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## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PROPHETS

*“The foundation by which to fix faith in the messages which God has sent to his people, will be more readily found in the study of his dealings with his prophets in past ages.” – W.C. White letter to L.E. Froom, January 8, 1828.*

*Understanding what the Bible teaches about the prophetic ministry would clear up the multitude of the questions that are entertained today regarding Ellen White.*

### 1. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, WHAT EXACTLY IS A PROPHET?

A. **Ex. 4:14-16 w/Ex. 7:1; Jer. 1:4-5, 9.**

- i. A prophet is a spokesperson for God.

*The Hebrew word for prophet is nabi; the Greek word is prophetes. Both words mean “spokesperson.” A prophet is simply a spokesperson for God. The characteristic introduction of a prophet is “Thus saith the Lord...”*

### 2. WHO IS CREDITED AS BEING THE VOICE OF THE PROPHETS?

A. **Rev. 12:17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12.**

*Scripture often refers to the gift of prophecy as “the testimony of Jesus Christ” or simply “the testimony” (Is. 8:20).*

### 3. HOW LONG WAS THE GIFT TO CONTINUE WITH THE CHURCH?

A. **Eph. 4:11-13.**

- i. The prophetic gift was given, along with the other spiritual gifts, to finish the work of the gospel. It makes no sense that God would remove the gift before it had the chance to accomplish what He sent it for.

B. **Joel 2:28; Rev. 12:17 w/19:10; 22:8-9.**

- i. Furthermore, the Bible predicted a special manifestation of the gift of prophecy in the last days.

#### 4. HOW DID GOD COMMUNICATE HIS WILL TO THE PROPHETS, AND THROUGH THE PROPHETS TO HIS PEOPLE?

##### A. Num. 12:6.

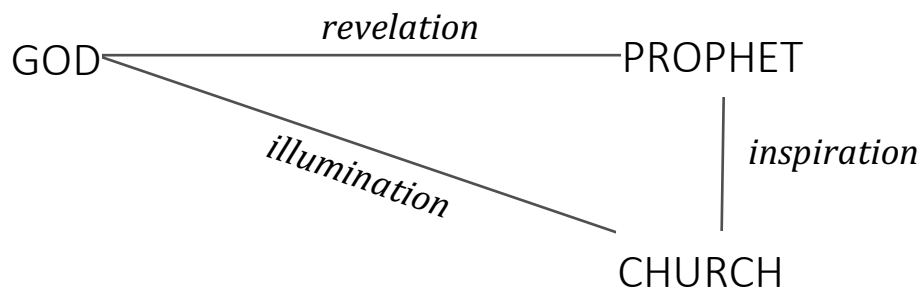
- i. He revealed Himself in a vision or dream.
- ii. At one time Mrs. White's son, W. C. White, made this inquiry of her: "Mother... we all have dreams. How do you know that God is speaking to you in the dreams of which you so frequently speak?" "Because," she answered, "the same angel messenger stands by my side instructing me in the visions of the night, as stands beside me instructing me in the visions of the day." Arthur White, *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 7

##### B. 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Mt. 26:56; Ro. 1:2; 16:26 nasb

- i. The prophets then communicated as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Their messages were recorded in Scripture.
- ii. Not all prophets, however, wrote books of the Bible
  - a. Literary canonical [Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Joel, Malachi, etc.]
  - b. Literary non-canonical [Iddo, Nathan, Ahijah (2 Chr. 9:29), Elijah (2 Chr. 21:12), etc.]
  - c. Non-literary [Enoch (Jude 14), Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Agabus (Ac. 11:27), etc.]

##### C. 2 Tim. 3:16.

- i. This process is called inspiration.



*The Lord reveals His message to the prophet in a vision (daytime) or a dream (nighttime) through the process of **revelation**; He then communicates the message through the prophet to the people through the process of **inspiration**; finally, He enables the people to receive the message of the prophet through the process of **illumination**.*

- ii. Dr. C. Raymond Holmes explains Biblical inspiration in these words –
  - a. “The literary creations of other human authors and writers can be and often are inspiring, but they are not inspired. The Bible is an inspired document because its author is God.” – *The Tip of the Iceberg*, p. 53.

## 5. UNDERSTANDING INSPIRATION

- A. There are three general views of inspiration:
  - i. **Verbal view (divine priority)** – in this view, God dictates His message to the prophet word-for-word.
  - ii. **Though view (divine-human)** – in this view, God reveals His message to the prophet, then leaves the prophet to communicate it in his or her own words, being guided by the Holy Spirit, but not dictated to.
  - iii. **Encounter view (human priority)** – in this view, the prophetic communication is based on a *subjective experience* of the prophet rather than any actual exchanging of information. The prophet then expresses his or her own ideas or thoughts – even erroneous ones – in the attempt to convey the “message” from God. Thus the message becomes more human than divine.

*In the first two views, the Bible is considered as fully inspired; fully reliable and trustworthy as the Word of God. The last view is the view of higher criticism, which views the Bible as a human production and therefore exalts the reader as the authority.*

- B. Seventh-day Adventists believe in thought inspiration. It appears clear from just the few Scriptures we’ve looked at that God permitted and guided men to communicate the divine message.
- C. Further, man’s involvement in the process did not negate the full authority of inspiration (“all Scripture”).
  - i. “as it is in truth, the Word of God” (1 Th. 2:13)

## 6. HOW DID ELLEN WHITE UNDERSTAND INSPIRATION?

- A. Ellen White clearly did not support the “Encounter” view of inspiration. Commenting on the views of higher criticism, Ellen White cautioned
  - i. To many the Bible is as a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives. AA 474

B. Neither did she support the view of verbal inspiration. Responding to an inquiry by Adventist physician, Dr. David Paulson, regarding her inspiration, she wrote

- i. In your letter you speak of your early training to have implicit faith in the testimonies and say, "I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, 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. 1SM 24, 5

C. She then gave her explanation of how she understood inspiration to work.

- i. The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language. The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14)." 1SM 24, 5
- ii. 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 and thoughts 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. 1SM 21.2
- iii. The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. 1SM 21.1

D. Furthermore, Ellen White did not believe herself to be infallible.

- i. “In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His word is true, and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning.” 1SM 37

E. Likewise, Seventh-day Adventists have never considered Ellen White infallible. This was not to say, however, that we can have no confidence in inspired writings. W.H. Littlejohn, president of the Battle Creek College, was asked “Do SDAs regard Ellen White as infallible?” He replied

- i. “No. Neither do they believe that Peter or Paul was infallible. They believe that the Holy Spirit which inspired Peter and Paul was infallible. They believe also that Mrs. White has from time to time received revelations from the Spirit of God, and that revelations made to her by the Spirit of God are just as reliable as revelations made by the same Spirit to other persons.” W.H. Littlejohn, RH 12.11.1883

## 7. WAS EVERYTHING ELLEN WHITE WROTE INSPIRED?

A. Ellen White herself was very clear on this question. She answered

- i. “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.” 1SM 39

B. One such example of “common things” was the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium. In one particular letter Ellen White wrote, she said there were 40 rooms in the building, when in reality there were only 38. When this was referred back to Ellen White as a reason for losing faith in the Testimonies, she responded,

- i. The information given concerning the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium was given, not as a revelation from the Lord, but simply as a human opinion. There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know. In my words, when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord and am stating it as such.... [F]or one to mix the sacred with the common is a great mistake. 1SM 38.3

C. The question you may find yourself asking is, “If not everything she wrote is inspired, how can we know the difference?” The Ellen White Estate has given a clear and unequivocal answer to this question –

- i. “Except for that which is in the nature of everyday matters or biographical, that which Mrs. White set before the people was based upon the visions given to her, whether or not she used the term ‘I saw...’ She, in her day, and we today, draw the line, not between books and letters, etc., but between the sacred and the common. No one need be confused.” 3SM 60 (compiler’s note).

## 8. WASN’T SOME OF HER COUNSEL JUST HER OWN OPINION?

### A. 1 Cor. 14:33.

- i. God is not the author of confusion. If the counsel of a prophet was only opinion and lacked divine authority, it would serve only to add more confusion to any discussion.

B. Ellen White had to deal with this mindset many times throughout her ministry. In a letter to the Battle Creek Church, she wrote –

- i. “After I wrote you the long letter which has been belittled by Elder H as merely an expression of my own opinion... the Lord **partially removed the restriction**, and I write what I do. I dare not say more now, lest I **go beyond** what the Spirit of the Lord has **permitted** me.... I have given you the light God has given to me. **In no case** have I given my own judgment or opinion. I have **enough to write** of what has been shown me, **without falling back on my own opinions**. You are doing as the children of Israel did again and again. Instead of repenting before God, you reject His words, and attribute all the warnings and reproof to the messenger whom the Lord sends.” 3SM 69-70

C. And in a letter to George Amadon on Jan. 15, 1906, she wrote

- i. “Those who have helped souls to feel at liberty to specify what is of God in the Testimonies and what are the uninspired words of Sister White, will find that they were **helping the devil** in his work of deception.” 3SM 70

D. Ellen White understood her counsels to be communications from God, and expressed this clearly on numerous occasions –

- i. “How many have read carefully *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and *The Desire of Ages*?... In my books, the truth is stated, barricaded by a ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon

my heart and mind **as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God,**  
upon the tables of stone...” 3SM 122

ii. “I am now looking over my **diaries** and copies of **letters** written for several years back... I have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in **testimony form**. While I am able to do this work, the people must have things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, **without one heretical sentence**, in that which I have written.” 3SM 52

iii. “Permit me to express my mind, and yet not my mind, but the word of the Lord.” 3SM 70

iv. “The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy.” 3SM 30

## 9. INSPIRATION OR APPLICATION?

A. For many Seventh-day Adventists, I believe the questions about Ellen White’s writings have much less to do with inspiration and far more to do with application.

i. For example, a person may read a statement where Ellen White comments on the riding of bicycles (which we will discuss in detail in “Ellen White Says,” Parts one and two), and because they don’t understand the statement, or because it doesn’t make sense to them, it’s easier to dismiss it as “uninspired”; Ellen White’s personal opinion. However, when such statements are understood, their inspiration becomes evident.

B. A person’s view of inspiration will dramatically affect his or her method of interpretation. When facing a difficult passage,

- a. A higher-critical view of Scripture leads the reader to ask the **doubter’s question** – “Is it true?” or “Is it inspired?”
- b. A belief in the full inspiration of Scripture leads the reader to ask the **faith question** – “What does it mean?”

C. And while Seventh-day Adventists for the most part dismiss the idea of higher criticism when it comes to the Bible, they regularly employ it in the writings of Ellen White. The doubter’s question removes ability of inspired writings to transform the readers, because when they come to passages that challenge their thinking, it gives them an “out” to avoid making any personal change.