

IS THERE A PROPHET OF THE LORD HERE?

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Text: 1 Kings 22:1-9

In 856 B.C., there was a war between Ahab, king of Israel, and Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. Their armies “encamped opposite each other for seven days” (1 Kings 20:29). On the eighth day the battle began, and the Israelites defeated the Syrians. Ben-Hadad fled to the city of Aphek and hid in an “inner chamber” (v. 30). Eventually, he was brought before King Ahab, who felt magnanimous after his victory and made a peace treaty with him. In this peace treaty Ben-Hadad promised to return the cities that his father had taken from Ahab’s predecessor (vs. 31-34).

However, as so often happened in history, peace treaties are made only to be broken. When Ben-Hadad got back to his palace in Damascus, he forgot all about the treaty he had made with Ahab and never returned the cities to Israel as he had promised.

A Royal Banquet

Three years later, in 853 B.C., Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, visited Ahab, the king of Israel. The two royal houses were related through marriage. Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram had married Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab (2 Kings 8:18).

On the occasion of this state visit Ahab gave a royal banquet at which he invited his royal guest to go to war with him against Ben-Hadad of Syria, who had never implemented the terms of the peace treaty. And on the spur of the moment Jehoshaphat agreed (1 Kings 22:1-4).

Now Jehoshaphat was one of the good kings in Judah. There were no good kings in the northern kingdom Israel, but there were a few good kings in the southern kingdom, and Jehoshaphat was one of them. But even good kings had weak moments, and on this occasion Jehoshaphat had a weak moment. Yet, as soon as he had said “Yes,” he realized he had made a mistake. To extricate himself from the situation he said, “Please inquire for the word of the LORD today” (v. 5). In other words, he wanted to make sure the LORD approved of this plan. It is always good to find out if the LORD is on

our side. Before we start a new project or journey, we should make sure the LORD is with us.

Ahab called together his prophets, about 400 of them, and he asked them, "Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?" They answered him with one voice, "Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king" (v. 6). Jehoshaphat, however, was not happy with this answer. So he asked, "Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of Him?" (v. 7).

Why was Jehoshaphat not satisfied with the answer of the 400 prophets? First, he realized that they were not worshipers of Yahweh, the God of Israel, but most likely worshipers of Baal. Scripture tells us that Ahab had introduced Baal worship in Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33). Second, when the 400 prophets said, "Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king," they used the Hebrew word *Adonai*, which the English Bibles translate as "Lord." Jehoshaphat, however, asked, "Is there not still a prophet of Yahweh (Engl. "the LORD," with "LORD" spelled in all capital letters) here, that we may inquire of Him?" He wanted to make sure that the answer came from Yahweh, the God of Israel, and not from some other source.

Confronted with this royal request, Ahab admitted that there was one prophet of Yahweh left in Israel. His name was Micaiah, the son of Imlah, but, said Ahab, "I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:8). Knowing the story of Ahab and Jezebel, we are not surprised that the prophet of God had not much good to say about Ahab. Nevertheless, Ahab ordered that Micaiah be brought to the royal court.

When the officer of Ahab came to Micaiah, he told the prophet not to upset the king but to fall in line with the 400 prophets. He said, "Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Please, let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement" (v. 13). The prophet responded in the only way a man of God can respond: "As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak" (v.14). This was true for Micaiah then and it is true for every minister of God today. Ministers of the LORD are not to preach what the people want to hear but what God has commissioned them to say.

When Micaiah came to Ahab, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall we refrain?" And Micaiah answered him, "Go and prosper, for the LORD will deliver it into the hand of the king!" (v. 15). Now, we would expect Ahab to be pleased with this answer. After all, this is what he wanted to hear. Yet, in verse 16 we find the king saying to Micaiah, "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" Why was Ahab not happy with the answer? What had happened?

Obviously, Micaiah had spoken in such a way that the king realized this was not the message of Yahweh. Perhaps Micaiah spoke with a smirk on his face, or maybe he said it in a sarcastic or cynical voice. Whatever the case, Ahab knew that this was not God's message. In verses 17 and 18, therefore, Micaiah gave Ahab the true message of Yahweh: "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'" In other words, "If you go to war, Ahab, you will die."

Now, if I had been in Ahab's shoes, I would have said, "Thank you very much, I'll stay home!" But not Ahab. He thought he could outwit God. In the later verses of the chapter we are told that Ahab disguised himself as a common soldier and went into battle hoping to avoid death, but human beings cannot outwit God. In verse 34 we read that an unnamed archer in the Syrian army "drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, 'Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded.'" A few hours later the king was dead (v. 37).

Is there a Prophet of the LORD here?

Jehoshaphat and Ahab faced a battle. They had to make an important decision. They asked God, "Shall we go into battle?" Now, the Law of Moses was in existence at that time, and the kings knew that law, but in this particular situation they wanted specific advice. And through Micaiah God told them not to go, but they went anyway and were defeated, as the prophet had foretold.

God's people today face the final battle in the great controversy. Yes, we have the Scriptures, but living in the time of the end creates specific problems. So, I am

asking, “Is there a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?” When there is a crisis in the church, “Is there a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him” how to meet it?

I am glad to be able to give a positive response to this question. Yes, there is a prophet of the LORD for the time of the end. How do I know? Because the Bible tells me so. Let us look at some of the Bible evidence leading us to expect the genuine prophetic gift in the last days.

The Remnant Church

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Rev. 12:1-6 NKJV)

What do the symbols in this passage mean?

1. The woman is a symbol of God’s people (see Isa. 54:5, 6; 2 Cor. 11:2)
2. The dragon is Satan (vs. 9)
3. The male Child is Christ (cf. Ps. 2:9)
4. The 1,260 prophetic days refer to the period of papal supremacy from the sixth century to the end of the eighteenth century (A.D. 538-1798).

In verses 7-12 we have an interlude explaining where Satan came from. But the story continues in verses 13-17:

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring [“the remnant of

her seed”—KJV], who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

1. Verses 13-15 describe in symbolic terms the persecution of the Christian church, first by the Roman Empire and later by the apostate Roman church.
2. In verse 16, the earth—personified—helps the church by providing a safe haven on the newly discovered continent of America, pictured symbolically as swallowing up the persecuting armies (see Rev. 17:15). Sending armies across the Atlantic in the seventeenth century was a difficult undertaking.
3. In verse 17, we are now in a time after the 1,260 day period, i.e., in the nineteenth century. Satan, seeing that he was unable to wipe out God's faithful people, is angry with a particular group of people called “the rest of her offspring” or “the remnant of her seed”—the remnant church.

The symbolism in verse 17 has changed. No longer is the focus on the woman—a symbol of God's people, the invisible church throughout the ages—but on a particular group, “the rest of her offspring,” the visible remnant church. The invisible church (the woman) does not cease to exist at the end of the 1260 years (there are still many of God's people in all Christian churches), but the focus now is on the visible remnant church of God.

Only twice in this chapter is an offspring of the woman mentioned. The first one is the male Child in verse 5, the Messiah; the second, “the rest of her offspring,” the remnant church. Both times the offspring of the woman is clearly identified, supporting the view that “the rest of her offspring” is the visible, not the invisible, remnant church. In other words, this is not simply the true Christians in any church or no church, but the followers of God in a distinct, identifiable group.

The text gives two identifying marks, or signs, of this remnant church:

- a. They keep the commandments of God
- b. They have the testimony of Jesus.

What do these two marks actually mean?

Keeping the Commandments of God

Whatever commandments we may want to include in the first mark, we must certainly include the Ten Commandments. So the first identifying sign of the remnant church is their loyalty to God's commandments—all of His commandments, including the fourth, the Sabbath commandment. In Revelation 12:17 God is saying, "At the end of time I will have a church—the remnant church—that you can recognise by the fact that they keep the commandments as I have given them in the beginning, including the Sabbath commandment." In the time of the apostles, or the early church, this would not have been a special sign, because they all kept the Sabbath; but today, when most Christians keep Sunday, the Sabbath has indeed become a distinguishing mark.

The Testimony of Jesus

The second identifying mark is "the testimony of Jesus." But what does this phrase mean? Is it a testimony that *Jesus* gives, or is it the testimony that *every true Christian* may give about Jesus? The expression "testimony of Jesus" (Greek: *marturia Iesou*) occurs six times in the book of Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 [twice]; 20:4). We will look at some of them for an indication of what the expression means.

Revelation 1:1, 2

The introduction to the book of Revelation sets forth the source of the book, i. e., God, and the content of the book—the revelation of Jesus Christ. In verse 2 we are told that John bore witness to "the Word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus."

"The Word of God" is commonly understood to refer to what God says; and "the testimony of Jesus" in parallel to "the Word of God" must therefore mean the testimony that Jesus Himself gives. How did Jesus testify of Himself? While here on earth, He testified in person to the people in Palestine. After His ascension, He spoke through His prophets.

Revelation 1:9

Before speaking in detail about his first vision, John introduces himself and states his credentials. He mentions who he is: John, "your brother"; where he is: on Patmos; why he is there: on account of "the Word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus"; and

when he received the vision: "on the Lord's day."

Again we see clearly the parallelism between the "Word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus." "The Word of God" in John's time referred to the Old Testament, and the "testimony of Jesus" to what Jesus had said in the Gospels and through His prophets such as Peter and Paul. Thus, both expressions describe the content of John's preaching, for which he was banished.

The Spirit of Prophecy

In Revelation 19:10, therefore, we read the explanation, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." However, what is "the spirit of prophecy?" This phrase occurs only once in the Bible, only in this text. The closest parallel to it in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. There Paul refers to the Holy Spirit, who, among other spiritual gifts, gives the gift of prophecy. Later in the chapter, in verse 28, the person who receives this gift is called a prophet (see also Eph. 4:11).

Now, just as in 1 Corinthians 12, where those who have the gift of prophecy in verse 10 are called prophets in verse 28, so in Revelation, where those who have the Spirit of prophecy in 19:10 are called prophets in 22:8, 9.

Please note the parallelism, almost line-by-line, between 19:10 and 22:8, 9.

Rev. 19:10
And I fell at his feet to worship him,

But he said to me,
"See that you do not do that!
I am your fellow servant,
and of your brethren
who have the testimony of Jesus.

Worship God!"

Rev. 22:8, 9
I fell down to worship before the feet
of the angel who showed me these things.
Then he said to me,
"See that you do not do that!
For I am your fellow servant
and of your brethren
the prophets,
and of those who keep the words of this book.
Worship God."

The situation in both passages is the same. John falls at the feet of the angel to worship. The words of the angel's response are almost identical, yet the difference is significant. Where 19:10 identifies the brethren as those "who have the testimony of Jesus," 22:9 calls them simply "the prophets." If the Protestant principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, this comparison must lead to the conclusion that "the spirit of prophecy" in 19:10 is not the possession of all church members in general, but only of those who have been called by God to be prophets.

Non-Adventist Interpreters

This is not purely an Adventist interpretation. It appears in the writings of other scholars. For example, commenting on Revelation 19:10, the Lutheran scholar Hermann Strathmann says:

According to the parallel 22:9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general but the prophets. Here, too, they are characterised as such. This is the point of verse 10c. If they have the *marturia lesou* [testimony of Jesus], they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets.¹

Similarly, James Moffat explains:

"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." This prose marginal comment specifically defines the brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus as possessors of prophetic inspiration. The testimony of Jesus is practically equivalent to Jesus testifying.²

The Witness of the Targums

The Jewish readers in John's day knew what the expression "Spirit of prophecy" meant. They would have understood the expression as a reference to the Holy Spirit, who imparts the prophetic gift to man.

Rabbinic Judaism equated the Old Testament expressions "Holy Spirit," "Spirit of God," or "Spirit of Yahweh" with "the Spirit of prophecy," as we can see

¹ Hermann Strathmann, "Martyrs," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-74), 4:501.

² James Moffat, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 5 vols. (Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 5: 465.

in the frequent occurrence of this term in the Targums (written translations of the Old Testament into Aramaic). *

Returning now to Revelation 12:17, we can say that "the rest of her offspring . . . keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," which is the Spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift.

This interpretation is strengthened by a study of the Greek word *echo* in this verse, meaning "to have." This word indicates possession. They *have* a gift of God—the prophetic gift. If the testimony of Jesus were our testimony about Jesus, John would have written something like this: "They keep the commandments of God and testify about Jesus," or, "they bear testimony to Jesus." But the Greek work *echo* is never used in the sense "to bear a witness."³

In summary, we can say that the remnant church, which according to prophecy exists after the 1,260 day period (after 1798), has two specific identifying marks:

1. They keep the commandments of God, including the Sabbath command as God has given it.
2. They have the testimony of Jesus, which is the Spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift in their midst.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church

From its very beginning in 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always claimed these identifying signs for itself. As Adventists we proclaim the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath; and we believe that as a church we have the testimony of Jesus, that is, that God manifested Himself prophetically in the life and work of Ellen G. White. Our fundamental belief number 18 says:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible

³ G. Pfandl, "The Remnant Church and the Spirit of Prophecy," *Symposium on Revelation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, 7 vols., ed. F. B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 7:312-313.

is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10).⁴

Scripture is our rule of faith and practice. It is the word of God for all people and all times, and it is necessary for salvation. The Spirit of prophecy is God's gracious gift to his remnant church for the time of the end.

We are a church prophetically foreseen, not just one church among many. God called this church into existence for a specific purpose—the proclamation of the three angels' messages (Rev. 14:6-12).

Conclusion

My friends, you are members of God's remnant church. However, this identification with the remnant does not give us an exclusive status with God. Salvation is not guaranteed through membership in any church—we are saved as individuals, not as a church. But being part of God's remnant church gives us access to God's special guidance in the time of the end.

But what did it help the kings of Israel and Judah that they had a prophet in their midst? They did not listen to him. Of what help is it to us that God graciously granted His remnant church a prophet, if we act like the kings of Israel and Judah?

Of what help is the word of the Lord through the Spirit of prophecy, if we have no time to read Ellen White's books, or if we read them but do not follow them? The kings of Israel and Judah refused to listen to God's prophet and were defeated. I pray that we may not follow in their footsteps.

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 Chr. 20:20 NKJV)

⁴*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, second edition (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 191.

* [If the congregation will understand and relate well to it, the speaker may decide to include the following details about the use of the term “spirit of prophecy” in the Targums, inserting this section where the asterisk (*) appears after the reference to the Targums:]

Thereupon the Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this in whom there is *the spirit of prophecy from before the Lord?*" (Gen. 41:38)⁵

Now two men had remained behind in the camp—one's name was Eldad; the other's name was Medad, yet *the spirit of prophecy* rested upon them though they were listed [among the elders], but they had not gone out of the Tent and prophesied in the camp. (Num. 11:14-15)

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man who has within himself the *spirit of prophecy*, and lay your hand on him. (Num. 27:18)⁶

Sometimes the term "Spirit of prophecy" refers simply to the Holy Spirit, but in many cases it refers to the gift of prophecy given by the Holy Spirit, as the context makes clear.

Commenting on this expression in the Targums, F. F. Bruce says:

The expression "the Spirit of prophecy" is current in post-biblical Judaism: it is used, for example, in a Targumic circumlocution for the Spirit of Yahweh which comes upon this or that prophet. Thus the Targum of Jonathan renders the opening words of Isaiah 61:1 as "The

⁵ Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 6, eds. K. Cathart, M. Maher, M. McNamara (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 138.

⁶ Idem, *The Targum Onqelos to Leviticus and the Targum Onqelos to Numbers*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 8, eds. K. Cathart, M. Maher, M. McNamara (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 102, 145 (italics in the original). Other occurrences of the term "spirit of prophecy" are found in Exod. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 11:25, 26, 29; 24:2; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6; 19:10, 23; 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Kgs. 22:24; 2 Chr. 15:1; 18:22, 23; 20:14; Ps. 51:13; Isa. 11:2. See Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 7 vols. (München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), 2:129.

Spirit of prophecy from before the Lord God is upon me." The thought expressed in Revelation 19:10 is not dissimilar to that already quoted from 1 Peter 1:11 where "the Spirit of Christ" is said to have borne advanced testimony in the Old Testament prophets. . . .

In Revelation 19:10, however, it is through Christian prophets that the Spirit of prophecy bears witness. What the prophets of pre-Christian days foretold is proclaimed as an accomplished fact by the prophets of the new age, among whom John occupies a leading place.⁷

⁷F.F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978),105-6.