

# The Authority<sup>1</sup> of the Prophets<sup>2</sup>



## SABBATH—FEBRUARY 14

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Exodus 4:10–16; 1 Samuel 12:1–4; 2 Kings 22:10–13; Jeremiah 36:22–31; Mark 1:21–27; Acts 16:25–34.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Don’t [Do not] treat prophecies<sup>3</sup> as if they amount to nothing. Put everything to the test. Hold on to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NlrV).

**ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE,** God talks to people through His prophets. And the people either accept or reject (refuse to accept) what the prophets tell them. Of course, by rejecting the words of the prophets, the people are not rejecting the prophets. They are rejecting God who sent them.

It is a very serious thing to claim to speak in the name of God. If you claim to speak in His name, then you are a mouthpiece for God. This work is no small task. People have been given authority to speak for the boss of a company, or the president or prime minister—but to speak for the Lord? That is a big job! Sadly, much of Bible history is a story of God speaking through His prophets and of people rejecting what was said. How careful we need to be not to make the same mistake today.

**THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE:** Why was Moses so unwilling 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<sup>4</sup> and extracanonical<sup>5</sup> prophets?

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1. authority—power that creates respect and trust; the skill to make someone obey.
  2. prophets—men or women who are spokespersons for God. God gives His prophets special messages to give to His people. Prophets also speak to God on behalf of His people. God may also give prophets warnings about what will happen in the future.
  3. prophecies—special messages from God, often explaining what will happen in the future.
  4. canonical—accepted as the highest standard (guide, example, rule, or law) of truth; canonical also refers to the books written by the Bible prophets that are part of the Old and New Testaments.
  5. extracanonical—writers or prophets who lived and wrote during Bible times whose books are not included in the Old or New Testaments.

**SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 15****THE PROPHET AS GOD'S MOUTHPIECE (Exodus 4:10–16)**

**What can we learn from Exodus 4:10–16 about how prophets are called and how they work?**

According to God's plan, Moses was to become as God to Aaron (read Exodus 4:16). And Aaron was to become Moses' mouthpiece or "prophet" (Exodus 7:1, NIV). This verse explains the close relationship between God and all His prophets. They were His mouthpieces, His spokespersons. God taught all His prophets, including Moses and Aaron, what they were to do as His mouthpieces. But Moses at first was an unwilling prophet.



**Aaron spoke to the people for God. Prophets were God's mouthpieces, His spokespersons.**

Ellen G. White said that she also was unwilling when first called by the Lord. "I had a second vision,<sup>6</sup> about a week after the first vision. God told me that

I must go and tell others what He had shown to me. It was shown me that people would be against my labors. I also was told that my heart would be torn with sadness. But God promised me that His grace would support me through all. God told me that it would be my duty to go out among the people and present the truth. My health was so poor that I suffered all the time. I was so shy that it was painful for me to meet strangers.



**God told Ellen G. White to tell others what He had shown her.**

"For several days, and far into the night after this vision, I prayed. I asked God to excuse me from this duty. I asked that God choose someone better able to do it. But what God wanted me to do did not change."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, page 69.

**In what way are we called to "make known to others what I [Jesus] have shown to you?" What has God "shown" to you? How can you better share that truth with others?**

6. vision—a special message from God that is seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God's will (plan).

**MONDAY—FEBRUARY 16****THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS AS A MAN (Matthew 7:28, 29)**

In Matthew 21:23 Jesus is teaching. The chief priests and the elders ask Him, “ ‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’ ” (NKJV). Jesus answers the question by asking another question: “ ‘The baptism<sup>7</sup> of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?’ ” (verse 25, NKJV; read verses 24–27). When the chief priests and elders refuse to answer, Jesus refuses to give a clear answer in return. If the chief priests refuse to accept God’s power in John’s ministry, it would be useless to discuss His own—which was also from God.

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

Full authority belongs to Christ as our Creator (John 1:3) and Savior (Romans 3:24). Jesus is both our Judge and the Standard<sup>8</sup> by which each life is to be judged. His authority is final. The Gospels<sup>9</sup> announce that Jesus’ teaching caused people to be amazed (surprised) because He taught as One having authority (Matthew 7:29).

Throughout the Gospels we find Christ’s godly authority. He forgave sins (Mark 2:10). He drove out devils (Mark 3:15).

7. baptism—when a person is put completely under water and brought back up out of it. This means that Jesus has forgiven this person’s sins and has given him or her new life.

8. standard—example, guide, principle (rule), or law.

9. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus’ life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

10. eternal—forever; without end.



**The priest and elders asked Jesus, “ ‘Who gives you the power to do what you do?’ ”**

And He claimed the right to judge the hearts of people (John 2:24, 25) and give eternal<sup>10</sup> life (John 10:28). But the authority that Christ used on earth was given to Him by the Father (John 17:2). Everything Jesus did on earth was done in close cooperation with His Father (John 5:19). At the same time, Jesus had full authority (Matthew 28:18). So, Jesus could pass His authority on to His disciples (followers) (Mark 6:7).

**What should our actions and feelings be toward authority?**

**TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 17****THE AUTHORITY OF THE WRITTEN WORD (2 Kings 22:10–13)**

**In 2 Kings 22:10–13 and Jeremiah 36:22–31, we find two different ways that people acted toward God’s Written Word (the Bible). We might not act quite as strongly as these people did. But what do their stories teach us about how we might choose to act toward God’s Written Word?**

One can refuse to accept God’s Word today without openly burning it, as this one king did. Instead, we can laugh at it or overlook it. Or we can say it is old-fashioned. And we can claim that it has nothing to teach us and has no power over our lives.

But no one safely can rebel against the Bible. Sooner or later he or she will suffer the results of that refusal. The Written Word explains clearly the will (plan) of God, who He is, the meaning of our lives, and the purposes of God for all people. The Bible explains these truths in a way that all can understand. To refuse Bible truth may not have bad results right away. But it will lead to the loss of eternal life.

All through her life Ellen G. White honored the Word of God. About the arguments between science and Scripture, she wrote, “There should be a firm belief in the full authority of God’s Holy Word. The Bible is not to be tested<sup>11</sup> by men’s ideas of science. Human knowledge is not a dependable guide.”—Adapted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 114.

In 1909 Ellen G. White attended her last General Conference<sup>12</sup> session. At the close of her last sermon, she picked

up the Bible, opened it, and held it out with her hands. She said, “ ‘Brothers and Sisters, I strongly recommend this Book to you.’ ”—Adapted from Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years*, page 197.



The Bible clearly explains who God is and His plan for our lives.

**Examine your attitude (thoughts and feelings) toward the Bible. How much time do you spend reading it? How seriously do you try to follow the teachings?**

### WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 18

#### THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPOKEN WORD (Hebrews 4:12)

**According to Jeremiah 38:1–4 and Acts 16:25–34, how did the spoken Word of God influence<sup>13</sup> people?**

11. tested—to prove something true or false, good or bad, right or wrong.

12. General Conference—the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

13. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

The Word of God works on our hearts in two ways. Paul says that the Word of God is the same as “any sword that has two edges. It cuts deep enough to separate soul from spirit. It can separate joints<sup>14</sup> from bones. It judges the thoughts and purposes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV). Paul is explaining that the *Word* means the *messages* preached both to the Israel of early Bible times and to Christians (Hebrews 4:2).

Like a surgeon’s (doctor’s) scalpel (knife), the spoken Word of God also can cut to heal and restore.<sup>15</sup> Or the spoken Word of God can make known that there is a deadly disease (sin) in the soul that will lead to the loss of eternal life. If the hearers do not accept the Word by faith, the Word cannot help them grow in God.

The General Conference was first organized (formed) in 1863. From 1863 until 1901, church organization<sup>16</sup> remained unchanged. As the years passed, the conference grew larger. During this time many associations (groups) were organized to care for the different ministries.<sup>17</sup> Some of these associations included the medical missionary work, Sabbath School, religious liberty, tract society, and so on. These associations ruled themselves. They were not inner parts of the General

Conference organization.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, they sometimes competed against one another. But all important decisions (plans) about the worldwide work were made by a few people at the General Conference in Battle Creek, Michigan, U.S.A.

The day before the General Conference meetings in 1901, Ellen G. White met with the church leaders. She encouraged them to make great changes in the running of the church. So, when the conference (meeting) opened, the usual order of business was suspended (put on hold). And a large committee (about 75 people) was chosen to work on changing the setup of the church. The result was that the General Conference committee was made a lot larger. The different associations became departments<sup>19</sup> of the General Conference. Union conferences were also organized to allow leaders in the field to make quick decisions without having to wait for decisions (rulings) from the conference headquarters.

The great change in church structure was led by God. It was accepted by all members. And it has stood the test of time. Some small changes and additions have been made over the years. But it is still the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

14. joints—the places in the body where the bones fit together and connect to one another.

15. restore—to make something as it was in the beginning before sin appeared.

16. church organization—a system of leaders, rules, and policies (guidelines) that governs the decisions (choices) and actions of a church.

17. ministries—the many types of work people do for God.

18. organization—the leaders who oversee the members and business of a large group of people, such as a worldwide church.

19. departments—divisions of special (and smaller) groups that are part of a larger group or company.

**THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 19****THE AUTHORITY OF  
NONCANONICAL PROPHETS<sup>20</sup>  
(Luke 7:28)**

**A prophet whose book is part of the Old or New Testament is called a canonical prophet.<sup>21</sup> Isaiah and Amos are two examples of canonical prophets. But we also find in the Bible several prophets whose books did not become part of the canon.<sup>22</sup> What do 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; and 2 Chronicles 12:15 tell us about these prophets and their writings?**

The books of Chronicles point to at least six different prophetic<sup>23</sup> books written by extracanonical prophets.<sup>24</sup> These prophets are Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, and Iddo.

**According to 2 Samuel 12:1–4; 1 Kings 11:29–39; 1 Kings 14:2–18; and Luke 7:28, what authority did extracanonical prophets have?**

The canon is a collection of God-inspired books that was put together as the rule of life and faith for God's people. Everything else has to be measured by it. It holds everything a person needs to know to be saved. But, not

everything the prophets wrote under inspiration is in the Bible. We know that Paul wrote more inspired letters than we have in the New Testament today (1 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 4:16). Now, suppose we found one of these letters today? It would not become part of the Bible. It would remain a God-given, inspired letter outside of the canon.

Ellen G. White's authority is the same as 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. They do not carry the kind of authority found in the Bible. In the end, the Bible and the Bible alone is our greatest authority.

**Why must even Ellen G. White's writings be tested by the Bible? Why must she not be the top authority on church doctrine (beliefs)?**

**FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 20**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** In 1982, a committee<sup>25</sup> of the General Conference prepared a statement on the relationship between the Bible and Ellen G. White. The list reads as follows: "(1) We believe that the Bible is the true Word of God. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit. (2) We believe that the canon of the Bible is made of only the 66 books

20. noncanonical prophets—prophets whose writings are not accepted as part of the Old or New Testament.

21. canonical prophets—prophets whose writings are accepted as part of the Old or New Testament.

22. canon—the list of books that were considered inspired (coming from God) and make up the Bible.

23. prophetic—foretelling future events.

24. extracanonical prophets—prophets who were considered inspired (led by God), but whose writings are not found among the books of the Bible.

25. committee—a group of people who have been asked to meet together to consider a matter.

of the Old and New Testaments. (3) We believe that the Bible is the foundation of faith. It is the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. (4) We believe that the Bible is the Word of God in human language. (5) We believe that the Bible teaches that the gift of prophecy<sup>26</sup> will be found in the Christian church after New Testament times. (6) We believe that the ministry (work done for God) and writings of Ellen G. White made clear that she had the gift of prophecy. (7) We believe that Ellen G. White was inspired by the Holy Spirit. We believe that her writings are inspired and useful for Seventh-day Adventists. (8) We believe that the purposes of the Ellen G. White writings are to help us understand and use the teaching of the Bible for our spiritual (holy) life and growth. (9) We believe that the acceptance of Ellen G. White's prophetic gift<sup>27</sup> is important to the growth and unity<sup>28</sup> of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (10) We believe that Ellen G. White uses quotes in the same way that many Bible writers use quotes."

**The list of what we do not believe:**

"(1) We do not believe that the quality or inspiration of the writings of Ellen G. White is different from that of the Bible. (2) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen G. White should be added to the canon of the Holy Bible. (3) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen

G. White are the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as the Bible is. (4) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen G. White may be used as the basis of doctrine. (5) We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen G. White may be used to replace Bible study. (6) We do not believe that the Bible can be understood only through the writings of Ellen G. White. (7) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen G. White are the final answer to the meaning of the Bible. (8) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen G. White must be included in preaching the truths of the Bible to other groups of people outside the church. (9) We do not believe that the writings of Ellen G. White simply came from living a pure life. (10) We do not believe that Ellen G. White's use of quotes makes her writings less inspired."

These two lists make clear that Ellen G. White's writings will help us better understand two important facts:

- (1) Her writings are not equal to the canon of the Bible.
- (2) Her writings are not just common Christian literature.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

- 1 Go through the lists above. How does this help clear up some questions about Ellen G. White? What questions does it raise?

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

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

28. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people or things are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.