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Recommended Citation

Kaiser, Angelika, "2011 Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium: "The Phenomenon of Prophecy and Role of Prophets in the Old Testament Compared with the Ministry of Ellen G. White"" (2011). *Memory, Meaning & Life*. 95.

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April 13, 2011

2011 Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium: "The Phenomenon of Prophecy and Role of Prophets in the Old Testament Compared with the Ministry of Ellen G. White"

Presentation

[Jiri Moskala](#), Professor for Old Testament Exegesis and Theology at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, shared a paper about the characteristics and major roles of prophets in the Old Testament and whether these roles/tasks can be found in the ministry of Ellen G. White.*

Testimony. Dr. Moskala started with a personal testimony on how he had gone from a fearful picture of God to the picture a loving, a "smiling" God, who wants the best for everyone and who delights in His children. He found forgiveness, a new picture of God, joy of salvation and assurance of salvation in Christ. In this context, he found God as a loving savior also in Ellen White's writings, for example in *Steps to Christ*: "If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your personal Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God as just as if you had not sinned." (p.62) Actually, her writings had a big influence on Moskala's spiritual growth.

Phenomenon of Prophecy. Pointing to the dominant role of prophets in the Old Testament (OT), Dr. Moskala listed several prophets and the crucial points in salvation history in which they were called to their ministry: Noah (before the Flood); Abraham (starting point for a new ministry to all nations); Moses (Exodus from Egypt); Hosea and Amos (before Samaria's fall in 722 BC); Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (before and during Babylonian captivity); John the Baptist (before Christ's appearing). Prophets also came often during a distinct time of crisis, Elijah and Elisha for example (Israel's idolatry).

Moskala quoted [Abraham Heschel](#) and said: "The God of the philosophers is a concept derived from abstract ideas; the God of the prophets is derived from acts and events." (Heschel, *God in Search for Man*, p. 213). After that Moskala gave an overview over the different kinds of prophets: starting with Enoch (first prophet, [Jude 14](#)) and his son Methuselah (prophetic meaning of name: "At his death He will send" or "When he is dead it shall be sent" - pointing to the flood which came in the year of Methuselah's death). Then Moskala proceeded to honorary prophets (Noah [[Gen 6-9](#)], Abraham [[Gen 20:7](#)], Moses [[Deut 18:15, 18](#)], Samuel [[1 Sam 3:20](#)] and David [[Acts 2:29-30](#)]) and mentioned also the different classifications of prophets in general (non-writing prophets [e.g. Enoch, Abraham, Elijah and Elisha] and classical writing prophets [major and minor prophets - number of 16]). Beside these there are, according to Moskala, also other special categories of prophets: those, whose writings were not included in the biblical canon (Samuel, Nathan, Gad [see [1 Chr 29:29](#); [2 Chr 9:29](#)]) and prophetesses like Miriam and Hulda.

Role of a Prophet. The major part of the presentation consisted of a comprehensive, yet probably not exhaustive depiction of a prophet and his/her role.

1) **Principal Task: Presenter of a Right Picture of God.** On the background of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, the prophets present God as a God who is NOT distant, cruel or angry and tyrannical. Their representation is not a dream picture, not an idealistic, motionless non-historical God of philosophers. Thus they correct wrong pictures about God and rather describe them as a God of love, truth and justice ([Gen 3:1-15](#); [Exod 34:6-7](#)). In Ellen White's writings, this picture of a loving, caring God is ever-present. Thus it is not surprising that the concept and statement "God is love" is the main content and also frame of her *Conflict of the Ages Series*: The first book (*Patriarchs and Prophets*) starts with this sentence and the last book (*The Great Controversy*) ends with it. The first sentence of the middle book (*Steps to Christ*) starts with the

sentence: "Nature and revelation alike testify of God's love" (p.9).

Who is a Prophet? Although the typical answer to this question is "Someone who sees the future!", the biblical and Hebrew picture reaches much further, as can be seen in the following major points.

2) Interpreter of History. Seen, that there is no real life and no prophecy without memory, history plays a big role in the function of a prophet. He/She interprets it from God's perspective and cannot be reduced to fulfil man's curiosity regarding the future. The history was interpreted in order to help the listener/reader understand what happened and to call for wise present action (e.g. Moses, Elijah, Habakkuk, John the Baptist). Referring back to *The Conflict of the Ages Series* by Ellen G. White, Moskala pointed to this magnum opus as an interpretation of history from original heavenly harmony through the fall, over biblical and Christian history up to the present. The last time and the final restoration of peace in the universe is described on the basis of the prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

3) A Spokesperson for God. The prophet is an authorized spokesperson for God, called by God Himself (Exod 7:1-2; Exod 4:15-16). Thus the prophet's authority is derived from God Himself (Num 12:6-8). Further Moskala pointed to the new type of prophet, that Moses was compared to the prophets before him: the OT church was more fully developed after the Exodus; and at Sinai, they did not want God to speak to them directly, but Moses should do it (Exod 20:19). Thus he spoke with God directly, wrote, and led the people of God. All future prophets would be compared to him and the role he had ("prophet like Moses").

It was important for Moskala to underline the character of the prophet in regards to him as being a spokesperson for God, not only a tool, but rather someone who is personally engaged, immersed, involved in God's mission. Quoting Heschel: "The prophet is not a mouthpiece, but a person; not an instrument, but a partner, an associate of God" (*The Prophets*, New York, 1962, p.25). Like actors, prophets sometimes even play out their messages (see Hosea [chps. 1-2], Isaiah [20:2-4], Micah [1:8] or Ezekiel's 12 symbolic actions [3:26-27; 4:1-3; 4:4-5; 4:6-8; 4:9-17; 5:1-4; 12:1-6; 12:17-20; 21:6-7; 21:18-23; 24:15-26; 37:15-23]).

4) Man/Woman of Insight. A prophet is a *seer*, someone with a special insight and a certain understanding from God. Prophets see what others do not see.

5) Man/Woman of Vision. Dr. Moskala emphasized the fact that it is granted to a prophet not only to see more than others, but also to see life more from God's angle, from His perspective. And while explaining the past, prophets also, like seers, predict the future, that, which is near (e.g. Habakkuk, Jeremiah) and/or that which is distant (e.g. Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah). Prophets point to Christ (e.g. Isaiah:7:14; 6:9; 11:1-16; 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; Ezekiel's five messianic predictions: 17:22; 21:27; 29:21; 34:23; 37:24-25). Thus a prophet speaks about hope and restoration (esp. about God's future kingdom: Isaiah 24-27 and Daniel 2 and 7). Their task is also to announce judgment on nations (Babylon, Egypt, etc.; incl. God's people) as well as to announce the nearness of the Day of the Lord - thus prophets are apocalyptic speakers. - Compared with the ministry of Ellen White, Dr. Moskala mentioned her constant pointing to Christ and His second coming. Having had many visions and unique insights into the Great Controversy, salvation history and God's plan of redemption, she clearly lived in three time-dimensions (past, present, future) and was able to call for action NOW, in her day and beyond. She also taught about the fall of Babylon and the Antichrist and can be called an apocalyptic prophet.

6) Man/Woman of God. The expression *man of God* (used 76 times in the OT, e.g. for Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, 20x for unknown prophets) designated a special, close relationship with God, which resulted in a godly life, in harmony with the law and truth and the will of God. - According to those around her, Ellen White loved Jesus deeply, lived according to the principles she herself uphold and had a strong spiritual impact on others.

7) Man/Woman of the Spirit. A prophet is called this way because he/she is led by the Holy Spirit: "the Spirit of God came upon" them (see Numbers 24:2) and gives them the message they should proclaim. An interesting play on words is found in Jeremiah 5:13: "And the prophets become wind, for the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them", since the Hebrew word for *spirit* can also be translated as *wind*. Warrant of truth, according to Moskala's research, however, is not some kind of spiritual ecstasy (vision, dream experience, etc.), but the actual message that the prophet received by God's Spirit.

8) Man/Woman of the Word. Expressions like "The word of the Lord came to the prophet ...", "Thus says the Lord ...", "This

is what the Lord Almighty says ...”, and “The Lord said to me ...” can be encountered frequently in Scripture and do not only point to the divine origin and authority of the prophet's words, but also to the control of his/her truthfulness: when the prophet's message is in harmony with God's previously revealed messages and His law, when they do not contradict basic principles which were revealed to previous prophets, then they are from God. This is illustrated in Deuteronomy 13:1-4, a text which shows the right basic of truth: not even the working of miracles is a warrant for truth, but the test by the word of God (see Isaiah 8:19-20). Not the gift of the Spirit, but the fruits of the Spirit are genuine signs of something wrought by God (Matthew 7:21-23). - Ellen White constantly pointed, as a *lesser light*, to Scripture, the *greater light*. It was a matter very close to her heart to encourage all to study and appreciate the Bible and keep it as the highest authority in one's life.

9) The Servant of the Covenant. According to Moskala, the makeup of biblical covenants resembled Suzerain/Vassal treaties with the parts preamble, historical prologue (past relationship defined), stipulations (law), blessings and curses (Lev 26 and Deut 28-30), witnesses, and special provisions. Examples are the Decalogue (Exod 20:1-17), Joshua 24 and the structure of the book of Deuteronomy. Prophets used the strong covenant language to steer people back to God, while, at the same time, calling them to a new, a *heart covenant* with God. - White, too, reminded people of what God had done, his faithfulness and immense love and warned about the results of distrust and disobedience.

10) Mediator/Intercessor. Prophets do not only pray for and with people and sinners (e.g. Daniel in Dan 2:20-23; 9:4-19; Abraham in Gen 18:22-33; Moses in Exod 32:31-32;), but sometimes even bear their sins symbolically (Ezek 4:4-6) and try to reconnect the people with God.

11) Revivalist and Reformer. The Prophet calls people to a deep, personal relationship with God which is built on gratitude and love. He/She calls for repentance (Ezek 18:31; 33:11; Amos 5—“Seek the Lord and live”—3x), for a return to God (e.g. Joel, Ezekiel) and for the denouncing of sins like pride, selfishness, idolatry, infidelity, murder, exploitation, etc. They call for genuine, true worship, speak against formalism and are against stagnation, the status quo and spiritual lethargy. Pointing to Micah 6:8, Moskala stressed the first-rank position of a personal love relationship every believer should have with God and how biblical prophets continually stressed this - as did Ellen White in her untiring ministry to numerous people in conversations, letters, publications. Calling individuals to repentance and motivating for a lively, ethically consistent (spiritual) life was her main ministry.

12) Pastor/Comforter. Like e.g. Ezekiel in the Babylonian exile, prophets can play the role of a comforter and pastor and encourage God's people like Isaiah and Habakkuk did. - Ellen White, for example, wrote many personal letters in order to encourage various individuals to trust in and follow God (see Testimonies Vol 1-9).

13) Evangelist/Missionary. Like e.g. Jonah, preaching to the Ninivites, a prophet can work as an evangelist/missionary in foreign countries. - White worked as a missionary abroad for over 10 years (1885-1887 in Europe; 1891-1900 in Australia and New Zealand).

14) Social Reformer. Prophets called for special care for aliens, the poor, widows and orphans. In Matthew 25:34-40 Jesus, the prophets of all prophets, summarized simple acts of social justice and lays big importance on them (e.g. he mentions the same six social actions always in the same order). - In the life and writings of E. G. White we can see a strong concern for the poor and for social justice, as well as strong commitment and involvement in matters of resistance to slavery and racism, advocating of religious liberty and prohibition of alcohol.

15) Teacher of Righteousness and Guardian of God's Law. Prophets teach what is right, the truth of God and His instructions for mankind, e.g. also in prophetic schools in the time of Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. - Although teaching ministry ranges far (spiritual instruction included), it is obvious that White had a burden for a right/a spiritual understanding of education in general and pastoral and religious education in particular. Her many publications on the topic and the well established Adventist school system are testimonies of that.

Moskala concluded with laying the stress on the fact of the multifaceted ministry of the prophets and the importance of the context, in which each prophet fulfills his/her ministry. He finished his presentation with 2 Chron 20:20.

Response. The response was given by Dr. Richard M. Davidson, like Moskala professor for Old Testament Interpretation at the SDA Theol. Seminary. Davidson expressed his appreciation for Moskala's well-put overview on the roles of prophets and

said that he, Davidson, can concur with all these points. He pointed however to some possibilities of improvement of this study, e.g. an expansion in regards to the physical phenomena and the role of these phenomena in the work of a prophet; some elaboration of the principle expressed in [Amos 3:6-7](#) or the pattern that in the end of prophetic time-lines (e.g. the 2300 days) there is always a prophet standing up, who is called by God; the role of the prophet as an expositor of the Word. He also uttered the question whether the paper should say something reg. [Joel 2:28](#). Finishing with mentioning a recent study on chiasmic structures in the major writings of Ellen White (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, etc.), Davidson wondered whether there could be much room for further research in this area.

* Please note that this and other articles on the presentations held are condensed summaries in which some lines of argumentation have been abbreviated. All papers/presentations will be published in a revised form in the Journal *Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium*, vol. 7, 2011, at the next Symposium, i.e. March or April 2012. Orders can be made to the [Center for Adventist Research](#).

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