LESSON 6 *October 31–November 6

(page 46 of Standard Edition)

The Prophetic Writings



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 17:14; Isa. 13:1; Jer. 36:17, 18; Rom. 16:22; Luke 1:1–4; Jude 14, 15; 2 Cor. 4:7.*

Memory Text: **"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"** *(Romans 15:4, NKJV).*

How would you like to be taught a song that God Himself composed? In Deuteronomy 32, the lyrics were written down by Moses at God's direction *(Deut. 31:19–22)*. We don't usually think of songs when we think of prophetic writings, though many of the psalms are, indeed, inspired songs, even if the lyrics themselves were not dictated directly by the Lord Himself.

The Bible describes three major ways that prophets communicated God's messages: (1) orally, (2) through writing, and (3) through symbolic actions or dramatizations. This week we will focus on the writings in the Scriptures. The Bible records the Word of God, as expressed through the words of His messengers, including sermons and speeches of the prophets.

Think of the variety of writing styles and genres in the prophetic writings: narrative, history, poetry, lament, and letters, just to name a few. Chosen men and women put into human language what they were led by the Holy Spirit to communicate. This week we will look at their writing, the use of literary assistants (secretaries), and at things to keep in mind when studying challenging passages.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 7.*

The Call to Write

The earliest method that God used to convey messages to humanity was through direct oral communication, such as audible voices, or dreams, or angels. It was not until the time of Moses that Scripture records the first divine instruction regarding these experiences, which was to write in a "book" what God had spoken.

What is the first mention of writing in the Bible? Read Exodus 17:14.

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In the Old Testament we find multiple examples of God's giving directions to His messengers to preserve His words for His people. Like Moses, Jeremiah was told, " 'Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day' " *(Jer. 36:2, NKJV)*.

He was also given the reason he was to write out the prophecies: " 'It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin' " *(Jer. 36:3, NKJV)*. The predictions were given to lead the people to salvation, rather than for the sake of curiosity about the future.

God's messengers wrote under a great variety of circumstances. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible while in the desert. David composed several of his psalms while being hunted by Saul *(see Psalms 52, 54, 57, 59)*. Daniel wrote his visions while serving in the courts of Babylon and Medo-Persia. In contrast, Paul wrote his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon while he was in prison, and John wrote Revelation while exiled on Patmos. It is evident that when God's messengers were impressed to write, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit regardless of their circumstances.

Interestingly, all the preserved teachings of Jesus come to us in written form through persons God chose to entrust with those treasured truths. This shows us the confidence God has that divine messages would be faithfully recorded and preserved by His messengers.

How would you answer someone who says that we cannot trust the Bible because we do not have the original manuscripts? Why is that, really, a weak argument?

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Literary Genres and Styles

The Bible contains a variety of writing styles used by God's inspired messengers. Some resemble the writing of a diary *(see Num. 33:1–49)*. On the other hand, the books of Daniel, Zechariah, and John contain examples of apocalyptic writing, which is marked by grand symbolism, cosmic themes, and descriptions of heavenly beings, among other characteristics.

Read Isaiah 13:1. How does the Bible here refer to the message Isaiah is giving?

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Visions received by the prophets are sometimes called "oracles"—meaning that they are communications or revelations from God (some versions translate the word as "burden"). Newer translations of the Bible show that many were written out in poetic form, often using parallelism. Parallelism is when subsequent lines repeat or sometimes contrast with earlier lines. For example: "In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel" *(Isa. 17:7, NKJV)*. "Maker" and "Holy One" are in parallel to each other, each image giving us more information about the other.

The prophets also used common literary devices such as metaphors (symbols) and hyperbole (exaggeration). For us to understand better and apply their messages, it is important to recognize the kind of writing that they used.

Another literary style frequently found in Scripture is the "covenant lawsuit." For example, in Jeremiah 2:4–9, Jeremiah presents God's legal complaint against His people for violating their covenantal obligations. Using courtroom imagery, the author portrays God as the prosecutor laying out the reasons for His judgment.

Scripture also contains prophetic writing, history, song, and parables. Jeremiah was told to compose a book of all his messages *(Jer. 36:2)*, while much of the New Testament writings consist of letters addressed to individuals or communities. No distinction is made in the authority of one style of communication over another. Paul's letters were to be regarded as carrying the same weight as the prophets of old, because Paul gives clear evidence in his letters that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit *(see 1 Cor. 7:10, 12, 40)*.

Some scholarship emphasizes the human element in Scripture at the expense of the divine. Why is that a sure path to spiritual ruin?

Literary Assistants

Read Jeremiah 36:17, 18 and Romans 16:22. What do these verses tell us about the Bible writers' use of literary assistants?

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Presumably, Jeremiah could have written his messages, but instead he relied on a trusted scribe to record his prophecies faithfully and to share them with the nation's leaders. Jeremiah is not the only example in the Bible where prophets used the services of a literary assistant to communicate the divine message.

In the New Testament, even though Tertius says that he "wrote this epistle" *(Rom. 16:22)*, it is evident from the beginning of the book of Romans that he was writing only what Paul wished to say. Tertius was his amanuensis, or secretary—a literary assistant who put Paul's words into written form.

This practice was not unusual for Paul. At the conclusion of his letters to the Colossians and Thessalonians, Paul makes a point of adding his salutation with "my own hand" *(Col. 4:18, 2 Thess. 3:17, NKJV)* as a way of authenticating the entire letter. This suggests that he relied upon someone else to pen the letters for him. Because this reality might raise doubts as to whether the letter correctly represented him—or worse, that it wasn't from him at all—Paul provided his own handwritten note at the end so that there would be no doubt about the genuineness of his epistle.

Many commentators attribute the variation in literary styles found among Paul's letters to his use of literary assistants. The same is suspected regarding Peter's two letters: "Although it is a fact that the style of language of 2 Peter is different from that of the first epistle, this may reasonably be accounted for by the probability that Peter . . . employed secretarial aid in phrasing an epistle he was writing in Greek. If Paul, who was fully at home in Greek, used secretaries, as he quite evidently did, it is even more logical to think that Peter, whose native language was Aramaic, would have done so, and that these secretaries would have exerted a definite influence on the wording of his letters in Greek."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 186.

This suggests that, while remaining faithful to the thoughts and meaning of God's messengers, the vocabulary and sentence construction might reflect the varying literary abilities of the assistants they employed. It's the thoughts that are inspired, not necessarily the specific words used to express those inspired thoughts.

Literary Sources

"And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yet, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth" *(Eccles. 12:9, 10, NKJV)*.

This passage can be read to show that Solomon did not originate all the proverbs that he recorded. Under the inspiration of God, he "sought out" many sayings and searched to find "acceptable words." In fact, the oft-quoted description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is attributed to the mother of an otherwise unknown King Lemuel, not Solomon *(Prov. 31:1)*. Evidence points to the influence of Egyptian literature on Proverbs as well.

Similarly, the inspired historians of the Old Testament tell us that they referenced archives and other historical annals to narrate faithfully the story of God's people.

Read 1 Kings 11:41; Luke 1:1–4; and Jude 14, 15. What do these verses tell us about how the inspired writers at times used non-biblical sources?

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Ezra and Nehemiah are other examples of Bible writers who relied upon historical records to document their accounts. Ezra includes copies of letters and royal decrees regarding Jerusalem and Persia *(see Ezra 4–7)*, and Nehemiah tells us about genealogical registries that he found and incorporated into his narrative *(see Neh. 7:5–72)*.

This principle appears in the New Testament as well. "It is clear from Luke's experience that Inspiration functions in a manner consistent with the natural operation of the mental faculties and does not set them aside. Here is an inspired writer who was led by the Holy Spirit to give diligent study to the available oral and written source materials on the life of Christ, and then to combine into a connected narrative the information thus gathered."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 669.

Jude seems to be quoting from 1 Enoch 1:9—a noncanonical, intertestamental Jewish work. Without mentioning their names, Paul also quoted from Greek philosophers *(see Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12)*.

Though the biblical writers were often guided by direct revelation through visions and dreams, this did not exclude the Holy Spirit from also inspiring these messengers to select material from other sources. Why is this an important concept for us to remember?

Divine Message and Human Imperfections

What does Paul say about God's treasure in 2 Corinthians 4:7?

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Paul writes of God's treasure as being entrusted to "earthen vessels" (human beings), so that God's power might be shown in contrast to our own weaknesses. Scripture reveals that just as God's messengers were not supernaturally preserved from failings in their personal lives (Moses, Elijah, David, Jonah, and Peter, for example), so their writings were not exempt from the imperfections of human understanding and communication.

"The union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God;' yet they are expressed in the words of men and are adapted to human needs."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 747.

The humanity of God's messengers is not overridden by their divine calling to communicate the treasures of truth, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Nor does it appear that the Holy Spirit saw fit to prevent His messengers from making statements and writing words that we today find hard to harmonize or to explain. However few these verses are, it takes a very narrow mind to stumble over them. As Bible-believing Christians, we are to surrender to the Word of God to the degree that we understand it and trust the Lord, despite what we don't understand.

Some discrepancies may be attributed to inconsequential mistakes by later copyists or to conflicting sources (records) that the inspired authors relied upon. When considering problematic passages, we need to ask ourselves if we fully understand the meaning of the writer's words and whether further study might solve the difficulty.

Even if we are not able to resolve every seeming mistake or discrepancy, we find that they are inconsequential to the essence of the message being presented. We can have confidence that the divine truths of Scripture are faithfully revealed despite the imperfections of God's messengers.

Why do you think God chose to use fallible human beings rather than sinless angels as His primary messengers?

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(page 52 of Standard Edition)

Ellen G. White's Writings

Ellen G. White's experience and writings parallel much of what we have studied this week regarding God's messengers in the Bible. She, too, received a divine commission to write out what had been revealed to her.

Reflecting in 1909, Ellen G. White wrote, "Because of the accident which had nearly cost me my life, I had been feeble in health and unable to write. . . . But one night the angel of the Lord came to my bedside and said to me, 'You must write out the things that I give you.' I said, 'I can not write.' Again the command was given, 'Write out the things I give you.' I thought I would try, and taking up a lapboard from the table, I began to write, and found that I could trace the words easily."—*The General Conference Bulletin*, May 31, 1909.

Like the inspired writers of Scripture, Ellen G. White also employed literary assistants. Her secretaries did the work that editors are expected to do—assist authors in expressing their messages clearly while not inserting thoughts of their own. They were not ghostwriters or coauthors. Their work was dependent upon the material that Ellen G. White herself produced, whether written out by hand or delivered orally.

Ellen G. White also quoted and adapted material from other literary sources in her writing to aid in the presentation of her messages. By recommending to her readers some of the very books she used, it is evident that she was not intending to be deceitful or unfair to those authors, but she found in their language apt expressions to convey the truths that she wished to express.

What about discrepancies or inaccuracies?

"In regard to infallibility," she wrote, "I never claimed it; God alone is infallible."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 37.

One may encounter certain statements in her writings that are difficult to understand or harmonize with others. Ellen G. White's humanity was not overridden by her divine calling. Like all of us, Ellen White would grow and mature as well, a growth and maturity that is revealed in her writings.

As already stated, but worth repeating, she also corrected those who believed that every word she wrote came directly from heaven. "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."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 58.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/6.

"God Is First": Part 1

By Gina Wahlen

Naum had to stand up for his faith at the tender age of seven. In Yugoslavia, school was obligatory every Saturday. Although young, Naum determined not to attend school on Sabbath. After missing two Saturdays in a row, the first-grader was confronted by a special commission set up to interrogate him.

Coming to his classroom, the group of five officials dismissed everyone in the class except for Naum.

Standing alone, the seven-year-old bravely faced the school director, two teachers, and two uniformed police officers—one of whom was the regional director of the secret police.

"Why aren't you attending school on Saturday?" the interrogator began.

"Because I believe in God, and according to the fourth commandment of His law, I'm not to be in school on His Sabbath. This is why I'll be in church every Sabbath, not in school," Naum replied.

"You'll be expelled from school, and will have no further opportunities to receive an education!" the man glared.

Naum's response came quickly. "I'll be in church anyway, because God is first in my life."

"So, what do you do at your church?" the interrogator continued.

"We read the Bible, sing songs, and pray."

"Sing us a song!" the group demanded. So, Naum sang a hymn and prayed a simple prayer, thanking the Lord for opportunities given, for health, for the government, and to direct the commission properly and honestly.

Following his prayer, Naum was asked if his father had told him not to go to school.

"No," Naum answered honestly.

If the answer had been "yes," his father would have gone immediately to prison. Knowing his son could be interrogated, Naum's father had never told him not to attend school.

The commission was silent for a few moments. Then abruptly Naum was told, "You will be informed whether or not you will stay in school."

Naum hurried home to tell his parents what had happened. Not surprised, "they knew what my decision would be," he recalls.

No directive came from the commission, so Naum continued attending school, except on Sabbaths.

Upon completing primary school, Naum was not allowed to continue his education because of his firm decision to keep the Sabbath. So, at age 15 he started working full-time with his father on their farm.

But God had other plans for Naum.

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Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Romans 15:4*

Study Focus: *Exod. 17:14; Isa. 13:1; Jer. 36:17, 18; Rom. 16:22; Luke 1:1–4; Jude 14, 15; 2 Cor. 4:7.*

Introduction

This week's lesson continues the discussion of inspiration and focuses on understanding how the prophets communicated God's message. Inspiration allowed the biblical writers to express in Scripture what God, in different writing styles and genres, had given them. Human language was the vehicle that God used to speak His word to human beings. Prophets thus used whatever was at their disposal to communicate what God commissioned them to say as precisely as possible. Sometimes this communication involved using literary assistants and borrowing from secular writings to make their point. Discussing these matters will enhance the class's appreciation of the surprising way in which God incarnated His message so that we could understand it.

Part II: Commentary

1. The final step in God's communication with the prophets is the written form in which they express the divine message.

According to Old Testament scholar Daniel Block, the prophetic process of conveying God's message took place in seven distinct but interconnected phases:

First Phase: The prophet receives the divine message in some form of revelation.

Second Phase: The prophet first transmits that message orally to his or her audience.

Third Phase: The oracle is recorded in written form.

Fourth Phase: The prophet adds the historical circumstances to the transcribed oracle to contextualize it for the audience and make it a complete literary unit.

Fifth Phase: The prophet gathers the literary units together.

Sixth Phase: The oracles in their literary units are edited and organized into a coherent book.

Seventh Phase. A formal heading is added to the book, which identifies the prophet, explains the circumstances of ministry, and describes the genre of the collection (see Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, Chapters 1–24, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997], p. 18).

This process involved horizontal activities through which the Holy Spirit enabled the biblical prophets to preserve and continue the original revelation initially given to them. Thus, from oral proclamation to the writing of Scripture, God has spoken to human beings. The process of illumination is God's way of enabling readers of Scripture today to understand God's Word and to receive His message personally.

2. The Bible writers used various literary devices and genres to transmit the messages God revealed to them.

The Bible is rich in literary forms and techniques, far more than many realize. A brief exploration reveals a surprising depth of artistry, demonstrating that biblical writers deliberately employed established literary conventions. Their use of these forms was not accidental but reflected a shared literary tradition familiar to authors of their time. Rather than inventing new structures with each composition, they drew from a common storehouse of literary and rhetorical techniques, shaping their messages with intentional craftsmanship (see Leland Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014], p. 16). Some prominent genres in Scripture are narrative, poetry, wisdom, law, gospel, epistle, and apocalyptic.

3. Some Bible writers made use of literary assistants and extrabiblical sources.

Many Christians who adhere to verbal-plenary, or dictation, models of inspiration believe that God communicated exclusively through supernatural means, such as dreams and visions. However, the biblical model of inspiration acknowledges multiple ways in which the Holy Spirit guided biblical authors, including literary assistants and historical research. In the latter approach, authors read, studied, compiled, and edited existing materials—both inspired and uninspired—while God providentially oversaw the process.

Literary borrowing is evident throughout Scripture: Moses adopted structures from the ancient Near East; Micah echoed Isaiah; and the compiler of 2 Kings drew directly from Isaiah. Solomon incorporated proverbs from other sages, while Gospel writers, such as Matthew and Luke, structured their accounts most likely based on Mark. Even John's Gospel uses Greek philosophical expressions, such as "logos," but redefines them theologically.

Paul alludes to Greek poets without naming them, and in John's Revelation there is some imagery that is also found in the noncanonical Book of Enoch. Luke's Gospel is the clearest example of the research mode, as he explicitly

mentions compiling his narrative through careful investigation. While divine intervention might have occasionally guided source selection, authors generally exercised their judgment under the Spirit's influence. This model highlights that biblical inspiration encompasses both divine guidance and human effort, preserving the sacred nature of Scripture.

For Further Study: For extensive documentation of literary borrowing in Scripture, see Jiří Moskala, "Can a Biblical Inspired Writer Use Literary Sources?" in *Ellen White Issues Symposium*, vol. 8 (2012), pp. 70–102; for a discussion of Ellen G. White's literary borrowing, see Jud Lake, "Ellen G. White's Use of Extrabiblical Sources," in Alberto Timm and Dwain Esmond, eds., *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, pp. 316–332.

4. In Scripture, God communicated His divine message in the language of imperfect humanity to accommodate our needs.

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 4:7 highlights the contrast between the surpassing power of God and the weakness of human instruments: "We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" *(ESV)*. This imagery reminds us that God's messengers, though divinely chosen, remain fallible. The Bible contains instances during which prophets and apostles displayed personal flaws; yet, their writings still carried God's inspired truth.

Scripture remains divinely guided, despite limitations in human memory, language, and historical records. Some discrepancies may result from variations in sources or later copyist errors, as seen in differences between 1 Chronicles 11:11 and 2 Samuel 23:8. Paul himself may have misstated a detail in 1 Corinthians 10:8 *(compare with Num. 25:9)*. Yet, such inconsistencies do not diminish the authority of Scripture. The essence of God's message remains intact, and, through study and faith, we can discern His truth beyond minor textual variations.

For Further Study: See Clinton Wahlen, "Variants, Versions, and the Trustworthiness of Scripture," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach*, Frank M. Hasel, ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute; Review and Herald Academic, 2021), vol. 3, pp. 63–83.

5. Ellen G. White's experience paralleled that of the Bible writers in conveying God's will to human beings.

In the framework of how the biblical prophets communicated what they had received in vision, one may discuss Ellen G. White's method of communicating the content of her visions. Her mission as a messenger of God extended far beyond receiving visions; it involved the challenging task of communicating those messages to individuals, groups, and the broader

church. This communication was the horizontal aspect of inspiration, as noted last week. Her method of delivering these messages varied, depending on the nature and audience of the revelation. She conveyed God's instructions through three primary means: oral presentations, personal letters, and the printed page. Public speaking played a significant role in her ministry. Ellen G. White frequently addressed large audiences at local churches, camp meetings, and General Conference sessions, where she shared messages of warning, encouragement, and instruction. Sometimes, while preaching, she would recognize individuals she had seen in vision, leading her to address them directly during her discourse. She felt a compelling urge to share specific warnings or counsel in such instances, demonstrating her sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's guidance during her public ministry.

Personal letters were another essential avenue through which Ellen G. White communicated her messages. Because she couldn't meet every individual face-to-face, she often wrote detailed letters conveying God's specific counsel, reproof, or encouragement. These letters were thoughtfully and prayerfully crafted, examining how the message would be received. In cases in which individuals might resist or misinterpret a direct message, she sometimes entrusted others to deliver the letter in person, ensuring the message was read in a supportive, prayerful setting.

Her written ministry also extended to books and periodicals, through which she addressed broader audiences. During her lifetime, she produced an extensive body of literature—nearly 24,000 pages of books and more than 4,500 articles. These writings provided doctrinal guidance, spiritual encouragement, and practical counsel, shaping the beliefs and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Despite the emotional and physical toll, Ellen G. White remained faithful to her calling, often expressing the deep personal burden she felt in delivering difficult messages, yet always committed to her mission of guiding the church according to God's will (for more detail, see Arthur White, "Delivering the Messages," in *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1969], chapter 3, pp. 12–14, https://media4.egwwritings.org/pdf/en_EGWMR.pdf).

Part III: Life Application

The following life application questions, drawn from the above commentary, are offered to enrich your class discussion. Choose from among them, and from those in the lesson, the ones that will best engage your class in meaningful reflection.

1. **The Bible's prophetic process involved divine revelation and human effort in writing and preserving God's message. How does understanding this process strengthen your confidence in the reliability of Scripture, and how can it encourage a more engaged approach to Bible study?**

2. **Given that the Bible contains various literary genres and devices, how does recognizing its artistic, and structured, composition impact how you read and interpret Scripture? How can an awareness of these literary forms help you apply biblical teachings more effectively in your daily life?**

3. **God allowed biblical writers to use research, literary assistants, and existing sources in composing Scripture. How does this understanding affect how you view inspiration? How can it inform how you engage with historical and theological research in your faith journey?**

4. **What does literary borrowing in Scripture say about how God incarnated His divine message? How does it affect the way you view inspiration?**

5. **Paul's imagery of "jars of clay"** *(2 Cor. 4:7, ESV)* **emphasizes that God uses imperfect human instruments to convey His truth. How does this idea encourage you in your spiritual walk, knowing God works through human limitations? How can this perspective shape your response to doubts or challenging passages in Scripture?**

6. **How do you explain Ellen G. White's literary borrowing to someone who believes she plagiarized?**

7. **Ellen G. White communicated her messages through public speaking, personal letters, and published writings, adapting to the needs of her audience. What lessons can we learn today from her approach to sharing biblical truth with others in a faithful and relevant way?**