

BLESSINGS FROM THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

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Seventh-day Adventists have always claimed to accept the Bible as their only self-sufficient creed and as interpreter of itself. As early as 1847, James White stated that “the [B]ible is a perfect, and complete revelation” and “our only rule of faith and practice.”¹ And in 1884, Ellen White added that God’s faithful end-time remnant people would “maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”² Many other similar statements could be mentioned, but these two are representative of the Adventist position on the topic.

But can we remain faithful to the Bible while we also accept the writings of Ellen White as prophetically inspired? According to James White,

The [B]ible is a perfect, and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice. But this is no reason, why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfilment of his word, in these last days, by dreams and visions; according to Peter’s testimony [Acts 2:17-20]. True visions are given to lead us to God, and his written word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the [B]ible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected.³

As pointed out by James White, a false prophet replaces and distorts the Bible; while a true prophet leads us “to God, and his word.” The wonderful way in which Ellen White exalts Christ and His Word is one of the most compelling reasons why Adventists accept her as a true prophet.

In Ephesians 4:11-14 (NKJV),⁴ the apostle Paul highlights the purpose of the various church ministries, including “prophets.” The passage reads, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 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; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. . . .”

So, in what sense do the writings of Ellen White fulfill the roles mentioned by Paul in this passage? Much could be said in this regard. But today we will reflect on her multifaceted role by means of five helpful analogies.

1. Prophetic Lighthouse: *safeguarding our journey through these last days*

In 2 Timothy 3:1, Paul speaks of the last days as “difficult times” (Greek *kairoi chalepoi*), which can be translated as “distressing times” (NRSV), “perilous times” (NKJV), and “terrible times” (NIV). Paul foresaw that in the last days people would become increasingly rebellious and arrogant (see 2 Tim 3:1-5). Then “every wind of [false] doctrine” would be blowing (Eph 4:14), and many would not “endure sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:3, 4). No wonder that Christ warned His followers about false preachers who would

perform “great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22). Are these not accurate characteristics of our own times?

Today, many Christians disregard the Bible and even distort its teachings. Our wonderful God has given us a modern manifestation of the gift of prophecy in the writings of Ellen White, not to replace the Bible but rather to exalt it and to lead us to its wonderful teachings. Those writings are intended to safeguard us in our journey through these challenging last days. Remember the well-known words of Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

2. Prophetic Telescope: *highlighting the great themes of the Bible*

In early 1898, *The Gospel of Health* (an early Adventist periodical on health reform) carried an article entitled “My Telescope,” by Sarepta M. I. Henry (1839-1900).⁵ In her insightful testimony, Mrs. Henry speaks of her own experience with the writings of Ellen White. As she started reading them, they seemed like a simple *lens* to understand the truth. But as she continued reading, they became to her a powerful *telescope* directed toward the field of heaven, the Bible. Mrs. Henry explains that the writings of Ellen White “are not the heavens, palpitating with countless orbs of truth, but they do lead the eye and give it power to penetrate into the glories of the mysterious living word of God.”⁶

Throughout her writings, Ellen White unfolds many significant Bible themes. These include, for instances, the marvelous person of Jesus Christ, as well as God’s unconditional love for sinners, His saving grace, His unchangeable moral law, and many other relevant subjects. But one of her most remarkable contributions is the way she unfolds the great cosmic-historical controversy between Christ and Satan (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-19; Rev 12:7-12). Glimpses of that controversy permeated all her writings, but especially the five volumes of the Conflict of the Ages Series, entitled respectively *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Great Controversy*. Currently, the EGWWritings.org website has available Ellen White books for free downloading in more than 130 languages.

As already stated, her writings are a powerful prophetic telescope, highlighting the great themes of the Bible.

3. Prophetic Microscope: *unfolding the precious gems of the Bible*

In addition to safeguarding our journey through these last days and highlighting the great themes of the Bible, the writings of Ellen White also help us to unfold many precious details of the Bible. Richard M. Davidson, professor of Old Testament at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, identified several places in which Ellen White, without knowing the original biblical languages, grasped the original meaning of some key Bible passages.⁷ For example, the creation story tells us that God created Adam and Eve in His own “image” and “likeness” (Gen 1:26, 27). Ellen White explains that “man was to bear God’s image, both in outward resemblance and in character,”⁸ which is precisely the meaning of the original text. Thus, “when Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker.”⁹

The Ten Commandments are introduced with a reminder of the saving acts of God (Exod 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21), which are the basis of obedience. So, Ellen White could say

properly that the Ten Commandments are “ten promises” and that “there is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus.”¹⁰ Just one more example: Exodus 25:8, 40 says that God showed to Moses a “type” or “pattern” (Hebrew *tabnit*) of the sanctuary to be built. What “type” or “pattern” was it? Ellen White insightfully explains that “God presented before Moses a *miniature model* of the heavenly sanctuary, and commanded him to make all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount.”¹¹ Indeed, Moses did not only receive oral instructions, but also saw a model which he could actually reproduce.

If you have access to *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen White, you could enrich your personal spiritual experience by reading the four canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—together with that wonderful book. To begin with, you could read the gospel narratives about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12) and then Chapter 74 – “Gethsemane” of *The Desire of Ages*. Undoubtedly, the writings of Ellen White are a useful prophetic microscope helping us to unfold many precious gems of the Bible.

4. Prophetic Filter: *eliminating false interpretations of the Bible*

The renowned German Lutheran theologian Gerhard Ebeling (1912-2001) suggests that the history of the Christian Church is “the history of the exposition of Scripture.”¹² This is indeed a very profound and meaningful concept! The history of the Christian Church is the history of the *interpretations* and *misinterpretations* of the Bible. No wonder that in a time when Christianity is divided into more than 45,000 different denominations,¹³ all kinds of false interpretations are being proposed as biblically based.

Since the very beginning of human history, Satan has always tempted people to disregard or at least to distort God’s Word. This happened, for instance, with Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:16, 17; 3:1-24); with the people of Israel throughout their history (2 Chron 36:14-16); even with Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13); and also with us in these challenging last days. In the world in which we live, people claim that what really matters is no longer what the biblical text actually says, but rather how we read it and how we understand it. So, private reason and personal experiences are replacing the authority of God’s infallible Word.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul warns us, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

In these extremely challenging days, the writings of Ellen White function as a prophetic filter eliminating false interpretations of the Bible and confirming right ones. Remember, a filter does not produce water; it only purifies the water that already exists. In regard to the Bible, the problem is not with the Bible itself, but with the biased way we often read it. The writings of Ellen White help to remove the human biases, allowing the Bible to interpret itself, so that its saving message can flow crystal-clear to each one of us today.

5. Prophetic GPS: keeping us faithful to the Bible

Have you ever driven through a very complex highway exchange or on a narrow and steep mountain road? Some of the most complex intertwined road interchanges are nicknamed “spaghetti junctions,” because they resemble a plate of spaghetti. If you do not know the place well, and the traffic is moving very fast, you may easily go in the wrong direction and face serious difficulties finding your way back to the road you should have taken. But technology has improved significantly, and today we have the much reliable GPS (Global Positioning System) which makes our travels much easier.

With so many religious and spiritual road options available today, it is very easy to be lead astray and never arrive at our destiny. But we are not left alone to find the right way we should take. In Isaiah 30:21 (NIV) we have this wonderful promise, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’” In biblical times, the Holy Spirit used many prophets to keep God’s people walking safely according to His Word. In more recent times, He sent us another prophetic voice with the same purpose.

Ellen White explained her own function by saying, “If you had made God’s word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the *Testimonies*. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God’s inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings.”¹⁴ Her writings are indeed a reliable prophetic GPS keeping us safe on the road of His Word.

Concluding remarks

As already mentioned, the writings of Ellen White are not intended to replace or overrule the Bible, but rather to uplift it and to keep us faithful to its teachings. Those writings can be considered (1) a prophetic *lighthouse* safeguarding our journey through these last days; (2) a prophetic *telescope* highlighting the great themes of the Bible; (3) a prophetic *microscope* unfolding the precious gems of the Bible; (4) a prophetic *filter* eliminating false interpretations of the Bible; and (5) a prophetic *GPS* keeping us faithful to the Bible.

But those writings can exercise these specific functions only if we read and study them with humbleness and a receptive spirit. If you are already doing so, praise the Lord for it! If not yet, why not start a personal reading plan from now on. A good option would be the read one of her books regularly with your family and/or with your friends. You could also choose a specific book to be your companion, reading from it with whoever you can and whenever you have a chance. For sure, if you do so, your life will be richly blessed.

God’s final words for us today are found in 2 Peter 3:18, “But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.”

¹ James White, in *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Brunswick, Maine: [James White], 1847), p. 13.

² Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1884), vol. 4, p. 413; republished in *idem*, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1911), p. 595.

³ J. White, in *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* p. 13.

⁴ All Bible references not indicated otherwise are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

⁵ S. M. I. Henry, "My Telescope," *Gospel of Health*, Jan. 1898, pp. 25-28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

⁷ See Richard M. Davidson, "Ellen White's Insights into Scripture in Light of the Original Biblical Languages," in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, edited by Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, Md.: Review and Herald, 2015), pp. 155-170.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, as Illustrated in the Lives of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1890), p. 45.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 15.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953), vol. 1, p. 1105.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association), vol. 4a, p. 5 (italics supplied).

¹² Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S. H. Hooke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 11-31 (Chapter 1 - "Church History Is the History of the Exposition of Scripture").

¹³ "Status of Global Mission, 2014, in the Context of AD 1800-2025," line "41. Denominations", at <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/StatusOfGlobalMission.pdf> (accessed Aug. 8, 2018).

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 5, p. 665.