9. Testing the Prophets (4Q 2026 Gift of Prophecy)

Biblical material: Dan. 10:7-19; Deut. 13:1-5; Isa. 8:20; John 11:25; Acts 15:36-39; Jer. 28:9, 15-17; 1 John 4:1.

Quotes

- I keep six honest serving men/They taught me all I knew;/Their names are What and Why and When/And How and Where and Who. *Rudyard Kipling*
- I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use. *Galileo Galilei*
- For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate error so long as reason is free to combat it. *Thomas Jefferson*
- Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers. *Voltaire*
- Anyone who has begun to think places some portion of the world in jeopardy. *John Dewey*
- A faith that cannot survive collision with the truth is not worth many regrets. *Arthur C. Clarke*
- Faith has need of the whole truth. *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*
- Understanding is the reward of faith. *Augustine*

Questions

Why is it so important to "test the prophets"? How is this accomplished? Why are some disturbed that this may be an expression of doubt? How do we detect fraud and misrepresentation in religion? On what basis do we decide what is true? How would you explain to others who may be more cynical that it is credible to believe prophets?

Bible summary

Daniel 10:7-19 records Daniel's vision and the angel's explanation. Even if something prophesied comes true, if the "prophet" leads you away from God, don't follow says Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Similarly if what spiritists say doesn't match God's word, don't believe them says Isaiah 8:20. In John 11:25 Jesus sys he is the resurrection and the life. Acts 15:36-39 describes Paul's strong disagreement wth Barnabas over John Mark. Jeremiah 28:9, 15-17 is the story of the false prophet Hananiah. "Dear friends, don't trust every spirit, but put the spirits to the test to find out whether they're from God, for there are many false prophets out there in the world." 1 John 4:1.

Comment

Isaiah 8:20 advises us to check all experience with "the law and the testimony." Similarly Jeremiah 18 reveals a God who expects us to examine the evidence of history as it relates to prophecy, while the experience of Jonah is an intriguing illustration of what happens when people *do* respond to God and his predictions. The truth is that prophetic evidence is not so much about proving God through the fulfillment of prophecy but seeing the God who is always working through history.

Jesus told us to identify those who speak for God (prophets) by their fruits (Matt. 7:20). Paul called Peter to account (Gal. 2) because he was not acting in harmony with the truth he knew. Consistency and honesty are vital, and that is why we should look for such evidences of truth in the life of those who make claims.

Understanding. That's one of God's keywords. Jesus says: "Listen and understand." (Matthew 15:10). He was continually amazed and saddened by his friends lack of understanding (Mt. 15:17, 16:9,11). On the Emmaus road Jesus explained the record of God's previous actions and prophecies in the Old Testament. "Then he opened their minds so they were able to *understand* the Scriptures." (Luke 24:45). Sadly so many still fulfil God's prophecy in Isaiah quoted by Jesus:

"Even though you hear, you won't understand, and even though you see, you won't perceive. They have a hard-hearted attitude, they don't want to listen, and they've closed their eyes. If they didn't they might be able to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand in their minds. Then they could return to me and I would heal them." Matthew 13:14, 15.

In asking questions, we're not talking of abusing God, or criticizing him and his actions. We are not *questioning* him in the negative sense of that word—being hostile, attacking God. God really *is* right. But it's just as important for us to know that too—and personally. So to ask God questions is not being cynical or sceptical (although we may be like that at times too!), nor should we feel that we are being disrespectful. Asking questions is just a way (and often the best way) of gaining understanding—and to know God better is what God himself wants for us.

For God does want us to test the prophets, to examine the evidence, and determine what is true. God invites us to do this. "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18 NIV) he encourages. Not "Come here and listen to my orders. Obey without question." To reason together is to share a conversation, a mutual exchange of thoughts so that you can arrive at a better understanding. The more we reason with God, we more we understand him—his purposes, actions and very nature—and the better we are able to live in him and share him with others.

Is our God so fragile that he cannot stand a little investigating? Is God threatened by our probing? Or is the problem with us—that we don't really want a God who answers questions. Maybe that *is* it—we would prefer not to bother with the questions since it gets us in deeper, forces us to think, and eventually demands a far greater commitment. After all, an "Accept and Obey" commanding God may not be too pleasant, but you can be sure that if you do as you're told you'll be OK. No questions. No thinking. No relationship. Just a simple military response. Just obeying orders—like any other concentration camp guard. Trouble is, if we simply "Believe and tremble" then we can be just like the demons, not part of God's kingdom at all. As Jesus so clearly explained: "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent." (John 17:3). Knowing God, knowing Jesus—in a positive and personal way.

This is the question: exactly how do you reason, or gain knowledge, without raising the matters that appear contradictory—without saying "But what about…?" Questions are a vital part in gaining intelligent faith. As the wise man writes in Proverbs, "Stupid people believe whatever they're told, but sensible people think about what they're doing. …. The inheritance of stupid people is stupidity, but sensible people are rewarded with knowledge." (Proverbs 14:15, 18).

Ellen White Comments

In these days of peril we are not to accept everything that men bring to us as truth. As professed teachers from God come to us declaring that they have a message from God, it is proper to inquire carefully, How do we know that this is truth? Jesus has told us that "false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:11). But we need not be deceived; for the Word of God gives us a test whereby we may know what is truth. The prophet says, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

From this statement it is evident that it becomes us to be diligent Bible students, that we may know what is according to the law and the testimony. We are safe in no other course of action. {2SM 99}

"By their fruits ye shall know them." Here is a test which all may apply if they will. None need be left in uncertainty and doubt. There is always sufficient evidence upon which to base an intelligent faith. But God will never remove from any man all occasion for doubts. Those who love to dwell in the atmosphere of doubt and questioning unbelief can have the unenviable privilege. He who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things that he cannot make plain to his finite understanding, will be left to the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and skepticism, and will make shipwreck of faith. {ST, December 30, 1886}

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