

The Gift of Prophecy¹



SABBATH—JANUARY 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 20:7; Exodus 15:20; Deuteronomy 18:15; Matthew 11:11; John 6:14; Hebrews 11:24–26.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then the Lord said, ‘Listen to my words. Suppose one of my prophets² is among you. I make myself known to him in visions.³ I speak to him in dreams’ ” (Numbers 12:6, NlrV).

ALL THROUGH HISTORY, AND EVEN NOW, people have made prophecies⁴ about the future. In most cases, their prophecies never came true. But what about the prophecies that did? How might this outcome be explained? Could it be pure luck? Or could the prophecies really have been from the Lord? Or—and here is a scary thought—could Satan have made the prophecies come true to deceive as many people as possible?

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 (plan). In the Bible, God gives the gift of prophecy to certain people. They are people who walk with God. They are not always sinless. But they work hard to live according to God's will. They have a personal relationship⁵ with God. This is why the Lord is able to use them in a special way.

This week we will study the work God called them to do.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: Are the Old and New Testament prophets saints? Or are they just common men and women? What role (work) do women prophets have in Israel? What are the differences between apostles⁶ and prophets in the New Testament?

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

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. visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God's will (plan).

4. prophecies—special messages from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

5. relationship—your emotional connection (tie) to another person and how deep your feelings are for that person.

6. apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 4**PATRIARCH⁷ AND PROPHET
(Genesis 20:7)**

In Genesis 20:7, we find the word *prophet*. This is the first time the word is used in the Bible. The word for prophet in Hebrew is *nabi'*. Study what this word means in Genesis 20:7. According to this verse, what is a prophet? And what kind of work does a prophet do?

In the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the word *prophet* means someone who receives God's revelation.⁸ Prophets are not only spokespersons for God. They also are messengers between God and the people. Abraham in Genesis 20 acts as the messenger between God and Abimelech. Abraham is told to pray to God for Abimelech.

Abraham is a "giant" in the Old Testament. Three times the Bible calls Abraham God's friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). God promises him, " 'I will give you many children. Nations will come from you. And kings will come from you' " (Genesis 17:6, NIV). Abraham is 99 years old when God makes him this promise! So how can it possibly come true when Abraham and Sarah are so old? But Abraham believes God in spite of what reason may have told him. He becomes

"the father of all those who believe" (Romans 4:11, NKJV).

Later, Abraham is willing to sacrifice (give up; offer) his son at God's command (Genesis 22). What great faith it takes to do this! So it seems strange that Abraham should lie to Abimelech about Sarah (Genesis 20:2). But, if we search our hearts, we will find a little of Abraham's weakness in us all. "When you look into water, you see a likeness of your face. When you look into your heart, you see what you are really like" (Proverbs 27:19, NIV). Sometimes the old nature⁹ rises again in the believer. Sometimes God's children in all ages backslide. We fall back into sin and unbelief. And sometimes we stray from the path of doing right. These reasons are enough to explain why Abraham, the "father of all those who believe," lacks faith and lies! How human¹⁰ Abraham is! Moments of great faith, moments of great weakness! But Abraham is far from perfect. And we who follow after him can relate to him.

What can you learn from Abraham's mistakes and lack of faith? What encouragement can you take from his story? God uses Abraham to do great things even though he is weak. How can we learn from Abraham not to let our weaknesses turn us away from pressing ahead in faith?

7. patriarch—fatherly figure or leader of a group of people in early Bible times.

8. revelation—how God makes Himself known to us.

9. old nature—what we are like before God forgives us and changes our hearts and minds. Without God, our nature is sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

10. human—not perfect; weak and sinful; making mistakes.



“When you look into water, you see a likeness of your face. When you look into your heart, you see what you are really like”
(Proverbs 27:19, NIV).

MONDAY—JANUARY 5

THE FIRST PROPHET OF ISRAEL (Exodus 34:28–35)

What do Exodus 4:10; Exodus 32:11–13, 32; Numbers 12:13; Numbers 20:10–12; and Hebrews 11:24–26 tell us about Moses’ personality¹¹ and character?¹² How do his character traits¹³ help Moses do his work as a prophet?

Moses is raised in Egypt to be a leader. His faith in God is strong. And his experience with God at the burning bush makes his faith stronger (Exodus 3). Moses’ background qualifies him to lead

the people of Israel. From the Bible we know that Israel often fails to trust in God. But Moses always asks God to forgive His people for failing Him (Exodus 32:11–13; Numbers 14:13–19; Numbers 16:46–50). At the same time, Moses warns the Israelites to be faithful to God.



Moses’ face shines after he sees the glory of God on Mount Sinai.

But Israel does not always remain faithful. They sin against God at Mount Sinai. They make a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32) while Moses is on the mountain. Moses spends 40 days with God on the mountain. He has a very special experience there. He sees the glory of the Creator. Then Moses returns to the people. His face shines (Exodus 34:28–35). It is no surprise that Moses’ face shines after such an experience. His shining face reflects (shows)

11. personality—the qualities of a person; what makes one person different from another person.

12. character—who a person is; God’s Ten Commandments make known who God is.

13. character traits—qualities, such as being honest and faithful, that make a person who he or she is.

God's glory¹⁴ (2 Corinthians 3:7).

But Moses' face shines for another reason too. The sin of the people with the golden calf is directed not only against God. It also is directed against Moses. His shining face is proof of his meeting with God. It helps him regain his rightful place of leadership. When the people see his shining face, they understand Moses has been with God. They accept him again as their leader and spokesman.

Anyone filled with the Spirit of God will reflect (make known) the goodness of God. Those who live close to God will have a strong influence¹⁵ on others. But they may never know until they get to heaven how strong their influence was!



All who are filled with the Holy Spirit will reflect God's glory to others.

14. glory—great beauty, power, and royal perfection.

15. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

16. prophesies—gives a message from the Lord to His people; foretells some future event.

Think of someone who seems to have a close relationship with the Lord. How is that closeness made known in his or her life? What character traits does he or she have? How can you learn to walk closer to the Lord? What things in your life are holding you back from that closer walk?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 6

PROPHETS IN ISRAEL (Deuteronomy 18:15)

Before his death Moses prophesies¹⁶ about Jesus. He tells the Israelites: “ ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me. He will be one of your own people. You must listen to him’ ” (Deuteronomy 18:15, NIV). Moses refers to a prophet who shall lead Israel in the years after Moses' death (Deuteronomy 18; Deuteronomy 34:9, 10; Hosea 12:10). The prophets from Joshua to Malachi lead the people after Moses. But none of them is the special prophet whom Moses said would come.

But Christ is. He is the only One who fulfills Moses' prophecy (read John 1:21; John 6:14; John 7:40). Jesus comes as the Second Moses. Jesus does not come to free His people from the power of earthly rulers. He comes to free them from the power of sin.

The writings of the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi are well-known. In addition, there are many other prophets in the history of Israel. Samuel lives during the period of the judges

(1 Samuel 3:20). Nathan and Gad continue Samuel's work (2 Samuel 12:1; 2 Samuel 24:13). Later, Israel is divided into two kingdoms in 931 B.C. We then find the prophets Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29), Elijah (1 Kings 18:1), and Elisha (2 Kings 2:9–14) working with the people of God.

Prophets come from all walks of life. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are priests. Isaiah and Zephaniah are of royal blood. Daniel is prime minister¹⁷ of Babylon. Samuel is a judge. Elisha is a farmer. Amos is a shepherd. Some prophets write books (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29). But others do not (1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 2:15). Some are counselors to kings (Jeremiah 38:14). Others preach to the people (Ezekiel 3:17). Each prophet comes from a different background. But all of them are God's messengers. God works through them to keep Israel from falling into sin.

All through the Holy Bible, we find the Lord speaks to His people through His servants, the prophets. The whole Bible itself is the work of these prophets. The Bible delivers (gives) the messages that God gives the prophets. Each prophet except for Jesus has flaws (faults; defects; problems). Jesus alone is perfect. Like us, prophets are human beings (persons), flesh and blood. But the Lord sends them to preach His messages. These messages are still preached today in almost every country in the world. They will continue to be

preached 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 learned from that prophet's life and message? How has what you have learned changed you for the better?

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 7

PROPHETESSES¹⁸ IN ISRAEL (Judges 4:1–10)

The Holy Bible names several prophetesses. Who are they? What do Exodus 15:20, 21; Judges 4:4–10; and 2 Kings 22:11–20 tell us about the work done in Israel by the prophetesses?

Miriam, the sister of Moses, is called a prophetess. She is described as leading the women in the Song of Moses (read Exodus 15:1, 21). Moses is the chosen leader of the people of Israel. But he would have worked mainly with the men. These men are the heads of their families. Miriam's work may have been with the Israelite women. She must have been several years older than Moses (Exodus 2:1–8). Josephus, a Jewish historian, writes that Miriam marries Hur. Aaron and Hur hold up the arms of Moses in the battle with the Amalekites.—*Antiquities*,¹⁹ volume 3, page 98.

17. prime minister—a person who has a very important position next to a king, president, or leader.

18. prophetesses—women who are spokespersons for God; God gives His prophetesses special messages to give to His people. Prophetesses also speak to God on behalf of His people. God may also give His prophetesses warnings about what will happen in the future.

19. *Antiquities*—twenty-one volumes written about Jewish life and history by Flavius Josephus, a Jewish writer living in the first century A.D.

Miriam is clearly an important person in Israel. We learn this from the story in the Bible about Miriam's leprosy.²⁰ She becomes a leper²¹ after she sins against her brother Moses and his wife (Numbers 12:1–15). If Miriam were not important, the people of Israel would not have had to wait seven days until God takes away her leprosy.

Deborah (Judges 5) seems to be a very unusual person. She lives in a society ruled by men. But she becomes a political²² and spiritual²³ leader. Few women gained such power in those days. Deeply spiritual, Deborah gives all praise to God for the victory (win) over the Canaanites²⁴ (verses 3–5, 13). She does not take any glory for herself or Barak.

Deborah is a “mother in Israel” (verse 7). She watches over the people with

motherly care. She counsels them and gives them justice.

What does Judges 4:1–8 tell us about how highly respected Deborah is in Israel at that time?

Another prophetess in Israel is Huldah (2 Kings 22:14–20; 2 Chronicles 34:20–28). King Josiah asks Huldah what God's will is. Both Jeremiah and Zephaniah are living at the time that Josiah calls on Huldah for help. King Josiah could have called either Jeremiah or Zephaniah. But he calls for Huldah, a woman, to help him instead.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 8

NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS (Matthew 11:11)

The last of the Old Testament prophets lived about 400 years before the birth of Christ. During that 400 year period many Jewish books are written. But none are accepted as coming from God.

The life of Christ brings in a new period. In this period, God again calls certain people to work as His spokespersons. According to Luke 1:66, 67 and John 1:6, 7, who are some of these New Testament prophets?



King Josiah asks Huldah, a woman and a prophet, what God's will is.

20. leprosy—a disease that affects the skin and nerves. Leprosy is caused by a tiny life-form called a mycobacterium. It causes boils or sores to form on the skin. The boils spread and grow larger. Over time, the body loses feeling and is unable to move certain parts. The body also loses muscle. And certain parts of the body may lose their natural shape or become deformed.

21. leper—someone who has leprosy, a disease that affects the skin and nerves.

22. political—having to do with ruling a country; having to do with government.

23. spiritual—having to do with God.

24. Canaanites—the people living in the land of Canaan before the Israelites came to live there.

What is the difference between them and the apostles, according to Acts 11:27, 28; Acts 13:1; and Revelation 1:1–3?

In New Testament Greek, the word *apostle* is used to describe someone who is an ambassador.²⁵ Josephus, the historian, uses this word when speaking of the ambassadors whom the Jews sent to Rome.—*Antiquities*, volume 17, page 11.

In the New Testament, *apostle* carries the idea of doing work for God in another place. The word *apostle* appears in Matthew 10:2–6. In these verses, Jesus sends His 12 disciples (followers) on a special mission.²⁶ These 12 are also called apostles. The apostles are those with special power from Jesus. Later, the apostles see for themselves Jesus' death and return to life. They see something that none of the prophets in the past have seen. Some of the apostles, such as John and Paul, are also prophets. But not all apostles are prophets. According to Ephesians 2:20, apostles and prophets together teach us what God has done in Christ for all people.

According to Matthew 11:11, why is John the Baptist greater than all the Old Testament prophets? What does Jesus mean when He says, “‘But the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is more important than he [John the Baptist] is’ ” (NirV)?

John the Baptist is the greatest prophet

because he announces the coming of Christ. All the prophets before John declare Christ's coming (read Luke 24:27; John 5:39, 46). Like Abraham, all the Old Testament prophets look forward to the day the Messiah would come (1 Peter 1:10, 11). But John sees Jesus with his own eyes. So, in a way, the work of the prophets in the Old Testament reaches its successful end in John. At the same time, John the Baptist does not live to witness how all the prophecies about Jesus come true. But today the least important follower of Jesus can rejoice in knowing that Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies about the Messiah (God's chosen One).

Think about some of the Old Testament prophecies that point to Jesus as Messiah. How can they help strengthen your faith?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pages 145–155; “Moses,” pages 241–256, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Abraham stayed for a time in Egypt. While there, he proved that he was not free from human weakness. By hiding the fact that Sarah was his wife, Abraham failed to show his trust in God's care. Abraham also failed to show the noble faith and courage that he had so often shown in his life.”—Adapted from

25. ambassador—a person called to represent his or her country in another country.

26. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 130.

“Moses had been shown the final reward to be given to the humble and obedient servants of God. Worldly profit became nothing next to this reward. The magnificent palace of Pharaoh and his throne were held out as a temptation²⁷ to Moses. But Moses knew that the sinful pleasures that make men forget God existed [were] in Pharaoh’s courts. Moses looked beyond the beautiful palace. He looked beyond a king’s crown. Instead, he chose the high honors that will be given to God’s people in a kingdom unspoiled by sin. Moses saw by faith an eternal [forever] crown that the King of heaven would place on the forehead of the person who has victory²⁸ over sin.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, page 81.

“The glory shining on the face of Moses shows the blessings to be received by God’s commandment-keeping people through Christ’s work for them. It shows that if we come closer in our connection with God, our knowledge of His requirements is clearer. Then we are more like

Him and His character and become more like Him in His nature.”²⁹ —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 330.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Discuss some of the character faults and weaknesses of different prophets and apostles in the Bible. What hope can you learn from these for yourself? At the same time, what are the good characteristics³⁰ seen in many of these people? What hope and promise can you find in their lives too?
- ❷ What about some of the so-called prophets we read or learn about today? How should we relate to them? What kind of people are they? What kind of prophecies do they make? What can we learn from the difference between them and the prophets in the Bible?
- ❸ How can we, as a church, carry on the work of the prophets? In what ways are we called to do just that? How can we better fulfill that work?

27. temptation—anything that can turn us away from God and that tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

28. victory—the act of winning the battle over, or winning the struggle against, something.

29. (His) nature—any of the qualities of God that make Him who He is, such as His love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.

30. characteristics—what a person is made of; the things that make you who you are, such as patience, kindness, hope, laziness, anger, and so on.