OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Lesson 3 for
October 17, 2026

«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."»

(2 Chronicles 20:20, NKJV)

In Old Testament times, people who received messages from God to communicate to others were called seers or prophets (1 Sam. 9:9).

They had the ability to know hidden things, and even those yet to come (1 Sam. 9:6), but their work was not limited to this; it encompassed much more. This ability, of course, did not come from themselves, but from God.

But there were also false prophets who spoke “vision of their own heart” (Jer. 23:16).

- Who were called to the prophetic ministry?
- How did the prophets behave?
- What work did the prophets do?
- Which women had the gift of prophecy?
- What characteristics did false prophets have?

WHO WERE CALLED TO THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY?

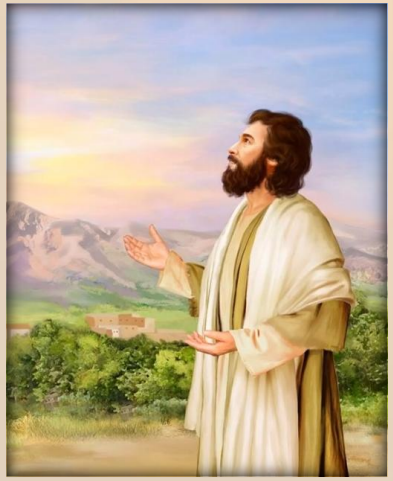
"Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years." (James 5:17 NIV)

We can fall into the error of believing that the prophets were "supermen." But Moses excused himself because he was slow of speech (Ex. 4:10); Isaiah said he had unclean lips (Isa. 6:5); Jeremiah thought he was too young for that task (Jer. 1:6).

Elijah, who dared to threaten King Ahab with a great drought for his impiety, is said: he "was a human being, even as we are" (James 5:17 NIV).

After performing a great miracle, Elijah completely collapsed under the threat of death from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19:2-4).

It is clear that God does not choose his prophets because they are perfect. What does he see in them? Their love for God and their willingness to obey him.



HOW DID THE PROPHETS BEHAVE?

"But Micaiah said, 'As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me' " (1 Kings 22:14 NIV)

As God's spokespeople, the prophets and prophetesses strove to live up to their calling (1 Sam. 12:3-4). The people knew them as "man of God," "honorable man" (1 Sam. 9:6).

Those who refused to accept their message hated and threatened them (1 Kings 22:8, 27). But despite the pressures they faced, the prophets faithfully delivered their message.

Micaiah appeared before two kings, 400 prophets who delivered a favorable message, and a guard who advised him to adapt to the circumstances. (1 Kings 22:10-13). However, he stood firm and refused to say anything other than what God revealed to him (1 Kings 22:14).

They were not perfect, but they were men and women of prayer, faithful to the Word, and servants of God and his people (1 Sam. 12:23; Jer. 42:4).

WHAT WORK DID THE PROPHETS DO?

"Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet." (1 Kings 19:16 NIV)

Among other things, the prophets performed these tasks:

With the kings

- They anointed them (1 Kings 19:16)
- They encouraged them when they did good (2Ch. 15:8)
- They confronted them when they did wrong (1 Kings 21:20)

With the priests

- They confronted them when they did wrong (Mal. 2:1-2)

With the people

- They instructed them in the ways of God (Micah 6:8)
- They declared their sin to them (Is. 58:1)
- They called them to repentance (Ezekiel 18:32)

With us

- They put their messages in writing (2Ch. 13:22)

WHICH WOMEN HAD THE GIFT OF PROPHECY?

"Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4 NIV)

The Old Testament mentions five female prophetesses. One of them, Noadiah, was a false prophet (Neh. 6:14). Regarding another, Isaiah's wife, we don't know if she is called a prophetess because she possessed that gift, or because she was the prophet's wife (Is. 8:3).

MIRIAM. As a prophetess, she led the women in song after the crossing of the Red Sea. She also helped her brothers lead the people during their pilgrimage in the desert (Ex. 15:20; Mic. 6:4).

DEBORAH. She held the dual office of prophetess and judge, and led the people in battle against Sisera, alongside Barak. After the victory, she sang a prophetic song of praise (Judges 4:4-9; 5:1).

HULDAH. She was consulted by Josiah about the book of the Law that had been found. In addition to answering the king's question, she spoke encouraging words to him (2 Kings 22:14-20).

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DID FALSE PROPHETS HAVE?

"Then the Lord said to me, 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.' " (Jeremiah 14:14 NIV)

Not all who prophesied did so because they had received a message from God (Jer. 14:14). What was their message, and why did they deliver it?

They invented their own prophecies (Ezek. 13:2, 17)

They said what people wanted to hear (Ezekiel 13:16)

They did not speak out against sin (Ezekiel 13:22)

They were seeking personal gain (Ezekiel 13:19)

Why would someone claim to speak for God when they know it's not true? Self-deception? A desire for recognition, or financial or other gain?

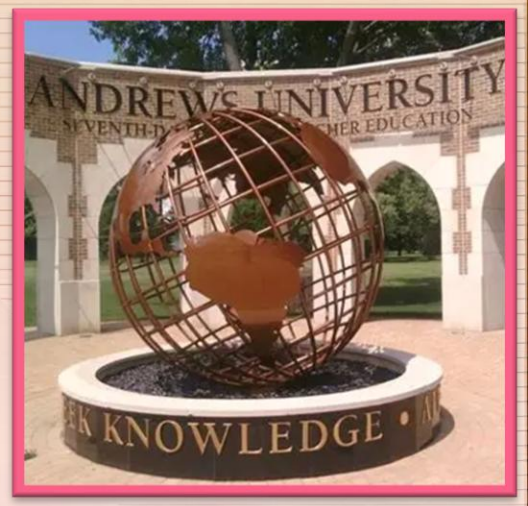
The saddest thing about false prophets is that there are people who listen to them and follow them. They like what they say because it requires no effort and doesn't stir their conscience. But following their path only leads to death.

The true prophet always warns about the dangers of sin, and encourages people to be faithful regardless of the consequences.

“None of the apostles and prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived the nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God has honored with divine light and power, have confessed the sinfulness of their nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ.”

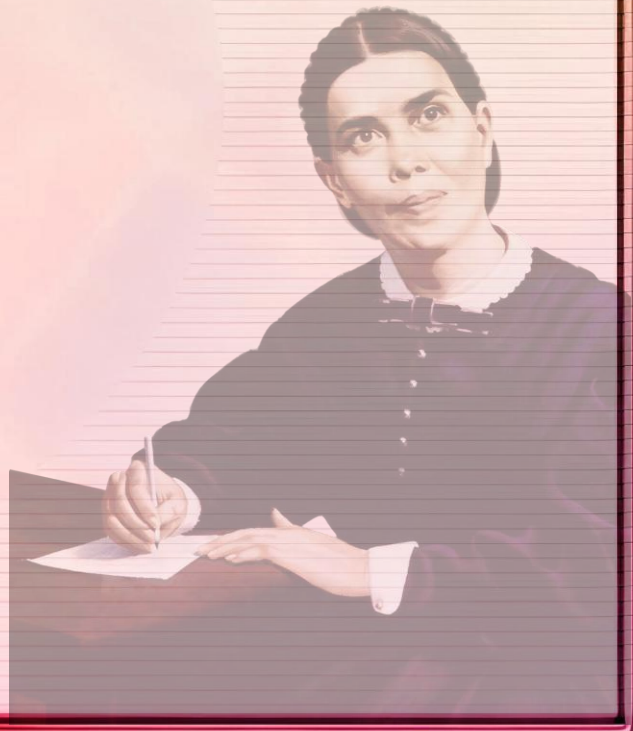
EGW (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 561)

APPENDIX: THE PROPHETIC CALL OF ELLEN G. WHITE



After her first vision, Ellen felt ill-prepared to fulfill her prophetic ministry. With poor health and limited education, the 17-year-old felt unworthy and incapable of carrying out her calling.

A week after her first vision, she had a second vision in which she was warned of the challenges she would face. After much prayer, and encouraged by some of her brothers and sisters, Ellen finally accepted her calling.

In less than twenty years, after receiving many visions, and supported by her husband –James White–, she had helped to create the foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (officially founded in 1863).

Her ministry was instrumental in establishing the Adventist health and education systems, and she left behind approximately 100,000 pages of inspired writings that continue to communicate divine instruction throughout the world.