

Testing God's Messengers



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 10:7–19; Isaiah 8:20; John 3:16; Matthew 7:20; Jeremiah 28:9, 15–17; Psalm 34:8.

MEMORY VERSE: “My friends, do not believe everyone who says that they speak God’s message. There are many false prophets [messengers] who are [traveling] around everywhere. They say that they have a message from God’s Spirit, but the message comes from a false spirit. So check each message carefully to see if it is really from God” (1 John 4:1, EASY).



How can you know if a diamond is fake or real? The best way is to test it.

A REAL DIAMOND is one of the most precious stones on earth. Many other things can be made to look the same as diamonds. But they are fakes. So how can you know if a diamond is fake or real? The best way is to test it. Some tests can be done at home with a few simple tools. Other tests must be done in a lab or a jewelry shop. If a diamond passes several tests, you can be sure that the diamond is real.

A diamond is one of the strongest materials on earth. Part of a diamond’s strength is that it can stand very high temperatures and temperature changes. To test a diamond, you can heat it with a lighter, then drop it into cold water. A real diamond will not be destroyed. A fake diamond will break!

God’s gift of special messages is worth more than any diamond. If someone says he has this special gift, we can’t simply take his word for it. We must test his messages. This week, we will look at Bible messengers to understand the rules we must use to test their gifts.

MIRACLES AND SIGNS (Daniel 10:7–19)

When God's people left Egypt, the Lord talked to His people about messengers. The Lord said, " 'You will have prophets [messengers]. I, the LORD, will let them learn about me through [in] visions. I will speak to them in dreams' " (Numbers 12:6, ERV).

God often uses miracles and special signs to show that someone is His messenger. Messengers get their messages straight from God. Often God sends them His messages in visions or dreams (Daniel 8:1; Isaiah 1:1; Acts 9:10; and so on). God may send miracles with these dreams as proof that they come from Him.

Read Daniel 10:7–19. Make a list of some of the miracles that happened when God appeared to Daniel?

Daniel lost his strength when God appeared to him. Then he needed to depend on God during the rest of the experience. People were with Daniel who didn't see God appear or hear the message that God gave Daniel. But the experience with God was so powerful that they were afraid. So, they ran away and hid. God uses miracles to show people that He chose someone to be His messenger. The miracles help bring God's messages to people's attention.

What does Deuteronomy 13:1–5 teach us about the gift of special messages?

Miracles, signs, and wonders show that someone is at work who is more powerful than any human. That doesn't mean that the miracles are always from God. Satan also can work miracles. So, miracles alone are not proof that someone is a messenger from God. Also, more than one miracle or sign is needed. Messengers must be tested, too. Miracles are not a test of the real gift of special messages. A person must pass all tests in the Bible before we can accept him as a real messenger from God. Sad to say, history is filled with many false messengers (read Matthew 7:15).

In some countries, miracles and signs happen more often than in other places on earth. Why must we be careful when we are trying to decide if something is really from God or not?



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AGREEMENT WITH THE BIBLE (Isaiah 8:20)

People may lie. But God does not lie (read Numbers 23:19). The messages God gives His messengers also will show that God always tells the truth. God's truth will be seen in the messages He gives.

Read Isaiah 8:20. What important rule is God giving us in this verse?



The new messengers don't disagree with the basic rules or ideas that God already gave in the Bible.

The Bible is always the final test for anyone who says he is a messenger. How do we test a messenger? We must compare what he says with what the Bible says. A real messenger from God will never go against Bible truth. That is why we must know the Bible if we want to follow the Lord. Then false teachers and false messengers cannot trick us.

In the Old and New Testaments, many messengers honored the writings of messengers who lived before they did. These new messengers give us more light about the writings from the past. But the new messengers don't disagree with the basic rules or ideas that God already gave in the Bible.

What do 2 Peter 1:19–21; Romans 15:4; and James 1:17 teach us about God and the messages He gives us in the Bible?

The Old Testament helps us understand God's plan to save sinners. The first special message that God gave us shows us this Bible truth (Genesis 3:15). The Old Testament offerings also show us God's plan to save us. Later, God gave His messengers more Bible truth about how Jesus was God's offering for sin. God gave His messengers more information about how Jesus would come to this earth as a baby. Jesus would live as a man. He would die for sinners. The Bible shows us that God gives His people more truth when they are ready to understand it. Their understanding of Bible truth grows with every age. A later group of God's people often will have more understanding about God's truth than His people who lived in the past.

But we must remember one important rule. We cannot say this rule enough: new Bible truths will **always** agree with the truth that God already gave to us.

WHEN JESUS WAS BORN AS A BABY (John 3:16)

What if someone says he is a messenger but doesn't believe in Jesus? Then this person is a false messenger. That includes messengers who are part of other religions. As John tells us, "How do you know whether a person has God's Spirit in him? He must agree that Jesus is God's Messiah [Savior] who was born as a human baby. If someone says that, then he has God's Spirit. But if someone does not agree to say that about Jesus, he does not have God's Spirit" (1 John 4:2, 3, EASY).

When John wrote these verses, he was talking about false teachers. These teachers said Jesus wasn't human. He only looked human. Yes, John is saying a messenger should agree that Jesus was a real person who lived on earth. (Most Christians agree.) But John's test does more than that. John's test helps solve a very real problem. This test is as important for our time as it was for John's.

What do the following verses tell us about Jesus? John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 11:25; Hebrews 4:14, 15; John 14:1–3.

Real messengers must believe that Jesus was God. They must also believe that He was a real human being. They must believe that Jesus came to this earth and lived a life without sin. He died for our sins on the cross. He woke up from the dead. He now works for us in heaven. Real messengers also must believe that Jesus is coming again. At the same time, real messengers must do more than agree that Jesus lived on earth. Jesus must be the most important part of their teachings. A real messenger will help people to have a saving relationship with Jesus.

The Bible helps us to see the sin in our hearts and get rid of it. Then Jesus can live in us. God's gift of special messages always brings us close to Him.

A real messenger won't try to get a group of people to follow him and his teachings. A real messenger won't brag about himself (Acts 4:12). God's true messengers will be ready to serve Him. They won't do anything to hurt the people that God sent them to help.

Jesus is fully God and fully human. He died for our sins. Why is this belief so important to our faith? What do we lose if we throw out this teaching?



A real messenger will help people to have a saving relationship with Jesus.

HOW WE LIVE TELLS PEOPLE WHO WE ARE (Matthew 7:20)



Many messengers had hard lives. Moses led the children of Israel through the desert (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

“ ‘In the same way, look at the way people live. Then you will know what they are really like [who they really are]’ ” (Matthew 7:20, EASY).

Jesus said the words above in His sermon on the mountain (Matthew 5–7). In this sermon Jesus talked about the basic rules and teachings for the Christian church. Part of the work for the church included the work that God’s special messengers would do. That’s why Jesus warned against false messengers in the church.

We must have enough time to know who someone really is. When we see how a messenger lives his life, we can see if he is really from God or not. Is he bringing people close to Jesus? Or is he leading people away from Him?

Read Jonah 1:1–3; Acts 15:36–39; and Galatians 2:11–14. What do these verses teach us about messengers?

Just because someone is a messenger doesn’t mean he is without sin. Just look at Jonah, Paul, or even Peter. They made mistakes. Only God is perfect. But His messengers never are. Messengers at times behave badly. They are sometimes weak in faith. But for the most part, their lives must show that they are walking with God.

A real messenger lives Bible truth. He builds up God’s kingdom (Matthew 7:16–20). What if someone says he is God’s messenger, but his life doesn’t match his message? Then we should not trust this person.

Many messengers had hard lives. Moses led the children of Israel through the desert (Deuteronomy 34:10–12). Haggai helped the people in Judah to start building the second temple again after 19 years (Haggai 1:12). Isaiah served four kings during a difficult time (Isaiah 39:5, 6; Isaiah 53:4–6). We also must remember Daniel (Daniel 9:15) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 9:1). God’s messengers always showed love for God and His people, even when the people were mean to them. Their love was proof that God was with them.

How often do people disappoint you with their behavior? What lesson can you learn from that experience?

WHEN THE MESSAGE HAPPENS (Jeremiah 28:9, 15–17)

People often think that a messenger is someone who tells about what will happen in the future. For sure, God's messengers do that. But that's only one part of a messenger's work. A messenger's work includes so much more. Messengers help people to come back to the Bible. Messengers give advice, warnings, and encouragement.

Messengers help people know and get ready for the future. Why else do messengers tell us what will happen in the future? Read Jeremiah 28:9, 15–17 for the answer.

We can test a messenger with this simple test: Do the things happen that he says will happen? When a messenger says that something will happen, then it should happen. As the Lord told Moses: “ ‘A prophet may say that he speaks with my authority [in My name], and he may say what will happen. But if it does not happen, you will know that his message has not come from me. He has not spoken my message. That prophet has spoken his own ideas. So do not be afraid of him!’ ” (Deuteronomy 18:22, EASY). This test can be hard to do because some messages may not happen if the people do what God asks.

We see this important rule in the story of Jonah. Jonah warned the people of Nineveh, “ ‘After 40 more days, God will destroy Nineveh’ ” (Jonah 3:4, EASY). But Nineveh was not destroyed. Why?

Read Jeremiah 18:7–10. What do these verses teach us about special messages?

What happens often depends on the choice that God's people make when they hear His warnings. If the people change their behavior, the punishment may not happen. The people of Nineveh obeyed Jonah's warning. They changed their lives. So, God did not destroy them (Jonah 3:10). Later, the future children of these Ninevites forgot about Jonah's warning. Nineveh again became an evil city. So, God destroyed it. God knows the future. But we don't. Our future happiness depends on the choices we make now.

Why is it important to understand that God's punishments depend on what we do when we hear His warnings? How can this rule help us better understand Bible truth?



The people of Nineveh obeyed Jonah's warning. They changed their lives. So, God did not destroy them (Jonah 3:10).

**GIVE THE LORD A CHANCE TO SHOW YOU
HOW GOOD HE IS!**

During more than one experience, Ellen White showed she had strength that was more than human.

Some Seventh-day Adventists accept Ellen G. White's gift. Other Seventh-day Adventists question it. God's people often felt the same way about His messengers in Bible times. God gave Ellen White her first vision in December 1844. At that time, some people doubted if she was a real messenger from God. Their questions helped Adventists to come up with reasons for their support of Ellen White's special gift.

First, the Adventists showed from the Bible that the gift of special messages would be in the church until the end-times. The Bible supports this idea. (Read Joel 2 and Revelation 12:17.) These and other verses promise that the gift of special messages will be a sign of God's end-time people. (Read Gerhard Pfandl, "The Gift of Prophecy and God's Remnant Church," *The Gift of Prophecy*, chapter 4.)

Second, the first Adventists saw that Ellen White's gift changed people's lives for the better. Her ideas helped them to work together in peace and love during the Sabbath meetings in the late 1840s. At this time, many of the Adventists didn't agree on Bible teachings. Ellen White's gift helped them to agree on Bible truth. Today, her writings continue to help the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith to work together in peace and love.

Third, God did many miracles when He sent His messages to Ellen White. During these public experiences, Ellen White shared information about things she had no way of knowing anything about. She told people what would happen in the future. During more than one experience, she showed she had strength that was more than human.

Today, Seventh-day Adventists continue to use these reasons to support their belief in Ellen White's gift. A powerful proof of Ellen White's gift is our personal experience with her writings. As a writer of the Psalms said, "Give the LORD a chance to show you how good he is" (Psalm 34:8, ERV). We must prayerfully read Ellen White's writings. Then we can test her messages to see if she really is God's messenger.

Start with her small but most popular book, *Steps to Christ*. Then read the Conflict of the Ages books. This set of books shows the war between good and evil, from the books of Genesis to Revelation.

To discover more, visit <https://whiteestate.org/absg/9>.

FINALLY, I BECAME A BIBLE WORKER!

When I was 16, I wanted to volunteer as a Bible worker. I was excited at the idea of serving overseas. But I was too young at the time. So, I needed to wait for a few years. I had fun looking at the volunteer jobs on the Adventist Volunteers Services (AVS) website anyway. I used to imagine myself teaching overseas as a Bible worker.

When I started university, I forgot all about being a Bible worker. I thought about what I would do when I finished school. Being a Bible worker wasn't on my list of things to do any longer. But in my final year of school, I took a break. I went as a Bible worker to India for a month. I had a wonderful experience. But I wasn't convinced that being a full-time Bible worker was part of God's plan for my life.

When I was 22, I started to look for work. The perfect job for me would give me enough free time to do Bible work. I wanted to serve God in my community. As I thought about this idea more, I knew I really wanted to be a Bible worker. So, I started looking for a teaching job on the AVS website. I got accepted to be a teacher at Malang Adventist Academy.

I left Manchester, England, for Indonesia just one day after my 23rd birthday. No question, this teaching job is the best 'gift' I ever gave myself!

My time in Indonesia was hard but in the best of ways. Being at Malang Adventist Academy was the best year of my life.

The school welcomes students from all faiths and churches. The school is really making the lives of their students better. One of my students was a Sunday keeper. He is now a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of his experience at school. I was happy when another student signed up for a Pathfinder camping trip. This student was Muslim. He knew that we would worship Jesus during our trip. He came to our meetings anyway and enjoyed them all! I enjoyed helping my students grow strong in faith. I shared my story with them about Jesus. I led Bible meetings. I encouraged my students to pray.

During my time at Malang, I learned so much about myself and God. I am grateful for my fellow teachers and the church community. Everyone was loving and caring from the start. Malang always will feel the same as a second home to me.

Are you, too, interested in Bible work? If yes, please check out the volunteer jobs on AVS. The class "Preparation [getting ready] for Mission [Bible work]" is an excellent class to take. This class will help you get ready to be a Bible worker.

This story is adapted from the TED News website, <https://ted.adventist.org/news/a-missionary-at-last/>.

INSIDE
Story

by GRACE NKESHIMANA



No question, this teaching job is the best 'gift' I ever gave myself!