

# Bible Studies for Adventists



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February 21–27, 2009

## Commentary on “The Integrity of the Prophetic Gift”

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### Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, February 21, 2009

Today’s lesson sets out to bolster the claim of E.G. White’s prophetic claim. This is done by referencing a few biblical prophets and demonstrating how they came under attack and scrutiny when they delivered an out of favor message from God (see 2 Chronicles 18, Jeremiah 43, 1 Kings 22). The story of the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7) not only alludes to an unpopular message, but also shows how a prophet changed his mind about a statement he made. Daniel’s vision and lack of understanding of the vision (Daniel 8:27) shows that prophets do not know everything.

The study then brings these stories to the present when it compares the “attacks leveled against the bible” to those “leveled against Ellen White.” The main attack referenced is Ellen’s use of other sources and how this makes her unreliable or dishonest. While this characteristic is not specifically part of the biblical references above, the point is to show that biblical prophets endured hardship and scrutiny, and Ellen White is doing the same. The goal of the study is further clarified when the writer states “we’ll explore a little more about how inspiration works, both with bible writers and with Ellen White.”

#### Week at a Glance

- What do we know about the integrity of biblical prophets?
- If scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White are both inspired by the same spirit, what is the relationship between them?
- What is the danger in seeing prophets as infallible?
- Can prophets give wrong advice?

#### Problems

There are two very clear conclusions to which the study writer funnels the reader. The first is presented as a new test for biblical prophecy not listed in Deuteronomy 18: 21-22. This test is one of opposition or unpopularity, that because God’s prophets often times presented unpopular messages from the Lord, Ellen White’s unpopular messages must also be from the Lord. This is an absurdly illogical argument. There are countless individuals throughout history that have said extremely unpopular statements, but this does not in any way make them God’s prophets.

The test for prophecy is beautifully clear and simple, so that we as Christ followers will not be easily led astray. “And if you say in your heart ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’ – when a prophet speaks the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18: 21-22 ESV)

The second desired conclusion is a bit more subtle, but can be picked up mainly in the story referenced of Nathan and David (2 Samuel 7) and in the questions asked in “The Week at a Glance.” Nathan was a prophet of the Lord, as clearly stated in verse 5 of this text, “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord...’” This study places the focus on the fact that

Nathan first encouraged David "...Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you." (verse 3) The bible study writer wants to take this text to show that bible prophets are not infallible and can give wrong advice, opening the door for Ellen White's many changes of mind and contradictions.

This is a gross misinterpretation of the text. Nathan did not initially give a prophetic word to David and then change that word later. David asked the opinion of a wise servant of his house. Nathan replied with encouraging words, NOT A PROPHECY! Later the Lord did reveal a message for King David through Nathan which differed from his encouraging words. So to answer the question at the end of the study "Can prophets give wrong advice?" Well, the answer is yes. But they cannot give a wrong prophecy if it is from the Lord. The danger in seeing prophets as infallible is that you raise the individual up and not the word from the Lord. Prophets are human and are not infallible; Prophecy FROM GOD is infallible.

## Summary

1. The question of whether or not a prophet is opposed, unpopular, or persecuted is not a biblical test of a prophet. The fact that any "prophet" is opposed in no way confirms them as a mouthpiece for God.
2. Prophecy from God, not the prophets, are infallible. Nathan did not claim that his words affirming David's desire to build a temple were from God. Nathan did not say "I was shown" or attribute his fleshly affirmation of David to God or one of His angels. On the other hand, Ellen White did claim that all her words were to be heeded as having come from God.

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## Day 2: Sunday, February 22, 2009

Today's lesson starts with a closer look at the story of King Ahab, King Jehoshaphat and Micaiah, a prophet of the Lord. (1 Kings 22: 10-18) It recounts the story of how 400 of King Ahab's prophets presented favorable words regarding the battle, but Micaiah, a true prophet of the Lord, gave an unfavorable message. It was so unpopular that he was placed in prison.

Ellen White's life and writings are then compared to this story, trying to show that since she faced, and still faces through her writings, attacks on her prophetic gift, she must also be a prophet. Hardship must be a sign of the prophetic gift since bible prophets faced hardship.

Some of the criticisms are then addressed at the end of the study with a quote from Herbert E. Douglass. He states how many people believe prophets should have full knowledge from the start of their ministry, that their predictions should be unaltered, and writings should be exempt from errors, discrepancies and mistakes. They should also never include uninspired sources. All of these points are okay for a prophet as long as one holds to the SDA belief regarding verbal-inspiration. The Adventist church does not assume a verbal inspiration concept either for the Bible or for Ellen White.

The teacher's edition clarifies exactly what the reader is supposed to understand by the end of the study. They are to **know** that prophets are not perfect, **feel** generous towards the flaws and failings of prophets, and then **do** revisit her writings with a deeper appreciation for her humanity. The summary states "Prophets are not perfect. Our expectations of Ellen G. White should reflect the model of the biblical prophets. God is able at any time to correct and further develop the understanding of the prophets and His church."

## Problems

Verbal-Inspiration. This is, as J. Vernon McGee so often said "where the rubber meets the road." This is the main avenue by which the SDA church can have such a different understanding from Christian doctrine and hold the writings of Ellen White as prophecy from the Lord. In fact, I believe it is the major way all false religion is propagated. The question comes down to, "Is the Bible the actual word of God?" If you say no, then you can make anything true. Even if you say that it is inspired by God, but written by human hands in human language as they saw necessary, then you can still argue for almost any truth you want.

The Bible is God's word. (There are many Bible texts, but the main one is 2 Timothy 3:16) It is a divinely inspired book. God actively worked through the process until its full completion. It is written revelation. "Scripture is not only man's word, but also, and equally God's word, spoken through man's lips or written with man's pen" (J.I. Packer, *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 31).

The term "inspiration" comes from Latin and English translations of the Greek word *theopneustos*. The word literally means "God-breathed." Another source describes the inspiration of the Bible as "...verbal (word-for-word) inspiration of Scripture...not only infallible (correct when it spoke on matters of faith and morals) but inerrant (correct when it spoke on any matters, including history and science)." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2009)

The SDA church, as the study plainly states, does not believe in this sort of inspiration, for the Bible or for Ellen White. This is how the church can elevate her writings to prophet status, errors and all. To the Adventist these are not errors in her writings, but "progressive revelation" to the church, the continuous unfolding of prior revealed truth. Deciphered: a way of justifying contradictions in her writings that she said were from God. This is only possible if you do not believe that "...the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has

supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.” [Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith (Article One)] “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.” (The Evangelical Theological Society)

With this view of scripture we can correctly answer the questions posed in the study. We know the prophets in the Bible are human and are not perfect, but their messages, WHEN FROM THE LORD, are perfect. Once they say “This is from the Lord,” or “God showed me” there is an entirely different set of criteria on which they are judged. It is clear from the Bible stories that not everything a prophet says is prophecy. Therefore, all their words are not held up to the prophecy test, only those which are in fact meant as prophecy.

It doesn't matter who Ellen White was as a person, “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:23 ESV) What matters is that she holds all her writings up as prophecy from God. Since she places her words in this category, they must be evaluated on the prophetic basis. Just as in the story of King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat, one set of prophets said one thing, and the prophet of the Lord said another. The one set was wrong and the prophet of the Lord was right. It is that simple.

## Summary

1. The Bible is the word of God. It is God breathed. (2 Timothy 3:16) It is infallible (correct when it spoke on matters of faith and morals) and inerrant (correct when it spoke on any matters, including history and science).
2. Prophets are not perfect, they are human just as we are. (Romans 3:23) But God's word is perfect, and so is prophecy given from Him.
3. Since the SDA church does not believe in the infallibility or inerrancy of scripture, the church is able to argue truth in any way possible.

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## Day 3: Monday, February 23, 2009

Day three of this week's study focuses on a story centered on the prophet Jeremiah, the assassination of Nebuchadnezzar's governor Gedaliah, fear of Babylonian retaliation and another unpopular word from the Lord. The people of Jerusalem asked Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord on their plan to flee to Egypt for refuge from the Babylonian army. Sure that Jeremiah would give a favorable message to the plan, they were angered when the Lord told them to stay in the city, for they would “...certainly...die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place [they] desir[ed] to go live.” (Jeremiah 42:22 ESV)

Not only did the people reject Jeremiah's message, but they also doubted the source of his words saying, “You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say [these things], but Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us.” (Jeremiah 43:2-3 ESV) Baruch happened to be Jeremiah's friend and scribe. (Jeremiah 36:4; 45: 1-5)

This story is then used as an illustration of Ellen White's own battles; claims that her writings were not from God and that much of what she wrote was plagiarized. This claim is refuted by a statement she made in *The Great Controversy*, admitting to the use of other literary sources as needed. A copyright lawyer was then hired to study her writings in regards to plagiarism. The lawyer concluded, “Ellen White was not a plagiarist, and her works did not constitute copyright infringement/piracy.”

The teacher's comments section of the study then states that God has provided us with biblical guidelines for determining what is true and what is false, but uses a quote from the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics to illuminate these guidelines. The study then asks, “How do we sort out the impostors from those who have a genuine message from God?”

## Problems

Plagiarism is a legal term pertaining to copyrighted material. It is defined as “taking without referencing from someone else's writing or speech.” Ellen White did use other writer's materials, as she admitted to in her quote from *The Great Controversy*, without giving proper reference when they were actually used. This is plagiarism. If a college student wrote a paper, and while handing the paper to the professor said, “Just so you know, Professor, I did use some ideas and writings from other people wherever I felt they may have explained it better,” but failed to provide specific citations for the works, the student would be flunked. Or maybe even kicked out of school. Simply admitting to it does not negate that it is still plagiarism.

Plagiarism, though, is not really the problem, especially since these copyright laws did not exist during Ellen White's time. Also, since all true biblical prophecy comes from the same source (God), plagiarism is not an issue because God cannot plagiarize Himself. (University Professors: I know technically you can plagiarize yourself if you turn in the same paper for more than one class, but God is not turning in a paper for credit in your class.)

As in previous study commentaries, comparing Ellen's hardships to biblical prophets' hardships to show Ellen White's prophetic gift is not a test for God's word. The test for prophets is simply put: if they are false, they are not a prophet of God. (Deuteronomy 18:21-22) This is pretty clear and simple, with no mention of hardship and skeptical attack.

As the teacher's comments outline, God has provided us with biblical guidelines for determining what is true and what is false. Unfortunately these guidelines are nowhere to be found in the study notes. Instead the writer uses a quote from the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics talking about "...professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility." We are not talking about credibility or integrity. We are talking about God's word. I think His power is sufficient enough to provide the integrity and credibility needed to let us know it is or is not his word.

## Summary

1. Plagiarism is not the problem. False prophecy is.
2. God has provided us biblical guidelines for determining what is true and what is false. We should stick to them.
3. Hardship and scrutiny is not a test of a prophet.

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## Day 4: Tuesday, February 24, 2009

The study begins by asking who the bible prophets designated as the source of their messages. Jeremiah 1:4, Ezekiel 7:1, and Hosea 1:1 are all referenced, and they answer the question in the same way. The prophets clearly state that their prophetic messages came from the Lord. This is important because it legitimizes their claim, but it also places the message in a whole new category of scrutiny.

The study claims the phrase "the Word of the Lord came unto..." means the message carries divine authority, was received by direct communication from the Lord, and is in the mind of the presenter ready to be given. The study writer then makes the claim that the phrase "thus says the Lord" shows that God speaks directly to the reader, and that the prophet's job was to bring the message before the people and apply the message to the audience's situation.

The study then shows that Ellen White also strongly emphasized the inspiration of the Scriptures because she said, "I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word." She also claimed divine inspiration for her writings: "In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me... it is true concerning the articles in our papers and in the many volumes of my books."

She claims the role of the "lesser light" which leads to the greater light, which is the Bible. Her messages are supposed to be for the end time remnant church and are not new or additional standards for the church, but help for the church in the end times.

Some questions are asked at the end of the study are...

- How can we avoid the trap of putting Ellen White's writings on par with the Bible?
- Why is that so easy to do and such a big mistake?

## Problems

Prophets do not choose the language, the words, or even the correct application of the message. God does all of these things. There is a continual attempt in these studies to downgrade who God is and what powers He has. HE IS GOD. He does not need any help from any of us to get His messages across. So when the Bible says "the Word of the Lord came unto..." or "thus says the Lord," it does in fact mean that these are God's actual words being given, not the prophet's.

There is a very clear contradiction in this study with the two quotes given by Ellen White. First she says she takes the Bible just as it is and as the Inspired Word, capitalizing the I and W to show that God is doing the inspiring. Another quote is then used to show that she also believes her writings, and not just some but all, are inspired by the same God. The problem here is that if she truly adhered to what she said about the Bible she would not have believed herself to be a prophet. One verse, out of many, that clearly states the completeness of scripture is "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." (Revelation 22:18-19 ESV)

Another scripture about the completeness of the Bible is "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV) Notice the piece about the man of God being competent and equipped for every good work. The SDA church and Ellen White would have you believe that this competence lasted until 1844. At that point her writings were necessary to give man complete competence to endure in the last days.

So why didn't God reveal this by adding this extra piece onto the 2 Timothy text? Because it is simply not true. God's word, the Bible, is not only the greater light, it is the ONLY LIGHT.

Speaking of the lesser and greater lights, here is a quote from Ellen White that shows just what she thought of the Bible compared to her own writings: "We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories... And while the

Scriptures are God's word, and to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake." (*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 32)

So how can we avoid placing Ellen White's writings on par with the Bible?

- Disregard them as false teachings, since they come into direct conflict with God's Word.

Why is it so easy for the SDA church to place them on par with the Bible?

- Ellen White herself made it clear that her writings and teachings trumped the Bible message.

## Summary

1. Bible prophets do not choose the message or how it is presented or the application of the message. God does.
2. Ellen White believed her own writings were superior to the scriptures, especially if they came into conflict at all with the information she gave.
3. God's word is complete and is given to us in its entirety so that we may also be competent and fully equipped until Christ returns. (Revelation 22:18-19; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

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## Day 5: Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Today's study is titled "Growth and Understanding," continuing the idea that "prophets did not receive all of God's light at one time." Over time, their walk with the Lord in faith allows more light to be given to them. The texts referenced give an illustration of how God revealed more and more information to the prophets over time. The main way this spiritual growth occurred, according to the chosen texts in the study, is through the diligent study of the scriptures. (Daniel 8:27, 9:2, Galatians 2:11-16, 1 Peter 1:10)

The study then presents a picture of true progressive revelation, or the unfolding of God's prophetic message over time. "The possession of the prophetic gift in biblical times did not imply immediate, full, and complete knowledge of spiritual and other matters." As the study of Daniel 8 and 9 shows, Daniel did not understand the vision given to him by God, but later in his life it was explained to him. This is a correct view of progressive revelation.

The study writer then quotes Ellen White, "For sixty years I have been in communication with heavenly messengers, and I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things, and in reference to the way in which God is constantly working to bring souls from the error of their ways to the light in God's light." This quote is used to explain why her later works sometimes modified her earlier works (which is not progressive revelation).

In the teacher's comments section, the reader is asked to consider what happens when our own plans and dreams run counter to the Lord's will? Further down the page the writer also asks about where our standards come from; either from the world or from the Bible.

## Problems

In the Bible the message does not change. The entire OT is a shadow of the future, fully revealed in Christ Jesus. Everything that is said or done points to the cross. This message is never changed or altered as new insight is given to the prophets. In other words, the new message given NEVER contradicts the old message given.

The attacks on Ellen White's prophetic status that focus on her personality, her character, her use of literature, or her lack of immediate and complete understanding are foolish. Any accurate view of the Bible would show that prophets are human, are sinners, are flawed, are not perfect, and do not know everything all at once. God on the other hand does know everything and is perfect, and so is His word. This includes the messages He gave to prophets.

Ellen White and the SDA church try and bring the Bible down to the level of flawed humans giving a flawed message that changes over time. With time and study new light is revealed, bringing new truth, almost totally removing God and His sovereignty from the equation completely. This provides the Adventist church a method of explanation for the modifications (contradictions) in her writings. The SDA church claims the Bible to be the truth and the ultimate authority, but actions speak louder than words. The church's actions of looking to Ellen for new and contradictory prophecy speak volumes about who they see as the greater light.

## Summary

1. New prophecy NEVER contradicts previously given prophecy.
2. True prophetic messages are given by God and the explanation of them is also given by God.
3. The Bible is our ultimate authority as Christ followers.



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## Day 6: Thursday, February 26, 2009

The study today returns to the story of Nathan and David. It begins with a question, asking “What was wrong with Nathan’s advice to David?” 1 Chronicles 22:8, which is referenced at the end of the question, is David telling his son that he had wanted to build the temple, but God said Solomon would not build it. This is the result of Nathan’s original encouragement to David about his desire to build the temple, but later prophetic message that David would not do as he desired. (2 Samuel 7:1-7)

The study rightly points out that while the prophet Nathan was a wise and God-fearing man, not everything a prophet says or does is done under inspiration. This is where Nathan’s encouraging words to David would fall. Ellen White also was not infallible in all she said or did. The study says “She grew, changed her mind on issues, and was constantly open for more light.”

Prophets are not always “on duty,” or speaking constantly for God. Ellen White wrote “There are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God.”

The study writer ends by saying that history has shown if erroneous counsel has been given by a prophet, God will intervene to correct the mistake.

### Problems

What was wrong with Nathan’s advice to David? Nothing. David was a man of God, and Nathan knew that. David’s desire to build the temple seemed like a good thing to do to David, and Nathan gave him wise and friendly advice from his own understanding.

In fact, I agree with much of what the study writer says in regard to prophets being human and not infallible. Even the Ellen White quote about common things needing to be said sometimes sounds accurate. The problem is that other Ellen quotes show that she believed all her writings to be prophetic. (see study notes from earlier in week.)

The other main issue is that in the story of Nathan and David, Nathan’s words of advice were replaced with God’s word. This is not an accurate comparison to Ellen White’s changing words. The new light she claimed to have been shown over time often contradicted the previous light she was shown. This would amount to God’s message being replaced with God’s message. God does not contradict His own word. Any time “an erroneous counsel has been given by a prophet,” and God “intervenes to correct the mistake,” it is a correction of the prophet’s own personal counsel to be replaced with God’s righteous counsel. Never does God correct his own erroneous council, since there is nothing erroneous about Him.

### Summary

1. Prophets are human and do not always speak for God.
2. God never corrects prophecy, only the personal messages given by man.
3. Nothing about God is ever erroneous.

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## Day 7: Friday, February 27, 2009

The last day of this week’s study asks the reader to do some further study of Ellen White’s writings, especially “The Question of Influence” in *Selected Messages* Book 3, pages 62-67. This section of her writings mainly speaks to the source she believed her writings to originate from. Many people questioned, and still question this source, but she continually said she believed her messages came from God.

A quote is then given from Clifford Goldstein, author of *Graffiti in the Holy of Hollies*. The gist of the quote is that Ellen White made many claims about her visions, saw many things and claimed that they were from God. Because of the loftiness of her claims and the detailed nature of her “visions,” she does not leave us with many options when making conclusions about her writings. “Either we take her for what she has claimed for herself . . . , or we have to reject her as [a] liar, a lunatic, or someone inspired by the devil. These are the only logical options.”

The study ends with two discussion questions. With what we know of Ellen White and her writings, what is the best and most logical explanation for her life and ministry? Of the questions that remain about her ministry, should we focus on these few questions and miss the big picture of her work or should we focus on the big picture?

### Problems

After reading the passage from *Selected Messages*, I noticed that any questioning of the source of her “visions” was frowned upon, to say the least. In one passage she calls God’s judgment upon those who do not see the truth she is present-

ing. "Those who have disregarded the messages of warning have lost their bearings. Some, in their self-confidence, have dared to turn from that which they knew to be truth, with the words, "Who has told Sister White?" These words show the measure of their faith and confidence in the work that the Lord has given me to do. They have before them the result of the work that the Lord has laid upon me, and if this does not convince them, no arguments, no future revelations, would affect them. The result will be that God will speak again in judgment as He has spoken heretofore." (*Review and Herald*, May 19, 1903, p. 8. {3SM 62.1})

Just as a side note, judgment is not a future conclusion for those who trust in Christ Jesus as savior. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1 ESV) Judgment of sins occurred at the cross for those who have faith in Jesus when he died for our sins. That is why the text uses the word "now." The word implies finality at the cross and current forgiveness in our own life. That is why Jesus said "It is finished" just before He died on the cross. (John 19:30)

We are supposed to ask questions. In everything we do we should ask for guidance from God. (Proverbs 3:5-6) We are also supposed to test the spirits. The Bible says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1 ESV)

In Ellen's quotes she clearly is upset that anyone would dare question the source of her messages. This quote, also from Selected Messages Book 3 shows that she felt it was an insult to God to question her authority: "For the future, I shall not belittle the testimonies that God has given me, to make explanations to try to satisfy such narrow minds, but shall treat all such questions as an insult to the Spirit of God." It is hardly an insult to God to question the spirits when He commands us to do just that. In fact, Ellen White should have welcomed the scrutiny, for if her words were truly from God they would easily stand under any questioning.

So how do we know what is truly from the Lord and what is not? The Bible clearly provides the methods by which we are to test the spirits. Deuteronomy 22 plainly states that if what a prophet says does not come to pass then they are not a prophet of God. Deuteronomy 13 also addresses if what a prophet says does actually come to pass but leads you to follow other gods; this is also a false prophet and should not be followed. Even Paul tells us in Galatians 1:8-9 that even angels can appear with a wrong message.

So, as the study rightly points out, Ellen White leaves us with very few options. She is either a messenger from God or a messenger from the devil. Guidance from the Bible clearly shows which conclusion is true.

## Summary

1. God commands us to test the spirits. (1 John 4:1)
2. God provides us with a clear test of the prophets. (Deuteronomy 18:22, 13:1-4)
3. Ellen White avoided questioning of her messages.