



22. IMPERIAL PSYCHICS: The Mysterious World of the Occult

There is an explosion of interest in psychic and occult phenomena today. Interest in astrology columns in newspapers is growing rapidly. Some two thousand newspapers throughout the United States have astrology columns. Books on the supernatural are selling in multi-millions. There is an explosion in the numbers of people claiming to have the psychic gift of prophecy. Even in the Christian church many people claim to have “a word of prophecy.” Why all this interest in astrology, the occult, psychic prophecies and words of prophecy? People want answers outside of themselves. Their lives have become confused. They are looking for some way to touch the divine. They are seeking ways to experience the supernatural.

However Jesus warns us against the counterfeit – “For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive...” (Matthew 24:24). False Christs and false prophets will claim they can put you in touch with the divine and give you supernatural answers. Jesus continued, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). No false prophet comes and says, “Hey, I’m a ‘False Prophet.’” False prophets come in various forms: some with their crystal balls, taro cards, ouija boards, their incense, pendants, and psychic hotlines, and others come claiming to be spirit-filled Christians. They all claim to be true.

If there are false prophets, could the true gift of prophecy be part of God’s true church today? What does the Bible teach about the genuine gift of prophecy? Does it teach that there will be a manifestation of the genuine gift of prophecy in the last days of earth’s history? Or does scripture teach, as many claim, that the gift of prophecy ceased at the end of Bible times?

Ephesians 4:8, says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” What were these spiritual gifts that Christ gave? “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). Notice the gift of prophecy is included. How long would these gifts remain in the church and what was their purpose? “For the equipping of God’s people for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Jesus gave these gifts to the church to strengthen it to accomplish its mission of proclaiming the gospel to the world. The church needs all these gifts to challenge the enemy head on. How long would these gifts remain in the church? “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, 14). So spiritual gifts would be in the church to bring that church to spiritual maturity. To bring it to a full knowledge of Jesus until the day that Christ would come again. Why? “So we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...” (Ephesians 4:14). In other words all of the gifts, including the gift of prophecy, will remain in the church until it comes to maturity - until the church comes to the place where it indeed is ready for the coming of Jesus. The Bible even predicts that God’s end-time people will have the gift of prophecy among them (Revelation 12:17; 19:10).

God used two methods to communicate with Biblical prophets. Firstly He gave visions and dreams (Daniel 7); and secondly He impressed their minds through His Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). Not all of God’s prophets are Bible writers. Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, John the Baptist, and Agabus never wrote books in the Bible. What’s the similarity between the Bible writers and these other true prophets? They were all inspired by God. The prophets whose writings are included in the Bible have a message that is for every age. The true prophets whose writings are not included in the Bible have a message from God for the

church at a particular period of time. Were there any female prophets? Absolutely. Deborah, Hulda and the seven daughters of Philip were prophets.

How can we distinguish the genuine gift of prophecy from counterfeits? The Bible gives us 5 tests for the genuine gift of prophecy: 1. Prophetic accuracy - When a prophet makes a prediction that is not conditional on the repentance of people, the true prophet is accurate 100% of the time (Jeremiah 28:9); 2. Biblical faithfulness - A true messenger from God will agree with the Bible and lead people back to the Bible (Deuteronomy 13:1-4); 3. Exalts Jesus - The genuine gift of prophecy exalts Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1, 2; Revelation 19:10 – “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”); 4. Commandment keeping – “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20); 5. Spiritual fruitage – God places the gift of prophecy in His church to bear spiritual fruit in the life of believers and in the life of that church (Matthew 7:20).

In more recent times, a young woman called Ellen G. White received more than 2000 prophetic visions and dreams. She wrote over 50 books, and lectured to thousands on 3 continents. George Wharton James in his book, “California: The Romantic and the Beautiful,” commented on this simple, humble, godly, spiritual woman – “This remarkable woman, though almost entirely self-educated, has written and published more books in more languages which circulate to the greater extent than any other woman in history” (p319). Quite amazing for a woman who had only a third grade education. Ellen White died in 1915.

Supernatural things occurred sometimes when Ellen White was in vision. Dr. Drummond was a sceptic regarding her visions. He said, “I cannot accept visions and dreams from any woman, I reject them.” He continued, “I will examine her in vision.” You can read the medical account of Dr. Drummond when he examined Ellen White in vision. He said, “She does not breathe. This is an unusual phenomenon.” And Drummond himself became a believer in God’s work through visions and dreams. During her visions she didn’t breath, her eyes were opened and she seemed to have no human strength. That something supernatural was taking place is without question. But were the visions from God or the powers of darkness? The Biblical tests must be applied.

The only thing honest hearted people can do before dismissing someone who claims to have the gift of prophecy, is to examine the individual’s claims by applying the Biblical tests (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). If Ellen White meets the Biblical tests of a messenger from the Lord, we should accept them as a genuine voice from God. If they do not, we ought to rule them out. How does Ellen White line up with those Biblical tests?

1. Prophetic Accuracy - One of the subjects she often wrote on was health. Back in the 1800s when she lived and wrote people had no idea that sugar and fat contributed to coronary heart disease. Ellen White also wrote about a diet of whole grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables - the very diet the American Heart Association has now recommended. Scientific researchers have concluded a diet rich in fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables helps to prevent cancer. Clive McKay of Cornell University said, “This woman is 100 years ahead of her time in the area of diet.” Back in the 1800s, Ellen White wrote, “Tobacco is a slow, insidious, but most malignant poison” (Ministry of Healing,” p327). When she wrote this, doctors were recommending cigars to their patients! They also believed inhaling tobacco smoke would cleanse the lungs. That was in the 1800s. Ellen White wrote that tobacco was a malignant poison long before any scientific evidence said otherwise.

2. Biblical Faithfulness - If you want to evaluate somebody’s writings you go to their own words. You don’t go to what some think they said. You don’t go to some web page by their critics who have pre-judged them without examining all the evidence. We would not want someone criticizing us based on what someone else said. So if you asked Ellen White what she believed about the Bible, what would she say? She wrote “In our time there is a wide departure from their doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle - the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty” (The Great Controversy p204). Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that Ellen White’s writings take the place of the Bible. They do not believe that her writings are another Bible. They believe God graciously gave the gift of the Holy Spirit in visions and dreams to guide in these last days.

3. Exalts Jesus – Did Ellen White exalt Jesus Christ? Let's see what she says herself about Jesus, "Lift up Jesus, you that teach the people, lift Him up in sermon, in song, in prayer. Let all your powers be directed to pointing souls, confused, bewildered, lost, to 'the Lamb of God'" (Gospel Workers, p160). She wrote "Desire of Ages," on the life of Christ; "Christ's Object Lessons," on the parables of Christ; "Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing," on the teachings of Christ on the mount; and "Steps to Christ," on how to know Jesus for yourself. Ellen White writings exalt Jesus as Lord and Saviour. There is a saying, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Rather than read the critics, get the book Desire of Ages, prayerfully read it and see if the Spirit speaks to your heart.

4. Commandment keeping - At a time of rebellion the Biblical prophets led people back to commandment keeping. The prophets did not contradict the prophets who had gone before them. Ellen White leads us back to obedience to God. She exalts the law of God and points out the significance of the Seventh-day Sabbath. She urges people to study the Bible. And as Jesus did, she says that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments.

5. Spiritual fruitage - What about spiritual fruitage? Why would the church need the gift of prophecy today? Ellen White wrote a book called "Education," and in it she said, "Seventh-day Adventists, Bible-believing Christians, should establish schools around the world so Adventist young people could be educated to bring the gospel to the world." What is the spiritual fruitage? The largest Protestant educational system in the world! Over 1.1 million students attend over 5600 schools, colleges and universities in nearly 145 countries of the world. Adventist schools dot the globe. What is the spiritual fruitage? Universities like Loma Linda University, one of the most prestigious medical schools in the world. Ellen White joined in picking out the site. She was one of the pioneers to start Loma Linda. Loma Linda's heart team has travelled around the world doing untold good, touching the lives of tens of thousands. Over 13 million outpatients visit the 785 hospitals, clinics, medical airplanes and ships operated by the church each year. This is no crystal ball. These are visions and dreams to help God's children.

It's amazing to me how God is touching honest hearted people who are looking for truth. They are seeing that God indeed has restored the gift of visions and dreams through the gift of prophecy. In these last days God promises to give His people the gift of prophecy, not to take the place of the Bible - never! But as a gift to guide and direct His people to know Jesus better, and to understand the word of God better. Why not thank Jesus for his guidance through the gift of prophecy. Why not start reading and applying it to your life?