

# Why We Can Have Confidence in the Prophetic Gift Today

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**Text:** 2 Chronicles 20:20—“So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, 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.’” (New King James Version)

## INTRODUCTION

King Jehoshaphat of Judah lived during the reign of Ahab in the northern kingdom of Israel. He led the people of Judah in reforms that were meant to bring them back to the pure worship of God. Satan is never pleased with such efforts, and a large army of Judah’s neighbors joined forces to attack them from the south. The Bible tells us that “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2 Chronicles 20:3). The Bible records his earnest, touching prayer in the presence of the people and adds that all Judah—men, women, and children—“stood before the Lord” in their need and distress. Then the Lord, by the gift of prophecy, spoke through a Levite named Jahaziel. His message? “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s” (verse 15). He added, “Tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you” (verse 17). With this prophetic encouragement, Jehoshaphat led the people the next day, exhorting them in the words of our Scripture reading today, to “believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper” (verse 20). They went out singing praises to God, and God fought the battle on their behalf, giving them a great victory.

It is important for us, also, to follow Jehoshaphat’s counsel—to believe in the Lord your God, and to believe His prophets. Primarily, this calls us to believe not only in God, but in His Word the Bible, where many of His prophets have recorded their messages. But it also calls us to believe *any* genuine prophet that God has sent. The Bible tells us that prophecy is one of the spiritual gifts that God has placed in the church, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Since we have not yet arrived at that point, we continue to need the gifts, including the gift of prophecy. Revelation 12:17 says that God’s last-day church on the earth will not only “keep the commandments of God,” but will “have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 19:10 tells us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” the Holy Spirit in His role of bringing prophecy to God’s people. So we should expect to find the genuine prophetic gift among God’s last-day people.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God has given this gift to them through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. We also believe that God is not limited to this one

prophetic voice. If He chooses, He can raise up others. We want to “believe His prophets,” but how can we know that a person who claims the prophetic gift is a genuine messenger for God? After all, Jesus warns us to “beware of *false* prophets” (Matthew 7:15).

The Bible gives us certain tests to evaluate those who claim that God is speaking through them. We have applied these tests to Ellen G. White, and we must apply them to any others who claim the gift of prophecy. Today we will review some of the ways in which Ellen G. White meets the Bible tests of a true prophet, and these will help to illustrate what we should look for when others arise making similar claims.

## **What Are the Bible’s Own Tests of a True Prophet?**

There are four major tests described in the Bible.

### **I. Agreement with Scripture. Isaiah 8:20.**

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (New King James Version, here and throughout). In its context, this is referring to receiving communication from the supernatural realm. The messages of God’s true prophets today, who claim to be speaking for Him, must be in agreement with God’s law and with the prophetic testimony of the whole Bible.

This is one of the things that is most impressive about the writings of Ellen G. White. They exalt the Bible and uphold its teachings, including those that most of the Christian world ignores or rejects. They call for people to obey God’s law, yet they teach that Christ, not law-keeping, is what saves us. These writings are saturated in the Word of God. They increase the reader’s respect and love for the Bible. They pass the first test, Agreement with Scripture.

### **II. Fulfilled Prediction. Deuteronomy 18:21, 22.**

““And if you say in your heart, “How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”” This tells us that the predictions of a genuine prophet will come true. The Bible also indicates that some prophecies from God through His prophets are conditional and will not be fulfilled if people or conditions change (see Jeremiah 18:7-10 and the Book of Jonah). But fulfilled prediction is a test, and we should expect to see fulfilled predictions in the work of a true prophet, even though predicting the future is not necessarily the main work of a prophet.

Ellen G. White is not known primarily for predicting the future, though she did do so with profound accuracy. Her ministry focused on guiding and helping the remnant church to fulfill its mission. Nevertheless, there are some predictions that have been fulfilled and others that are in the process of coming true, while others still await fulfillment. While a number of her fulfilled predictions relate to the Seventh-day Adventist movement and its work, some address events in the wider world.

For instance, in 1890, when theologians were teaching that the world was getting better and the millennium of peace was approaching, and evolutionary teachers were claiming that man was evolving upward, Ellen White wrote that “the tempest is coming,” and that, among other things, “thousands of ships will be hurled into the depths of the

sea. Navies will go down, and human lives will be sacrificed by millions” (*The Signs of the Times*, April 21, 1890; also in *Messages to Young People*, pp. 89, 90). These and other terrible events she mentioned began to be fulfilled about 25 years later in World War I and met still greater fulfillment in World War II.

Another fulfillment of prophecy in our times may be found in the fact that Protestantism in the United States has taken the initiative to mend the breach between the two religious groups—Catholic and Protestant. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ellen G. White wrote: “The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 588). Even 50 or 60 years ago, this was unthinkable and absurd, but on November 12, 1997, something unexpected happened. As *Christianity Today* magazine reported, for the first time in 450 years, evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics publicly had come to mutual agreement regarding their understanding of salvation. A document called “The Gift of Salvation” was released, expressing theological agreement between Catholics and Protestants on this fundamental issue that has divided them for so long. The signers of this document were 16 Catholic leaders and 19 prominent Protestant leaders of various churches and institutions.<sup>1</sup> There are other elements we could mention, but what we want to emphasize is the fact that Ellen G. White prophesied this in the decade of the 1880s, when such unity seemed impossible.

### **III. Acknowledging Christ’s Incarnation. 1 John 4:1, 2.**

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.” It is important to mention that this declaration demands more than a simple confession of Christ’s humanity. This was a key point of divergence about Jesus for the pagan beliefs of that day, and so John focused it. But the principle behind his statement is that a true prophet will tell the truth about Jesus. This will involve upholding Christ’s preexistence, divinity, incarnation, sinless life, atoning sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, priestly ministry, and His second coming.

It is well known that in *The Desire of Ages*, among her other writings, Ellen G. White exalted all aspects of Christ work, guiding the reader to a deep and personal relationship with the Savior. *The Desire of Ages* presents the life of Jesus, His teachings, His character, and His divine-human nature in a most persuasive and appealing manner. If you have not read that book recently, you have a spiritual treat—no, a feast—in store for you in its pages.

### **IV. Bearing Good Fruit. Matthew 7:15, 20.**

“Beware of false prophets. . . . By their fruits you will know them.” Jesus tells us that an important test of the prophetic gift is its fruit. What kind of fruit do we see in the life of the person who claims to be a prophet? We do not expect perfection of any human being, but we should expect to see a life committed to God and centered on Him and His work in the earth. And beyond the individual who claims the prophetic gift, what kind of fruit do we find in the lives of those who adopt this person’s teachings? Do they follow

Scripture more closely? Do their lives show growth in the likeness of Jesus? Are they interested in what Jesus is interested in—winning a lost world to Him? What kind of fruit do we find from this person’s ministry? A survey among Seventh-day Adventists in 1980 showed a distinct difference between those who were regular readers of Ellen G. White’s writings and those who were not. The readers were more sure of their salvation, more involved in witnessing, more positive about their church, and showed other important “fruits.”<sup>2</sup> Mrs. White also revealed the fruits of genuine Christianity in her personal life, as her neighbors and others who knew her testified.

Additionally, there is the fruit of her ministry in the life of the church. From the beginning of Mrs. White’s prophetic ministry in 1844 thru 1915 (more than 70 years), evidence of divine guidance is seen in its results in the Adventist church, which continue even today. In the early years there was only a small group of believers, but her counsel and direction have helped the church to grow, until today it numbers about 16 million baptized members. Her guidance in the area of health has resulted in establishing 168 hospitals and health centers supported by the Adventist organization, in addition to numerous institutions run by self-supporting ministries.

Ellen White’s vision of a publishing work led the church to start such an effort. It has grown from nothing to consist today of 62 publishing houses around the world, printing in 892 languages. The Adventist church that started in the northeastern region of the USA with a few churches is now established in 201 of the 230 countries in the world. Ellen G. White’s counsel in education directed the church to establish its own schools, until today we operate close to 7,500 schools worldwide, from elementary schools to major universities.<sup>3</sup> All of these accomplishments and many others are thanks at least in part to the divine direction given to a special person. When one considers her limited academic education and her weak physical condition, it is clear that these accomplishments could never have been achieved outside of divine grace working in her.

We can truly confirm that the Bible’s tests of a true prophet have been fulfilled in the ministry of Ellen G. White. But some today criticize and even mock Mrs. White as “that old lady,” thinking that she is a hindrance who keeps the church from being “relevant” in our society. They seem ashamed of her ministry. Fortunately, in relation to the entire membership of the church, their numbers are not large. But sometimes they may influence others to be reluctant or suspicious about these writings. This is truly sad, for there are great blessings to be found in these books, blessings that we miss when we ignore them. And those blessings will be additional evidences that tell us that God has given the genuine gift through the ministry of Ellen G. White. Those who give these writings an honest reading will find several things happening. Some of you have already made these discoveries. You have found that

**1. The writings of Ellen G. White bring a person closer to God.** So many people have found that these writings have brought them comfort and have energized them. These writings have been a means through which they have received strength to continue in fulfilling God’s will for their lives. Sometimes, in studying her books and articles, the teachings and admonitions they have found there have shaken their complacency or their pet ideas. But they can testify that they receive a spiritual blessing from reading her

writings. They have come to know God better. Her writings have helped to motivate them to serve the Master and to dedicate everything they have and are to His service.

## **2. The writings of Ellen G. White help us love and understand God's Word.**

Though Ellen G. White wrote no commentaries on the Bible, she wrote about Bible subjects with a depth of understanding that is often breathtaking. Her major books that deal with significant portions of Scripture include the Conflict of the Ages series (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Great Controversy*), *Christ's Object Lessons*, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, and the first portion of *The Ministry of Healing*. These books, and others from her writings, offer spiritual help in knowing God and deepening our love for Him, while they give us a more comprehensive knowledge of God's plans for the world, His church, and ourselves. When we study His Word, we learn to love it and to love the God who revealed it. In it we find the words of life that He has left us for our edification. By pointing us repeatedly to the teachings and themes of Scripture, the writings of Ellen G. White encourage us to make the Word our study, and they enhance our understanding and appreciation of it.

**3. The writings of Ellen G. White help us find answers to questions and deal with doubts.** As a youth in his home country, Armando\* received his early education from evolutionist and Marxist teachers. Suffering and death were difficult subjects for him to understand. But when he began to study the books of Ellen G. White, they shed beams of light that cleared his doubts and helped him understand what was at the center of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. He subsequently became a Seventh-day Adventist. Years later, while in his doctoral program at Andrews University, he learned that the great controversy theme is an important contribution of Ellen G. White to the theological world. Although others have recognized this theme, no one else has presented it with the comprehensive scope that she has, starting with the problem of evil in heaven and proceeding through the ages and into the eternal kingdom of God in the future. This was a divine revelation to the remnant people to provide a better understanding of God's remedy for the problem of sin.

The writings of Ellen G. White have been a source of help in dealing with the doubts and questions that many people have faced in their Christian life. Even when we have not yet found the answers to some of our questions, our experience with having resolved other issues can give us confidence to trust God's direction and His revelation. It is God's grace that has given us this marvelous gift that guides us and lightens the path for us to follow. We may thank God for His marvelous gift!

**4. The writings of Ellen G. White provide helpful counsel for Christian living.** In such books as *Steps to Christ* and *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, we find valuable instruction on how to become a Christian and live out one's commitment to the Savior. *Steps to Christ* especially has brought countless people to a saving knowledge of Jesus and shown them how to live the Christian life. Books like *Christian Service*, *Gospel Workers*, and *Evangelism* have helped both ministers and laity know how to share their faith. *The Ministry of Healing* and *Counsels on Health* contain Ellen G. White's major

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instruction on healthful living, benefiting many with more vibrant health and longer life. *The Adventist Home* and *Child Guidance* give helpful counsel on having happy, Christ-centered homes. In so many areas of life, Ellen White's writings point the way to a life that not only meets our own needs, but honors God and blesses others. Those who have given these writings a fair chance in their lives have found that they can say with Jehoshaphat, "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." (2 Chron. 20:20).

## CONCLUSION

So we may believe that Ellen G. White is inspired by God because:

1. She fulfills all the biblical tests of a true prophet, and
2. We have evidence of the God-given value of her ministry in:
  - a. Her timely messages for the church, for the leaders as well as the members;
  - b. Her positive influence in helping the church become involved in areas such as health, education, publishing, and missions, among others;
  - c. Her specific advanced instruction in many areas of life, such as nutrition, health, and education, that indicate her divine inspiration.
  - d. And not least, the impact that she has had in the lives of so many. Her writings have led millions to a deeper love for God and to grow in their service to His church and to their neighbors.

Therefore let us praise God because He has given us this special "gift of light," to give us the assurance that just as "by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved" (Hosea 12:13), in the same way He will guide us until we safely enter our heavenly home.

Dr. Armando Juárez, born in Mexico, served the Mexican Union for 25 years in various pastoral, administrative, and seminary teaching capacities. He also served at Pacific Press as editor of *La Revista Adventista* and associate editor of *El Centinela*. Since 2003 he has been the Hispanic Coordinator for the Nevada-Utah Conference. He and his wife Dámaris have three adult children.

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<sup>1</sup> *Christianity Today*, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative," by Timothy George, December 8, 1997, pp. 34, 35. "The Gift of Salvation" document appears on pp. 35-38.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the survey and its results, see Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr., "Who Reads Ellen White?" *Ministry*, October, 1982, pp. 10-12.

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<sup>3</sup> Data taken from the Statistical World Records of the Seventh-day Adventist Church , March 4, 2009 in [http://www.adventist.org/world\\_church/facts\\_and\\_figures/index.html.en](http://www.adventist.org/world_church/facts_and_figures/index.html.en).