

# **The Theology of Inspiration/Revelation**

## **What It Is and**

## **How It Works: Phenomenon & Methodology**

### **Introduction: A Human Problem and a Divine Solution:**

#### **A. The Human Problem:**

1. Before sin entered our world, there was total harmony and tranquility among the creation, with unobstructed union, communion, and communication between:
  - a. The Godhead: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
  - b. Their Creation:
    - (i) The orders of the angels in heaven.
    - (ii) Humankind on earth
    - (iii) The animal kingdom on earth.
2. The rebellion of Lucifer and one-third of the angels of heaven (Rev. 12:4), and of Adam and Eve upon earth (Gen. 3:1-7), shattered this harmony.
  - a. It destroyed direct communion and communication between the Godhead and mankind.
  - b. It replaced harmony with a “dis-eased” state characterized by :

(i) Confusion	(iv) Animosity
(ii) Turmoil	(v) Antipathy
(iii) Hostility	(vi) Total alienation
3. Mankind was utterly helpless to rectify the situation.

#### **B. The Divine Solution:**

1. Communication between God and mankind being severed, God provided a two-part Divine solution:
  - a. An office of priesthood was established immediately.
  - b. The office of prophet was introduced subsequently.
2. A Priest was a mediator who spoke to God on behalf of man.

- a. Originally he was the family husband/father.
- b. During the Exodus, the priests performed various duties:
  - (i) They offered sacrifices prescribed by Jehovah.
  - (ii) They provided religious instruction.
  - (iii) They provided for the physical custody/maintenance of the Tabernacle/Temple.
  - (iv) They met the social-welfare needs of the people.
  - (v) They provided choral music for services and ceremonies (In the Christian era, many of these duties were done by lay elders, deacons, and deaconesses).

3. A Prophet was a mediator who spoke to man on behalf of God.

- a. Enoch (the father of Methuselah) is the first prophet identified in Scripture (Jude 14; Gen. 5:18-24). Like all other prophets during the first 2,500 years of human history, he was an **oral prophet**.
- b. Moses (c. 1,500 A.D.), was the first **literary prophet** in history.
- c. The oral tradition continues, though now there are two kinds of prophets: **oral** and **literary**.
- d. The literary tradition very quickly subdivides into two streams:
  - (i) **Canonical/literary**: the approximately 40 men who wrote the 66 books of our Bible.
  - (ii) **Non-canonical/literary**: writers equally inspired as the writers of the Bible, whose writings were not included in the canon of Scripture (eight such were identified by name in the Old Testament). The SDAs tend to see Ellen White in this subcategory.

## I. The Witness and Testimony of Scripture:

Scripture has little to say about either the process or the content of Inspiration/Revelation.

### A. Process of Inspiration:

- 1. In the last letter he wrote, Paul declared: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NKJV).
  - a. The Greek word for “inspiration” is *theopneusis*:

- (i) *Theos*=God
- (ii) *Pneuma*=breath
- (iii) *Sis*=a suffix indicating an ongoing process

b. *Theopneusis* means, literally, “God-breathed”

2. In Peter’s last letter he declared: “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, NKJV).

a. The Greek word for “moved” is *phero*=to carry a load, to move, to be conveyed, to be borne, “with a suggestion, perhaps, of speed or force, as by wind. In Acts 27:15, 17, the word is used for the driving of a ship before the wind, and in Acts 2:2 for a rushing mighty wind as the Holy Spirit descended on the believers at Pentecost.” (7BC 602)

b. The prophets were thus “moved by the divine initiative and borne by the irresistible power of the Spirit of God along ways of His choosing to ends of His appointment.” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, III: 1479, 1480)

## **B. Content of Revelation:**

1. Duet. 29:29 shows that some information is revealed to mortals by God, whereas some is not.

a. We may and should study that information which God has revealed.

b. That which God has not revealed, however, is precluded from human investigation.

2. In I Cor. 2:9, Paul, quoting Isa. 64:4, assures us that the unaided human mind cannot even imagine the wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love Him. It took a divine revelation to bring them to our understanding; unaided human reason and intelligence were insufficient to produce this information.

## **II. A Working Definition of Terms--Prophet & Non-prophet:**

### **A. Terms Relating to the Prophet:**

1. “Prophet”

- a. A male/female individually and supernaturally called and qualified by God to serve as His spokesperson
  - b. The prophet's message originates in a special revelation of the divine mind and will.
  - c. The message is given both at God's command and His initiative.
  - d. "It is designed to enable man to co-operate intelligently with the infinite purposes of God."
  - e. Such messages "consist essentially in counsel, guidance, reproof, and warning." (*SDA Bible Dictionary* [1979]; 903, 905)
2. **"Inspiration"** : A process by which God enables the prophet to receive and to communicate accurately His messages for His people.
3. **"Revelation"**: The informational **content** of the message communicated through the process of inspiration. Most Evangelical Christians hold this revelation to be
- a. infallible--inerrant;
  - b. trustworthy--all-sufficient and reliable
  - c. authoritative --binding upon the Christian.

**B. Terms Relating to the Non-Prophet:**

1. **"Illumination"**: The work of the same Holy Spirit, who originated and communicated the message to the prophet, and who now enables the non-inspired hearer/reader to:
- a. **Comprehend** spiritual truth by discerning the nature and content of God's message. It may generally be thought of as a work upon the mind in understanding.
  - b. **Motivate** the Christian to act upon the implications of such a message--essentially a work upon the "heart"--in bringing truth home to the emotional faculties and engendering compliance. Through "illumination" the Holy Spirit seeks, progressively, to:
    - (i) convince
    - (ii) convict
    - (iii) convert
2. Ellen White's comments on the process of "illumination":
- a. "The Holy Spirit is beside every true searcher of God's word, enabling him to discover the hidden gems of truth. Divine

illumination comes to his mind, stamping the truth upon him with a new, fresh importance. He is filled with a joy never before felt. The peace of God rests upon him. The preciousness of truth is realized as never before. A heavenly light shines upon the Word, making it appear as though every letter were tinged with gold. God Himself speaks to the heart, making His Word spirit and life. Eternal life is the receiving of the living elements in the Scriptures, the doing of the will of God.” (RC 128, from RH, Oct. 1, 1901)

- b. “We receive Christ through His word, and the Holy Spirit is given to open the word of God to our understanding and bring home its truths to our hearts. We are to pray day by day that as we read His word, God will send His Spirit to reveal to us the truth that will strengthen our souls for the day’s need.” (MB 112, 113)

### **III. Three Views of Inspiration:**

#### **A. The Verbal/Mechanical View:**

1. Information is communicated by God to the prophet by direct verbatim dictation, like a stenographer taking down the exact words of an executive employer’s dictation. The prophet/stenographer is not at liberty to make changes or additions to the original message.
2. This view has been generally held by many Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and a number of SDAs.
3. There are insuperable problems for the holder of this view :
  - a. The minor discrepancies in different accounts of the same event recorded by the different writers of Scripture in the four Gospels, e.g., the exact wording of the inscription Pilate ordered placed upon the cross above Christ’s head:
    - (i) “The King of the Jews” (Mark 15:26)
    - (ii) “This is the King of the Jews” (Luke 23:38)
    - (iii) “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matt. 27:37)
    - (iv) “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19).
  - b. The minor errors of fact recorded by Bible writers:

- (i) Matthew attributed the passage dealing with the 30 pieces of silver for which Christ would be betrayed to Jeremiah (Matt. 27:9), whereas the writer who actually provided this information was Zechariah (Zech. 11:13).
  - (ii) Paul reports that 23,000 Jews were slain by Jehovah at Baal-Peor for immorality (I Cor. 10:8), whereas Moses puts the figure at 24,000 (Num. 25:9).
4. While there is a **limited** element of truth in the verbalist's position (a few portions of Scripture are accepted as verbally inspired), it still cannot satisfactorily explain the overall phenomenon of inspiration/revelation as it is observed throughout the Bible.
- a. Some SDAs continue to hold tenaciously to verbal inspiration, relying solely upon one statement from EGW to "prove" that she supported the verbal/mechanical position: "The scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves." (4T 9:1)
  - b. A careful reading of ISM 15-23, however, makes it clear that Mrs. White did not hold such a view.

**B. The Plenary/Thought View:**

1. God gives messages to the prophets, but they are at liberty to employ their own words (and even metaphors) in communicating the message, for the thought/idea generally is more important than is the exact, precise word chosen by the prophet to communicate it. This view does not deny that on occasion the prophets, indeed, did use the very words of God (i.e., the listing of the Ten Commandments by Moses); but this was not their general mode of approach.
2. This view is held by some Christians and many SDAs.
3. Ellen White thinks that this most closely approached the reality of the data presented in Scripture, as well as her own method of communicating inspired truth:
  - a. "The writers of the Bible were God's penman, not His pen." (ISM 21:2)
  - b. "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men [who] were inspired. (ISM21:2)
  - c. "The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression . . . . God, as a writer, is not represented."

(1SM 21:1)

**C. The Existential/Neo-Orthodox/”Encounter” View:**

1. Both Verbal and Plenary views share one point in common: in each, the inspiration resides at the point of the idea/message (and so, in one sense, inspiration for them may be seen as “objective.”). But for the Existential/Neo-Orthodox view, inspiration is to be found not in words/ideas, but in the prophet himself/herself (and so this position may be seen as “subjective”).
2. Thus, they hold three basic assumptions:
  - a. Inspiration is inherently subjective rather than objective.
  - b. The Bible contains the Word of God, but it is not the Word of God.
  - c. Inspiration is quantitative rather than qualitative.
3. This view is held by many “modernist” and “liberal” Christians. It has been creeping into the SDA Church as early as the 1970s.
4. SDAs believe that there is a subjective element in the process of inspiration/revelation, but they also believe in the primacy of the objective.

**IV. The Calling of the Prophet:**

**A. An Operation of the “Divine Initiative”:**

1. It is God who does the calling. Just as a person did not choose to be high priest in the time of Israel (“No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called, as was Aaron”--Heb. 5:4), so no one ever chooses the office of prophet for himself.
2. Christianity is unique among all the great religions of the world:
  - a. In all other religions, we see man in search of God.
  - b. In Christianity alone, we see God in search of man. Jesus’ three parables of the “lost” (Luke 15):
    - (i) Lost coin: the housewife diligently seeks.
    - (ii) Lost sheep: the shepherd leaves 99 in the fold to find the one who has strayed.
    - (iii) Lost boy: the loving father goes seeking him with

forgiveness and restoration.

**B. Bill Gothard's Metaphor of the Divine "Chain of Command":**

1. DEITY--Father, Son, Holy Spirit
2. Angel Gabriel; ("His angel"--Rev. 1:1)
3. The Prophet: ("holy men of God"--2 Peter 1:21)
4. The Church
5. The World

**V. The Tasks of the Prophet:**

1. Every prophet's work was twofold in nature:
  - a. To receive messages from God.
  - b. To proclaim messages for God (*SDA Bible Encyclopedia* [1979]: 903).
2. The four Biblical terms translated into English as "prophet" convey implications of one or the other of these two tasks:
  - a. The earliest terms used to designate a prophet in Old Testament times were the Hebrew *ro'eh* and *chozeh*, which meant seer"--one who sees things which other ordinary mortals do not (example: Elisha at Dothan, 2 Kings 6:15-17).
  - b. Later, the Hebrew *nabi* was employed to convey the idea that a prophet communicates to his fellows as a spokesperson for God.

Explains Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch:

The Hebrew prophet was originally called *roeh*, 'seer,' (cf. I Sam. ix.9), and at a later period was given the title of *nabi*, 'inspired speaker.' These designations do not signify two different types of prophets but are complimentary. The term *roeh* indicates the power to behold visions, while the term *nabi* emphasizes the ability to convey the Divine message to the people by word of mouth. Both functions

were necessary for the mission of the prophet. He was preacher, counselor, sociologist, reformer, and inspired critic of society. The prophet was, in the language of Scripture, a ‘watchman’ ([Ezek]. iii.17) to the people; or, as a modern historian has expressed it, ‘a storm bird of world history.’ He raised his voice of warning on the eve of critical events. When disaster befell and despair overwhelmed the people and threatened them with extinction, they turned to him for guidance, and the stern preacher became a sympathetic friend, comforting and directing them in their sorrows.” (Ezekiel [London: The Socino Press, 1950], “Introduction,” p. xii)

- c. The Greek *prophetes* also conveys the idea of spokesperson for God.

#### A. Receiving the Message:

- 1. God employed eight modalities (“divers manners”--Heb. 1:1) in communicating with mankind in ancient times.
  - a. Theophany (visible manifestation of God; face-to-face communication):
    - (i) Abraham at Mamre (Gen. 18)
    - (ii) Jacob wrestling with the “Angel” (Gen. 32:30)
    - (iii) Moses meeting Jehovah atop Mt. Sinai (Ex. 33:11)
  - b. Angels: (Gen. 32:1; Dan. 10:11,12; Acts 8:26; Heb. 1:14)
  - c. Audible voice of God:
    - (i) Sinai: Giving of the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20:1, Ev 616) by the Father and Christ, jointly (ST Oct. 15, 1896, in 1BC 1103, 1104).
    - (ii) Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:17)
    - (iii) When Greeks came to see Christ in the Temple (John 12:29)
    - (iv) When Christ was transfigured (Matt. 17:5)
  - d. “Optics” (light and shadow):
    - (i) Urim and Thummin on high priest’s breastplate (Ex. 28:30; Numb. 27:21; 1 Sam. 28:6; 1SP 398, 399; PP 351)
    - (ii) Cherubim at either end of the Ark of Covenant (1SP 399; PP 349)

- e. Casting of lots: An often-used method in Old Testament (1 Sam. 14:41; Num. 26:55, 56), but used only once, early, in the New Testament (Acts 1:26). See EGW's proscription against using this method as a substitute for the regular "election" of church officers (2SM 328, 1900)
  - f. Trance-like "vision" of the day: (Num. 12:6)
  - g. Prophetic dream in the night season (Num. 12:6)
  - h. Holy Spirit-directed research (the "Lucan Model"): There is no Biblical evidence that Luke, the author of two New Testament books, received any of his information through prophetic dreams; rather he appeared to rely upon research of documents and interviews with eye-witnesses (Luke 1:2)
2. The typical methods by which God communicated directly with the prophet were daytime visions and nighttime prophetic dreams:
- a. Probably the only difference between the two was in:
    - (i) The time of the day
    - (ii) Daytime vision physical phenomena was probably absent at night.
  - b. Daniel's catalogue of various physical phenomena experienced by the prophet in vision (Dan. 10) is probably the most comprehensive single reference in the Bible:
    - (i) Lungs cease operation; no breath in the body--though heart continues to function.
    - (ii) Loss of natural strength
    - (iii) Reception of supernatural strength
    - (iv) Eyes open--though prophet is not aware of events immediately transpiring about him/her
  - c. The message-content of dream or vision appears to be undifferentiated.
3. EGW was once asked by her son, William C. White, whether she had ordinary dreams as do others who do not possess the prophetic gift.
- a. EGW: "Yes."
  - b. WCW: How can you tell the difference between the two?
  - c. EGW: The same angel who stands by my side in the vision of the day also stands by my side in the prophetic dream at night (Arthur

L. White, *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 7). EGW was never left in doubt as to which was which!

4. An issue in Adventism which recurs cyclically is the question of whether EGW ever held a large, heavy Bible while in vision:

- a. Some have alleged that this story is a myth in Adventism which George Knight either forgot or didn't dare to include in his work on *Myths in Adventism*.
- b. There is evidence that EGW did hold such a Bible upon an unsupported, outstretched hand, upon at least five different occasions (sometimes it was a different Bible).
- c. Physical phenomena is never a proof of the genuineness of an alleged prophet, for Satan can counterfeit them in false prophets.
  - (i) Physical phenomena do serve as an evidence of the present working of a supernatural power.
  - (ii) They, however, do not constitute proof: they do not validate which of these two supernatural powers is presently at work.

5. **Types of Messages** received by a prophet:

a. **Literal, actual (“historical”) events/happenings:**

- (i) Past: Creation scenario revealed to Moses (Gen. 1, 2)
- (ii) Present: Elisha at Dothan (2 Kings 6)
- (iii) Future:
  - (a) The 2nd- and 3rd-Comings of Christ (1 Thess. 4; Rev. 21; Zech. 14).
  - (b) Moses' vision on Mt. Nebo of the ascension of Christ 40 days after the Resurrection and his own role in the scenario (Duet. 34:1-4; PP 476).

b. **Symbolic parables:**

- (i) Dan. 7: four terrifying beasts arising from the sea
- (ii) Incident of James White and Dr. John Harvey Kellogg each collecting a mound of stones to throw at each other. (Ms. 2, 1880; cited in 3 Bio 161, 162)

c. **Verbal messages:** The prophet holds a conversation with:

- (i) Jesus
- (ii) Angel Gabriel

**B. Communicating the Message: “Treasure” in “earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7):**

1. The prophet has three optional approaches available to him/her as he/she seeks to communicate God’s message:
  - a. The prophet may choose to record verbatim the exact words spoken by Christ or Gabriel--the “prophet-as-stenographer” view of inspiration.
  - b. The prophet may choose to:
    - (i) Paraphrase the actual message as given
    - (ii) Use his own words in describing a scene seen in vision
  - c. The prophet may choose to use the words of some other (theologically non-inspired) author--especially if the pre-existing words adequately describe the thought/idea which the prophet wishes to convey. This, of course, potentially leaves the prophet open to charges of plagiarism.

**VI. Five Popular Misconceptions Concerning Prophets:**

**A. The Prophet Is Basically a “Fortune-Teller”:**

1. In the popular mind, the term “prophet” generally conjures up the image of:
  - a. One who is a “fortune-teller”--a predictor of future events; or
  - b. One who works miracles; or
  - c. One who wrote a part of the Bible
2. The existence of John the Baptist in the New Testament demonstrates the shallow insufficiency of such views:
  - a. John made no future predictions: his message was present-tense, not future-tense (Messiah has come! Messiah is here!)
  - b. John Zebedee wrote of John the Baptist: “John did no miracle” (John 10:41).
  - c. John wrote no part of the New Testament: he was a non-canonical prophet.
  - d. However, Jesus said of him:

- (i) He was the “greatest” of all prophets.
  - (ii) He was even more than a prophet (Matt. 11:9, 11).
- 3. In Bible times, prophets did far more than merely foretell the future: Moses, one of the greatest of God’s prophets in Old Testament times, made very few predictions of future events--and most of those were Messianic prophecies.
- 4. In our own time, EGW refused to call herself a “prophet” (though she never disclaimed the role), for two stated reasons:
  - a. The term itself connoted in public consciousness too limited a role, and she did not wish to be unnecessarily circumscribed in her prophetic ministry. (1SM 31-37)
  - b. In 1844 the term “prophet” was so strongly linked with Mormon leader Joseph Smith, that EGW did not wish to be tainted by the issue of polygamy which, inevitably, came to the minds of people then, whenever the term “prophet” was mentioned. (2SG iv)
- 5. With regard to the predictive element of a prophet’s ministry,
  - a. Comparatively little of EGW’s estimated 25 million words were devoted to prediction. Robert Olson, when Secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, estimated that “probably not more than two percent [of her writings] dealt with future events.” (“Ellen White’s Predictions,” White Estate shelf document, Nov. 6, 1989, p. 1)
  - b. She was not a miracle-worker.
  - c. She wrote none of the Bible--she was a literary, though non-canonical, prophet.

**B. Receiving a Divine Dream Itself Constitutes the Recipient a Prophet:**

- 1. The call to the office of prophet is always to a task of serving a body of believers rather than an individual.
- 2. One method God employs in communicating with His prophets is dreams of divine origin:
  - a. However, because one is the recipient of a divine dream does not automatically make him a prophet.
    - (i) In Bible times certain non-prophets received dreams from an authentically divine origin, but no one considered them

as prophets because of this singularly-unique experience.

- (a) Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2, 4)
- (b) Egyptian Pharaohs at the time of: Abraham (Gen. 12:14-20); Joseph (Gen. 41:1-41)
- (c) Pilate's wife Claudia (Matt. 27:19)

(ii) In the early Advent Movement there were some who received authentically divine dreams--largely for personal direction and guidance in their own lives-- and neither EGW nor denominational leadership considered such to be prophets, though the dreams did come from God.

- (a) William Miller (Virgil E. Robinson, *Reach Out*, p. 300)
- (b) James White
- (c) Joseph Bates and Annie Smith had the same dream, same night
- (d) John N. Loughborough: had 20 divine dreams (1T 600-604).

3. A prophet is one who is called by God to serve a body of people as spokesperson for God, not one who is merely divinely-instructed of God for purely personal benefit.

**C. "Prophet" Just Another Term for Religious Leader, Like Pastor or Teacher:**

1. Some in Protestantism today tend to blur the edges of three categories of "prophet":

- a. They believe that "prophet" is synonymous with a religious leader such as a "pastor," "teacher," or spokesperson for religion.
- b. When Paul identifies the different kinds of "Spiritual Gifts", he is creating mutually exclusive categories:
  - (i) "Some" (but not "all") were called to be "apostles."
  - (ii) "Some" (but not "all") were called to be "prophets."
  - (iii) "Some" (but not "all") were called to be "evangelists."
  - (iv) "Some" (but not "all") were called to be "pastors"--while others were called to be "teachers."

c. Paul heightens the intended contrast in 1 Corinthians 12:29, 30 by

his series of rhetorical questions, the obviously intended response being negative:

- (i) “Are all apostles?” [”No!”]
- (ii) “Are all prophets?” [”No!”]
- (iii) “Are all teachers?” [”No!”]
- (iv) “Are all workers of miracles?” [”No!”]
- (v) “Have all the gifts of healing?” [”No!”]
- (vi) “Do all speak with tongues?” [”No!”]
- (vii) “Do all interpret [tongues]?” [”No!”]

2. In the Old Testament there were several institutions which were known as “The Schools of the Prophets.”

- a. Some have incorrectly concluded that one, in ancient times, had to attend a certain kind of school if he/she wished to serve professionally as a prophet.
- b. And some have inferred that EGW supported this view, on the basis of her remark concerning the students in these institutions:

In the highest sense the prophet was one who spoke by direct inspiration, communicating to the people the message he had received from God. But the name was given also to those who, though not so directly inspired, were divinely called to instruct the people in the works and ways of God. For the training of such a class of teachers, Samuel, by the Lord’s direction established the schools of the prophets.” (Ed 46)

3. Mrs. White did not believe in the existence of “degrees of inspiration”:

- a. She emphatically did not take the position that the teachers in the Schools of the Prophets were “senior” (or “regular”) prophets, while the students under their tutelage were considered as some sort of “junior” prophets.
- b. She sought, rather, to convey the thought that these students were called “prophets” purely in a colloquial manner, merely as a nickname, because of the identity of the profession of their

- teachers.
- c. That Ellen White did not believe in the existence of “degrees of inspiration” is clearly revealed by her attacking this errant view. (1SM 23)
4. EGW considered her own calling as a prophet unique within the SDA denomination:
    - a. **Her “Work”:**
      - (i) “God has not given my brethren the work He has given me.” (5T 20; cited in 5T 677)
      - (ii) “God has seen fit to thrust me into positions in which He has not placed any other one in our ranks. He had laid upon me burdens of reproof that He has not given to any other one.” (3T 315, cited in 3SM 62)
    - b. **Her “Words”:**
      - (i) “One stood by my side and said: ‘God has raised you up and has given you words to speak to the people and to reach hearts as He has given no other one . . . . God has impressed this upon you by opening it before your vision as He has to no other one now living . . . .’” (2T 607, 608; cited in 5T 667, 668, 1871)
      - (ii) “God has given me a testimony to bear to His people that He has given to no other one and I must bear this testimony which is like fire shut up in my bones.” (Letter 36, June 28, 1878, in 5MR 181; portion also cited in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 117)

**D. The Holding of a Certain Office Automatically bestows the Prophetic Gift:**

1. Both the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (of Salt Lake City, UT) and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (of Independence, MO) believe that whoever happens to hold the office of Chairman of the Council of Twelve Apostles (the equivalent among SDAs would be General Conference President) automatically possesses the prophetic gift. There is, however, no Biblical evidence to support the view that the gift of prophecy has ever been bestowed upon anyone because he/she held some civil or sacerdotal position among God’s people.
  - a. It is true that the first three kings of Israel (Saul, David, and

- Solomon) had the prophetic gift, but it was not because they were king; many of Israel's kings did not have the gift.
- b. Aaron, the first high priest, had the gift; but it was not because he was high priest; the majority of Israel's high priests did not have the gift.
  - c. Miriam, a choir leader, had the prophetic gift; but she is the only one of record holding that office who was so gifted.
  - d. Deborah and Huldah were judges--even female judges; but the gift was not bestowed just because of their office. Most judges did not have the gift.
2. There is no particular pattern, in either Old or New Testament, to indicate that God chose only one particular category of person to serve as prophet:
- a. Some were of the royal line (Isaiah, Daniel).
  - b. One was a herdsman (David), another a gatherer of the sycamore fruit (Amos).
  - c. Some were humble fisherman (Peter, Andrew, James, John).
  - d. One was a rabbinical scholar (Paul).
  - e. One was a physician (Luke).
  - f. And one was even a corrupt, grafting, extorting civil servant for Rome (Matthew).
  - g. Women were called as well as men:
    - (i) The Old Testament identifies five such.
    - (ii) The New Testament also identifies five such.
    - (iii) Ellen White was the daughter of a hat-maker.
- Truly, "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).
3. Some have misunderstood Amos' rather cryptic remark ("I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet" (Amos 7:14) as inferring that the gift might be genetically transmitted. There were father-and-son prophetic teams (David and Solomon, for example); but, again, there is not even a hint in Scripture that the gift may be received through lineal/genetic descent.
4. While it is true that "God has given to every man [every woman] his [her] work" (UL 268:3), and "Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God" at any given point in time (COL 327:0), yet it is also true that the correct answer to Paul's rhetorical question ("Are all prophets?") must, in the end, be answered in the negative!

## **E. The Prophetic Gift Automatically Confers Omniscience:**

1. Some hold the view that the moment a prophet is called, he/she is, automatically (and immediately), gifted with omniscience (all knowledge) However, the Bible nowhere supports the view that the prophet has all-knowledge from Day One of his/her calling to the prophetic office.
2. On the contrary, some Biblical prophets misunderstood points of theology:
  - a. John the Baptist had a serious misunderstanding concerning the nature of the Messiah's work (Matt. 11:3).
  - b. Peter found that some points of Paul's rather abstruse theological reasoning were, for him, "hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16).
    - (i) Peter earlier pointed out that various prophets "searched diligently," concerning certain points of faith, within the writings of other fellow prophets, in order to know the truth of the matter (1 Peter 3:16).
    - (ii) If the prophet were already so gifted with omniscience, there would be no need for him/her to have to "search" for anything.
3. Some Biblical prophets even misunderstood a vision from the Lord:
  - a. Daniel initially misunderstood the meaning and intent of the 2300 day/year vision (Dan. 8:14); and, fearing that the captivity of the Jews was to be extended from 70 years to 2,3000 years, he "fainted" and "was sick certain days" (Dan. 8:27). And God had to send the angel Gabriel back to Daniel to straighten him out. (Dan. 8:27-9:23)
  - b. Peter initially misunderstood the vision of the animals lowered from heaven in a sheet, thinking that God wanted him to eat Levitically-unclean flesh food (Acts 10:11-14). But God quickly straightened the apostle out, by informing him that he "should not call any man common or unclean" (v. 28).
4. Even Ellen White initially misunderstood:
  - a. That the close of probation (the "shut door" view) took place on Oct. 22, 1844; whereas later study--and the visions of the Lord--cleared up this mistake. (G 429, 1SM 63, 74)
  - b. That the claims of the Sabbath were obligatory upon New Testament Christians, thinking Joseph Bates erred in promoting

that view. (LS 95:3, 4)

5. The important thing to remember is: that although God's true prophets may have at times misunderstood points of truth, yet they never taught error.

## **VII. The Nature and Purpose of Inspiration:**

### **A. The Nature: As Revealed by Biblical Metaphors:**

1. A **“gift”** (Eph. 4:8, 1 Cor. 12:1) which promotes the work of the “body,” by strengthening the members of the church through:
  - a. Perfection (sanctification) of saints: they grow up into Him in all things.
  - b. Unification of the body: so there is no schism.
  - c. Edification of Christians:
    - (i) Doctrine
    - (ii) Reproof
    - (iii) Correction
    - (iv) Instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16)
    - (v) Stabilization as an anchor (Eph. 4:14) and as a rock
2. A **light**:
  - a. To reveal future events (Rev. 1:1,2; 22:6)
    - (i) If one knows what is coming, one may better prepare for it.
    - (ii) Validation of the divine origin of inspired writings--for only God knows and, therefore, only He can reveal the future.
  - b. To protect in the present because our mortal enemy, Satan, is represented in Scripture as:
    - (i) A deadly “serpent” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2)
    - (ii) A “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8)

### **Conclusion:**

1. It is of utmost importance that every Christian correctly understands--to the extent that God has revealed it (Duet. 29:29)--the facts concerning the nature and methodology of Inspiration/Revelation.

- a. For if you don't understand correctly, how can you give an intelligent reason for your faith (1 Peter 3:15)? We are called to give "reasonable" service (Rom. 12:1).
  - b. Fatal deception and pitfalls await the unwary and uncritical.
  - c. Validation is a crucial, absolute necessity.
2. The counsel of the inspired Scriptures:
- a. "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:19-21).
  - b. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20).