

The Gift of Prophecy and God’s Remnant Church



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Revelation 12; 14:1–12.*

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*).

The remnant theme first appears with Noah and his family (*Gen. 7:23*) and resurfaces in the history of Israel. The apostle Paul refers to a remnant (*Rom. 11:5*) that was then constituted of Jews who had accepted Jesus and who later became the nucleus of the Christian church. In the book of Revelation a remnant appears in the churches of Thyatira (*Rev. 2:24*) and Sardis (*Rev. 3:4*). It appears also in chapter 12—the subject of our study this week.

God’s faithful remnant was not always a visible remnant; that is, from the early days up to the last days, God has His faithful ones in different faiths, which is why the call is made: “‘Come out of her [Babylon], my people’” (*Rev. 18:4*). Nevertheless, there is a specific depiction of God’s remnant in the last days.

The Week at a Glance: What do the symbols in Revelation 12 represent? What events in history can be seen as a fulfillment of this chapter? What is the meaning of the phrases “the testimony of Jesus” and “the spirit of prophecy”?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.

Good Versus Evil: Act 1

Read Revelation 12:1–6. What’s happening here?

Revelation 12 introduces the great controversy between Christ and Satan in symbolic form and describes its progress from the time of Christ to the time of the end. In verse 1 John sees a dazzling sight—a pregnant woman, “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet” (*NKJV*), and wearing a crown of 12 stars. He calls the appearance a “great sign” (*NKJV*), indicating that the woman is more than a mere woman. She is a symbol for the church or for God’s faithful people (see *Isa. 54:5, 6; 2 Cor. 11:2*). The woman’s dazzling appearance links her to Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness (*Mal. 4:2, Rev. 1:16*).

According to Revelation 12:6, the woman flees from the dragon into the wilderness, where she is taken care of by God for 1,260 days. What is this talking about, and what do the 1,260 days symbolize? *Dan. 7:25, Rev. 12:14, 13:5*.

Until the nineteenth century, most students of prophecy used the year-day principle, and so they understood the 1,260 days to refer to the time of persecution of the church during the Middle Ages, a period of 1,260 years.

And with good reason, too. First, the whole section is filled with symbols that aren’t taken literally, so why should the time element be taken literally, as well? Second, the various time phrases used in Daniel and Revelation—“time and times and half a time” (*Dan. 7:25, 12:7, Rev. 12:14, NKJV*), “forty-two months” (*Rev. 11:2, 13:5, NKJV*), and “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (*Rev. 11:3, 12:6, NKJV*)—are not the natural way of expressing a literal three and one-half years (see *Luke 4:25, James 5:17*). For these reasons and others, Seventh-day Adventists (in contrast to most other Christians today) interpret the 1,260 days as 1,260 years and see it as a reference to the period of papal supremacy from the sixth to the end of the eighteenth century.

What are some of the symbols prevalent in your own society and culture? What purpose do they serve? What is the advantage (and disadvantage) of them? How do you use symbols in your everyday life? How does the way symbols are used around you help you better understand the way the Bible uses symbols?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 12:17*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: That God's people have the gift of prophecy.

Feel: Gratitude for Jesus' testimony about Himself and a desire to witness for Him.

Do: Share with others what Jesus has revealed to us.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. The Testimony of Jesus (*Rev. 1:1–3, 19:10*)

A What does this passage say about the process of revelation?

B In what sense did John have the testimony of Jesus? In what sense do we have it?

II. Speaking Up for Jesus (*Rev. 12:8–17*)

A How are prophets a blessing to the persecuted church?

B Read Revelation 1:9, 2:13, 6:9, 20:4. The Greek word for *testimony* or *witness* is also the origin of the word *martyr*. What does that tell us about what witness can entail?

III. Apply Spiritual Gifts (*John 1:6–9, Rev. 22:20*)

A As a prophetic people, how can we bear witness concerning the second coming of Jesus?

B How does your own witness complement the Word of God and Jesus' testimony about Himself?

► **Summary:** The testimony of Jesus and the Spirit of Prophecy are a continuation of God's self-revelation through the Old Testament prophets, climaxing in Jesus and transmitted through the apostles, prophets, and martyrs of the early church. God's end-time people are characterized as preserving and restoring this prophetic message. By the power of the Holy Spirit and through their words and deeds, they speak up for Jesus in the last days.

Good Versus Evil: Act 2

Revelation 12:7–12 is an interlude in the story; it focuses on the fall of Satan in heaven and his being cast down to the earth. Hence, we are given a glimpse into the origins of the great controversy as it began in another part of the universe. The back-and-forth between heaven and earth should tell us how closely events in one impact events in the other. Truly, we are in the midst of a cosmic battle!

Revelation 12:13–17 picks up the story from verse 6 and describes in symbolic terms the persecution of the Christian church, first by the Roman Empire and later by the apostate Roman Church. What do the symbols here represent?

In these verses, a flood of water is sent against God’s people, a symbol of persecuting armies (*Jer. 46:7, 8; 47:2; Dan. 9:26*). In contrast, in Revelation 12:16 the earth is described as helping the persecuted church. In 1620, the first pilgrims, fleeing the religious persecution in Europe, arrived on the American continent. On this newly discovered continent, they found a safe haven where the persecuting armies of the European powers could not reach them. Thus, symbolically, the new continent America swallowed up the persecuting armies.

In Revelation 12:17, we are now in the time after the 1,260-day period (which ended at the close of the eighteenth century). Satan, seeing that he was unable to wipe out God’s faithful people, is angry with a particular group called “the rest of her offspring” (*NKJV*) or “the remnant of her seed” (*KJV*).

Read carefully Revelation 12:17. What is the first identifying mark of this special remnant? How do the following texts help us understand what “the commandments of God” mean? *Matt. 24:20, Rom. 3:31, Eph. 6:1, James 2:9–11, 1 John 3:4.*

How much simpler could God have made it? This end-time remnant will be distinguished, first of all, by the fact that it keeps the commandments of God, all of them, which, of course, includes the seventh-day Sabbath.

How firm are you in your own mind regarding God’s call that we keep His commandments? How can you be sure that the Lord commands us to keep them? How do you respond to arguments against keeping the commandments, especially the Sabbath?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Few may be called to serve as prophets, but it is our responsibility as members of God’s remnant church to share God’s revelation of truth with a dying world.

It was suicide, not war. And the 300 Spartan soldiers knew they were going to their deaths. But a glorious death was what a Spartan was bred for from the age of seven. And so the elite hoplite warriors calmly followed their king to the narrow pass of Thermopylae to die.


Herodotus tells us that the Persians sent a spy to observe the Spartans on the eve before battle. The hoplite warriors combed out their long hair and rubbed oil into their skin, anointing themselves for death. King Xerxes laughed when he heard this, ridiculing them for being feminine and for their vastly inferior numbers. He expected a quick and easy victory.

But three days later Xerxes was no longer laughing. Ten thousand Immortals, the elite corps of the Persian army, were cut into pieces against the Spartan phalanx, with only two or three Spartan deaths in the first day of battle. The next day met with similar results. A wall of Persian corpses began to pile so high that the morale of his army began to suffer, despite his superior numbers.

After three days of battle, Xerxes learned of a goat path that led around the Greek lines. Herodotus says that when Leonidas, the Spartan leader, heard Xerxes was coming around to attack him from behind, he ordered the bulk of the force to retreat to Athens, allowing them valuable time to prepare for a naval battle against Persia. With only a remnant of the original force, the small army shrank even smaller, comprised of the Spartans, seven hundred Thespians, and the Spartan slaves.

The Persian army came at the remnant from both sides, raining arrows down on them until all died. But the sacrifice made by the 300 and their allies kept the deadly Persian calvary from sweeping down on the retreating Greek force. Though the Greeks lost the battle, it signified the beginning of the end of the Persian Empire.—www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae.

Consider This: A remnant is defined as a small group that remains or is left over. In the last days, God will have a remnant of believers. Based on the account above, how would you define the characteristics of a remnant? What qualities did the Spartans show in battle that the remnant must have in spiritual warfare?

C O N T I N U E D 

The Testimony of Jesus

The second identifying mark of the remnant church is “the testimony of Jesus” (*marturia Iesou*). This expression occurs six times in the book of Revelation (*Rev. 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4, NIV*).

What is the meaning of the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” in the following texts? *Rev. 1:2, 9; 19:10; 20:4, NIV*.

Two grammatically possible explanations concerning its meaning have been put forward. The first view interprets “the testimony of Jesus” as man’s witness for Christ (*NEB, RSV*). The second view understands “the testimony of Jesus” as the self-revelation of Jesus—His own testimony (*NIV, NKJV*).

A study of the word *testimony* in John’s writings indicates that each time it appears in the same grammatical construction as in Revelation, it always refers to Jesus’ own testimony (*John 1:19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31*). In contrast, the idea of witnessing about somebody in John’s writings consistently is expressed by a different grammatical construction.

In the book of Revelation, therefore, the expression “testimony of Jesus” also should be understood as Jesus’ testimony about Himself and not the remnant’s testimony about Him. This is borne out by a study of the texts in Revelation themselves. Revelation 1:2 says that John bore witness to “the word of God” and to “the testimony of Jesus.” Thus, “the word of God” refers to what God says and is parallel to “the testimony of Jesus.” Thus, “the word of God” is simply what Jesus says; it is the testimony that Jesus gives about Himself.

The same is true in Revelation 1:9. John introduces himself, states his credentials, and says that he is on the island of Patmos because of “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus.” The parallelism between the “word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” is again clearly discernible. Thus, according to the principle of interpreting scripture with scripture, every text in the book of Revelation where the phrase “testimony of Jesus” appears always refers to Jesus’ own testimony.

How has Jesus revealed Himself to you? Would you like to know Him better? What is the only way you can?


Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary**

I. The Remnant: Past and Present (*Read Revelation 12:17, 14:12, and chapter 19 with your class.*)

The word *remnant* comes from the Greek word *loipoi* that means “remaining ones” and from *leipo*, “to leave behind.” God always had a remnant of Israelites, preserved from captivity, famine, and pestilence to continue as His chosen people. Again and again, the majority of God’s people apostatized, and a remnant was “left,” implying a few from many (*see Isa. 10:22 and Jer. 42:2*). Interestingly, the Hebrew counterpart to the Greek word translated “remnant” does not imply the *last* of anything, except that those who *remain* faithful are the last link in their generation of the chosen line.

Ever since the days of Abraham, God has preserved a last link or remnant of His people. Jesus divinely commissioned the Christian church as the successor to Judah, appointing it as the custodian of His purposes on earth and making it His chosen instrument for the salvation of humanity. As part of this divine commission, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has recognized the importance of the three angels’ messages, believing that they contain special truth for these last days. Seventh-day Adventists have proclaimed these messages and believe their movement to be the remnant depicted in Bible prophecy.

The defining characteristics of the remnant in Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 are obeying the commandments of God and having the spirit of prophecy—the testimony of Jesus Christ. The testimony of Jesus is defined as the Spirit of prophecy. Seventh-day Adventists take this to mean that the remnant will be distinguished by the gift of prophecy in their midst. We believe that the ministry of Ellen G. White fulfills the requirements of Revelation 12:17 in a unique way.

CONTINUED 

The Spirit of Prophecy

Revelation 19:10 says, “ ‘ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ ” In all of Scripture the phrase “spirit of prophecy” appears only in this text. What does it mean? *1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28; Eph. 4:11.*

The closest parallel to the phrase “spirit of prophecy” in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. There Paul refers to the Holy Spirit, who gives the gift of prophecy among other gifts (*charismata*), and the person who receives this gift is called a prophet.

Now, just as in 1 Corinthians 12:28, those who have the gift of prophecy (verse 10 of the same chapter) are called prophets—in Revelation 22:8, 9 those who have the spirit of prophecy (*Rev. 19:10*) are also called prophets.

“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! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ ” (*Rev. 19:10, NKJV*).

“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.’ ” (*Rev. 22:8, 9, NKJV*).

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. In Revelation 19:10, the brethren are identified by the phrase “who hold to [have] the testimony of Jesus” (*NIV*). In Revelation 22:9, the brethren are called simply “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 Revelation 19:10 is the prophetic gift, which is given not to church members in general but only to those who have been called by God to be prophets.

This is not purely an Adventist interpretation. Lutheran scholar Hermann Strathmann says about “brothers who have the testimony of Jesus” (*NKJV*) in 19:10: “According to the parallel 22:9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general, but the prophets. . . . If they have the *marturia Iesou* [the testimony of Jesus], they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets.”—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), vol. 4, p. 501.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED


Consider This: What is the mission of the remnant church? Define the role that the three angels' messages play in that mission.

II. Counterfeits and Cautions (*Review Matthew 24 and Revelation 19 with your class.*)

Jesus warns His disciples in Matthew 24 that there will be counterfeit manifestations of the gift of prophecy in the last days. John counsels the church to test those who claim to have the prophetic gift (*1 John 4:1*). The following are some standards for those who profess to speak on behalf of God: (1) their personal lives should be in harmony with Scripture; (2) their messages should be in harmony with Scripture; (3) their ministry should exalt Jesus as Savior and the Son of God; and (4) their ministry should be confirmed by predictions that come true.

F. M. Wilcox, in a morning devotional study at the General Conference Session on Friday, June 7, 1946, wrote, "The unity of the faith has not yet been fully attained by the church of Christ [the Seventh-day Adventist Church]; she has not yet arrived unto the perfect knowledge of the Son of God, or unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. There is still need that she be saved from false winds of doctrine, from the sleight of [men and women] and their cunning craftiness. Therefore the gifts of the Spirit of God are as greatly needed in the church today as ever before in her history."

Consider This: If Elder Wilcox was right about Adventists 61 years ago, would you say he is even more right now? What protection or safeguards does God offer us against counterfeit spiritual manifestations? What kind of assurance does this give us?

CONTINUED 

The Remnant Church

From our study thus far, we understand that in Revelation 12:17 “the rest of her offspring” (*NKJV*) refers to God’s visible remnant church that can be recognized by two specific characteristics: (1) they “keep the commandments of God” as God has given them on Mount Sinai, including the Sabbath commandment, and (2) they “have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is the Spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift.

The Sabbath-keeping Adventist movement, from even before its organization in 1863, always has claimed these identifying signs for itself. As Adventists we proclaim the Ten Commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath; and we believe that as a church we have the testimony of Jesus; that is, that God manifested Himself in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just one church among many. It is a church prophetically foreseen. God has called this church into existence for a very specific purpose—to proclaim the three angels’ messages to a dying world.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What is happening there that helps us understand some of the characteristics of God’s end-time people? What elements come into play, and in what ways are we justified in seeing ourselves and our calling there?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that we are members of God’s remnant church. However, this identification with the remnant church does not accord us an exclusive status with God. We can be part of this corporate remnant and still be lost. Salvation is not guaranteed through membership in any church. We are saved as individuals, not as a church. It’s a great privilege and responsibility, being part of this church, because we have a sacred calling; but being a member of this church no more guarantees salvation than being a Hebrew in ancient Israel did (*Jer. 8:20*).

What is your only *guarantee* of salvation, and how can you have it as your own?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Question:**

Jesus was clear: what he said was what the Father asked Him to say (*John 12:48, 49*), and God gave him the Spirit without limits (*John 3:34*). Therefore, Revelation 19:10 declares that “the testimony of Jesus,” which inspired the prophets, has divine origins through “the spirit of prophecy” or the Holy Spirit. It further confirms that the messages of the remnant people, who declare the testimony of Jesus, have divine origins. With this in mind, how would you explain to a young Christian that the messages of the remnant church are definitely from God?

Application Question:

God has called the Seventh-day Adventist Church into existence for a specific purpose (*Rev. 14:6–12*) and has given us enlightening information through the pen of Ellen G. White. What is the importance of Ellen G. White’s writings to us as a church?

► **STEP 4—Apply**

(Read the following to the class and discuss its significance.)

In responding to the question “Shall we regard the Testimonies as an addition to the Scriptures?” in a study lesson on the gift of prophecy, E. L. Cardey said, “No, we are rather to regard the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy as we would a telescope, which does not add stars to the universe, but brings them into clearer view.”

Ask a volunteer to pray that God will help us to understand His true love for us.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” pp. 7–16, in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1; “Historical Prologue,” pp. vii–xxxii, in *Early Writings*.

“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—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 is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (2nd ed.,) (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 247.

A study of the idea of the remnant in the Old Testament reveals a few interesting characteristics. Perhaps the most important one is that all through the Bible, the remnant were those who were living with more light than others. Noah had the light about the coming flood. Abraham had the light about the true God. The nation of Israel was worshipping the Lord in the sanctuary, while their pagan neighbors were sacrificing children on their altars or bowing down to statues of cats and bulls and other animals. In short, the idea of the remnant had more to do with a revelation of truth and of God’s character than with the holiness of those who had that knowledge. The point? As expressed in Thursday’s lesson, being part of the remnant means only that you have great light, and with that light comes important responsibilities. It does not mean you automatically have salvation; nor does it mean that those who aren’t part of the remnant are lost. It’s an unfortunate fact of sacred history that many of those who were part of God’s remnant not only failed to live up to the light they were given but oftentimes rebelled against it.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What important message is found in Luke 12:48 for those who believe that they are part of the remnant church?
- ❷ The claim that we are the “remnant church” can sound very arrogant and exclusive. And yet, why does it make sense that God would have a special people with a special message in the last days? Or does it? Discuss.
- ❸ If being in the remnant does not guarantee salvation, then what’s the advantage of being part of it?