak was flawed. What aid did God promise him? What are some of the other weaknesses that other Bible leaders experienced that God helped them to overcome? How does this inspire your class members with hope that God can use them despite their flaws and weaknesses? How has God turned spiritual deformities into “pearls”? How has He used “irritants” to make us stronger?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** We will consider the lives of the prophets from the Old and New Testaments to define the work of a prophet.
Prophets in Israel

Prior to his death Moses told the Israelites: “‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear’” (Deut. 18:15, NKJV). The context indicates that this prophecy had an immediate application to the prophetic leadership of Israel in the years following the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 18; 34:9, 10; Hos. 12:10). The prophets from Joshua to Malachi were a partial fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

Christ, however, fully could meet the conditions set forth in Moses’ prediction (see John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40). He came as the Second Moses, not to free His people from the power of earthly rulers but to free them from the power of sin.

The writings of the prophets of the Old Testament from Isaiah to Malachi are well-known. In addition, there were many other prophets in the history of Israel. Samuel lived during the period of the judges (1 Sam. 3:20). Gad and Nathan continued his work (2 Sam. 12:1, 24:13). After the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. we find the prophets Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29), Elijah (1 Kings 18:1), and Elisha (2 Kings 2:9–14) ministering to the people of God.

Prophets came from all walks of life: Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests, Isaiah and Zephaniah were of royal blood, Daniel was prime minister of Babylon, Samuel was a judge, Elisha was a farmer, and Amos a shepherd. Whatever their backgrounds, all of them were God’s messengers through whom God tried to keep Israel from falling into sin. Some prophets wrote books (1 Chron. 29:29, 2 Chron. 9:29), others did not (1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 2:15); some were counselors to kings (1 Sam. 22:5), others preached to the people (Ezek. 3:17). After four centuries of prophetic silence, John the Baptist appeared as the last of the prophets of the Old Covenant period (Matt. 3:1).

All through the sacred Scriptures we see the Lord speaking to His people through His servants, the prophets. The whole Bible itself is the work of these prophets, delivering the messages that God gave them. No matter how diverse their backgrounds, education, temperaments; no matter the flaws in their characters (with the radical exception of Jesus), these human beings, flesh and blood like us, were used by the Lord to proclaim His messages, messages that still are being proclaimed today in almost every country in the world and will continue until the close of time.

Which prophet can you relate to the most? Which prophet speaks the clearest to you, and why? What have you taken from that prophet’s life and message? How are you able to apply what you’ve learned to your life in a way that changes you for the better?
Bible Commentary

I. Abraham: Fervent Yet Flawed *(Read Genesis 20:7 with your class.)*

The first recorded instance in which the word *prophet* is used in the Bible occurs in Genesis 20. If we look at the story, we see that Abimelech’s entire family suffered from a curse because of one man’s coveting of Abraham’s wife. Sarah and Abraham had lied about being married, mentioning that Sarah was Abraham’s half sister but neglecting to mention she was his wife. This was only half the truth—and from the lips of a prophet no less! It was enough to convince Abimelech that Sarah was free to join his harem. And when he took her, God shut up all the wombs of Abimelech’s wives. What is so interesting about the narrative is that, despite Abraham’s lie, God refers to Abraham as a prophet and makes Abimelech’s restoration contingent upon Abraham’s intercessory prayer on his behalf. Though many of us are fallen and flawed, God still calls us in our imperfections to serve Him.

*Consider This:* God still called Abraham, despite his faults. What hope should this give us that God can use us, despite our faults? At the same time, why do the prophets’ flaws not give us the license to willfully against God while claiming to serve Him?


After Israel’s rebellion against God with the golden calf, God told Moses He would destroy them and create a new chosen people from Moses. The prayer of Moses prevented Israel’s complete extermination as a nation. In his role as intercessor, Moses stood as a forerunner of Christ. Moses does not excuse his people’s sin; he, instead, intercedes for them, seeking for God to forgive them. This intercessory role demonstrates some of the work of a prophet.

We also learn that during the time that Moses related God’s words to the people, his face was veiled. The veiling of Moses’ face makes him a type of Christ. Jesus veiled His divinity with humanity in order to dwell with us. Veiled, Moses represented how God must reveal Himself to us; unveiled, God could not fellowship with us without destroying us. But veiled in humanity, He could fellowship freely with sinners in order to reunite humanity to heaven. The glory reflected in Moses’ face equals the
Prophetesses in Israel

Scripture mentions a number of prophetesses. Who were they? What do the following texts tell us about the role they played in the history of Israel? Exod. 15:20, 21; Judg. 4:4–10; 2 Kings 22:11–20.

Miriam, the sister of Moses, is called a prophetess. She is described as leading the women in the Song of Moses and Miriam (compare Exod. 15:1 and 15:21, NIV). Moses was the appointed leader of the people of Israel, but his dealings would have been primarily with the men, who were considered the heads of their families. Miriam’s task was, perhaps, with the Israelite women. She must have been several years older than Moses (Exod. 2:1–8), and according to Josephus she married Hur, who together with Aaron had held up the arms of Moses in the battle with the Amalekites.—The Works of Flavius Josephus (Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher), p. 98.

That she was an important person in Israel is seen in the fact that all Israel had to wait seven days until God took away her leprosy after the unfortunate incident with her brother Moses and his wife (Num. 12:1–15).

Deborah (Judges 5) must have been an extraordinary person. In a society dominated by men, she became a political and spiritual leader, something few women achieved in those days. Deeply spiritual, she ascribed all praise for the victory over the Canaanites to God (vss. 3–5, 13); she did not take any glory for herself or Barak.

As a “mother in Israel” (vs. 7), she watched over the people with maternal care, counseling and aiding them in procuring justice.

Read Judges 4:1–8. What does this tell us about how highly respected this woman was in Israel at that time?

Another prophetess in Israel was Huldah (2 Kings 22:14–20, 2 Chron. 34:20–28). When King Josiah asked her concerning God’s will, she prophesied judgment and disaster upon Jerusalem and its people but not in Josiah’s day; his eyes were not to see the evil because he humbled himself before the Lord. It is interesting that Huldah was consulted although both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were living at the same time.
blessings to be received by God’s commandment-keeping people through the mediation of Christ.

Numbers 16 further demonstrates that the work of a prophet is based on the mediating actions of Moses and Aaron in holding back the deadly plague. (1) Moses acts as God’s mouthpiece (vs. 46). (2) Aaron carried the censer from the Holy Place—a censer used only inside the temple—and brought it among the people. The incense symbolized Jesus’ work of intercession and atonement, coming from heaven and down to us. Aaron served as a type of Christ, who came down among sinful humans and offered Himself for their sins.

**Consider This:** How do the actions of Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16 shed further light on the work of an intercessor? What does this, in turn, teach of Christ’s atoning work for us?

### III. Women Prophets: Miriam and Deborah (Read Numbers 12:1, 2; Judges 4:1–18 with your class.)

Miriam is the first woman in the Old Testament named as a prophet. She stood second only to Moses and Aaron in power. Miriam claims to possess the prophetic gift, since God has spoken through her. Micah asserts that God delivered Israel out of Egypt through Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. After the deliverance, Miriam led the women in the Song of Moses at the Red Sea. Quite possibly, she could be viewed as organizing the first women’s ministry department of God’s church. In addition to communicating to the people the messages God gave her, she may have taught and reproved the people during a ministry that spanned 90 years.

Later, during the time of the judges, God called another woman, Deborah, to be a prophetess. Deborah listened to cases under a tree between Ramah and Bethel. This arboreal courtroom allowed the people the freest access to her as they came to her for judgment. As a prophetess she corrected abuses and redressed grievances. Verse 8 of Judges 4 tells us just how highly Deborah was held in esteem. So great was her influence that the great warrior Barak, whom God called to deliver Israel from their enemies, refused to go into battle without Deborah marching with him. Her presence would make it clear that the undertaking was God’s will. Barak, a strong and brave warrior, submitted himself to her prophetic guidance. Deborah, though female and no warrior, did not refuse to lead Israel into battle. God shows us through her story that He does not limit Himself to the male gender in calling prophets.
New Testament Prophets

The Old Testament prophetic period came to an end about four hundred years prior to the birth of Christ. During the period between that end and the birth of Christ, many Jewish books were written, but none were accepted as inspired.

The life of Christ ushered in a new era, in which God again called individuals to function as His spokespersons. Who were some of these New Testament prophets, and what was the difference between them and the apostles? Luke 1:67; John 1:6, 7; Acts 11:27, 28; 13:1; Rev. 1:1–3.

In New Testament Greek, the word *apostle* was used of persons in the sense of ambassador, envoy, or delegate. Josephus, for example, used this word when speaking of the ambassadors whom the Jews sent as their representatives to Rome.—Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, p. 11.

In the New Testament, *apostle* carries the concepts of mission and representation. The term appears in the context of Jesus’ ordaining and sending forth His disciples on an evangelistic mission (Matt. 10:2–6). The apostles were those with special authority from the risen Lord; they had seen for themselves His death and resurrection, something that all the previous prophets hadn’t. Some of the apostles, such as John and Paul, were also prophets, but not all apostles were prophets. According to Ephesians 2:20, apostles and prophets together provided the foundational interpretation of what God had done in Christ for humanity.

Read Matthew 11:11. Why was John the Baptist greater than all the Old Testament prophets? What does Jesus mean when He says, “But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (NKJV)?

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet in the sense that it was his privilege to announce the coming of Christ, to whom all the prophets had borne witness (see Luke 24:27; John 5:39, 46). Like Abraham, all the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day the Messiah would come (1 Pet. 1:10, 11), but John saw Him in the flesh. Hence, in some sense, the prophetic office in the Old Testament reached its climax in John. At the same time, John the Baptist was only at the door of the kingdom of grace, looking in, while the least follower of Jesus can look back and rejoice in the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies through Christ.

Dwell on some of the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Jesus as Messiah. How can they help strengthen your faith?
Consider This: What do the ministries of Miriam and Deborah teach us about the work of prophets? What does the fact that God chooses women, as well as men, to serve as prophets, reveal about God?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. What danger is there in focusing on the faults of a prophet as a means of justifying your own sins?

2. Which of the prophets inspire you to live a godly life? Why?

Application Questions:

1. The Bible says, “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23), but it provides a solution that allows us to escape the “wages of sin” (6:23), which is death. What is your understanding of how this solution works? What is it based on? How can you avail yourself of this wonderful provision?

2. Because of his sins, Moses did not get to the Promised Land. Do the consequences of your sins discourage you or drive you closer to the Source of salvation? Explain.

3. Discuss the impact a forgiving spirit could have on the life of your church.

STEP 4—Apply

1. How does your church make a positive difference in people’s lives? How could it do better?

2. It was clear for all to see that Moses had been in the presence of God after he descended from Mount Sinai. What about yourself? What about your life reveals your relationship with God?

3. What kind of role model do you represent? If not a good one, why not? Why do you not have to be perfect to be a role model?

Read Acts 4:12, and ask the class to pray silently for someone in need.

“During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection. In concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, he betrayed a distrust of the divine care, a lack of that lofty faith and courage so often and nobly exemplified in his life.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 130.

“Moses had been instructed in regard to the final reward to be given to the humble and obedient servants of God, and worldly gain sank to its proper insignificance in comparison. The magnificent palace of Pharaoh and the monarch’s throne were held out as an inducement to Moses; but he knew that the sinful pleasures that make men forget God were in its lordly courts. He looked beyond the gorgeous palace, beyond a monarch’s crown, to the high honors that will be bestowed on the saints of the Most High in a kingdom untainted by sin. He saw by faith an imperishable crown that the King of heaven would place on the brow of the overcomer.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage,* p. 81.

“The glory reflected in the countenance of Moses illustrates the blessings to be received by God’s commandment-keeping people through the mediation of Christ. It testifies that the closer our communion with God, and the clearer our knowledge of His requirements, the more fully shall we be conformed to the divine image, and the more readily do we become partakers of the divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 330.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Discuss some of the character flaws found in various prophets and apostles in the Bible. What hope can you take from these for yourself? At the same time, what are the good characteristics seen in many of these people? What hope and promise can you find there, as well?

2. What about some of the so-called *prophets* today, those making all sorts of predictions, many of which are reported in the local newspaper? How should we relate to them? What kind of people are they; what kind of predictions do they make? What can we learn from the contrast between them and the prophets seen in the Bible?

3. In what ways can we, as a church, act in the role of the prophets? In what ways are we called to do just that? How can we better fulfill that role?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 2:1–11; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 1:6, 7; 13:9; Eph. 4:11; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10.

Memory Text: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6, NKJV).

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the existence of spiritual gifts. We’re not alone either. Many charismatic and Pentecostal churches have claimed to see the manifestation of spiritual gifts among themselves. Some of these have included people in church, making noises like animals (lions, donkeys, dogs, even chickens!), as well as the utterances of prognostications and prophecies, such as the time it was prophesied that God blew up the space shuttle Challenger in order to teach America a lesson because there was a public school-teacher on board. (Apparently, someone believed that God doesn’t like public schoolteachers.)

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, but we also believe that everything should be tested by the Word of God. This week, using the Word, we’ll take a closer look at some of these gifts.

The Week at a Glance: What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? How are they manifested? What about the gift of tongues? What does the Bible teach about counterfeit gifts?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.
Spiritual Gifts

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).

Spiritual gifts (Greek charismata) are known as spiritual because they originate with the Holy Spirit, who apportions them to each according to His will (1 Cor. 12:11). In addition, the Holy Spirit is given to Christians so that they may understand and appreciate these gifts (1 Cor. 2:10–13).

Paul provides four lists of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28–30; Eph. 4:11, 12). What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Why were they given?

___________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

According to the New Testament, spiritual gifts are given for the completion of the mission entrusted to the church. This includes the nurture and edification of the church, as well as the proclamation of the gospel to the world. The existence of these gifts should serve as a constant reminder of our utter dependence upon the Lord in order for us to do the work He has called us to do.

From the Gospels we know that the apostles possessed spiritual gifts even prior to Pentecost. In Luke 9:1, Jesus “gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases” (NKJV), and in Matthew 10:8 He charged them to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons” (NKJV). Then at Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (Acts 2:1–4). This seems to indicate that it is possible to receive more than one baptism of the Holy Spirit.

How have spiritual gifts been manifested in your own church? What has been the fruits of these gifts? What can you do to help nurture these gifts in your local congregation? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath for discussion.

___________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
**The Lesson in Brief**

**Key Text:** 1 Corinthians 12:4–6

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to some individuals in the church.
- **Feel:** Gratitude for God manifesting His power in the church.
- **Do:** Identify and use spiritual gifts.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Some to Be Prophets (Eph. 4:11–13)
   - A How would you define a spiritual gift?
   - B In what ways does prophecy contribute to the outcomes mentioned in verses 12 and 13?

II. Not All Prophets Speak for God (Acts 8:9–25; 16:16–18; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10)
   - A Certain gifts more obviously reveal the presence of the supernatural. What dangers exist in overemphasizing those gifts, undervaluing them, or blindly following them?
   - B How do you feel about manifestations of the supernatural? What role do our feelings play in discerning genuine versus counterfeit manifestations?

III. Apply Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12)
   - A This passage affirms the equality of the gifts while chapter 14 suggests that some may be more useful than others. How should prophecy function in relation to the other gifts? Does one gift override the others? What role does love (chapter 13) play?
   - B How can we discover what our gifts are? How do we recognize and affirm if there is a prophet among us?

**Summary:** The Holy Spirit empowers the church for health and growth by dispensing spiritual gifts. One of these gifts is prophecy. We need to identify and use our gifts in the body of Christ so that the Head is glorified.
Spiritual Gifts in the Church Today

These days we find two views among Christians in regard to the permanency of spiritual gifts. Some believe that edifying gifts, such as knowledge, wisdom, teaching, exhortation, faith, and mercy, are permanent gifts but that the sign gifts, such as prophecy, healing, tongues, and miracles, ceased with the death of the apostles. Defenders of this view claim: “The sign gifts had a unique purpose: to give the apostles credentials, that is, to let the people know that these men all spoke the truth of God. Once the Word of God was inscripturated, the sign gifts were no longer needed and they ceased.”—John F. MacArthur, Jr., Charismatic Chaos (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), p. 199. Other Christians believe that all the spiritual gifts will be present in the church until the Lord comes.

What do the following texts say about the permanence of spiritual gifts? 1 Cor. 1:6, 7; 13:9, 10; Eph. 4:11–13.

According to Paul, the charismata, the spiritual gifts, will be in the church until Jesus comes, but does this mean that all the gifts will be present all the time?

The church father Irenaeus (A.D. 120–195) wrote about the presence and operation of spiritual gifts even in his day. Thus, according to Irenaeus, spiritual gifts were still in evidence at the end of the second century A.D.

During the next two centuries, however, the church suffered a serious spiritual and theological deterioration, and the spiritual gifts largely disappeared. During the time of the Reformation, beginning with John Wycliffe in England, God used the Reformers to restore neglected truth, and they certainly had the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and teaching. None of the main Reformers, though, claimed to have the prophetic gift. This particular gift, according to Revelation 12:17, was to be manifested again in the end-time remnant church.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:12 that spiritual gifts are given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (NKJV). What kind of equipping is Paul referring to, and in what way do you see this happening in the church today?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Just as God endows the church with spiritual gifts, including prophecy and tongues, each one of us is endowed with spiritual gifts to help finish God’s work on earth.

South Korean soprano Sumi Jo was born with a heart full of music. No surprise when you consider that her mother listened to soprano arias during her pregnancy, for she dreamed of having a daughter who would one day grow up to be a great singer.


The last time heaven gave a concert on earth, it took place at night before an audience of shepherds more than two thousand years ago. Unfortunately no one today, not even a music expert like the late Mr. von Karajan, has heard heaven sing since then. But one need only listen to Sumi Jo’s Prayers to get an idea of just what it must have been like to be in that field of shepherds.

Listening to the vocal purity and the ease with which she hits those high notes, you may find it surprising to know that Sumi Jo started singing as a mezzo soprano, with a much smaller range of notes. She most likely would have remained one if not for the intervention of a very special teacher, who told Sumi that she was a coloratura soprano, capable of singing impossibly high notes and complicated trills. Sumi could sing only a high C at the time. But after three years of hard study, Sumi Jo taught herself to sing 12 more notes beyond that, increasing her range by an octave and a half.—www.scena.org/lsm/sm9-8/sumi-jo.htm.

Gifted people take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. Sumi Jo’s voice is one in a million. But in a church of fifteen million members, each one of us is like the only one to God. Each is special and gifted in His eyes. It is up to us to use for Him what He has given us.

Consider This: Just as God has given the gift of prophecy to the church, He gives us talents and spiritual gifts to consecrate to Him for use to spread His truth. What are your spiritual gifts? How are you being called to use those gifts for Him? Like Sumi Jo, we may not be aware of the true range of our gifts. How has God used teachers or mentors to help you reach your true potential in Him?
Counterfeit Gifts

What does the Bible teach about counterfeit gifts and their origin?

Matt. 7:22, 23; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Rev. 16:13, 14.

By the power of God, Moses and Aaron, standing before Pharaoh, turned a staff into a snake (Exod. 7:10), the river Nile into blood (vs. 20), and made frogs come out of the Nile to cover the land (Exod. 8:6); but by the power of Satan the Egyptian magicians could do the same. However, from the third plague onward the Egyptian magicians were unable to counterfeit God’s miracles.

This teaches us two things: (1) Satan can produce miracles that look like the genuine article, and (2) Satan can work only within the limits set by God.

Counterfeit gifts are not just a perversion of the true gifts of God but can be similar manifestations from a different source—Satan.

A study of the texts listed above should reveal to us a few other important points about the existence of counterfeit spiritual gifts. First, as we can see, these false manifestations can be done by those professing the name of Jesus; indeed, as Jesus said, many will claim to do some miracles in His name. And yet, according to Jesus, they are not of Him.

Second, there will be miracles, miraculous signs and wonders, powerful enough to deceive many. In other words, we need to be very careful not to be swept away by the existence of the supernatural. Even though something is done in the name of Jesus and appears to be supernatural doesn’t mean it’s a genuine gift of the Spirit.

Finally, in the end, Satan is working to do what he can to deceive as many people as possible. Thus, whatever manifestations that do appear, we always must test them by the Bible. If they are not in harmony with the Word of God, we have our answer, regardless of how impressive the manifestations appear to be. The Bible must be our ultimate standard.

With these thoughts in mind, what are we to make of these ministries that claim to manifest all sorts of prophecies, healing, and wonders week after week? Without wanting to judge anyone, why should we be leery? What kind of questions should we ask, and why?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Spiritual Gifts and the Gift of Prophecy (Read 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:11–13 with your class.)

The spiritual gifts are given to build up God’s people (1 Cor. 12:7, 14:4, Eph. 4:12), to prepare them to face the future with confidence, and for eternal life (John 12:50, Rom. 6:23). Ephesians 4:12 says the gifts are used for “equipping” the saints (NKJV). Interestingly, the word used for “equipping,” katartizo, is also used in Matthew 4:21 to mean the mending of nets. In Galatians 6:1 the word is used to mean restoring those who have been overtaken in a fault. So, in a sense, the gifts were given for the purpose of “mending” or “restoring” God’s people and knotting or uniting them together. The prophetic gift was especially indispensable to the founding of the church in New Testament times, uniting God’s people together. And today it is the appointed guide of the remnant church.

Second Peter 1:19–21 defines the gift of prophecy. It is the act of speaking authoritatively for God, either by foretelling future events or declaring God’s will. Foretelling is not essential to the nature of a prophet; neither are all prophetic utterances considered predictions. Some utterances may be warnings or counsel given to the prophets, inspired by the Holy Spirit. A prophet may speak of the past, present, or future.

Just as the Holy Spirit inspires the prophets, He also specifically equips the church with spiritual gifts, whether it is the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues. All who surrender to Jesus and join His church have the assurance that the Holy Spirit will equip them with the ability to perform their duties as Christians to the highest degree. Spiritual gifts are meant to prepare us to successfully do God’s work no matter what the circumstances.

Consider This: What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Why is the gift of prophecy so important to the church? While each of us has different gifts, what is implied by the fact that each and every member, surrendered to Jesus, is promised spiritual gift(s)?

II. Counterfeit Gifts (Read Acts 16:16 with your class.)

In Acts 16 we read of a young female slave with a spirit of divination, or a “Python spirit,” as Luke calls it, who was following Paul. In Greek
The Gift of Prophecy

The French physician Michel de Notredame (1503–1566), known as Nostradamus, supposedly predicted the great fire of London of 1666 with the words: “The blood of the just will be demanded of London, burnt by the fire in the year 66.” ([http://www.armageddonline.org/nostradamus.php](http://www.armageddonline.org/nostradamus.php) [Accessed January 29, 2007.]) The Irish seer Cheiro warned journalist W. T. Stead in 1894 and again in 1911 that he would drown in April 1912. Stead died when the *Titanic* sank in April 1912. In 1956 Jean Dixon published a vision in which she said she saw that a Democrat would be elected president of the United States in 1960, only to be assassinated in office. John Kennedy, a Democrat elected in 1960, was assassinated in 1963 while in office.

**How can we account for these exact predictions by people who had little in common with the biblical prophets?** *Isa. 8:19, Acts 16:16, 2 Cor. 11:14.*

Ever since Satan used the snake in the Garden of Eden to deceive Eve, he has used a variety of human agents to deceive men and women, including the giving of predictions that have come true. Which means, then, that the fulfillment of a prediction is not a guarantee that it is a true prophecy from God.

Nevertheless, prophets and prophecies play an important part in the plan of salvation. This point is made clear in the Bible.

**Prophecy,** or the prophetic office, is listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It appears first on the list in Romans 12:6 and second, after apostleship, in both 1 Corinthians 12:28–30 and Ephesians 4:11. What makes the prophetic gift so important that it is the only gift that is mentioned in all four lists of spiritual gifts or ministries?

The purpose of the prophetic gift is to provide a means of communication between the Creator and His creatures. Prophetic messages in Scripture have unveiled the future (*Daniel* 2), counseled and reproved kings (*Isa. 7:3, 4*), warned of coming judgments (*Jer. 1:14–16*), called for revival (*Joel 2:12, 13*), and encouraged and comforted God’s people (*Isa. 40:1, 2*).

Prophets were men and women who spoke the word of God to their generations. The emphasis in the prophetic gift was not on predicting the future (although this was one of the marks of a true prophet) but on setting forth what God wanted His people to hear.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

mythology Python was a serpent or dragon who was believed to have guarded the oracle at Delphi, the place where ancient Greeks sought the counsel of their gods. The sun god Apollo was believed to have killed Python and was hence called Pythian Apollo. Interestingly, Python was worshiped at Delphi as the symbol of wisdom. And the ancient writer Plutarch, who was a priest of Pythian Apollo, tells us that the name Python was given to those practicing ventriloquism, the act of talking through a medium. (See The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 330.)

When one thinks back to the very first medium, the serpent in Eden that tempted Eve with its spurious brand of wisdom, this association of serpents as mouthpieces for divine wisdom really should come as no surprise. Satan was the first ventriloquist, and four thousand years later, Luke tells us that he’s using his same tricks again, speaking through the body of this girl. Luke implies that her wild cries and contortions were similar to the priestesses at Delphi. No doubt the local people believed the slave girl’s utterances were oracles or divine messages from the gods.

What makes the story even more tragic is that there were men who exploited the girl’s powers for monetary gain. But what the men who exploited her didn’t see was that the darkened mind of this girl longed for salvation. The evil spirit inside her used her at every opportunity to harass and block the progress of God’s work. But when Paul gave the command to depart from the girl, the spirit was powerless to resist.

Consider This: More often than not, it is easy to be like the townspeople, who mistake the profane for the sacred. What guidelines do the texts in Acts 16 give us for separating the counterfeit gift of prophecy from the spurious utterance of the “Python”?

STEP 3—Practice

Witnessing

It was dark and late when the fuel light flickered on. For Marie and her two colleagues traveling from Russia to Romania to hold health and Bible seminars for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it was a bad sign: they were almost on empty, and the town they approached had shut down for the evening. They prayed and kept driving.

They saw a man on a bicycle weaving down a side street. Marie called out to him. “We need fuel. Can you help us?” She spoke to him mostly in English, using the few Romanian words she knew.
Spiritual Gifts and 1 Corinthians 14

The church in Corinth had many problems: division, immorality, court cases among believers, marriage problems, and the abuse of the Lord’s Supper. Another problem concerned spiritual gifts, particularly the use of the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 14:1–5).

What was the gift of tongues in the book of Acts? Going solely by what these verses in Acts 2:1–11 say, what kind of languages were being spoken?

What were the tongues spoken in the church in Corinth? 1 Cor. 14:1–25.

When we apply the principle Scripture interprets Scripture, which means obscure passages are explained by plain ones, we have to conclude that the tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 are of the same nature as the tongues in the book of Acts, especially because the same Greek word glossa is used for tongues in both books. In other words, the evidence is that tongues in both places were the supernatural ability to speak in foreign languages. Some understand the gift to apply also to instances in which a person speaking in one language is understood in another language or languages by those listening. In either case, this undoubtedly rules out the common and popular notion of tongues today, in which people babble in unknown languages.

Also, God works through man’s intelligence. Would the Lord, who warned us against babbling on as the heathen do (Matt. 6:7, NEB), inspire unknown noises? In 1 Corinthians 14:22, tongues are a sign to unbelievers as at Pentecost, and how could someone uttering noises that no one understands be a sign to unbelievers? Tongues, as Acts 2 shows, are real languages, given for the purpose of building up the church. Furthermore, spiritual gifts were given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7), ruling out using a gift purely for personal gratification, as the so-called modern gifts of tongues are used today.

In spite of all the manifestations of ecstatic speech today, nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages. Modern tongues-speaking, called glossolalia, is not the same as the biblical gift of languages.

Think about the words you speak on a daily basis. How much is meaningful, purposeful talk, and how much is nonsensical banter?
He answered in a mixture of Romanian and Russian. “Follow me to my house,” he said. “It’s about ten minutes away, and I’ll help you find fuel.” To her surprise, Marie had no trouble understanding him. Her two companions, however, understood nothing he said. Marie urged them to follow him. One of her colleagues objected. It didn’t take a linguist to interpret that the man had been drinking. But Marie and her other colleague trusted that this man, though reeking of alcohol, might be an answer to prayer.

They followed the man on the bike to his house. But once they arrived safely, it suddenly became a struggle to communicate. Marie no longer understood him when he spoke, and he no longer understood her.

The next morning, the language barrier that had momentarily broken down the night before was still lodged firmly in place. Even so, the Romanian man took one of Marie’s colleagues and an empty gasoline can door to door until they collected enough fuel to make it to the Romanian border.

Though staying the night with the Romanian man’s family was only a small side trip in a much larger journey, the experience made a deep impression on Marie. It was a far cry from her first experience with tongues. Raised a Catholic who found her way into a charismatic church, she then experienced the false gift of tongues, never doubting it was the real thing.

Not long before joining the Adventist Church, however, Marie heard about an experience that made her question this belief: A visitor to the Episcopal charismatic church service recognized one of the tongues being spoken during the service. But instead of words of praise to God, the person speaking in tongues uttered blasphemy. “The false gift of tongues is powerful when you hear it in others or hear it in yourself. But this visitor planted a seed,” Marie recalls, making her doubt the charismatic church’s use of the gift. “Later when I studied the Bible with a Seventh-day Adventist Bible worker, I learned the truth and let go of the false tongues.”

For Marie, traveling from Russia to Romania to hold seminars was more than just getting from point A to point B. What she learned about the true gift of tongues was in many ways the true destination of her journey.

Consider This: How would you help someone understand the Bible’s teaching of the gift of tongues? What’s the difference between the true gift and the false? How can you tell? How does Marie’s experience illustrate one of the true purposes of the gift of tongues?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: In what ways do you feel the Lord prompting you to use your God-given talents? In what ways can you use them to better serve your church and community?

Ask a volunteer to pray that God will help us to make good use of our spiritual gifts.

“The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ’s service. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 328.

“The man who makes the working of miracles the test of his faith will find that Satan can, through a species of deceptions, perform wonders that will appear to be genuine miracles.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 2, p. 52.

“Some of these persons have exercises which they call gifts and say that the Lord has placed them in the church. They have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver. Fanaticism, false excitement, false talking in tongues, and noisy exercises have been considered gifts which God has placed in the church. Some have been deceived here.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 412.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s study. What kind of gifts are manifested in your local church? How can you take better advantage of what you have? Most important, how are these gifts being used?

2. Pentecostal Christians believe that speaking in tongues is the evidence that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Scripture, what is the true evidence of a Spirit-filled life? See Gal. 5:22, 23.

3. What are some of the supernatural manifestations common in your culture and your part of the world? What seems to be the fruit of these manifestations? What are ways that you, as a church, cannot only protect other church members from being deceived but also help others outside the church be aware of the potential dangers inherent in these manifestations?

4. Discuss what Ellen G. White says in the first quote listed above. What does she mean about the gifts being “purified and ennobled”? What is she talking about? Can people have gifts that are used for wrong purposes? Explain.
The Gift of Prophecy and God’s Remnant Church

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Revelation 12; 14:1–12.

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17, NKJV).

The remnant theme first appears with Noah and his family (Gen. 7:23) and resurfaces in the history of Israel. The apostle Paul refers to a remnant (Rom. 11:5) that was then constituted of Jews who had accepted Jesus and who later became the nucleus of the Christian church. In the book of Revelation a remnant appears in the churches of Thyatira (Rev. 2:24) and Sardis (Rev. 3:4). It appears also in chapter 12—the subject of our study this week.

God’s faithful remnant was not always a visible remnant; that is, from the early days up to the last days, God has His faithful ones in different faiths, which is why the call is made: “‘Come out of her [Babylon], my people’” (Rev. 18:4). Nevertheless, there is a specific depiction of God’s remnant in the last days.

The Week at a Glance: What do the symbols in Revelation 12 represent? What events in history can be seen as a fulfillment of this chapter? What is the meaning of the phrases “the testimony of Jesus” and “the spirit of prophecy”?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.
Good Versus Evil: Act 1

Read Revelation 12:1–6. What’s happening here?

Revelation 12 introduces the great controversy between Christ and Satan in symbolic form and describes its progress from the time of Christ to the time of the end. In verse 1 John sees a dazzling sight—a pregnant woman, “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet” (NKJV), and wearing a crown of 12 stars. He calls the appearance a “great sign” (NKJV), indicating that the woman is more than a mere woman. She is a symbol for the church or for God’s faithful people (see Isa. 54:5, 6; 2 Cor. 11:2). The woman’s dazzling appearance links her to Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2, Rev. 1:16).

According to Revelation 12:6, the woman flees from the dragon into the wilderness, where she is taken care of by God for 1,260 days. What is this talking about, and what do the 1,260 days symbolize? Dan. 7:25, Rev. 12:14, 13:5.

Until the nineteenth century, most students of prophecy used the year-day principle, and so they understood the 1,260 days to refer to the time of persecution of the church during the Middle Ages, a period of 1,260 years.

And with good reason, too. First, the whole section is filled with symbols that aren’t taken literally, so why should the time element be taken literally, as well? Second, the various time phrases used in Daniel and Revelation—“time and times and half a time” (Dan. 7:25, 12:7, Rev. 12:14, NKJV), “forty-two months” (Rev. 11:2, 13:5, NKJV), and “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev. 11:3, 12:6, NKJV)—are not the natural way of expressing a literal three and one-half years (see Luke 4:25, James 5:17). For these reasons and others, Seventh-day Adventists (in contrast to most other Christians today) interpret the 1,260 days as 1,260 years and see it as a reference to the period of papal supremacy from the sixth to the end of the eighteenth century.

What are some of the symbols prevalent in your own society and culture? What purpose do they serve? What is the advantage (and disadvantage) of them? How do you use symbols in your everyday life? How does the way symbols are used around you help you better understand the way the Bible uses symbols?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Revelation 12:17

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That God’s people have the gift of prophecy.
- **Feel:** Gratitude for Jesus’ testimony about Himself and a desire to witness for Him.
- **Do:** Share with others what Jesus has revealed to us.

**Learning Outline:**

I. The Testimony of Jesus (*Rev. 1:1–3, 19:10*)
   - A What does this passage say about the process of revelation?
   - B In what sense did John have the testimony of Jesus? In what sense do we have it?

II. Speaking Up for Jesus (*Rev. 12:8–17*)
   - A How are prophets a blessing to the persecuted church?
   - B Read Revelation 1:9, 2:13, 6:9, 20:4. The Greek word for *testimony* or *witness* is also the origin of the word *martyr*. What does that tell us about what witness can entail?

III. Apply Spiritual Gifts (*John 1:6–9, Rev. 22:20*)
   - A As a prophetic people, how can we bear witness concerning the second coming of Jesus?
   - B How does your own witness complement the Word of God and Jesus’ testimony about Himself?

**Summary:** The testimony of Jesus and the Spirit of Prophecy are a continuation of God’s self-revelation through the Old Testament prophets, climaxing in Jesus and transmitted through the apostles, prophets, and martyrs of the early church. God’s end-time people are characterized as preserving and restoring this prophetic message. By the power of the Holy Spirit and through their words and deeds, they speak up for Jesus in the last days.
Good Versus Evil: Act 2

Revelation 12:7–12 is an interlude in the story; it focuses on the fall of Satan in heaven and his being cast down to the earth. Hence, we are given a glimpse into the origins of the great controversy as it began in another part of the universe. The back-and-forth between heaven and earth should tell us how closely events in one impact events in the other. Truly, we are in the midst of a cosmic battle!

Revelation 12:13–17 picks up the story from verse 6 and describes in symbolic terms the persecution of the Christian church, first by the Roman Empire and later by the apostate Roman Church. What do the symbols here represent?

In these verses, a flood of water is sent against God’s people, a symbol of persecuting armies (Jer. 46:7, 8; 47:2; Dan. 9:26). In contrast, in Revelation 12:16 the earth is described as helping the persecuted church. In 1620, the first pilgrims, fleeing the religious persecution in Europe, arrived on the American continent. On this newly discovered continent, they found a safe haven where the persecuting armies of the European powers could not reach them. Thus, symbolically, the new continent America swallowed up the persecuting armies.

In Revelation 12:17, we are now in the time after the 1,260-day period (which ended at the close of the eighteenth century). Satan, seeing that he was unable to wipe out God’s faithful people, is angry with a particular group called “the rest of her offspring” (NKJV) or “the remnant of her seed” (KJV).


How much simpler could God have made it? This end-time remnant will be distinguished, first of all, by the fact that it keeps the commandments of God, all of them, which, of course, includes the seventh-day Sabbath.

How firm are you in your own mind regarding God’s call that we keep His commandments? How can you be sure that the Lord commands us to keep them? How do you respond to arguments against keeping the commandments, especially the Sabbath?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Few may be called to serve as prophets, but it is our responsibility as members of God’s remnant church to share God’s revelation of truth with a dying world.

It was suicide, not war. And the 300 Spartan soldiers knew they were going to their deaths. But a glorious death was what a Spartan was bred for from the age of seven. And so the elite hoplite warriors calmly followed their king to the narrow pass of Thermopylae to die.

Herodotus tells us that the Persians sent a spy to observe the Spartans on the eve before battle. The hoplite warriors combed out their long hair and rubbed oil into their skin, anointing themselves for death. King Xerxes laughed when he heard this, ridiculing them for being feminine and for their vastly inferior numbers. He expected a quick and easy victory.

But three days later Xerxes was no longer laughing. Ten thousand Immortals, the elite corps of the Persian army, were cut into pieces against the Spartan phalanx, with only two or three Spartan deaths in the first day of battle. The next day met with similar results. A wall of Persian corpses began to pile so high that the morale of his army began to suffer, despite his superior numbers.

After three days of battle, Xerxes learned of a goat path that led around the Greek lines. Herodotus says that when Leonidas, the Spartan leader, heard Xerxes was coming around to attack him from behind, he ordered the bulk of the force to retreat to Athens, allowing them valuable time to prepare for a naval battle against Persia. With only a remnant of the original force, the small army shrank even smaller, comprised of the Spartans, seven hundred Thespians, and the Spartan slaves.

The Persian army came at the remnant from both sides, raining arrows down on them until all died. But the sacrifice made by the 300 and their allies kept the deadly Persian calvary from sweeping down on the retreating Greek force. Though the Greeks lost the battle, it signified the beginning of the end of the Persian Empire.—www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae.

**Consider This:** A remnant is defined as a small group that remains or is left over. In the last days, God will have a remnant of believers. Based on the account above, how would you define the characteristics of a remnant? What qualities did the Spartans show in battle that the remnant must have in spiritual warfare?
The Testimony of Jesus

The second identifying mark of the remnant church is “the testimony of Jesus” (marturía Iesou). This expression occurs six times in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4, NIV).

What is the meaning of the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” in the following texts? Rev. 1:2, 9; 19:10; 20:4, NIV.

Two grammatically possible explanations concerning its meaning have been put forward. The first view interprets “the testimony of Jesus” as man’s witness for Christ (NEB, RSV). The second view understands “the testimony of Jesus” as the self-revelation of Jesus—His own testimony (NIV, NKJV).

A study of the word testimony in John’s writings indicates that each time it appears in the same grammatical construction as in Revelation, it always refers to Jesus’ own testimony (John 1:19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31). In contrast, the idea of witnessing about somebody in John’s writings consistently is expressed by a different grammatical construction.

In the book of Revelation, therefore, the expression “testimony of Jesus” also should be understood as Jesus’ testimony about Himself and not the remnant’s testimony about Him. This is borne out by a study of the texts in Revelation themselves. Revelation 1:2 says that John bore witness to “the word of God” and to “the testimony of Jesus.” Thus, “the word of God” refers to what God says and is parallel to “the testimony of Jesus.” Thus, “the word of God” is simply what Jesus says; it is the testimony that Jesus gives about Himself.

The same is true in Revelation 1:9. John introduces himself, states his credentials, and says that he is on the island of Patmos because of “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus.” The parallelism between the “word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” is again clearly discernible. Thus, according to the principle of interpreting scripture with scripture, every text in the book of Revelation where the phrase “testimony of Jesus” appears always refers to Jesus’ own testimony.

How has Jesus revealed Himself to you? Would you like to know Him better? What is the only way you can?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED


STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Remnant: Past and Present (Read Revelation 12:17, 14:12, and chapter 19 with your class.)

The word remnant comes from the Greek word loipoi that means “remaining ones” and from leipo, “to leave behind.” God always had a remnant of Israelites, preserved from captivity, famine, and pestilence to continue as His chosen people. Again and again, the majority of God’s people apostatized, and a remnant was “left,” implying a few from many (see Isa. 10:22 and Jer. 42:2). Interestingly, the Hebrew counterpart to the Greek word translated “remnant” does not imply the last of anything, except that those who remain faithful are the last link in their generation of the chosen line.

Ever since the days of Abraham, God has preserved a last link or remnant of His people. Jesus divinely commissioned the Christian church as the successor to Judah, appointing it as the custodian of His purposes on earth and making it His chosen instrument for the salvation of humanity. As part of this divine commission, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has recognized the importance of the three angels’ messages, believing that they contain special truth for these last days. Seventh-day Adventists have proclaimed these messages and believe their movement to be the remnant depicted in Bible prophecy.

The defining characteristics of the remnant in Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 are obeying the commandments of God and having the spirit of prophecy—the testimony of Jesus Christ. The testimony of Jesus is defined as the Spirit of prophecy. Seventh-day Adventists take this to mean that the remnant will be distinguished by the gift of prophecy in their midst. We believe that the ministry of Ellen G. White fulfills the requirements of Revelation 12:17 in a unique way.
The Spirit of Prophecy

**Revelation 19:10** says, “‘For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ In all of Scripture the phrase “spirit of prophecy” appears only in this text. What does it mean? I Cor. 12:8–10, 28; Eph. 4:11.

The closest parallel to the phrase “spirit of prophecy” in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. There Paul refers to the Holy Spirit, who gives the gift of prophecy among other gifts (charismata), and the person who receives this gift is called a prophet.

Now, just as in 1 Corinthians 12:28, those who have the gift of prophecy (verse 10 of the same chapter) are called prophets—in Revelation 22:8, 9 those who have the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10) are also called prophets.

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’” (Rev. 19:10, NKJV).

“I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God’” (Rev. 22:8, 9, NKJV).

The situation in both passages is the same. John falls at the feet of the angel to worship. The words of the angel’s response are almost identical, yet the difference is significant. In Revelation 19:10, the brethren are identified by the phrase “who hold to [have] the testimony of Jesus” (NIV). In Revelation 22:9, the brethren are called simply “prophets.”

If the Protestant principle of interpreting scripture by scripture means anything, this comparison must lead to the conclusion that “the spirit of prophecy” in Revelation 19:10 is the prophetic gift, which is given not to church members in general but only to those who have been called by God to be prophets.

This is not purely an Adventist interpretation. Lutheran scholar Hermann Strathmann says about “brothers who have the testimony of Jesus” (NJKV) in 19:10: “According to the parallel 22:9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general, but the prophets. . . . If they have the marturia Iesou [the testimony of Jesus], they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets.”—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), vol. 4, p. 501.
Consider This: What is the mission of the remnant church? Define the role that the three angels’ messages play in that mission.

II. Counterfeits and Cautions (Review Matthew 24 and Revelation 19 with your class.)

Jesus warns His disciples in Matthew 24 that there will be counterfeit manifestations of the gift of prophecy in the last days. John counsels the church to test those who claim to have the prophetic gift (1 John 4:1). The following are some standards for those who profess to speak on behalf of God: (1) their personal lives should be in harmony with Scripture; (2) their messages should be in harmony with Scripture; (3) their ministry should exalt Jesus as Savior and the Son of God; and (4) their ministry should be confirmed by predictions that come true.

F. M. Wilcox, in a morning devotional study at the General Conference Session on Friday, June 7, 1946, wrote, “The unity of the faith has not yet been fully attained by the church of Christ [the Seventh-day Adventist Church]; she has not yet arrived unto the perfect knowledge of the Son of God, or unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. There is still need that she be saved from false winds of doctrine, from the sleight of [men and women] and their cunning craftiness. Therefore the gifts of the Spirit of God are as greatly needed in the church today as ever before in her history.”

Consider This: If Elder Wilcox was right about Adventists 61 years ago, would you say he is even more right now? What protection or safeguards does God offer us against counterfeit spiritual manifestations? What kind of assurance does this give us?
The Remnant Church

From our study thus far, we understand that in Revelation 12:17 “the rest of her offspring” (NKJV) refers to God’s visible remnant church that can be recognized by two specific characteristics: (1) they “keep the commandments of God” as God has given them on Mount Sinai, including the Sabbath commandment, and (2) they “have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is the Spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift.

The Sabbath-keeping Adventist movement, from even before its organization in 1863, always has claimed these identifying signs for itself. As Adventists we proclaim the Ten Commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath; and we believe that as a church we have the testimony of Jesus; that is, that God manifested Himself in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just one church among many. It is a church prophetically foreseen. God has called this church into existence for a very specific purpose—to proclaim the three angels’ messages to a dying world.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What is happening there that helps us understand some of the characteristics of God’s end-time people? What elements come into play, and in what ways are we justified in seeing ourselves and our calling there?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that we are members of God’s remnant church. However, this identification with the remnant church does not accord us an exclusive status with God. We can be part of this corporate remnant and still be lost. Salvation is not guaranteed through membership in any church. We are saved as individuals, not as a church. It’s a great privilege and responsibility, being part of this church, because we have a sacred calling; but being a member of this church no more guarantees salvation than being a Hebrew in ancient Israel did (Jer. 8:20).

What is your only guarantee of salvation, and how can you have it as your own?
**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Question:**
Jesus was clear: what he said was what the Father asked Him to say (John 12:48, 49), and God gave him the Spirit without limits (John 3:34). Therefore, Revelation 19:10 declares that “the testimony of Jesus,” which inspired the prophets, has divine origins through “the spirit of prophecy” or the Holy Spirit. It further confirms that the messages of the remnant people, who declare the testimony of Jesus, have divine origins. With this in mind, how would you explain to a young Christian that the messages of the remnant church are definitely from God?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**Application Question:**
God has called the Seventh-day Adventist Church into existence for a specific purpose (Rev. 14:6–12) and has given us enlightening information through the pen of Ellen G. White. What is the importance of Ellen G. White’s writings to us as a church?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**STEP 4—Apply**

(Read the following to the class and discuss its significance.)

In responding to the question “Shall we regard the Testimonies as an addition to the Scriptures?” in a study lesson on the gift of prophecy, E. L. Cardey said, “No, we are rather to regard the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy as we would a telescope, which does not add stars to the universe, but brings them into clearer view.”

Ask a volunteer to pray that God will help us to understand His true love for us.

“One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White—the Lord’s messenger. Her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”—Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . (2nd ed.,) (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 247.

A study of the idea of the remnant in the Old Testament reveals a few interesting characteristics. Perhaps the most important one is that all through the Bible, the remnant were those who were living with more light than others. Noah had the light about the coming flood. Abraham had the light about the true God. The nation of Israel was worshiping the Lord in the sanctuary, while their pagan neighbors were sacrificing children on their altars or bowing down to statues of cats and bulls and other animals. In short, the idea of the remnant had more to do with a revelation of truth and of God’s character than with the holiness of those who had that knowledge. The point? As expressed in Thursday’s lesson, being part of the remnant means only that you have great light, and with that light comes important responsibilities. It does not mean you automatically have salvation; nor does it mean that those who aren’t part of the remnant are lost. It’s an unfortunate fact of sacred history that many of those who were part of God’s remnant not only failed to live up to the light they were given but oftentimes rebelled against it.

Discussion Questions:

1. What important message is found in Luke 12:48 for those who believe that they are part of the remnant church?

2. The claim that we are the “remnant church” can sound very arrogant and exclusive. And yet, why does it make sense that God would have a special people with a special message in the last days? Or does it? Discuss.

3. If being in the remnant does not guarantee salvation, then what’s the advantage of being part of it?
The Inspiration of the Prophets

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Jer. 36:1–4; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:1–4, 20, 21.

Memory Text: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Christians have long debated the question, What does it mean when we say that the Bible is inspired? For Seventh-day Adventists there is, in addition, the question of the inspiration of Ellen G. White. In 1906, she wrote a letter to an Adventist physician in which she refuted the idea that every word she wrote was as inspired as the Ten Commandments: “My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have made any such claims, neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause ever made such claims.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 24. This week we will study some of the issues surrounding the question of inspiration.

The Week at a Glance: What is the difference between inspiration and revelation? What is the difference between verbal and thought inspiration? Can prophets get help from others when they write? What are some examples of prophets quoting sources outside the Bible?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.
Revelation-Inspiration

Study 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20, 21. What do these texts tell us about the divine activity in the production of the books of the Bible?

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul says that the Bible is theopneustos (God-breathed). In the Latin translation of the Bible the text reads, scriptura divinitus inspirata, from which we get the English word inspired. Paul is saying that the Bible had its origin in an activity of the Holy Spirit. Through visions and dreams, the Holy Spirit revealed truth to the prophets (revelation), and then He ensured, through His guidance in the writing process (inspiration), that what the prophet wrote was in harmony with what God had revealed.

Second Peter 1:21 tells us that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (NIV). As a ship is carried along by the wind, the biblical writers were moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus, revelation-inspiration refers to that process whereby the Holy Spirit revealed to the prophets what God wanted them to know and then guided them in the proclamation of that message. Some spoke the word; others wrote it down. The written form became the inspired (God-breathed) Scripture.

Although in the New Testament the apostles did not claim inspiration as frequently as did the Old Testament writers, it is obvious that they regarded their messages as given by divine authority. Paul, for example, wrote, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches” (1 Cor. 2:13, NKJV), and “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13, NKJV).

Yet, the Bible is also a human book. At face value it bears all the hallmarks of human authorship. Authors in recording their own experiences refer to themselves with personal pronouns (Neh. 1:1–11, Dan. 10:1–9, Gal. 1:12–20), the customs and traditions of the authors’ times are seen in the writings, and some of the psalms and proverbs reflect the literature and culture of the surrounding nations. In short, though inspired by the Lord, the Bible also reflects the humanness of its penmen.

Of all the Bible authors, which one’s humanity comes through most clearly to you? In what ways can you sympathize and relate to that author purely on a human level? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Timothy 3:16

The Student Will:
- Know: God reveals Himself to His prophets, inspiring them to speak, write, and act.
- Feel: Respect for the prophets and the sacredness of their writings.
- Do: Read the Bible to hear God’s voice.

Learning Outline:

I. From God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21)
   - What is God’s role in the writings of Scripture?
   - What does 1 Thessalonians 2:13 call the message of the apostles?

II. By Human Beings (Jer. 36:1–8)
   - What does this passage reveal about the human phenomenon of inspiration? How might these men have felt speaking and writing these words?
   - Read 2 Samuel 23:2. What do you think it was like for prophets to receive a revelation and be inspired to speak and write?
   - Read 2 Timothy 4:13. Is this text verbally inspired, thought inspired, or not inspired at all? What does this suggest about the nature of the Bible?

III. Inspiration and Ellen G. White (Luke 1:1–4)
   - How does the biblical model of inspiration help us understand the inspiration of Ellen G. White? What insights does Ellen G. White’s ministry give us into the inspiration of biblical prophets?
   - How do you feel about the fact that Ellen White borrowed from other sources, used literary assistants, had an editorial process, and compiled books from her earlier writings?

Summary: God’s revelation and the inspiration of His prophets is a dynamic process. Rather than overpowering the prophet’s humanity, God embraces it with His Spirit.
Verbal or Thought Inspiration

**What** do the following texts tell us about inspiration in Scripture?

* Isa. 2:1, 2; Ezek. 36:16; 1 Cor. 7:10–12, 39, 40; 1 Thess. 2:13.

---

Two important theories of inspiration are:

**Verbal Inspiration.** The focus in verbal inspiration is on the words of the Bible rather than on the author. All the words are said to be inspired by God, who chooses from the vocabulary and educational background of the writer. According to this view, only the original writings of the biblical writers are inspired, not the copies, which might have errors. This view must be distinguished from the dictation theory of inspiration, in which every word in Scripture is dictated by the Holy Spirit without reference to the vocabulary and educational background of the writer.

**Thought Inspiration.** The focus here is on the writers, not on the words. Primarily the thoughts, not so much the words of the Bible, are inspired (1 Cor. 7:10–12, 39, 40; 1 Thess. 2:13), except when the words of God or an angel are quoted (Jer. 29:30, 31; Rev. 19:9) or when God speaks directly through a prophet (Num. 22:35; 23:1–12, 26). The writer receives the vision, dream, or thought and puts it down in writing in his own words (Isa. 2:1, 2; Rev. 4:1): the Holy Spirit ensures that the words used convey God’s truth correctly. The Bible, therefore, is declared to be the infallible revelation of God’s will.

On the basis of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, Adventists hold to thought inspiration. “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. As the last sentence indicates, the words of the prophet become the Word of God. In the same vein David wrote, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2, NKJV). This indicates that inspiration not only imparted thoughts but ensured that the Written Word accurately conveyed God’s thoughts.

**Why is it important to have a correct understanding of how inspiration works? What are the dangers of holding wrong views?**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God inspired the prophets to write in their own style and from the perspective of their own culture.

A class member comes to your Sabbath school class and says one of the following statements: “You’ll never guess what the Lord showed me this week” or “The Lord spoke to me this week and told me...” What is your immediate reaction to this person?

1. How wonderful! Share it with us!
2. It couldn’t have been the Lord, because He doesn’t speak to us personally anymore.
3. Half believing and half skeptical.

How would you then relate to this person? How could this expression be misconstrued?

**Consider This:** We are told that prophets are inspired by the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit speak to people today? What methods does He use?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Revelation—Inspiration

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in thought inspiration—that the thoughts of the Bible writers were inspired but not their actual words.

**Consider This:** Ask someone in the class to read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. How would this text confirm or deny this belief?

“The writing of the Bible took place over a period of more than 1,000 years. Although most, if not all, the writers of Scripture were Israelite or Jewish,
Visions and Physical Phenomena

What do the following texts tell us about how heavenly visions affected some biblical prophets? Dan. 10:7–9, 17, 18; Acts 9:1–5; Rev. 1:17.

To stand in the presence of a heavenly being can be a powerful experience. Daniel, Saul (Paul), and John all fell to the ground when they received a heavenly vision. Daniel wrote, “No strength remained in me” (NKJV), and John said, “I fell at his feet as dead.” Ellen White describes her experience with these words: “As inquiries are frequently made as to my state in vision, and after I come out, I would say that when the Lord sees fit to give a vision, I am taken into the presence of Jesus and angels, and am entirely lost to earthly things. I can see no farther than the angel directs me.”—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 36.

In 1868 her husband, James White, gave the following description of her physical appearance while in vision: “1. She is utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her; 2. She does not breathe. . . . [This] has been repeatedly proved by pressing upon the chest, and by closing the mouth and nostrils; 3. Immediately on entering vision, her muscles become rigid, and joints fixed, so far as any external force can influence them; . . . 4. On coming out of vision, whether in the daytime or a well-lighted room at night, all is total darkness. Her power to distinguish even the most brilliant objects, held within a few inches of the eyes, returns but gradually.”—Life Incidents (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press, 1868), p. 272.

Many observed her during her visions. Joseph Bates, for example, wrote, “I have seen her in vision a number of times, and also in Topsham, Maine; and those who were present during some of those exciting scenes know well with what interest and intensity I listened to every word, and watched every move to detect deception or mesmeric influence. And I thank God for the opportunity I have had with others to witness these things. I can now confidently speak for myself. I believe the work is of God.”—Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White, p. 89.

However impressive these physical manifestations might be, why must we not base our belief in her gift on them? What ultimately must be the final test of Ellen White’s prophetic calling?
these authors lived in a wide variety of circumstances.”—The New International Version Archaeological Study Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), p. xii.

**Consider This:** Because so many different individuals wrote the Bible and it has been copied down through the centuries, is it not possible that errors could have been made in the process? Why or why not? What implications does your answer have for your faith in God?

“Some look to us gravely and say, ‘Don’t you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?’ This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 16.

**Consider This:** How do the above quotes affect your belief in the accuracy of the Bible? Is there anything to take into consideration? If so, what?

**II. Visions and Physical Phenomena**

**Consider This:** Wherever possible, divide your class into three groups. Ask each group to read and discuss one of the following texts, then to identify for the class who was having the vision and how it affected him.

- *Group 1*—Daniel 10:7–9
- *Group 2*—Acts 9:1–5
- *Group 3*—Rev. 1:17

Not all visions or instructions from the Lord recorded in the Bible indicate that they were accompanied by physical manifestations. The Lord spoke to Joseph and revealed Pharaoh’s dream. He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and Daniel, as well as many others in the same way.

**Consider This:** Which of the following conditions would help you believe that someone had a vision from the Lord:
Inspiration and Literary Assistants

Prophets were not God’s pens but His penmen. What they saw or heard in visions and dreams they wrote down according to the best of their ability. From Scripture we know that some of the biblical authors had secretaries to help them write down the messages of God.

Read Jeremiah 36:1–4, Romans 16:22, 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:15–18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17. What do they tell us about the use of literary assistants?

Thus, both Old Testament and New Testament writers used literary assistants or scribes to write down the messages God had given them.

From New Testament times we know that at times scribes used a wax tablet to take down the gist of what the author wanted to say before they wrote a good copy of the letter. Prior to sending it, the author would go over the letter to make sure it conveyed to the reader what he wanted to say.

Ellen White also used literary helpers. Here’s why:

1. With formal schooling ending at the age of nine, she recognized her own limitations as a writer. “I am not a grammarian. I will try, if the Lord will help me, at forty-five years old to become a scholar in the science. God will help me. I believe He will.”—Selected Messages, book 3, p. 90. Thus, some of her assistants functioned as her copy editors.

2. The great demand for her writings made it necessary for her to have literary help. “After my husband’s death, faithful helpers joined me, who labored untiringly in the work of copying the testimonies and preparing articles for publication.”—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 50.

3. Because most of her books were not written as books but were put together from previously written material, she needed special assistance in their production. Marian Davis was Ellen White’s bookmaker. “She takes my articles which are published in the papers, and pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if when she finds it, she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it. The books are not Marian’s productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings.”—Selected Messages, book 3, p. 91.

How does this understanding help us better grasp how inspiration works? What wrong views might you have held on the topic of inspiration?
Learning Cycle

1. The vision was accompanied by some physical evidence.
2. The tenor of the person’s life showed evidence that he or she was led by God.
3. The message of the vision coincided with what the Bible says.

III. Inspiration and Literary Assistants (Read Romans 16:22 and 1 Corinthians 16:21.)

Despite all the technology of today, people still need to use literary assistants for a variety of reasons. How much more this would have been true during the time that the Bible was written by hand. Imagine how long it would have taken a prophet to write out everything in his or her own handwriting.

Consider This:
1. Is Romans any less inspired than 1 Corinthians?
2. Why do you think Paul would have someone else write his letter to the Romans?

Surely God is big enough and great enough to protect His words and preserve them for our education and guidance today.

STEP 3—Practice

Class Activity: When you were a child, at some time or other you probably played the game gossip. The teacher or leader would say a sentence in someone’s ear and that person would whisper it to the next person and so on. By the time the sentence got back to the teacher, it rarely resembled what the teacher originally had said.

(Try this in your class, if you have time.)

Thought Questions:

1. In the eighth century B.C. the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, wrote the book of Isaiah. Read Isaiah 53:3–5. What is he describing? If God had not been the one who was inspiring the writers of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Daniel, or Jeremiah, how do you think it would have all fit together as it does?
Inspiration and the Book of Luke


In writing his Gospel, Luke doesn’t seem to have relied on dreams or visions. Neither was he an eyewitness to the events he describes. Instead, he worked from what he had learned from others, all, no doubt, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, which ensured that what he wrote down was in harmony with the historical events and God’s will.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul not only received information orally from others (1 Cor. 1:10, 11) but in a few places quoted from the writings of pagan authors. For example, in Acts 17:28 he quotes from the Cilician poet Aratus (ca. 315–240 B.C.) who wrote, “It is with Zeus that every one of us in every way has to do, for we are also his offspring.” See also 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Titus 1:12, where Paul quoted other sources, all in order to teach inspired truth.

Ellen White from time to time used other books as sources for her own works. In the introduction to The Great Controversy she wrote: “The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. . . . In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works.”—Pages xi and xii.

Prophets using other sources? Many people find that disturbing. What does this tell us, though, about how inspiration can work? If you think about it, what’s wrong with prophets under the guidance of the Holy Spirit going to other sources as a way of helping express truth?
2 There are people today who believe that God spoke to the prophets of the past but that there are no modern prophets or that God does not speak to us today. Is it our responsibility to convince them, or does the Holy Spirit alone have to do the convincing? Give reasons for your answer.

**Application Questions:**

1. What New Testament texts can you cite that show Isaiah’s prophecy to have been true? What does that reveal to you about the reliability of God’s Word?

2. What other prophecies from the Old Testament can you cite whose fulfillment is shown in the New Testament? How might this be used as an effective way of witnessing?

**Consider This:** If time permits, list the Old Testament and New Testament texts on a flip chart for everyone to see. Ask: How can knowing this strengthen your belief in prophecy?

How can the comparison of Old Testament prophecies and their New Testament fulfillment strengthen someone else’s faith in the whole Bible?

**STEP 4—Apply**

Because God loves us so very much, He wants to give us all the help we need to live in a close relationship with Him. This includes the Bible and all its prophecies and the Spirit of Prophecy written by Ellen G. White. He also will speak directly to us through His Holy Spirit, if we only will listen. However, there will be times we may wrestle in our understanding of the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy. When this happens, what should we do? What guidelines can we follow to resolve conflicts? Consider the following ideas:

1. Pray for God’s enlightenment.
2. Consider the principle involved.
3. Consider the time and place of the writing and the writer’s culture.
4. Discuss your findings with other Christians whom you respect spiritually.
5. Wait on the Lord to reveal the answer.

“Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God. You know how the Lord has manifested Himself through the Spirit of prophecy. Past, present, and future have passed before me. I have been shown faces that I had never seen, and years afterward I knew them when I saw them. I have been aroused from my sleep with a vivid sense of subjects previously presented to my mind and I have written, at midnight, letters that have gone across the continent, and arriving at a crisis, have saved great disaster to the cause of God. This has been my work for many years. A power has impelled me to reprove and rebuke wrongs that I had not thought of. Is this work of the last thirty-six years from above or from beneath? . . .

“. . . In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper, expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, read your answers to Sunday’s study and compare notes on which prophets members were able to relate to. Which prophets were picked, and why?

2. Some people have worked on the assumption that some parts of the Bible are more inspired than others. Though it’s true that some parts might be more relevant to us today than others, that’s radically different from the idea that some parts are more inspired than others. What’s the great danger of taking such a position? As you think about it, ask yourself the following questions: Who decides which parts are more inspired than others? What criteria does one use to make that determination? Where does the authority to make these decisions come from? What happens when people disagree about which parts are more inspired than others?

3. Think about the life and teachings of Ellen White during her long years of ministry. Despite the large amount of misinformation out there about her and her ministry, and despite the frequency with which her writings have been abused, what great evidence and reasons do we have for believing in the reality of her prophetic gift?
LESSON 6  *January 31–February 6

Testing the Prophets

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 8:20; Jer. 18:6–10; Jonah 3; 4; Matt. 7:20; Gal. 2:11–14.

Memory Text: “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NKJV).

Fundamental Belief number 18 states, “One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White, the Lord’s messenger. Her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”—Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . (2nd ed.) (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 247. (See Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14–21; Heb. 1:1–3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10).

Although Mrs. White never called herself a prophetess, the church has recognized her as such. In 1905 she wrote: “Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to designate myself.”—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 36. This week we’ll look a little closer at her prophetic gift.

The Week at a Glance: How did God communicate to His prophets? What are the biblical tests of a true prophet? What is conditional prophecy? Are prophets infallible? Why do we believe that Ellen G. White’s visions and prophetic dreams were from God?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.
Dreams and Visions

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).

How did God communicate with individuals whom He called to prophetic office? Gen. 15:1, Num. 12:6–8, Dan. 7:1.

In Scripture we learn that God primarily used dreams and visions to communicate with His messengers. Prophetic dreams played an important role in the time of the patriarchs (Genesis 20–41), in the ministry of Daniel (Daniel 1–7), and in the Nativity narratives (Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 19, 22). Visions frequently are mentioned in the writings of the prophets (Isa. 1:1, Ezek. 1:1, Dan. 8:1, Obad. 1:1, Nah. 1:1) and in the book of Acts (9:10, 10:3, 11:5, 16:9, 18:9).

During her 70-year ministry (1844–1915) Ellen White received an estimated two thousand visions and prophetic dreams. “At times I am carried far ahead into the future and shown what is to take place. Then again I am shown things as they have occurred in the past. After I come out of vision I do not at once remember all that I have seen, and the matter is not so clear before me until I write, then the scene rises before me as was presented in vision, and I can write with freedom.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 36.

Often her visions were given while she was in the presence of others, who observed certain physical phenomena—she did not breathe, she had supernatural strength (no one could move her limbs), and she was unconscious of her surroundings. Adventists and non-Adventists have testified to the supernatural character of her visions. At the General Conference session in 1893, J. N. Loughborough said: “I have seen Sister White in vision about fifty times. . . . She has been examined while in vision by skillful physicians, and we have testimonials from them which declare that the phenomena of her visions are beyond their comprehension.”—General Conference Daily Bulletin, January 29, 1893.

What’s been your experience with Ellen White’s writings? In what ways have they impacted your spiritual life? Put aside any preconceived notions that you might have about her published works, and just read some of them. What can they tell you about the author?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 2:11–14

The Student Will:

Know: How to test a prophet.

Feel: Gratitude that God reveals Himself to us even though we are flawed.

Do: Read the writings of Ellen White, always submitting them to the test of Scripture.

Learning Outline:

I. Prophets Under Scrutiny (Isa. 6:1–10)

A How do the visions of a prophet inform his or her message?

B According to Isaiah 8:20, what is one important test of revealed truth?

C What is another important test identified in Jeremiah 28:9?

D What important qualifier does Jeremiah 18:6–10 offer to this test?

E What fourth test is found in 1 John 4:1–2?

F What final test does Jesus offer in Matthew 7:15–23?

II. Prophets Are Not Perfect (Gal. 2:11–14)

A What do incidents such as the one in Galatians 2:11–14 tell you about the people God uses to reveal His purpose?

B How does it feel to know that God can use you despite your imperfections?

III. Put to the Test (Jer. 28:5–11)

A Think about how a prophet must feel under public scrutiny. How can we test anyone claiming to have a message from God in a way that is not dismissive or hurtful but strengthens a community’s faith in Jesus and God’s Word?

B How must we put the writings of Ellen White to the test?

Summary: God often reveals Himself to prophets through dreams and visions. But not all dreams and visions come from God. We need to test prophets and their message and accept what is from God.
Agreement With the Bible

**What** is one of the most important tests of a true prophet? *Isa. 8:20.

Why should this be so important?

---

*Law (Heb. torah)* is the common biblical term for the inspired writings of Moses (*Deut. 4:44, 31:9*); the *testimony* refers to the witness of the prophets (*2 Chron. 23:11, John 3:32*). In other words, what a prophet says must harmonize with what God has revealed already. Though later prophets may reveal additional insights regarding the plan of salvation, they will not contradict what God has said before. God’s unchangeableness (*Mal. 3:6*) is at stake in His revelations to humanity.

An example of this test of a true prophet is given in Jeremiah 28. Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would serve the king of Babylon 70 years (*Jer. 25:11*). A few years into the 70 years, Hananiah the son of Azur claimed otherwise: “In the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, ‘Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: “I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord’s house . . . with all the captives of Judah who went to Babylon,” says the Lord’ ” (*Jer. 28:1–4, NKJV*). Because this was not in harmony with what God had told Jeremiah previously, God gave another message to Jeremiah: “Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord: ‘. . . This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord.’ So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month” (*Jer. 28:15–17, NKJV*).

Every true prophet has made the writings of previous prophets the benchmark for his or her own ministry. The same is true for Ellen White. Anyone familiar with her books can testify that she used Scripture profusely. She immersed herself in the Bible and constantly referred to the biblical text, and what she wrote is in agreement with the Bible. Although she was not a theologian and did not write an exegetical commentary on the Bible, her message is in harmony with the message of Scripture.

**Why must harmony with the Bible be our final test of everything moral, spiritual, and theological? Why must we have a final authority, especially in spiritual and theological matters?**
Learning Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1 — Motivate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Biblically based tests are given to determine whether a prophet is a true spokesperson for God or is speaking on his or her own. These tests strengthen our assurance in God’s Word.

*Bring a sample tabloid featuring a prominent modern “seer” to show the class. Or browse the Internet for an article. A third option in lieu of this would be to ask for a volunteer to share a story of someone he or she may have heard about who claimed to be able to see into the future.*

In the day and age in which we live, many people set themselves up as being able to predict the future. Depending on where you live, you need only to glance at the tabloids in the racks as you stand in a grocery line (or wait to pay for your purchases in almost any store) to see many of their names and their predictions. This is especially true as an old year ends and a new one begins.

Jeane Dixon and Nostradamus are two of the more famous prognosticators. What names have you observed today that are popular or becoming popular?

**Consider This:** What makes these people so popular? Why do otherwise logical people read these predictions and tend more and more to believe them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 2 — Explore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Bible Commentary**

I. Dreams, Visions, Angels—Communicators From God

In the beginning God spoke to Adam and Eve face-to-face. Because of sin this became impossible. He then chose to communicate with humans via dreams and visions. Angels also were chosen communicators of what God wanted them to say.
Fulfilled Prophecy

Read Jeremiah 18:6–10. What important principle regarding the fulfillment of predictions is found here?

The proof of a true prophet lies, in part, in the fulfillment of his or her predictions (see 1 Sam. 9:6, Jer. 28:9, Lam. 3:37). At the same time, though, not all predictions come to pass if the people involved have a change of heart. It’s what is known as conditional prophecy, and it’s important for us to understand.

Study Jonah 3 and 4. What must be taken into consideration in applying the test of fulfilled prophecy?

The fulfillment of most prophecies (exceptions are the end-time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation) is dependent on the actions and attitudes of the people concerned. Jonah made the clear-cut statement, given to him from God, that in 40 days Nineveh would be “overturned” (Jonah 3:4, NIV). Yet, it never happened. Was Jonah a false prophet? Of course not. Instead, the prophecy was conditional—its fulfillment depended upon how the people responded to the message God had given them.

This principle may explain why a particular prophecy made by Ellen White did not come to pass. In 1856, Mrs. White declared: “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.’” —Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, pp. 131, 132.

All who were alive way back then are now, of course, dead. How do we explain this? The answer is conditional prophecy. We must remember that she was told God’s kingdom could have come in her lifetime. In 1896 she wrote: “If those who claimed to have a living experience in the things of God had done their appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would have been warned ere this, and the Lord Jesus would have come in power and great glory.”—Review and Herald, Oct. 6, 1896.

In the last volume of the Testimonies for the Church, published in 1909, she wrote, “If every soldier of Christ had done his duty, if every watchman on the walls of Zion had given the trumpet a certain sound, the world might ere this have heard the message of warning. But the work is years behind. While men have slept, Satan has stolen a march upon us.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 29. If we apply the principle of conditionality to her 1856 vision, the problem disappears. See also Friday’s lesson.
**Consider This:** Ask someone to read Numbers 12:5, 6. What did God say He would use in His efforts to communicate to His people? Why would He use those ways instead of other ways? What other ways could the Lord communicate to His prophets?

1. Ask someone to read Zechariah 1:9, 13, 14. What did God say about the way in which He spoke to Moses?
2. Ask someone to read Numbers 12:7, 8. What did Moses see when God spoke to him face-to-face?
3. Why do you think it was only the back of God’s form that Moses saw?

**II. Tests of a True Prophet**

**Just for Teachers:** Prepare the following texts in advance either on individual pieces of paper or on a flip chart: Isaiah 8:20; John 3:27; John 3:34; John 5:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21.

As we discussed earlier, not everyone who calls himself or herself a prophet really is. However, God does not leave us in doubt as to whether or not we should believe a person who claims to be speaking for God. He has given us specific instructions on how to test any person who claims to have a message from Him. He also has told us how to test the truthfulness of what is said.

**Consider This:**

1. Have someone read John 3:34. Ask: Even though John is speaking directly about Jesus, how can what he says help us in testing a prophet or their predictions?

2. Have someone read John 3:27. Ask: Where does John say true prophecy comes from?

3. Have someone read John 5:39. Ask: About whom will a true prophet preach? What will he preach about Jesus?

4. Have someone read Isaiah 8:20. Ask: What acid test must be given to all prophecy to prove that it is true?

5. Have someone read 1 Thessalonians 5:20–22. Ask: Once we have tested the prophet and his or her words, what should we do?
Confessing Jesus, the God-man

**What** was one of the issues John faced in his time, and what does he say is another mark of a true prophet? *1 John 4:1, 2.*

One of the problems in John’s day was the question over the human nature of Christ. Was He really flesh and blood, or did He, as some taught, only appear to have a body? To understand and confess that Jesus was truly human became so important to John that he declared it to be a test of a true prophet.

This test is broader than simply believing that Jesus became a human being. It includes everything the Bible teaches about Jesus. He took on humanity for a purpose. He became man in order to live a sinless life and then die for sinful humanity. But more than that, He became man so that after His resurrection and ascension He could minister for us in the heavenly sanctuary. Our High Priest is one who is able to understand us and can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was tempted in every way human beings are tempted *(Heb. 4:14, 15).*

Every true prophet will point people to Jesus, the God-man, who is the Savior and example of all humanity. Ellen G. White’s life was devoted to doing just that. She wrote, “Jesus Christ is everything to us,—the first, the last, the best in everything. Jesus Christ, His Spirit, His character, colors everything; it is the warp and woof, the very texture of our entire being. . . . Christ is a living Saviour. Continuing to look unto Jesus, we reflect His image to all around us.”—*Messages to Young People,* p. 161.

**Why** is it so important that true prophets exalt Jesus Christ? *Acts 4:12.*

The ecumenical spirit and postmodern thinking have permeated almost all Christian churches today, in the process eroding the uniqueness of Christianity and especially the importance of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. In contrast, Ellen White wrote: “The only hope for fallen man is to look to Jesus and receive Him as the only Saviour.”—*Testimonies to Ministers,* p. 367. “Only Bible truth and Bible religion will stand the test of the judgment.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education,* p. 127. “Let us lift up Jesus, the Saviour of men. Talk of his love, tell of his power.”—*Signs of the Times,* March 18, 1889. See also Friday’s study.
III. Ellen G. White—Prophet and Prophecy

“I said that I did not claim to be a prophetess. Some were surprised at this statement, and as much is being said in regard to it, I will make an explanation. Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to designate myself... “My work includes much more than this name signifies. I regard myself as a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people.” —Ellen G. White, Letter 55, 1905, Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 35, 36.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church designates Ellen White as a prophetess and includes the acceptance of her in this role as a part of our fundamental beliefs.

Consider This: Based on the information given above, answer the following questions:

1. How well do Ellen G. White’s writings harmonize with Bible doctrines?

2. Has Ellen G. White ever held her teachings to be above the Bible?

3. What emphasis does she put on the Bible?

4. Do her writings include information that generally was not known or understood during her time? (In other words, did she prophesy on various matters before the world had discovered their significance?)

5. Has the church tested Ellen G. White’s writings thoroughly by the Bible standards of testing a prophet?

6. Whom does she uphold as our example and our salvation?

STEP 3—Practice

Too often in the past (and sometimes even today) Ellen G. White’s writings have been used to browbeat one another and to prove points in a way she did not mean nor ever would have sanctioned. It is safe to say that if she were still alive, she would be writing additional testimonies on that subject. Sadly, as a result of the misuse of her writings, many people have left the church, and many still in the church reject her writings.
The Orchard Test

What did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount about how true prophets can be identified? Matt. 7:20.

The context of this statement is Jesus’ warning to the disciples to beware of false prophets (Matt. 7:15). Jesus applied the principle—that a good tree bears good fruit—to the life of the prophets. What kind of fruit do they bring forth? What influence do their teachings have on others?

The orchard test takes time. Ellen White lived and worked for 70 years under the critical eyes of millions of people, largely skeptical, doubtful, suspicious, and in some cases openly hostile. Errors, faults, and inconsistencies were and still are exposed with great satisfaction by her opponents. God alone is flawless; His messengers never are.

What do these texts tell us about the character flaws of some people who had the prophetic gift? Gen. 12:12, 13; Jon. 1:1–3; Acts 15:36–39; Gal. 2:11–14.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

Being a prophet, of course, does not make a person infallible or sinless. Mrs. White made mistakes and had character weaknesses, as did other people, but the trend of her life was such that at her death a local non-Adventist newspaper reported, “The life of Mrs. White is an example worthy of emulation by all. . . . She was a humble, devout disciple of Christ and ever went about doing good. . . . Her death marks the calling of another noted leader of religious thought and one whose almost ninety years were full to overflowing with good deeds, kind words and earnest prayers for all mankind.”—“Called to Her Reward,” St. Helena Star (Calif.), July 23, 1915.

Some people have difficulties accepting her prophetic ministry because they stumble over certain details of her writings but fail to see the bigger picture: the way God used her to raise up this church, the many wonderful insights she received from God, and the contributions she has made to this church.

What are the great advantages of having the prophetic gift manifested among us? What are potential challenges it brings?
**Application Question:**
How much do you know about Ellen G. White and what she has written? What has been your life’s experience in relation to her and her writings? What can you do to evaluate her and what she has written with an honest and open mind?

**Witnessing**
Our church spends much time and money to teach people about the Bible. Most of its teaching is targeted on the prophecies. Many books and study guides have been written, classes taught, and evangelistic meetings centered on prophecy. Daniel and Revelation seminars are held regularly in churches.

**Consider This:** Is this much focus on prophecy important? Why, or why not? What relation does the teaching of prophecy have to the teaching of Jesus and grace?

- How can you personally help a person who has doubts about Bible prophecy? What do you need to know before you can help someone else?

- Other churches believe they have been led by modern-day prophets. If you had a friend who believed this, how could you communicate, without being offensive, the importance of testing prophets by the Bible tests?

**STEP 4—Apply**
As adults, we have been influenced by our experiences, our teachers, our parents, and our friends. Sometimes the opinions and beliefs we have collected over the years need to be re-examined for their validity. As our knowledge has grown and as we have gathered new experiences in life, the opinions and beliefs we once held may look different from the way they looked in the past.

Because change is difficult, we may refuse to examine new ideas or new evidence that will cause us to think or act in a different way. You may be unsure yourself about the value of understanding Bible prophecy or its importance in the mission of the church.

**Consider This:** What steps can you take to help clarify your knowledge and understanding today? How willing are you to change your views as you gain new understanding? How much would a re-study (with an open mind) of Bible prophecy and Ellen White’s writings help you in your walk with Jesus?

“As the subject was presented before me, the period of Christ’s ministry seemed almost accomplished. Am I accused of falsehood because time has continued longer than my testimony seemed to indicate? How is it with the testimonies of Christ and His disciples? Were they deceived?

“Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not’ (1 Cor. 7:29, 30).

“Again, in his epistle to the Romans, he says: ‘The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light’ (Rom. 13:12).

“The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 67.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why have some Seventh-day Adventists lost confidence in Ellen White’s prophetic ministry? Could part of the problem be with how her work has been presented? Discuss.

2. Take some of your favorite excerpts from her writings and read them again. What was it about them that you liked so much? What is the message she is giving in these sections? Bring your selections to class and share them.

3. Some people use the writings of Ellen White as the final authority on every point. Why is that wrong? What great dangers does such an attitude present to our church? What are some ways this wonderful gift has been, and still is, abused in the church? What have been some of the results?
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


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.


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

CONTINUED
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?
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.
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.**
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?
Predicting the Future

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

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.
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?

“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:

1. 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.

2. 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?

3. 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?
The Authority of the Prophets

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NKJV).

All through the Bible, a theme recurs: God talks to people through His prophets, and the people either accept or reject what’s being said. Of course, by rejecting the words of the prophets, they’re not rejecting the prophets, they’re rejecting the One who sent them.

It’s a very serious thing, then, to claim to speak in the name of God. If you claim to speak for Him, and are, then you are a mouthpiece for the Creator of the universe, no small responsibility. People have been delegated authority to speak for the boss of the company, or the president, or prime minister—but to speak for the Lord? That’s heavy. Unfortunately, much of biblical history is a story of God speaking through His prophets and of people rejecting what was said. How careful we need to be so as not to make the same mistake today.

The Week at a Glance: Why was Moses so reluctant to become God’s prophet? What authority did the prophets have in Israel, even those who never wrote a book of the Bible? Is there a difference between the authority of the canonical and extracanonical prophet?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.*
The Prophet as God’s Mouthpiece

Read Exodus 4:10–16, the dialogue between God and Moses. What happened here, and what can we learn from this exchange about how prophets are called and how they operate?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

According to the arrangement God put in place, Moses was literally “to become God” to Aaron (see Exod. 4:16), and Aaron was to become Moses’ mouthpiece or “prophet” (Exod. 7:1). This defines accurately the intimate relationship between God and all His prophets; they were His mouthpieces, His spokespersons. Furthermore, as in the case of Moses and Aaron—God “taught” all His prophets what they were to do in regard to being a mouthpiece. Moses was, however, somewhat of a reluctant prophet.

According to her own testimony, Ellen White was reluctant when first called by the Lord, as well. “In my second vision, about a week after the first, the Lord gave me a view of the trials through which I must pass, and told me that I must go and relate to others what He had revealed to me. It was shown me that my labors would meet with great opposition, and that my heart would be rent with anguish; but that the grace of God would be sufficient to sustain me through all. After I came out of this vision I was exceedingly troubled, for it pointed out my duty to go out among the people and present the truth. My health was so poor that I was in constant bodily suffering, and to all appearance had but a short time to live. I was only seventeen years of age, small and frail, unused to society, and naturally so timid and retiring that it was painful for me to meet strangers.

“For several days, and far into the night, I prayed that this burden might be removed from me, and laid upon some one more capable of bearing it. But the light of duty did not change, and the words of the angel sounded continually in my ears, ‘Make known to others what I have revealed to you.’ ”—Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, p. 69.

In what way are we called, regardless of our position in the church, to “make known to others what I have revealed to you”? What has God revealed to you? How can you better share that with others?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** The authority of a prophet comes from God.
- **Feel:** Willing to accept the message God communicates through His prophets.
- **Do:** Regard the Bible as the supreme authority for Christian life and doctrine.

**Learning Outline:**

1. **Speaking for God** *(Exod. 4:10–16)*
   - What was the basis of Moses’ authority? What is the respective importance of being called, being sent, and encountering God?
   - What was the basis and evidence of Jesus’ authority *(Matt. 21:23, John 17:2)*? How does this apply to prophets?

2. **Responding to Authority** *(2 Kings 22:10–13)*
   - What feelings are involved in relinquishing autonomy to an external authority?
   - Read Jeremiah 36:22–31. Do prophets have authority if no one listens? How does it make you feel when people reject the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White?
   - Read Hebrews 4:12. God’s Word always calls for a response or choice. What role do emotions play in our response?

3. **Relative Authority** *(1 Chron. 29:29, 30)*
   - In what way is the preacher of a sermon inspired? With what authority should we regard his or her message?
   - How much authority should we give to inspired writings outside of the biblical cannon? How can we ensure that we don’t ascribe more authority to Ellen G. White’s writings, to contemporary authors, or to church leaders than we give to Scripture?

**Summary:** Prophetic authority derives from the Source, content, and scope of the message. Personal power, influence, or charisma should not be confused with prophetic authority. Scripture is the ultimate authority.
The Authority of the Incarnate Word

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).

In Matthew 21:23, while Jesus was teaching, the chief priests and the elders asked Him, “‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’” (NKJV). Jesus responded to the question in good rabbinic fashion, and that was with a counter question: “‘The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?’” (vs. 25, NKJV; see vss. 24–27). In rabbinic debates the counter question was meant to point the way to the answer of the original question. When they refused to answer, He refused to give a clear answer in return, because if they refused to acknowledge God’s power in John’s ministry, there was little point in discussing His own—which was also from God.

**What do the following texts tell us about Jesus’ authority?** Matt. 7:28, 29; Mark 1:21–27; Luke 8:22–25; 9:1; John 5:25–27.

Ultimate authority belongs to Christ as our Creator (John 1:3) and Redeemer (Rom. 3:24). He is at once the final court of appeal and the absolute norm by which each life is to be judged. Divine authority finds its focus and finality in Him. The Gospels, therefore, declare that His teaching caused astonishment because He taught as One having authority (Matt. 7:29).

Throughout the Gospels we find Christ’s more-than-human authority. He forgave sins (Mark 2:10), drove out devils (Mark 3:15), and claimed the right to judge men’s hearts (John 2:24, 25) and give eternal life (John 10:28). Yet, the authority that Christ exercised within His earthly commission was granted to Him by the Father (John 17:2). Whatever He did, including all the miracles He performed, always was done in dependence on and in cooperation with His Father (John 5:19). At the same time, He had absolute authority (Matt. 28:18). Therefore, He could delegate authority to His disciples (Mark 6:7) and will in the end judge all people (John 5:27).

**We live in a day and age when it’s fashionable to question authority. How are we to relate to authority? What factors should determine our answer?**
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** A prophet is God’s human instrument to proclaim His Word. The authority of the 66 books of the Bible supersedes any other prophetic utterances.

A woman once told the following story:

One night in a dream she found herself in a room with lots of people. Suddenly there was a bright light in the room. The light focused on her and said, “You are doing well, but go tell it to others.”

The woman woke up. She had the strongest feeling that she had been in the presence of God, and that He had told her what He wanted her to do.

“Go tell what? To whom?” she wondered. Perplexed, she shared her dream with her pastor.

“I think maybe the Lord has someone He wants you to share Him with” was his answer. “I recently received a call from a woman who would like to study the Bible. Would you be willing to go and study it with her?”

The woman was petrified. She had tried giving Bible studies before. The whole time she had felt completely inadequate. She really didn’t want to try it again. However, she was unwilling to offer a flat No. After much hesitation she said, “I guess I’ll try.”

Each week for several weeks thereafter, she drove to the woman’s house, Bible in hand. Every time she prayed that the woman wouldn’t be home! But every time she was there and waiting.

A month later the woman with the dream moved to a new area across the country. She felt very relieved to give up the Bible studies.

About a year later the woman received a letter in the mail from the person to whom she had started giving Bible studies.

The letter read, “I just have been baptized! I wanted you to know immediately. I had been praying for someone to help me study the Bible when you originally called me. I know the Lord sent you! I shall never forget you. Thank you, thank you!”

**Consider This:** What if the woman with the dream had refused to begin the Bible studies? Do you believe God directs happenings like this? Why, or why not?
The Authority of the Written Word

Compare these two responses to God’s Written Word: 2 Kings 22:10–13; Jeremiah 36:22–31. Though we might not act quite as dramatically as the folk did here, how do these incidents represent the basic responses to God’s Written Word?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

One can reject God’s Word today without openly burning it, as did this king. Instead, it can be ridiculed, ignored, denounced as out-of-date, or interpreted in such a way that it is deprived of any historical value or authority.

Yet, no one can disregard the authority of Scripture with impunity. Sooner or later, he or she will suffer the consequences of that rejection. In the Written Word, the character and will of God, the meaning of human existence, and the purposes of God for humanity in all ages are stated in propositional form that all can understand. To reject it may not have immediate consequences, but it will certainly result in eternal loss.

“He [Christ] pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 39, 40.

All through her life Mrs. White exalted the Word of God. In regard to the controversy between science and Scripture she wrote: “There should be a settled belief in the divine authority of God’s Holy Word. The Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science. Human knowledge is an unreliable guide.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 114.

In 1909 she attended her last General Conference session. At the close of her last sermon she picked up the Bible, opened it, and held it out on extended hands.

“‘Brethren and Sisters,’ ” she said, “‘I commend unto you this Book.’ ”—Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years, p. 197.

Examine your own attitude toward the Scriptures. Ask yourself the following questions: How much time do I spend in them? How seriously do I try to follow the teachings? When I read, am I trying to find fault with it? What’s my attitude toward passages that I find disturbing or that express ideas that I don’t like? What can I learn from my answers?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Prophet’s Relationship to God’s Authority

If you were giving permission to someone to speak for you, you would want to be very sure that he or she understood your position and what you stood for. You would choose someone you highly trusted to represent you.

That describes the kind of relationship God had with Moses. The first 40 years of Moses’ life were lived learning the ways of his world. The second 40 years were lived learning the ways of God’s world and building a close relationship with Him.

Consider This: Which education was more valuable and why? Have someone read Exodus 3:10–12. How is Moses’ attitude at this stage of his life different from what it had been when he tried to deliver the Israelites 40 years before? Which education prepared him better to be a mouthpiece for God? What made the difference in his success?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church considers Ellen G. White to be a spokesperson or prophet from God. It does not consider her writings to be above or even equal to the Bible.

What is Ellen G. White’s authority in relationship to God? What position should her writings have in the church?

II. Jesus’ Relationship to God and His Authority

Jesus was God’s authority on earth. He spoke for God. He healed in God’s name. He did miracles in the name of God. His authority is and was absolute. No doctrine, no religious authority, no prophet, no preacher, is equal to or above Jesus.

Consider This: Read in class John 1:1–4 and Romans 3:21–24. Ask the following questions:

Where did Jesus’ authority come from? What gives Him absolute authority? Is there any authority now or ever equal to His? Why, or why not?

Why is Jesus’ authority important to us? What can we experience because of it?
The Authority of the Spoken Word

In ancient times, when writing material was scarce and most people could not read, the spoken word was very important. What effect did the spoken Word of God have on people in the following passages? Jer. 38:1–4, John 3:1–10, 6:51–66, Acts 16:25–34.

The Word of God, whether spoken or written, has a double function. It is like a two-edged sword, says Paul, “piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12, NKJV). In the context of what Paul is saying, the word refers to the messages that were preached both to ancient Israel and to Christians (Heb. 4:2).

Like a surgeon’s scalpel, the spoken Word of God can penetrate to heal and restore, or it can furnish the evidence of a deadly disease that will result in eternal condemnation. Unless the word preached meets with faith on the part of the hearers, it cannot benefit them.

While not everyone in the church was willing to accept Ellen G. White’s prophetic authority, the church by and large listened to her counsel and benefited by it. The following story reveals the good things the church experienced by following Ellen G. White’s advice. For example, church organization between 1863 (when the General Conference was organized) and 1901 remained basically unchanged. As work in different lines developed, various associations (Medical Missionary, Sabbath School, Religious Liberty, Tract Society, etc.) were formed to foster these ministries. Because these associations were all autonomous organizations represented by independent corporations but not integral parts of the General Conference organization, they were sometimes in competition with one another. On the other hand, all major decisions in regard to the worldwide work were made by a few people at the General Conference in Battle Creek.

The day before the General Conference session in 1901, Ellen G. White met with the church leaders and urged them to make drastic changes in the running of the church. Accordingly, when the conference opened, the usual order of business was set aside, and a large committee (about 75 people) was appointed to work on the reorganization of the church structure. The result was that the General Conference committee was enlarged considerably, the various associations became departments of the General Conference, and union conferences were organized to enable leaders in the field to make decisions on the spot without having to wait for answers from Battle Creek.

The reorganization of the church structure, directed by divine counsel, was accepted unanimously and has stood the test of time. With some modifications and enlargements, it is still the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.
III. The Authority of the Written and Spoken Word

**Consider This:** Put the following texts on slips of paper and give them out to members of the class in advance: 2 Samuel 12:1, 1 Kings 11:29, Luke 7:24–27.

1. Ask the class to name some of the prophets who wrote the books of the Bible. What was their basic message? How does it apply to us today?
2. Now turn to the texts that were given out earlier, reading one at a time. Ask the class the following questions about each one:
   a. Who was the prophet?
   b. What was his message?
   c. To whom was it given?
   d. What application can be made from it to today?

The prophets in the texts we read did not write any of the 66 books in our Bible. Yet we believe that what they said were messages from God, and as such there is something for us to learn from them today.

God’s Word—the 66 books in our Bible—supersedes any other prophetic words. While we understand that God uses additional prophets to speak His words, they never will speak for the Bible, change the Bible, or add to the Bible. They may help us better understand the Bible and how to apply it to our lives today. That is the role of Ellen G. White’s writings in the church.

**Consider This:** What is a noncanonical prophet? How do we or should we relate to the authority of noncanonical prophets?

---

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

**Just for Teachers:** Type or write the following questions and possible answers on 3" x 5" cards to give to each class member. Read them over in class and suggest that the class members put them in their Bibles to remind them to study God’s Word on a regular basis.

How seriously do you take the Bible in your life today as
   a. an authority on religious information or ancient history,
   b. an expression of God’s will,
   c. a guide to daily life,
   d. a means to reach eternal life?
The Authority of Noncanonical Prophets

Apart from the canonical prophets, such as Isaiah and Amos, we find in Scripture a number of prophets whose books did not become part of the canon. What do the following texts tell us about these prophets and their writings? 1 Chron. 29:29, 2 Chron. 9:29, 12:15.

Among its sources, the books of Chronicles refer to different prophetic books written by extracanonical prophets: Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, and Iddo.


In David’s time, Scripture was the books of Moses, but not for one moment did David question the authority of Nathan. He knew that Nathan was a prophet and that his word was authoritative, even though Nathan had no books that ever made it into the Bible.

Let us suppose that archaeologists found a book written by Nathan today. Would it be added to the Bible? No; it would remain an inspired book outside of the canon. And if a theological statement were found in the book, it would remain an inspired and authoritative statement outside of the canon.

The canon is simply the collection of books that under God’s guidance was put together as the rule of life and faith for God’s people and by which everything else has to be measured. It contains everything a person needs to know to be saved. However, not everything the prophets wrote under inspiration is in the Bible. We know, for example, that Paul wrote more inspired letters than we have in the New Testament today (1 Cor. 5:9, Col 4:16). Now, if we found one of these letters today, it would not become part of the Bible. It would remain an authoritative, inspired letter, outside of the canon.

Ellen White’s authority can be compared to the authority of the extracanonical prophets. The inspired messages she received for the church are not an addition to the canon. Her writings are not another Bible, nor do they carry the kind of authority found in the Bible. In the end, the Bible and the Bible alone is our ultimate authority.

Why must even Ellen White’s writings be tested by the Bible? Why must she not be the final authority on doctrinal matters?
Application Questions:
How well do you know the writings of Ellen White?
   a. Well enough to know I don’t believe in them.
   b. I don’t know them well at all.
   c. I’m not sure how well I know them.
   d. I read them on a regular basis.

Consider This: If your answer was a, b, or c, why not try reading some of her writings again, asking yourself the following questions:

1. Whom is Ellen White pointing to? Does she uphold the Bible?
2. Is she really being judgmental and nitpicking or have I allowed the way others read her or talked about her to influence me unduly?
3. Would it be helpful to ask God to clear my mind of preconceived ideas or past experiences before I begin to read her writings?

Witnessing

Consider This: Print the following pairs of lists in two columns on a whiteboard, flip chart, or on slips of paper to hand out to the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bold</th>
<th>Timid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good speaker</td>
<td>Poor with words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well educated</td>
<td>Not highly educated but teachable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which of these characteristics can God make the best use of in His work? Why?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: You are just as important to God as any prophet He ever has called. He has a specific plan for your life. Do you know God’s plan for your life? What has He revealed to you that you have done or refused to do?

If you already are not spending quality time with Jesus each day, how about rescheduling your life to include time to prayerfully study His Word—His messages to the prophets—and Ellen G. White’s writings. When you do so, God will help you discover His special plan for you.
Further Study:

In 1982, an ad hoc committee of the General Conference prepared a statement on the relationship between the Bible and Ellen G. White. It reads in part, “Affirmations:” (1) We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. (2) We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. (3) We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. (4) We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language. (5) We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times. (6) We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy. (7) We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are applicable and authoritative especially to Seventh-day Adventists. (8) We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life. (9) We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (10) We believe that Ellen White’s use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible. Denials: (1) We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture. (2) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture. (3) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture. (4) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine. (5) We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture. (6) We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White. (7) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture. (8) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large. (9) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety. (10) We do not believe that Ellen White’s use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.”—“The Inspiration and Authority of Ellen G. White Writings” in Ministry, August 1982, p. 21.

The conclusion then was drawn that a correct understanding of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White will avoid two extremes: (1) regarding these writings as functioning on a canonical level identical with Scripture; (2) considering them as ordinary Christian literature.

Discussion Question:

Go through the lists above. How does this help clarify some issues regarding Ellen G. White? What questions does it raise?
The Integrity of the Prophetic Gift

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Sam. 7:1–7, 1 Kings 22:10–18, Jer. 43:2–4, Dan. 8:27.

Memory Text: “As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak” (2 Chronicles 18:13, NKJV).

If you ever read modern criticism of the Bible, one thing you’ll notice: The same kind of attacks leveled against the Bible are similar to the attacks leveled against Ellen White. And one attack against Ellen White is that because she used other sources, she is not reliable or honest.

Yet, Ellen White has explained in print how she used the writings of others, and why. She even recommended that people read certain books she used in writing her own works. That hardly sounds as if she were trying to hide her use of other sources.

This week we’ll explore a little more about how inspiration works, both with Bible writers and with Ellen White.

The Week at a Glance: What do we know about the integrity of biblical prophets? If Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White are both inspired by the same Spirit, what is the relationship between them? What is the danger in seeing prophets as infallible? Can prophets give wrong advice?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.*
The Integrity of the Prophet

The year was 853 B.C. King Ahab of Israel invited King Jehoshaphat of Judah to go with him into battle against the Arameans, and Jehoshaphat agreed. However, he requested that before they go into battle they ask for a word from the Lord. When Jehoshaphat refused to accept the word of the four hundred prophets of Ahab, Micaiah, a prophet of the Lord, was called.

Read 1 Kings 22:10–18. How did Ahab’s officer attempt to influence Micaiah, and what did the prophet do, regardless of the circumstances?

Micaiah’s message was unpopular with the king, and he was sent to prison for it (1 Kings 22:27). King Ahab, in spite of the prophet’s warning, went into battle and was killed; and King Jehoshaphat, who in a weak moment had agreed to support King Ahab, barely escaped with his life.

Though prophets, like all humans, have their moments of weakness, in this case Micaiah was determined to tell the truth, no matter how unpopular it was with those in authority. Throughout history, God’s prophets have endured hardship because they refused to change their testimony to suit their contemporaries.

During Ellen White’s lifetime, critics questioned her integrity and have continued to do so ever since her death. She has been accused of deception, falsehood, and lies. One major reason for these accusations has been personal presuppositions about how a prophet should function. For example, some critics believe that “prophets ‘should have full knowledge’ from the start of their ministry; their predictions should be unalterable, their writings exempt from all errors, discrepancies, and mistakes, and never include uninspired sources. For them, prophets never express merely personal opinions in their writings.” —Herbert E. Douglass, Messenger of the Lord (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 468. As we have seen in our study of biblical prophets, these presuppositions assume a verbal-inspiration concept that Seventh-day Adventists do not hold. If we don’t hold it for the Bible itself, why should we for Ellen White?

Have you ever had to deliver an unpopular message? What kind of pressures did you face? In what ways did you try to make excuses to yourself that could have allowed you not to deliver the message? What have you learned from that experience?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 2 Chronicles 18:13

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That prophets are not perfect.
- **Feel:** Generous toward the flaws and failings of prophets.
- **Do:** Revisit the writings of Ellen G. White with a deeper appreciation for her humanity.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Integrity** *(1 Kings 22:10–18)*
   - **What external pressures do prophets experience?**
   - **Read Jeremiah 43:1–4. What accusations have prophets faced through the ages? Does Ellen G. White’s use of literary assistants affect the integrity of her messages?**

II. **Thus Says the Lord** *(Hos. 1:1)*
   - **How do you feel about people who claim to speak for God? How can we avoid becoming skeptical or cynical?**
   - **Read Galatians 2:11–16. Why does God use progressive revelation? What contributes to the growth of a prophet’s character and understanding? What might this experience be like for the prophet?**
   - **How do you feel about the fact that as God gave more light, Ellen G. White’s understanding of various subjects could develop or even change over time?**

III. **Prophets in Error** *(2 Sam. 7:1–7)*
   - **Why do some people expect more of Ellen G. White than biblical prophets? How can we respond to unrealistic expectations or misunderstandings about inspiration?**
   - **How do you feel about the possibility of God leading His church beyond the understanding of Ellen G. White on some points of belief? Why might that possibility be necessary? What role do the spiritual gifts of wisdom and knowledge play in this progression?**

**Summary:** Prophets are not perfect. Our expectations of Ellen G. White should reflect the model of the biblical prophets. God is able at any time to correct and further develop the understanding of prophets and His church.
The Integrity of the Message

A few months after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, was assassinated. The leaders and the people left in the land were afraid of Babylonian reprisals and decided to seek safety in Egypt; but they wanted to make sure that God was on their side. So, they asked Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord concerning their plan.

What was Jeremiah’s message, and how did the people respond to it? Of what did they accuse Jeremiah, and who was said to have originated the counsel that Jeremiah declared to be from the Lord? Jer. 43:2–4.

Because some did not like the clear instructions God gave, they claimed Jeremiah’s message actually had originated with his literary assistant Baruch and not with the Lord.

How interesting that thousands of years later, Mrs. White (like Jeremiah) has at times been the focus of claims that her literary assistants wrote her books or that she plagiarized most of what she wrote. Yet, in the introduction to The Great Controversy she stated that she had used other books: “In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted. . . . In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works.”—Page 14.

Does this justify the charge of plagiarism? In 1981 the General Conference asked a non-Adventist copyright lawyer to study the matter. After spending more than three hundred hours researching, he concluded that “Ellen White was not a plagiarist, and her works did not constitute copyright infringement/piracy.”—Adventist Review, September 17, 1981. Among the reasons given were first, the fact that the books Ellen White used were not covered by copyright; and second, even if they had been covered by copyright, her use of phrases and sentences did not constitute an infringement of copyright.

Why was there always hostility among God’s professed people to the messages of the prophets? Look in your own heart; can you find, at least somewhat, part of the answer there? Explain.
TEACHERS COMMENTS

Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God has provided us with biblical guidelines for determining what is true and what is false.

How do you determine if something is true? How can you tell if the source of what you believe is credible? Because we constantly are bombarded with information from all kinds of sources, it is crucial that we know whether or not those sources are trustworthy.

Each one of us is involved in an eternal battle. How can we be certain that the information on which we base eternal decisions is reliable? Read the following quotation: “Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. . . . Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist’s credibility.”—Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics (www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp).

Consider This: In the search for truth and justice, how important is the integrity of those who claim to speak for God? How is integrity related to credibility? How do we sort out the impostors from those who have a genuine message from God?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Integrity of the Prophet (1 Kings 22:1–28)

Micaiah’s initial prediction of victory (vs. 15) for the coalition forces of Ahab and Jehoshaphat surely was delivered in an ironic tone, as indicated by Ahab’s sharp reply (vs. 16). Note that Micaiah indicates in verse 28 that the fulfillment of prophecy is one test by which to determine the genuineness of a prophet. Although outnumbered 400 to 1 (vs. 6) by Ahab’s prophets, Micaiah was the only one who told the truth.

CONTINUED
“Thus Says the Lord”

What did the prophets often designate as the source of their messages? Jer. 1:4, Ezek. 7:1, Hos. 1:1. Why is this so important to what they have to say?

The prophets repeatedly pointed out that their messages came from God. Their position can be compared to that of earthly ambassadors who are sent out by an earthly ruler and who are commissioned to represent their sovereign. In that capacity they must adhere closely to the instructions they have received. The expression “the Word of the Lord came unto . . .” means that (a) their messages carry divine authority, (b) they received them by direct communication from the Lord, and (c) these messages are in their minds, ready to be presented.

The expression “thus says the Lord” appears more than four hundred times in the Old Testament—a powerful testimony to the fact that in Scripture, God is speaking directly to the reader. The prophet’s responsibility was to bring these messages before the people and apply them to the audience’s situation.

Ellen White strongly emphasized the inspiration of the Scriptures. “I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word,” she said. —Selected Messages, book 1, p. 17. At the same time, she also claimed divine inspiration for her writings: “In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. . . . It is true concerning the articles in our papers and in the many volumes of my books.”—Page 29.

Ellen White called her writings the lesser light leading men and women to the greater light—the Bible. (See Colporteur Ministry, p. 125.) While both are light, their functions are different: (1) The Bible is God’s message for all time and for all people. The writings of Ellen G. White are God’s message for a particular time, the end time, and for a particular people, the remnant church. (2) Her writings are not a new or additional standard of doctrine but a help for the church in the time of the end. Her writings focus the reader’s attention on Scripture. They do not replace Scripture.

How can we avoid the trap of putting Ellen White’s writings on par with the Bible? Why is that so easy to do and such a big mistake?
**Consider This:** How solid is our personal integrity when we hold the minority opinion? How prone are we to give in to popular opinion for the sake of peace? How much trust would you invest in a prophet who was on the king’s payroll?

Also, do you think it was easier or harder for Micaiah to oppose 400 prophets who claimed to speak for the Lord than it was for Elijah to oppose 850 prophets who admittedly weren’t of the Lord? *(See also 1 Kings 18:1–40).*

**II. The Integrity of the Message** *(Jeremiah 43:1–7)*

Johanan had been loyal to Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians. However, Ishmael had murdered Gedaliah, and Johanan and Hoshaiah feared that the Babylonians would punish all the Israelites *(see Jer. 40:13–41:15)*. They had asked Jeremiah to seek God’s guidance and pledged to follow the Lord’s counsel. When God’s guidance was different from what they expected, they turned against Jeremiah.

**Consider This:** How do we respond when God tells us to go against our own wisdom? What role did fear for their own personal safety play in the accusation of Johanan and Hoshaiah against Jeremiah? Can fear of retribution for sin cause us to find excuses for disobeying God’s message?

**III. “Thus Says the Lord”** *(Jeremiah 1:4, Ezekiel 7:1, Hosea 1:1)*

**Consider This:** Read 2 Peter 1:20, 21. What does this say to the assertion that Jeremiah’s literary assistant was the source of his inspiration? What danger are we in when we try to find excuses for not accepting God’s will?

**IV. Growth in Understanding** *(Daniel 8:27, 9:2; Galatians 2:1–16, 1 Peter 1:10)*

**Consider This:** Read Acts 10:9–17, 24, 28, 34, 35. Peter, a man conditioned by his culture (as we all are), had many things to learn. If an apostle/prophet who was a member of Christ’s inner circle for more
Growth in Understanding

Prophets did not receive all of God’s light at one time. As they faithfully ministered as the Lord’s servants, they received more light and grew in their understanding.

What do the following texts tell us about the spiritual-growth experience of biblical prophets? Dan. 8:27, 9:2, Gal. 2:11–16, 1 Pet. 1:10.

The possession of the prophetic gift in biblical times did not imply immediate, full, and complete knowledge of spiritual and other matters. Prophets received increased light as history unfolded and as they were able to understand it. They also had to study Scripture, as the case of Daniel illustrates (Dan. 9:2). In Daniel 8:27 the prophet said, “I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it” (RSV). About ten years later the angel Gabriel came and explained to him the full import of the vision (Dan. 9:20–23).

The prophets knew only that which God had revealed to them, and only this were they permitted to set forth as a “Thus saith the Lord.” Since the messages to one prophet often complemented those given to others, it became necessary to study and compare the various revelations in order to get a balanced and comprehensive view of the messages from Heaven.

It was the same with Ellen White: “For sixty years I have been in communication with heavenly messengers, and I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things, and in reference to the way in which God is constantly working to bring souls from the error of their ways to the light in God’s light.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 3, p. 71.

Hence, when we compare earlier writings of Ellen G. White with her later works, we sometimes find that her later writings modify or expand her earlier writings, reflecting a deeper insight into God’s messages.

She was not a systematic theologian but more of an evangelist and communicator of what God showed her. Her understanding of theology, though founded on Scripture and informed by her visions, grew through the years as she continued to study Scripture and the writings of others and was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We must be careful not to place the attributes of God, such as omniscience (knowing all things), on His messengers. What is the danger in seeing prophets as infallible and having full knowledge in all areas of life?
than three years didn’t understand everything, how can we expect prophets in other times suddenly to have all the right answers?

V. When Prophets Get It Wrong (2 Samuel 7:1–7, 1 Chronicles 22:8)

David’s course of action is notable here. First, before moving ahead with his plans, he sought divine counsel. At first his prophetic consultant, Nathan, assured him that the Lord was with him (David) in the execution of his plans. When Nathan reversed himself, on the basis of a fresh word from the Lord, David did not question whether or not Nathan was inspired. Nor did he complain about not being allowed to move forward with his plans. Instead, he offered a prayer of thanksgiving!

**Consider This:** When my plans and dreams run counter to the Lord’s will, do I accept His direction or do I look for faults in the Lord’s messenger so that I can justify doing things my way?

**STEP 3**—Practice

**Thought Questions:**

1. According to 2 Timothy 3:14–17, God’s prophetic voice as expressed in Scripture will confront us with things that are wrong in our lives. It will correct us. How can I avoid the natural inclination to resist that corrective voice and resist the temptation to attack the messenger whom God uses to deliver the message?

2. Today there are many standards that claim to be the ultimate measure of what truth is. For some people the scientific method is the final measure of truth. For others personal experience is the standard by which everything is to be judged. Still others would say that the question is irrelevant—that there is no such thing as truth. For fewer and fewer people, even among professing Christians, the Bible is still the ultimate authority. Which of the options above is closest to the one that directs your life, and
When Prophets Get It Wrong

Read 2 Samuel 7:1–7. What was wrong with Nathan’s advice to David, and why would God not allow David to build Him a temple? 1 Chron. 22:8.

The prophet Nathan was a wise, thoughtful, and God-fearing man, but not everything a prophet says or does is done under inspiration. In giving his approval to David’s plan, Nathan had spoken as a friend of the king and not in his capacity as a prophet. A permanent dwelling for the God of Israel was probably something that most pious people desired. In a night vision (2 Sam. 7:4–17), however, God told Nathan that what he had told David was wrong and that he had to go and tell David.

Ellen White was not infallible, and she never claimed infallibility. She grew, changed her mind on issues, and was constantly open for more light.

In one instance, when the publishing house in the South was doing poorly, she supported making it merely a depository for the Review and Herald. “Go ahead,” she said, “God’s cause must not be left to reproach, no matter who is made sore by arranging matters on a right basis. Edson should give himself to the ministry and to writing. . . . Finance is not his forte at all.”—Manuscript Releases, vol. 17, p. 270. But within 24 hours Ellen G. White received a vision that caused her to reverse herself. “Let the Southern field have its own home-published books,” she told the General Conference.—Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years, p. 193.

We must remember that prophets are not always on duty—that is, they are not speaking constantly for God. “There are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 3, p. 58.

But as history has shown, if erroneous counsel has been given by a prophet, God will intervene to correct the mistake.

Some people love to focus on every perceived error in either the Bible or in the lesser light, which is the writings of Ellen G. White. What’s so dangerous and unhealthy about that kind of attitude? How can you protect yourself from falling into that trap?
why did you choose it instead of the other available options?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Application Question:

Having a credible witness to truth makes no difference if I do not take the time to listen (see Rom. 10:13–17) to it. What practical steps can I take this week to avoid the distractions that make it so hard to listen?

Witnessing

To a heart enslaved by sin, the thought of submitting to the authority of God is completely foreign. To suggest that the messages of people now dead for centuries should govern our lives today is quite often alien to contemporary culture. Even the thought of prophetic contemporaries meets with a certain degree of hostility, for the modern mind often resists even the hint of submission to any type of moral authority. Given these realities, discuss with the class what you could share from your personal experience regarding what led you to believe that God speaks to you through credible, though not infallible, messengers. How would you tell nonbelievers that you believe in a God you cannot see and that you believe that He communicates with you through ordinary, fallible human beings like you?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Believing that God will use credible and reliable messengers to communicate truth to us means little if we do not act on the message delivered, for even demons “believe” (see James 2:19–24). Discuss the steps you could take this week to act on some truth you have discovered in the Bible.

The integrity of the prophetic messenger is crucial to the credibility of the message. While no one in the class may be a prophet in the biblical sense, the integrity of each member is a crucial part of his or her proclamation of God’s message. Invite each member to spend time in the coming week reflecting on his or her personal integrity. Some areas for consideration may include financial accountability to God and others, sexual purity, charity and Christian service, care for our bodies as God’s temples, and observance of the Sabbath rest.

“Ellen White made claims about her ministry that leave no room for compromise or ambivalence about those claims. She claimed to have seen things that could have come only from supernatural inspiration. Either her claims are true or she was a lunatic and/or a powerful liar who promulgated her insane ravings or amazing deceptions from the middle of the nineteenth into the second decade of the twentieth century.

“What rational options are there for someone who claimed to have seen, in vision, what she claimed to have seen? She claimed to have seen Jesus bring the redeemed into the Holy City. She claimed to have seen people living on other planets and angels protecting God’s people. She claimed to have seen, in vision, Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary or what Satan looked like in heaven before he sinned. She claimed to have seen angels visiting Adam and Eve in Eden. She said that she saw the look on Adam’s face when he realized that Eve had sinned. She claimed to have seen Jesus, in vision, and what His face was like after the wilderness fast. She claimed to have seen the Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb, as well as an angel release Paul and Silas from prison. She claimed to have seen Satan lead lost multitudes into the final rebellion against God after the second resurrection. She claimed to have seen, in vision, life in the new earth, and on and on. . . .

“What does one do with these claims? Those who place her ministry on the level, for instance, of Martin Luther, are living in a logical fantasy world. Either we take her for what she has claimed for herself (which, of course, leaves open a whole group of questions that we, as a church, haven’t always answered in the most fortuitous manner), or we have to reject her as [a] liar, a lunatic, or someone inspired by the devil. These are the only logical options.”—Clifford Goldstein, Graffiti in the Holy of Holies (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2003), pp. 172, 173.

Discussion Questions:

Read over the argument above. The point is simple: Ellen White, by her claims, doesn’t leave us many logical options regarding her ministry. From what we know of her life, her teachings, and the legacy of writings that she has left, what’s really the best and most logical explanation for her life and ministry? Defend your answer.

As with the Bible, some questions remain regarding Ellen White’s ministry. Should we focus on these few questions and miss the big picture of her work, or should we focus on the big picture, knowing that as with anything, some questions will remain?
The Message of the Prophets

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 20:1–17; Leviticus 16; Matt. 24:24–31; Rom. 3:21–28; Heb. 8:1, 2; 9:23.

Memory Text: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16, NKJV).

The doctrinal framework of the Seventh-day Adventist Church largely was created by a small, dedicated group of Adventist pioneers. Their meetings were characterized by earnest Bible study and prayer. Writing in 1904, more than a half century after the events, Ellen G. White still had vivid memories of these gatherings. “Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word.”—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 206. At times, when they could go no further, Ellen White would supply answers given to her in vision, though she never initiated doctrinal formulation. The visions were not given to take the place of faith, initiative, hard work, or Bible study. The crucial point to remember is that our church’s doctrines are based solely on the Bible. They are not dependent upon Ellen White’s writings, however helpful she has been in clarifying some of those teachings.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we need to keep the commandments when we are saved by grace? What is the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary? How does the Sabbath commandment differ from the other commandments? What happens at death, and why is knowledge of the state of the dead important? What does the Bible teach about the manner of Christ’s second coming?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.*
Righteousness by Faith

What is the common lot of all human beings, and why? What is the only solution for the situation in which we find ourselves? 1 Kings 8:46, Rom. 3:21–28, 5:12.

Sin is the greatest problem we face. The Egyptians thought that death was humanity’s biggest problem, hence they developed the art of mummification and built huge pyramids to keep the mummies. The Greek philosophers thought ignorance was the chief enemy of true happiness, so they emphasized education. But the chief problem of humanity is sin. Sin destroys happiness and peace of mind. Sin kills, and no modern medicine can cure it. From the moment we are born, we begin to die. The only cure is Jesus Christ and the Cross. “There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 19.

According to the Greek poet Homer, ships passing through the Strait of Messina were in danger of running afoul of the rock Scylla on one side or the whirlpool Charybdis on the other. Christians are always in danger of running afoul of either legalism or cheap grace. Those who fear that talk of assurance of salvation in Christ will lead to cheap grace and the tolerance of sinful behavior stress the importance of obedience. Those who fear that talking of obedience and victorious Christian living directs attention away from Christ and leads to legalism emphasize God’s part in salvation.

The balanced Christian will have assurance of salvation in Jesus and lead a victorious Christian life at the same time. The two go together like the two sides of a coin. Whomever God justifies, He also sanctifies. We cannot have one without the other. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone; good works follow, even though those good works, even done under the unction of the Holy Spirit, never can justify us before God. Our salvation is rooted only in what Jesus has done for us.

Discouraged over your spiritual life? Not getting the victories you wish you had? What great hope can you find in the fact that you are accepted solely through what Jesus has done for you and not through your victories or failures? Why should that hope keep you from never giving up in your struggles with sin and self?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Timothy 4:16

The Student Will:

Know: Key doctrines as revealed through biblical prophets and affirmed by Ellen G. White.

Feel: Desire to understand the Bible’s teachings better.

Do: Share this knowledge with others.

Learning Outline:

I. Salvation (Rom. 3:21–28)

A How can we ensure that righteousness by faith remains at the heart of our church’s mission?

B Read Hebrews 9:1–8. What did God reveal about His plan of salvation to Moses? What does Hebrews 8:1, 2 reveal about the ongoing work of salvation? Why can we have assurance about the judgment?

II. Distinctly Adventist (John 11:11–14)

A How has our understanding of conditional immortality (the soul sleeps), with an emphasis on the resurrection, brought you hope and comfort?

B Read Revelation 14:9–11. How do you feel about God burning the wicked until they are consumed rather than letting them burn eternally, as some Christians believe?

III. Blessed Hope (Matt. 24:24–31)

A How should our expectation regarding Jesus’ return influence the way we live?

B How can we keep this hope alive as time goes by? What can you do to share our knowledge with others?

C How do the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White help us live in the waiting time?

Summary: While Adventists are characterized by these important doctrines, we always have affirmed that the Bible is our only creed and that we are a people of the Book. Although noncanonical prophets can provide helpful insights, the Bible should be the only foundation on which our doctrine and faith rest.
The Sanctuary

**What** were the services of the Old Testament tabernacle, and how did they illustrate the plan of salvation? *Heb. 9:1–8.*

With the sanctuary service God produced a visual demonstration that enabled the sinner to understand the great plan of salvation. Confession, sacrifice, forgiveness, faith, reconciliation, holiness, all graphically were demonstrated in the daily and yearly services of the earthly sanctuary.

**According** to Hebrews 8:1, 2, Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. What does His ministry consist of, and why does Hebrews 9:23 say that the heavenly sanctuary needs cleansing?

---

In the Old Testament the sinner received forgiveness through faith in the atoning blood of the Promised Seed (*Gen. 3:15*), who was foreshadowed in the animal sacrifice of the sanctuary service. And just as in the earthly service at the close of the year there was a Day of Atonement, a day of judgment on which the sanctuary was cleansed, so in the heavenly sanctuary service there is a day of judgment prior to Christ’s second coming.

The pre-Advent judgment reveals to the universe those who have professed Christ and are really His followers. God, so to speak, opens the books of heaven for all the universe to see that in each case His decision was just and fair. In that sense, this judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus (*Rom. 3:4*).

---

In *Leviticus 16*, the key element that appears again and again is blood. And that makes sense, because this is the Day of Atonement, and only blood atones. And what is atonement, other than the work of God saving us? Hence the judgment is good news; it’s the work of God saving us because we can’t save ourselves. The crucial point is that just as the high priest never went into the Most Holy Place without blood, neither should we, for to enter into the Most Holy Place without blood means death, not atonement. Dwell on these ideas. What hope and encouragement should they bring to us, who are living in the great antitypical day of atonement?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to take a decisive stand with Him in the great controversy between good and evil.

Absalom, King David’s estranged son, was poised to overthrow his father and establish himself as king. The conspiracy had gained momentum, and Absalom had secured supporters throughout the kingdom. His plans were advancing rapidly, and he appeared to be destined for a successful overthrow of David’s government. At this crucial juncture an unnamed messenger arrived in Jerusalem to warn David about Absalom’s conspiracy. David acted decisively when he heard the message of warning, and his actions eventually led to the defeat of Absalom and his rebellious supporters. (See 2 Sam. 14:25–18:18.)

Christians are involved in a much greater battle, a cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan. Prophets throughout the ages have been entrusted with a message not only of warning but also of hope. This message unmasks the conspiracy of Satan and his rebel followers and calls us to take decisive action. The prophetic message that God has placed in our hands offers salvation, freedom, and deliverance. God offers us the privilege of joining His ranks as He defeats the enemy of life, but He leaves that choice up to us.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Righteousness by Faith (1 Kings 8:46–51, Romans 3:21–28, 4:1–11, 5:12)

In Solomon’s dedicatory prayer offered at the opening of the temple, he addressed the frailty of humanity and the strength of sin’s hold on the human race. As he expresses it, our only hope lies not in the strength of human effort to overcome temptation but in the merciful forgiveness God freely provides to the sinner. The foundation for his appeal lies not in a supposed natural goodness of man but in the fact that God has chosen us as His special possession.
The Sabbath

The Sabbath and marriage are the only earthly institutions that come to us from the time before sin entered the world. Hence, sometimes they are called the twin sisters of Paradise. When you look at our world today, it’s obvious that Satan has worked hard to deface and defile them.

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What is it about the Sabbath commandment that makes it stand out from the others?

The fourth commandment is, in a sense, a test commandment. It tests humanity’s spirituality. Because it deals with time, which is invisible, rather than with tangible objects, it is well suited to measure humanity’s attitude toward God. How we feel toward the Sabbath is an indicator of how we feel toward God. It is the only commandment an individual can break and yet be fully accepted as a good person in any conservative Christian society.

In a certain sense, the Sabbath is arbitrary. Why the seventh day over any other? It’s because God said so, that’s why. There’s a lot of obvious and apparent logic in not stealing, not killing, not coveting, and so forth. You don’t have to be a Christian to follow those precepts; many non-Christians do.

But to obey the seventh-day Sabbath, which isn’t rooted in any natural phenomena, is to reveal a willingness to obey simply because God tells us to. Sabbath keeping is an act of faith; we keep the seventh-day Sabbath, not because it’s socially acceptable, not because it’s popular, not because it fits in with any natural cycle. No, we keep the seventh-day Sabbath because God commands us to, and as New Testament Christians saved by grace, we reveal our faith through obedience to God’s commandments (James 2:10, 11; 1 John 5:2, 3; Rev. 14:12).

In fact, by resting on the Sabbath, we’re revealing to the world that all this talk about resting in Christ isn’t just talk. As Sabbath keepers, we truly rest in Christ’s work of salvation for us, not just daily but also in a special way each week. We reveal the fullness of our assurance in Christ by resting on the Sabbath (see Heb. 4:1–11). Sabbath keeping is an outward expression of our rest in Christ.

Though the Sabbath is, in a sense, arbitrary, what are the tangible and practical benefits we get from keeping the Sabbath holy, as God commanded? What can you do to better enjoy the benefits of Sabbath keeping?
A thousand years later Paul asserts the same thing: as we trust in God and the sacrifice through Jesus that God offered for sin, our sin is forgiven. Our obedience is nothing but filthy rags compared with the spotless character of Christ. Even Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, was accepted by God before he obediently adopted the symbol of obedience, which in his time was circumcision. Likewise, our obedience is rooted in God’s acceptance of us as demonstrated by His forgiveness.

**Consider This:** Which of the following is a stronger motivator for you to obey God: (1) fear that God will punish you or exclude you if you do wrong, or (2) appreciation for the forgiveness that God offers you at His personal expense?

II. The Sanctuary *(Hebrews 9:1–8)*

The sanctuary of the Old Testament was not an end in itself *(Heb. 9:9)* but an illustration that pointed to the ministry of Christ. The blood of sacrificial animals actually could not bring forgiveness; nor could it provide an escape from the judgment which all humans deserve *(see Rom. 6:23).* When Christ entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary in heaven, He secured our salvation, not with the blood of animals but with His own blood. The judgment, the penalty, the sentence that rightfully belonged to us was, instead, pronounced against Him. He died, and we are released! *(See Heb. 9:13–28.)*

**Consider This:** We are living in the time of the end, the prophetic hour of judgment that immediately precedes the Lord’s glorious return. During this time, what should be our primary focus? Personal moral improvement? The incomparable mercy of God in taking on Himself the condemnation that is rightfully ours? Does my spiritual inheritance depend on my efforts to improve my life or on Christ’s death in my place? Does the magnitude of God’s mercy explain the severity of the warnings given to those who do not appreciate it? *(See Heb. 10:26–29, 37–39.)*

III. The Sabbath *(Exodus 20:1–17, James 2:10, 11; 1 John 5:2–3; Revelation 14:12)*

The importance of keeping the Sabbath holy is rooted in Creation and
State of the Dead

What do the following Bible texts tell us about humanity’s condition in death? Ps. 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 6; John 11:11–14; Acts 2:34.

Inspiration teaches that only God is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16) and that human beings apart from God are subject to death. Jesus taught that death is a sleep that ends in one of two resurrections—a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation (John 5:28, 29). William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury, recognized this when he wrote, “Man is not immortal by nature or of right; but he is capable of immortality and there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive it from God and on God’s terms.” —Nature, Man, and God (London: Macmillan & Co., 1934), p. 472.

How are we to understand texts such as Matthew 25:46 and Revelation 14:9–11? Do they teach eternal torment in hell?

The notion of human immortality is found in all primal, animistic, and polytheistic religions. It was also an important concept in Greek philosophy, which conceived of Hades as a ghostly, shadowy underworld, in which the soul lived a twilight existence. The Greeks viewed human beings as consisting of matter and soul. At death, matter and soul separated, releasing the soul from the prison house of matter into an independent existence.

In Matthew 25 and Revelation 14, the words translated “everlasting” and “for ever” do not mean necessarily never ending. The Greek words aion and aionios express duration as long as the nature of the subject allows. For example, in Jude 7 we are told that the cities Sodom and Gomorrah are suffering the punishment of eternal (aionios) fire. Yet, 2 Peter 2:6 says that they were turned into ashes. When the subject of the words eternal or forever is the life of the redeemed who have received immortality, the word means a time without end. When it refers to the punishment of the wicked, who do not receive immortality, the word has the meaning of a limited time period.

From popular preachers to popular films, the world is flooded with spiritualism (the idea that the dead live on now in another existence). How does our understanding of the state of the dead give us powerful protection against this terrible deception?
redemption, God’s two supreme actions in human history. The Sabbath is a part of the Creation story (see Gen. 2:1–3), and the fourth commandment, as recorded in Exodus, calls us to worship on the seventh day, because God created the world. However, in Deuteronomy 5:12–15, the fourth commandment calls us to worship because God has delivered us from slavery by His amazing power. Worshiping each Sabbath reminds us that we lovingly are created and are not some randomly evolved mass of tissue. It also reminds us that God has released us from our slavery to sin and that we may rest securely in Him.

Consider This: Sabbath keepers sometimes observe the Sabbath in different ways, sparking controversy within the church. How do the themes of rest and the commemoration of Creation and redemption inform our practice of Sabbath keeping? (Note Exodus 16, Neh. 13:15–22, Isa. 58:13, 14; Luke 4:16; John 5:1–18.)

IV. The State of the Dead (Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; John 5:28, 29; John 11:11–14; Acts 2:34; 1 Timothy 6:16)

Consider This: First, read 1 Corinthians 15:12–23, then discuss the following: According to Paul, there is no resurrection from the dead, no eternal life, apart from Christ. He says that if Jesus were not raised from the dead, we would be responsible for our sins and the penalty for sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). If, however, Paul is wrong and there is another way to get eternal life (for example, the theory of an immortal soul), what does that say about the necessity of Christ for deliverance from death?

V. The Second Coming (Matthew 24:5, 24–31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; Revelation 1:7, 19:11–21)

“The usual N[ew] T[estament] terms for the 2d coming of Christ are parousia, ‘presence,’ ‘out-shining’; epiphaneia, ‘appearance,’ ‘appearing’; and apokalupsis, ‘revelation.’ Parousia appears commonly in the papyri for the visit of an emperor or king. . . . Epiphaneia occurs often in classical Greek to describe the glorious appearance of the pagan gods. . . . Apokalupsis is used of the ‘appearing’ or ‘revelation’ of Christ at His 2d coming.”—Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, p. 999.
The Second Coming

Since the early 1970s, Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* has sold more than fifteen million copies. In recent years, the *Left Behind™* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers) has sold millions, as well. These facts indicate that there is a general awareness among many Christians that we are living in the time of the end.

The word *Adventist* in our church name means that we believe in the second coming of Christ so much that it’s part of our identity. Yet, our understanding of the Second Coming is far different from that advocated in the *Left Behind™* series or by Hal Lindsey.

What does the Bible teach about the manner of Christ’s coming, and why is it of vital importance to know this? What deceptions did Jesus warn us about regarding the manner of His coming? *Matt. 24:5, 24–31; Rev. 1:7.*

First introduced by John N. Darby in the nineteenth century, the concept that Christ’s coming consists of two stages has captured the thinking of many Protestants today. The first supposed stage involves a secret rapture, when all true Christians will be *caught up* with Christ, and the second focuses on Christ’s appearing seven years later to rule on earth for 1,000 years.

Seventh-day Adventists can find no scriptural support for splitting the Second Advent into a *rapture* and an *appearing*. According to the New Testament, Jesus’ return will be an indivisible, single, literal, audible, and visible event (*1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 19:11–21*). And, just as important, Jesus warned us against false interpretations about the manner of His coming. Jesus obviously knew that deception would be rampant (*Matt. 24:24*), which is why the Word of God is so clear about how He will return.

Though the passing of every day brings us closer to Christ’s return, the passing of each day also makes His return seem more and more delayed. How do we strike the balance between living in the expectation of Christ’s return and yet simply getting on in the daily routine of life?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**Consider This:** What preparations would you make if the president of your country promised to visit your home and take you away to a new permanent home in a tropical paradise? How would that promise affect your attitude about your own self-worth or your outlook on the problems you face in life?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Role Play**

Assign someone in the class the role of being a skeptical atheist. Someone who is analytical and has some acquaintance with atheistic positions would be an ideal candidate. The role of the other class members is to present the teachings reviewed in this lesson and to make a strong case for faith based on them. Consider the human longing for purpose, meaning, significance, redemption, love, and longevity. How do the teachings about righteousness, the sanctuary, the Sabbath, death, and Christ’s coming provide answers for our human needs? Allow the skeptical atheist ample time for rebuttal. Challenge the class to provide valid answers to the objections.

**Witnessing**

Invite class members to share real-life experiences of sharing the message studied in this lesson. Take time to pray about obstacles that may be standing in the way of someone who is drawn to the message of faith in Christ.

**STEP 4—Apply**

**Consider This:** Moses records the story of Balaam in chapters 22 to 24 of the book of Numbers. Balaam really does not want to deliver God’s message of hope for Israel because he’d rather collect a reward for cursing Israel. However, God only offers a message of blessing. Later on, Balaam is killed by the Israelites, and his enduring epitaph is that he would do anything for money. God has entrusted us with a prophetic message of hope for our times. Are we so wrapped up in making money and the things of this life that we neglect our calling to share that message? Discuss what you could do this month to faithfully deliver the message.

During the early years, many of our pioneers became imbalanced in their preaching of the law. Hence, Ellen White wrote in 1890: “As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law.” —Review & Herald, March 11, 1890. At the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference Session, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones did just that. The burden of their message was “to affirm the truth that the only way righteousness can be obtained is through a living faith in the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on Calvary’s cross as a propitiation for the sins of the world. No one can enter the kingdom of God without being clad in the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. This robe can neither be purchased with silver or gold nor earned by good works. This message was a clarion call to make Christ and His righteousness the center of all our living and our preaching. It placed special emphasis on righteousness by faith as a real personal experience rather than a mere theory.” —A. V. Olson, Through Crisis to Victory 1888–1901 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1966), p. 35.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there any teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that is based on anything other than the Bible? That is, is there any doctrine that comes from Ellen White rather than the Bible? Though we believe in the gift of prophecy, why must we make sure that we know all our teachings are from the Bible alone? What problems are created if we lean on Ellen White for our doctrines? At the same time, why is she so helpful to us in clarifying and understanding teachings that we have gotten from the Bible?

2. Dwell on the idea that Sabbath keeping is an expression of the rest we have in Christ, in that our salvation is based on His works for us, not on our own. How does this help answer the spurious charge that by keeping the Sabbath, we are denying the gospel of God’s grace?

3. Even critics of Ellen G. White admit that she played a big role in moving the Adventist Church from legalism toward a more Cross-centered view of salvation, which is a strange thing for a “false prophet” (what many of these same people refer to her as) to do. How is the inconsistency of these critics revealed by their view that, though a “false prophet,” she nevertheless guided the church away from legalism?
Lesson 11 *March 7–13

Interpreting the Prophetic Writings

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 65:17; Mark 1:15; Rom. 2:14–16; Eph. 2:8, 9; James 2:14–26; 1 John 5:12, 13.

Memory Text: “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27, NKJV).

As Seventh-day Adventists we believe that Ellen White manifested the gift of prophecy. The next question, however, is how do we interpret her writings?

Though we believe that her inspiration, not her authority, is on the same level as the Old and New Testament prophets, when interpreting what she has written, we must apply the same principles of interpretation to her writings that we do to Scripture. Indeed, principles for interpreting the Bible can be used when interpreting Ellen White’s writings, even though the authority of the Bible is above the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy. To use an analogy from American law, one might use the same principles for interpreting a decision of the United States Supreme Court as for interpreting a decision by a lower court, but in the end the decision of the Supreme Court carries the ultimate authority.

The Week at a Glance: What is the difference between exegesis and the homiletical use of a biblical text? Why is context so important? Can people who have never heard the gospel be saved? What distinguishes the kingdom of grace from the kingdom of glory?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 14.
Exegesis

Exegesis is concerned with the original meaning of a text. It focuses on what the author wanted to say and what the text meant to the original reader.

What is the original or exegetical meaning of Romans 2:14–16? Compare Ezek. 3:17–19, Rom. 10:12–17.

There is no question that there will be people in heaven who never have heard the gospel. “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 638.

On occasion, God, apart from human messengers, reaches out to individuals in heathen lands and saves them. However, they are saved because the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they have responded appropriately as evidenced by their works. They are not saved because they have lived up to their conscience; if they were, then they would be saved by keeping the law, and the New Testament clearly denies that possibility (Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16). The issue in Romans 2:11–16 is the accountability of Jews and Gentiles, not their salvation. The fact that God is no respecter of persons (vs. 11) is illustrated by what Paul says in Romans 2:12. “As many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (NKJV). Those “without law” are the Gentiles who do not have the written law given to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. However, they will perish, not because they did not have the written law but because they are sinners who have transgressed against the law “written in their hearts, their conscience” (vs. 15).

In the judgment, Jews and Gentiles will be judged and condemned by their respective laws, the Jews by the written law and the Gentiles by the law “written in their hearts.” Among the Gentiles, conscience performed the same function as the written law performed among the Jews. Scripture clearly says that “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10, NIV). This means that Jews and Gentiles are sinners alike and are all saved the same way, not by any law keeping but only by Jesus’ death on the cross.

How reliable a guide is your conscience? Does following your conscience always guarantee that you will make a right decision? Justify your answer.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Luke 24:27

The Student Will:

Know: How to understand and apply the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

Feel: A desire to deepen and enrich personal Bible study.

Do: Commit to deeper Bible study.

Learning Outline:

I. Exegesis Versus Homiletics (1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

A What is the original context and intended meaning of this passage? How have we expanded its meaning and applied this verse to other things?

B Can you think of any examples in which a preacher has employed Scripture to make a point or communicate an important truth not specifically intended by the writer?

II. Time and Place (Jer. 4:23–26)

A What connotations do these verses have for people in the end times? What was Jeremiah denoting in this vision?

B Do you sometimes feel distant from the world of the Bible? How can we better identify with the experience of ancient people?

C How does an understanding of her time and place help us better interpret the writings of Ellen G. White?

III. Context (Isa. 65:17–20)

A How does the immediate context inform the way we interpret this passage? In what way can we apply it to our future?

B What dangers are there in taking a passage of Ellen White out of its context? Why is it important to consider all that is said on a particular topic rather than isolated examples?

Summary: Just as the interpretation of Scripture requires the use of sound methods of interpretation, so, too, the writings of Ellen G. White need to be studied carefully in order to understand accurately their meaning.
Homiletics

Homiletics is the art of preaching. In a homiletics class a student learns sermon preparation and how to use the Scriptures in preaching. Sometimes a preacher may use just the wording of a text, without special regard for its original meaning, to make a point or an appeal during a sermon. This is called the homiletical use of Scripture.

**What was the kingdom Jesus was proclaiming as being near in Mark 1:15?**

The kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming at that time was the kingdom of grace, which He established at His First Advent. But the text also can be applied to our situation today. A preacher on Sabbath morning may tell the congregation, “All the time prophecies have been fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand.” And he may appeal to them that today we need to repent and believe the gospel. The kingdom that the modern preacher has in mind, however, is no longer the kingdom of grace but the kingdom of glory that Christ will inaugurate at His second coming. The first interpretation of Mark 1:15 is exegetical, the second homiletical.

According to Mark 1:17, Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee one day when He saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea. Jesus said to them, "’Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men’" (*NKJV*), and immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

A modern preacher, using the words of Mark 1:17, may call upon church members to follow Jesus because only He can make us fishers of men. Exegetically the text applies to Simon and Andrew, but homiletically it can be applied to every Christian, because Jesus wants us all to become fishers of men (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

Ellen G. White frequently used Scripture homiletically. She was steeped in the language of the Bible, and whenever she spoke or wrote on a topic, she used biblical language and biblical texts to convey to the church the message that she had received from the Lord. For example, in the book *Education*, Ellen G. White has a chapter on the study of physiology. Speaking of good posture she says, “Among the first things to be aimed at should be a correct position, both in sitting and in standing. God made man upright, and He desires him to possess not only the physical but the mental and moral benefit, the grace and dignity and self-possession, the courage and self-reliance, which an erect bearing so greatly tends to promote.”—*Education*, p. 198. That “God made man upright” is a quote from Ecclesiastes 7:29 (*NKJV*), but when Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, he was referring to moral uprightness, not to posture.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God has appointed the means for us to interpret His prophetic messages correctly.

During World War II, Allied intelligence intercepted numerous messages. This offered a tremendous battlefront advantage. There was one problem: having the messages did not mean understanding them. Knowing that messages could be intercepted, the senders had disguised them in code. Allied teams of code breakers were assembled to find out what the messages were saying. Their success turned the tide in favor of the Allies.

God has sent messages. They are useless, however, unless we understand them. Since the messages were given ages ago in cultural settings different from ours, in other languages, and to a variety of personalities, God’s messages effectively can be disguised. Perhaps this explains why so many Christian denominations all claim to tell the biblical messages. Fortunately there is a system of principles that enables us to decode the messages. Two words are important to the system: (1) hermeneutics and (2) exegesis.

“Hermeneutics is the field of theological study that deals with the interpretation of Scripture. Often, it is characterized as being primarily concerned with the theory or theories of interpretation, and in this respect it can be distinguished from exegesis, which may be thought of as a practical application of hermeneutical principles.”—The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), p. 415.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Exegesis (Ezekiel 3:17–19; Romans 2:14–16, 10:12–17)

Words take meaning from their context. Taken out of context, they may say something quite different from what was intended. If we heard that someone had fixed the works of a clock, we would think of moving parts, not musical scores.

The point is simple: to understand words or units of speech, context

CONTINUED
Time and Place

A crucial rule of biblical interpretation is the principle of studying the times and circumstances during which a particular text was written and by whom.

**What is Jeremiah describing in Jeremiah 4:23–26?**

When most Adventists read these texts, they think of the millennium. However, when Jeremiah wrote this text, around 600 B.C., he was not thinking of the millennium. The context of this passage is the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

God, through Jeremiah, pleaded with His people to turn from their evil ways, but they would not listen. In verses 23–26 the prophet sees in vision what will happen if they disobey. In poetic language he describes the waste and desolation that will come upon the land of Judah because of their disobedience. The crucial point is that when a text was written and under what circumstances need to be taken into account when we seek to interpret it.

What happened with Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C. is a symbol of what will happen to the world in the future. When Jesus comes and the earth is cleansed with fire, Jeremiah 4:23–26 will be an apt description of this earth during the millennium. Thus, exegetically, Jeremiah 4:23–26 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. Symbolically, however, it also refers to the time of the millennium. Ellen G. White, therefore, quotes from Jeremiah 4 to describe the situation on earth during the millennium.—*The Great Controversy*, p. 659.

In reading Ellen White, we also need to take time and circumstances into account. For example, in 1897 Mrs. White wrote that “the money expended in bicycles and dress and other needless things must be accounted for.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 398.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the bicycle was not an economical means of transportation but was rather a rich person’s toy. The best early bicycle cost US$150, an investment comparable to the cost of an expensive car today. People were mortgaging their income for months in advance to buy what was then an expensive luxury item. Within a few years’ time the bicycle became a useful and inexpensive means of transportation, and she never again spoke against it.

Her policy on bicycles was based on the biblical principle of good stewardship. If she were alive today, she probably would apply this principle to other things that people spend frivolously on.

**Time and circumstances are important not just in the interpretation of inspired writings but in all aspects of life. How quick are you to judge the actions of others without getting more background information? How can you improve in this area?**
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

must be studied. Context includes time, place, culture, historical setting, the author’s frame of mind, the intended audience, contemporary manners and customs, and so forth. Guided by God’s Spirit, we can, through careful attention to these factors, know the meaning of Scripture; but ignoring them will produce fanciful interpretations.

Consider This: What do the texts suggest about the importance of understanding the biblical context of a particular scripture? What is the danger of not taking a particular text’s context into consideration? How do we define what that context is or what it includes?

II. Homiletics (Mark 1:15, 17)

Consider This: In 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, the context suggests that the human body is God’s temple. Three chapters earlier (1 Cor. 3:16, 17) Paul calls the body of believers, that is, the church, God’s temple. In chapter 3, Paul warns that if believers destroy God’s temple, the church, God will destroy them. Some preachers have exercised license with these verses, reasoning: (1) human bodies are God’s temples (1 Cor. 6); (2) Paul says if we destroy God’s temple, God will destroy us. The problem is that the temple of 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 is clearly the church (“body of Christ”), not the human body. (If we already have destroyed our human body, why would God destroy it again?) The preacher’s good intention is to encourage us to care for our bodies. Does this justify blending these verses out of context? Explain. What larger principle about interpretation does this give us?

III. Time and Place (Jeremiah 4:23–26)

In Jeremiah 10:3, 4 the Lord rebukes Israel:

“For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple” (NKJV).

Sincere Christians have applied this to the custom of decorating Christmas
Immediate Context

**Read** Isaiah 65:17. What is the new heaven and new earth to which Isaiah is referring? Is it the new earth that Christians expect in the future?

In the immediate context, Isaiah says, “‘No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed’” (vs. 20, NKJV). Death on the new earth? This cannot be the new earth we expect that follows the millennium. What then is the new heaven and the new earth in verse 17?

In this passage Isaiah describes a “new creation” that would have been brought about had Israel, following the restoration from the Babylonian captivity, remained faithful to God and fulfilled the divine commission to be a light to the world (Isa. 42:6). Unfortunately, it didn’t, and thus the prophecy, which was conditional, was not fulfilled. This “new heaven and new earth” never became a reality. Nevertheless, in a secondary sense these verses point forward to the new heaven and the new earth to be ushered in at the close of the millennium. But in that “new earth and new heaven” there will be no children born to the redeemed (Matt. 22:30), neither will there be any more sorrow or death (Rev. 21:4), so we have to be careful how far we seek to push the imagery.

**In Christ’s Object Lessons,** Ellen White makes the statement that “those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved.” —Page 155. Does this mean we can never be certain about our salvation?

When we study the context, we discover that she is speaking about whether a person can fall from grace after conversion. Many Christians in her days believed in the doctrine of “once saved always saved.” Ellen White was clearly against this teaching. In context she says, “Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation.”—Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 155.

The immediate context makes it clear that she is addressing the issue of self-confidence and temptations after conversion. We are never secure against temptations, we never can say that we cannot fall, that we are saved and therefore secure from temptation, but this does not mean that in Jesus we cannot have day-by-day assurance of salvation.

If your hope of salvation rests in what Jesus did for you, how can you then not have assurance of salvation? On the other hand, if you are looking to self, how can you ever have any assurance at all?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

trees. It certainly sounds like a condemnation of the practice—cutting the tree, nailing it to a stand, decorating it with tinsel—but is this the practice God condemned? When we consider time and place (the seventh century B.C. when idolatry was practiced in Israel, but when there was no record of Christmas trees), it becomes clear that the practice rebuked here is the creation of idols. Should we not keep this principle in mind when considering passages that forbid women to talk in church or that discuss proper hairstyles?

IV. The Immediate and Larger Contexts

Let’s look more closely at a definition of a word we’ve encountered already in this lesson:

context: 1. the parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specified word or passage and can influence its meaning or effect. 2. the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.—Random House Webster’s College Dictionary (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 294.

Christians approach Romans 15 and Colossians 2 differently, resulting in different interpretations. Some believe that all Sabbaths have been eradicated under the new covenant. Others disagree. Does context help resolve the dilemma? In the immediate context of Colossians 2, verse 17 specifies that the matters in question were “a shadow of things to come” (NKJV). The question arises, “Were all Sabbaths [holy days] ‘shadows’?”

Study the following hypothetical situation: Suppose Canada conquers the United States. The new government announces that national U.S. holidays will not be observed (for example, Independence Day, Presidents’ Day, etc.) Does this mean that Christmas is banned, for it too is a holiday? No. The people we now refer to as Canadians celebrated Christmas prior to the existence of the United States, and the ban was specifically against national holidays, not all holidays. By extension, the immediate context of Colossians 2 specifies days that were “shadows,” not all Sabbaths. Through their knowledge of the yearly shadow sabbaths (for example, Passover), Paul’s first-century readers knew that he meant these annual holidays. In Romans 15 the immediate context does little to explain this issue, leading the student to explore the larger context to ascertain the author’s intent. The only New Testament controversies regarding which days should be observed are
The Larger Context

The larger context refers to what other texts beyond the immediate passage have to say on a particular topic. It can refer to other chapters in a book, the whole book, or to the whole of Scripture.

Are we saved by grace through faith alone, or do we also need works? Eph. 2:8, 9; James 2:14–26. Is Paul in conflict with James on the issue of salvation? What do the following texts have to say on this topic? Rom. 3:21–28, Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6–12.

When we look at the larger context in Scripture, what other passages have to say on the topic, we discover that James is not arguing for good works as a requirement for salvation. Rather, he insists that there are two kinds of faith, one valid and the other invalid. Paul speaks about the valid faith that is followed by good deeds. James refers to the invalid faith that stops at the intellectual level, faith that is mere mental assent.

Paul uses the example of Abraham to show that we are justified on the basis of valid, or real, faith. James shows that Abraham’s faith was real because it produced good works (obedience). Therefore, we do not need anything but faith, valid faith, to be saved, and our behavior will show if our faith is valid or not.

When reading Ellen White, we also need to look at the larger context in her writings; i.e., everything she has written on a particular topic. We cannot just take one or two statements and run with them. For example, on the issue of meat-eating she has very absolute-sounding statements but also many modifying statements that need to be considered, as well.

In the book Counsels on Diet and Foods, she says: “Vegetables, fruits, and grains should compose our diet. Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs. The eating of flesh is unnatural. We are to return to God’s original purpose in the creation of man.”—Page 380. Anyone reading only this statement would have to come to the conclusion that under no circumstances are we to eat meat. However, a few pages further on is this statement: “A meat diet is not the most wholesome of diets, and yet I would not take the position that meat should be discarded by every one. Those who have feeble digestive organs can often use meat, when they cannot eat vegetables, fruit, or porridge.”—Pages 394, 395. (See also Friday’s lesson.) When we look at the total body of what she has written on a given topic, a balanced picture emerges that is invaluable for every Christian who takes religion seriously.

While we shouldn’t make meat and drink our religion, God has given us wonderful counsel about diet that can have a positive impact on our health. How careful are you in your diet and all your habits? Why wait until sickness strikes before you make a change for the better?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

about the annual feasts. This then forms the natural context for understanding Romans 15. (See Hebrews 8–10.)

Consider This: Just as Christmas was celebrated in what we know of as Canada today long before U.S. holidays existed, so the weekly Sabbath came from Eden, before Old Covenant sabbaths were established. We understand a conquering nation eliminating national holidays but not Christmas, because it is religion based. Likewise, we are not surprised that “shadow sabbaths” were superseded by Christ’s coming, but does that eliminate the weekly Sabbath?

►STEP 3—Practice

Application Exercise:
Select a chapter from the Gospels and answer the following questions (answer the majority by reading the chapter[s] before consulting commentaries):

a. Who wrote it? When was it written?
b. Who is the intended audience?
c. Why was it written? What is the apparent meaning?
d. Why was the authorship important to the original audience?
e. Are there customs or manners that are difficult to understand? List them.
f. Are there groups or individuals in the Gospels that I should learn more about? What steps can I take to do so?
g. How can I apply what I’ve learned to my home, job, family, and personal life?

Hints: Always request God’s guidance before starting. Clues about authorship and dates often are found in the opening and closing chapters. Do not rush.

►STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Invite class members to write out three things they have learned from this lesson that they will use in their Bible study this week. Share and discuss if time allows.

Further Guidelines for the Interpretation of Inspired Writings
Apart from the guidelines studied in this week’s lesson, we need to (a) ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the study of His Word; (b) ensure that we use one or more good translations; (c) look for principles that are universal and apply to all people, in all places, and at all times; (d) be willing to obey the truths we discover; (e) be open-minded and willing to surrender previously held positions; (f) guard against extreme interpretations; (g) work together with people of experience; and (h) use common sense.

Ellen G. White on Once Saved Always Saved
“There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable. Peter’s fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. Self-confidence led him to the belief that he was saved, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation. Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 154, 155.

Discussion Questions:

1. Look at the whole context of the Ellen White quote above. Now look at the one statement about not saying we are saved. How easy to take that one statement out of context and come away with a whole different meaning from what was intended. Why must we always be careful not to pull statements out of context? What other examples can you find of people having done just that? Why is it such a temptation?

2. What are some other ways that Ellen White’s writings have been misused? What can we do, however, to avoid the trap of throwing the whole thing out, simply because it has not been used properly?

3. Think about what we’ve been given with the health message as it appears in the writings of Ellen White. What great blessings can we take away from it if we use it properly? What traps must we avoid?
LESSON 12 *March 14–20

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, probably would 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?**
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Amos 3:7

The Student Will:
Know: How the prophetic gift has enriched the Adventist Church, just as it did God’s people of old.
Feel: Gratitude and pride for how God has led our church.
Do: Become more involved in the progress and development of our church.

Learning Outline:

I. Mission (Matt. 28:19, 20)
-A To what extent can Ellen G. White be credited with our growth as a denomination?
-B Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. In what ways have Christian education and publishing benefited our church?

II. Health (Lev. 13:46)
-A What was the practical benefit of the hygiene and dietary laws for the Israelites? How have we as a church benefited from prophetic guidance on such matters?
-B Why do you think healthful practices are declining among Adventists? How does this make you feel? What can we do as individuals to reverse this decline?
-C What can we do to promote innovative medical and lifestyle practices that are relevant today?

III. Theology (Ps. 33:6)
-A What should be the relationship of Ellen G. White’s writings to new insights in theology, medicine, or science? Does Ellen G. White limit the expansion of our understanding in any way? Explain your answer.
-B How can we become more involved in furthering the work of the church in blessing others?

Summary: Through the gift of prophecy, working in harmony with the other spiritual gifts, God graciously has blessed our church. Our commitment to world mission, education, publishing, health and medical work, and scientific and theological discovery that affirm God’s Word find their inception in the writings of Ellen G. White. We can be grateful for God’s leading.
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.*

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

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.**

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God has given us blessings and gifts so that we might be a blessing to others.

In, perhaps, the most famous mutiny of all time, the H.M.S. *Bounty* is wrested from Captain William Bligh while sailing the seas of the South Pacific. Nine of the mutineers and a company of Tahitians flee to uninhabited Pitcairn Island to escape capture and punishment. A sordid tale of tragedy follows. “By 1800, through drink and fighting, all the men were dead except Alexander Smith. . . . With him were 11 women and 23 children. Shortly after this he was converted through reading the *Bounty* Bible and immediately began to teach the children from the Bible.”—Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1966), vol. 11, p. 998.

The social atmosphere of the island changed overnight! Where there had been violence, there was peace. Where drunkenness had reigned, sobriety now ruled. Spirited passion was replaced by passion for the Spirit. Why? Because one person found a Bible, was changed and blessed by the prophetic gift, and then shared those blessings with all those around him. How many homes, families, cities, and even nations can testify to the blessings of following the counsels of God!

**Consider This:** How is it where you live? Like Alexander Smith, what can you do to influence positively those around you? How can you change their situation for the better?

**STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary


Read Acts 16:6–10. Paul and Silas were expanding their work to include unreached areas in Asia minor. Many places within that region were
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?
untouched by the gospel. We would consider Paul and Silas to be visionaries; but their vision apparently was not broad enough! God was calling them to Europe. Circumstances orchestrated by the Holy Spirit prevented them from executing their travel plans. However, it was in vision that Paul clearly was shown God’s direction.

**Consider This:** Discuss God’s leading of the church into a broader understanding of His mission or share how God has led class members into unexpected witnessing opportunities.

---

**II. Education** *(Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:4–7, 20–25)*

Read 2 Kings 6:1, 2; Proverbs 22:6; 2 Timothy 1:5, 6. While the home held the ultimate responsibility for educating the young in the ways of God, the broader community also shared that responsibility. Prophetic schools were established so that the prophets could educate leaders in the counsels of God. Samuel, Elisha, and others are considered founders of these early educational institutions.

**Consider This:** Invite class members to share how God has used Christian education to bless them or their families. Discuss the importance of passing on the torch of faith to future generations.

---

**III. Health** *(Exodus 15:26, Leviticus 7:22–26, 11:1–8, 13:46)*

Read Proverbs 17:22, John 5:1–9, 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, Titus 1:12, 3 John 2. The Bible shows a clear association between spiritual and physical health. It is neither accidental nor incidental that dishonesty and cruelty were associated with gluttony. Sexual abuse of the body had spiritual consequences, because the body is God’s temple. Jesus first healed the man by the pool of Bethesda and later instructed him to stop sinning. On the positive side, spiritual health contributes to physical health. A carefree, guilt-free “heart” is a powerful medicine.

**Consider This:** Discuss the interrelationship of physical and spiritual health. Why should a spiritually minded person be interested in a
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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

healthy lifestyle? How can an interest in health lead a person toward a quest for spiritual wholeness?

IV. Publishing (Exodus 17:14, 34:27; Deuteronomy 6:1–9, 31:24)

Read Luke 1:1–4 with Acts 1:1; John 21:24, 25; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Revelation 1:1, 2. God knows the power of a recorded revelation in the work of spreading the gospel. Many prophets not only spoke the message but also wrote the message, providing an enduring record of God’s interaction with humankind that could be shared from generation to generation.

Consider This: In this age of technological explosion, publishing the good news may go far beyond the printed page. Discuss what technologies might be included in publishing today.

V. Theology (Genesis 1:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 42:5)

Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 4:3, 4; and 2 Peter 1:19–2:3. Scripture leads us to salvation that comes through trusting Christ. It shows us what is true and right and prepares us for a complete life in Him. Error-filled theology, as in error-filled thinking, leads to sin-filled living. Should we be surprised that God considers truth to be important?

Consider This: Discuss the concept that truth is relative—what is truth for you may not be truth for me. If everything is true, even opposing ideas, can anything be true? What is meant by the phrase “truth is exclusive”?

STEP 3—Practice

If your meeting space, class size, and the personality of your class allows, divide into groups of five to seven. Let each group concentrate on one or two of the special blessings studied in the lesson. One variation would be
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.


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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to allow the groups to be self-selecting. Those with an education story could form group one, those with a health story group two, and so on. Then have these smaller groups explore answers to the following questions:

1. How would my life be different if God had not used publishing, education, healing, and so forth to make a difference in my family or my personal life?

2. What benefits have I or those around me received through the special blessing provided through God’s guidance using the means shared in the preceding question?

3. What do I believe God may be calling me to do to extend the blessing He has given me to others?

STEP 4—Apply

Start an ongoing personal or class project that grows out of this lesson. It is not enough to receive the blessings provided by the prophetic gift. We are given God’s gifts only so that we can share them. These suggestions are not exhaustive but may prime the pump of discussion.

Mission: Select a missionary in another country and contact him or her. Offer prayer and even financial support through certified groups, such as Gospel Outreach and Adventist Frontier Missions. Other ways to assist might include supplying literature. Reach out locally to overlooked groups, such as prisoners.

Education: Find a young person in your church who cannot afford a Christian education. Provide finances and earning opportunities so that he or she can attend a Christian school.

Health: Start a health-based ministry to reach your community. Your conference office or national organizations such as the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP) can help guide you.

Publishing: Distribute literature door-to-door or begin a Signs of the Times® newspaper box program.

Theology: Engage your neighbor through Bible studies.

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:

1. As a class, go over your answer to Monday’s final question.

2. 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.

3. 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?

4. 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?
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


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)

A. How does this parallel our pioneers’ experience? How do the Bible and prophetic guidance help people move through crises?

B. What role did Jesus’ miraculous appearances play for the disciples? How did these miracles relate to His exposition of the Scriptures?

C. 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)

A. How do you feel when people attack the Bible or Ellen G. White’s writings? How should we respond to critics?

B. 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)

A. In what areas do you personally need more understanding? How does our denomination need to grow in understanding?

B. 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**


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

CONTINUED
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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

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?

CONTINUED
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?

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
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.
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.

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:**

1. **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?**

2. **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?**

3. **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?**