

We Need To Test A Prophet's Unique Message!

Description

We Need To Test A Prophet's Unique Message!

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 3rd Quarter

Rest In Christ

Week 12

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This week's lesson is entitled, "The Restless Prophet," and discusses the life and ministry of Jonah as presented in the book of Jonah and the other mentions of him in the bible, including 2 Kings 14 and the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

We are all most likely familiar with the story of Jonah. We know that the story in Jonah is mainly about God's grace and how we should respond to it. But today we would like to use the story to bring out two things about the gift of prophecy. First, we will look at the purpose of a prophet, and second, we will look into the way to determine if a prophet is a false prophet or not.

Tuesday's lesson reads,

"While walking the city, Jonah proclaimed God's message: 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' (Jon. 3:4, NKJV). The message was right to the point. Though the details are not given, it becomes clear that the message fell on receptive ears, and the people of Nineveh (collectively!) believed Jonah's words of warning." Sabbath school Quarterly Lesson, Tuesday, September 14, 2021

The main mission of a prophet is to proclaim a message from God. We know from the text that Jonah gave a message of warning. We do not know what the message was much beyond that, but we can infer from the words of the king of Nineveh in Jonah 3 that it contained a call to turn from evil as well. In Jonah 3:8, the king of Nineveh says:

⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

Again, Jonah's message must have awakened the king and the people of Nineveh to the truth about their evil ways and violence.

Jonah was a prophet chosen by God to give a message of righteousness to people. The King of Nineveh recognized that there was evil and violence in the land that needed to be turned from. This recognition was a direct result of the message delivered from God through Jonah.

Interestingly, we can also know from the story that Jonah himself was not righteous, even when giving the message of righteousness to Nineveh. Not that it had to be that way, as the Ellen White quote in Friday's lesson brings out, but it was. Ellen said,

"In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; yet He who had bidden him go was able to sustain His servant and grant him success. Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly. Yet in the hour of Jonah's despair the Lord did not desert him. Through a series of trials and strange providences, the prophet's confidence in God and in His infinite power to save was to be revived." Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 266.

It might seem that an unrighteous messenger would be a sign of a false prophet, but when we look at the lives of Jonah, Balaam, and King David – who committed adultery and murder – we can see that this idea is not supported in scripture.

We know that Jesus told his disciples to beware of false prophets. Matthew 7:15-20 reads,

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. ¹⁸ A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus said we will know them by their fruits. Many think that "their fruits" here means their character. But in Jonah's case, again, we can see that his character wasn't very admirable. He was disobedient, hateful, and, as the Ellen White quote in Wednesday's lesson tells us, he was worried about his reputation (See *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271). But in spite of all this, God did use Jonah to deliver His message of righteousness to Nineveh, which caused Nineveh to repent. The message of righteousness did bear fruit!

Ellen White commented on this verse in Matthew 7 in "Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing," in the chapter entitled, "Beware of false prophets." – Matthew 7:15. She said,

"Teachers of falsehood will arise to draw you away from the narrow path and the strait gate. Beware of them; though concealed in sheep's clothing, inwardly they are ravaging wolves. Jesus gives a test by which false teachers may be distinguished from the true. 'Ye shall know them by their fruits,' He says. 'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?'"

We are not bidden to prove them by their fair speeches and exalted professions. They are to be judged by the word of God. ‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.’ ‘Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.’ Isaiah 8:20; Proverbs 19:27. What message do these teachers bring? Does it lead you to reverence and fear God? Does it lead you to manifest your love for Him by loyalty to His commandments? If men do not feel the weight of the moral law; if they make light of God’s precepts; if they break one of the least of His commandments, and teach men so, they shall be of no esteem in the sight of heaven. We may know that their claims are without foundation. They are doing the very work that originated with the prince of darkness, the enemy of God.” Ellen White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 145-146

So, when testing prophets, it is the message of the prophet we need to test, not the character of the prophet. This is very import, because if we think it is a prophet’s character that is to be examined, we may be inclined to reject a message on that basis. Imagine if the people of Nineveh had done this! What if they said, “Don’t listen to Jonah, his character is rotten, so he must be a false prophet.” – Would that have been the right response? If we recognize that that wouldn’t be the right response, then obviously, we can’t judge whether someone is a true prophet by their personal character – it has to be by whether their message is true.

Some want to examine the life of a prophet of God in order to find some inconsistency to doubt their calling. But this we are not told to do. It is the message they bear that should be examined. Is the message true? Will it bear good fruit if we put it into practice in our lives?

Acts 17:11 comments the Bereans doing this very test – testing the message. It reads,

¹¹Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Notice, the Bereans examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul *said* was true, not to see whether Paul’s personal character was flawed. As Ellen White pointed out in Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing that we just read, Isaiah 8:19-20 admonishes the same thing. It reads,

¹⁹ And when they say to you, “Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people seek their God? *Should they seek* the dead on behalf of the living?

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.

Here, Isaiah is admonishing the people of the Northern Tribes to investigate the messages they were hearing to see if they were true. Obviously, the wizards and mediums were not speaking according to the law of truth, and that is why they had no light in them. Their character is not even mentioned. As we all know, really nice people can promote untrue things, and not-so-nice people can promote true things.

When it comes to testing whether someone is a true or false prophet, the important thing is the *message* of the prophet, not the character or works of the prophet.

But honestly, most Christians and SDAs alike are not even expecting or looking for any more prophets to come with a message from the Lord today. Since they aren't seeking for such a prophet and such a message, they likely will not find it. Jesus said, "seek and you will find," not, "don't bother seeking and hopefully you will get lucky and find!"

Should we be seeking a prophet for today?

You've probably heard Adventist evangelists say something like this: If Jesus warned against false prophets, wouldn't that imply that there would be true prophets also? If this were not the case, Jesus should have said, "beware of prophets" thereby eliminating all chance for deception.

This is a good point, and it is just as true today as it was when Ellen White was alive. According to the truth taught in Ephesians 4, we should hope for and look for a prophet for us today. It reads,

¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ 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.

Here we see that God designed that ALL these gifts should be in the church, for our benefit, until we all come to unity in the faith and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So, we should ask ourselves, are we, as a body of believers, all unified in the faith? Considering the divisions going on in the SDA church over women's ordination and many other things today, the only reasonable conclusion is no. And what about ourselves, do we measure up to the stature of the fullness of Christ? If not, we need help. And this help comes from the Lord in the organized manner presented here in Ephesians 4. How can the Lord lead his pastors and teachers of today in giving a unified, coherent message without a spokesperson, or prophet, for today?

The arguments we're presenting here aren't new. The early SDA pioneers made these very arguments to prove to their contemporaries that past prophets were not enough; they needed a living prophet in their own day. As an example, you can read the introduction to Ellen White's book, *Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1*, written by the pioneer Roswell Cottrell. (See *Spiritual Gifts Volume 1* pages 5-16). Seventh-day Adventists, from the conference president to the lay member, should be seeking to find out if there is anyone in the church claiming to have a message of righteousness from God for us today. The General Conference was never intended to take the place of a prophet. It was instituted for the purpose of organizing God's denominated people to more effectively get the messages of righteousness and truth from the Lord out to the world.

So, back to our earlier question. When we find someone with a message they claim is from the Lord, what are we to do? Are we to examine the messenger? No. We are to examine the unique message they bring and see if it is true. (To this point, by the way, a prophet should have a unique message. If someone is simply repeating ideas they heard from other people, that wouldn't qualify them as a prophet even if everything they said was true. If they just repeat what past prophets said, then they are really a teacher or evangelist. Plus, a false prophet could repeat true teachings from previous prophets, so the only way to test a prophet is to examine the unique points of their message to see if they are true.)

For a deeper study on this all-important topic, see our video, [“How Do You Know If a Prophet Is True or False?”](#) and [“What Is the Spirit of Prophecy? SDA Edition,”](#) by [Trent Wilde](#).

In closing, Ellen White said,

“Precious light is to shine forth from the word of God, and let no one presume to dictate what shall or what shall not be brought before the people in the messages of enlightenment that He shall send, and so quench the Spirit of God. Whatever may be his position of authority, no one has a right to shut away the light from the people. When a message comes in the name of the Lord to His people, no one may excuse himself from an investigation of its claims. No one can afford to stand back in an attitude of indifference and self-confidence, and say: ‘I know what is truth. I am satisfied with my position. I have set my stakes, and I will not be moved away from my position, whatever may come. I will not listen to the message of this messenger; for I know that it cannot be truth.’ It is from pursuing this very course that the popular churches were left in partial darkness, and that is why the messages of heaven have not reached them.” Ellen White, *Counsels to Sabbath School Workers*, p. 28