

# Revelation-Inspiration

## Ellen White's Witness and Experience

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The Bible tells us that God spoke through His prophets “at sundry times and in divers manners” (Hebrews 1:1). This variety often was apparent in individual prophets. Elijah communicated with God on the mountain top in full view of thousands of Israelites. He also received instruction from God alone by the stream and the cave.

Seventh-day Adventists have been privileged to have a prophetic messenger. There were hundreds who witnessed Ellen White's visions, especially in early years. But she also received many of her messages while she was alone. Our focus in this study, however, will be on her witness to *her* own work and that of the Bible prophets.

There were three rather distinct periods in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. These periods represent some variety in the revelation experience as well as her relation to it.

1. The establishing of a prophetic ministry from 1844 to 1884. It began with her first vision at the age of 17 in Portland, Maine, and ended with the last recorded public vision at a campmeeting in Portland, Oregon. (See EW 13-17, and GCB January 29, 1893.)\*

2. A personal world ministry from 1885 to 1900. This time span began with two years in Europe, followed by a brief interlude in America with the 1888 General Conference Session almost exactly in the middle, and closes with nine years in Australia and New Zealand.

3. The crowning years from 1900-1915. During this time she completed many books, reaffirmed her confidence in the Lord's leading in her prophetic role, and played an active role in general church developments.

### 1. 1844-1884—The Establishing of a Prophetic Ministry

Adventists in 1844 would seem to have had enough problems without the need to consider the presence among them of one who had the prophetic gift. After the October 22 disappointment there was division, scattering, confusion and uncertainty. The main Adventist group continued to look for the advent of Christ, setting new dates in a few instances, and rejecting any suggestion that they should reevaluate their conclusions. They turned away from the prophetic gift and Sabbathkeeping, as well as a changed understanding

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of the cleansing of the sanctuary. Their rejection of these three steps in advancing light spelled doom for them. These first-day Adventists (now known as Advent Christians) today number only a few thousand, and have not grown in size or influence for many years.

The small handful of Adventists who *did* accept a correct understanding of the cleansing of the sanctuary and the doctrine of the Sabbath and the prophetic gift as manifested to Ellen Harmon (White) were saved much confusion and further disappointment of time-setting for Christ's return. They were also helped in their study of Bible truths. Today they number more than three and a half million around the world. Writing about these early years Ellen White says:

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\* Full titles for all sources used in this study are listed at the close

In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied diligently to understand the meaning of many Scriptures. At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study came to a point where they could go no farther, and had recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture. These experiences were repeated over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point (*RH* June 14, 1906; *3SM* 38).

Those who accepted the visions as genuine, were thus spared much confusion and were led to build their faith on a "thus saith the Lord" that was demonstrated both from the Bible and the living witness of the visions. This brings us to the central focus of this earliest period—the visions.

From the start, the visions were given in public. But more than this, they were accompanied by certain physical phenomena. She did not breathe and also exhibited superhuman strength. Her experiences called to mind the visions of Daniel. (See Daniel 10.) Ellen White comments on these phenomena:

Some of the instruction found in these pages [printed works] was given under circumstances so remarkable as to evidence the wonder-working power of God in behalf of His truth.....These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy (*Ibid*).

After her marriage to James White in 1846, he was often present when her visions occurred and he invited others who were present to test the physical phenomena.

"The visions" was a term most often used to describe Ellen White's work in those early days by church leaders. In an editorial titled "Our Use of the Visions of Sister White," J N Andrews made the following point:

It is plain that those who reject the work of the Spirit of God under the plea that the Scriptures are sufficient, do deny and reject all that part of the Bible which reveals the office and work of the Holy Spirit (*RH* February 14, 1870).

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Note the many times Ellen White herself used the term "visions" when she discussed her work in an 1849 statement:

I saw the state of some who stood on present truth, but disregarded the *visions*—the way God had chosen to teach in some cases, those who erred from Bible truth. I saw that in striking against the *visions* they did not strike against the worm—the feeble instrument that God spake through—but against the Holy Ghost. I saw it was a small thing to speak against the instrument, but it was dangerous to slight the words of God. I saw if they were in error and God chose to show them their errors through *visions*, and they disregarded the teachings of God through *visions*, they would be left to take their own way, and run in the way of error, and think they were right, until they would find it out too late. Then in the time of trouble I heard them cry to God in agony. "Why didst thou not show us our wrong, that we might have got right and been ready for this time?" Then an angel pointed to them and said, "My Father taught, but you would not be taught. He spoke through *visions*, but you disregarded His voice, and He gave you up to your own ways, to be filled with your own doings (*1SM* 40)." [Emphasis supplied.]

In her first book, *Experience and Views*, published in 1851, she early established her understanding of the relation that was to be observed between “the visions” and the Bible:

I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the “last days;” not for a new rule of faith, but [1] for the comfort of His people, and [2] to correct those who err from Bible truth (*EW* 78).

That same year she answered someone who claimed she had gotten her message other than from the Lord. She said:

What if you had said ever so much, would that affect the visions, that God gives me? If so, then the visions are nothing.....What you have said, Sister A, influenced me not at all (*Letter 6, 1851; 3SM* 63).

Then she added a further point:

My opinion has nothing to do with what God has shown me in vision (*Ibid*).

The Lord’s messenger was clear as to the source of the visions. But she spelled out even more detail about the experience in 1860:

I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or in writing a vision, as in having the vision (*2SG* 292; *1SM* 36).

Writing about these early visions she said:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing

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what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation (*RH* October 8, 1867; *1SM* 37).

But what did Ellen White “see” in visions? The first writing of *The Great Controversy* is a prime example. Almost every page contains the words “I saw.” Sometimes it was events: “I saw the Roman guard.” Sometimes it was a look into the character of people: “I saw that Luther was ardent and zealous.” Other times she was permitted to go behind the scenes: “I saw Satan and his angels seeking to shut this divine light from the people of God” (*1SG* 68,122,156).

Ellen White’s account of Moses’ vision just before Israel entered Canaan is informative. God gave him a detailed description of the promised land with all of his physical senses in operation. He even saw *in color*. He saw “hills gray with olives and fragrant with the odor of the vine, wide green plains bright with flowers.” He saw “sunny valleys musical with the ripple of brooks and the song of birds” (*PP* 472-476). Ellen White had the same kind of experience.

The visions listed below are only representative of the hundreds given to Ellen White. They demonstrate the wide range of subjects presented to her.

1. The first vision containing encouragement after disappointment (December, 1844).
2. Vision to begin publishing (November, 1848).

3. Vision begins the nine volumes of *Testimonies for the Church* (November 20, 1855).
4. *The Great Controversy* vision (March 21, 1858).
5. The comprehensive health reform vision (June 6, 1863).
6. Vision leading to establishing our own health institute (December 25, 1865).
7. A world work shown in vision (January 3, 1875).

One of the most informative letters Ellen White wrote on visions was sent to J N Loughborough in 1874. Written thirty years after her first vision, it reveals several important facts about them.

There was variety:

The Spirit of God has come upon me at different times, in different places, and under various circumstances (*Letter 2, 1874; 3SM 36,37*).

There was no human control, not even her husband:

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My husband has had no control of these manifestations of the Spirit of God. Many times he has been far away when I have had visions (*Ibid*).

She could *not* have visions when she chose:

It is utterly false that I have ever intimated I could have a vision when I pleased. There is not a shade of truth in this. I have never said I could throw myself into visions when I pleased, for this is simply impossible (*Ibid*).

She did not welcome the visions:

I have felt for years that if I could have my choice and please God as well I would rather die than have a vision, for every vision places me under great responsibility to bear testimonies of reproof and of warning, which has ever been against my feelings, causing me affliction of soul that is inexpressible. Never have I coveted my position, and yet I dare not resist the Spirit of God and seek an easier position (*Ibid*).

What was her attitude toward publishing what she had seen in vision? Here is what she says:

I was shown years ago that we should not delay publishing the important light given me because I could not prepare the matter perfectly.....I was shown that I should present before the people in the best manner possible the light received; then as I received greater light, and as I used the talent God had given me, I should have increased ability to use in writing and in speaking. I was to improve everything, as far as possible bringing it to perfection, that it might be accepted by intelligent minds (*Letter 11, 1884*).

She then states that J N Andrews delayed his work too long on publishing *History of the Sabbath* while “other erroneous works were taking the field and blocking the way, so that minds would be prejudiced by the opposing elements.” Then in regard to preparation of her own *Testimonies* for publication, she stated:

Where the language used is not the best, I want it made correct and grammatical, as I believe it should be in every case where it can be without destroying the sense (*Ibid*).

The writing of the messenger during this period was directed to a young church. The books and articles prepared were done largely for Adventists. And, until near the end of these years, the messages were directed almost exclusively to an audience in North America.

But the death of James White in 1881 signaled the end of an era. The prophet had been given the visions, and James White had usually been the leading force in carrying out the instructions. First it was a paper, then organization, a health message, a medical work, an educational system, and much, much more. In each of these enterprises James White led the way.

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After the last public vision in 1884, it was time for moving on to a new phase of her work. Ellen White was to take an even more personal, world role.

## 2. 1885-1900—A Personal World Ministry

J N Andrews had gone to Europe in 1874 as our first *official* missionary. He died in 1884 and it seemed to church leaders that Europe needed the personal ministry of Ellen White. So, as a widow at age 58, she traveled to Europe with her son William and his family. She spent two years there, from 1885 to 1887. The visions continued, but now they came in private.

Her book, *The Great Controversy*, had been prepared in a special printing in 1884 and colporteurs had sold 50,000 copies. Europe wanted the book too. Ellen White decided to revise and expand it with a worldwide audience in mind. She published an 1888 edition shortly after returning to America. The book was also printed in other languages. She prepared an author's introduction that is an important statement on inspiration. We'll come back to it in a moment.

There was a brief interlude of four years in America, and then Ellen White returned to overseas labor for nine years in Australia and New Zealand from 1891-1900 (from ages 63 to 72).

The brief four years in America were significant ones for the church. In the middle of these years, the historic 1888 General Conference at Minneapolis was held. On the surface, righteousness by faith was the point of contention. But Ellen White's inspiration was also an issue. She accepted the preaching of Jones and Waggoner on faith and actively worked with them following the historic meeting. It is not surprising that she made several significant statements on inspiration during this time:

1. 1886—"Objections to the Bible" (1SM 19-21).
2. 1888—Introduction to *Great Controversy*, v-xii.
3. 1888—"The Inspiration of the Word of God" (1SM 15-18).
4. 1889—"The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration" (5T 698-711).
5. 1889—"The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies" (5T 654-691).

A brief review of some high points of these published statements is revealing.

### 1. 1886—"Objections to the Bible" (1SM 19-21)

In this statement, prepared while she was in Europe, Ellen White talked of the problems of communication of truth from three different sides. We might call it a hermeneutical discussion—that is, consideration of how to interpret

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or explain the meaning. Her comments apply to her own writings as well as to the Bible.

#### A. Problems for the Writer:

Human minds vary. The minds of different education and thought receive different impressions of the same words, and it is difficult for one mind to give to one of a different temperament, education,

and habits of thought by language exactly the same idea as that which is clear and distinct in his own mind (1SM 19).

#### B. Problems Created by the Reader:

Speaking from the writer's perspective, she says:

If the man he communicates with is not honest and will not want to see and understand the truth, he will turn his words and language in everything to suit his own purposes....This is the way my writings are treated by those who wish to misunderstand and pervert them (*Ibid*).

#### C. General Problems:

The Scriptures were given to men, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations, as God in His providence saw a fitting opportunity to impress man at sundry times and divers places (*Ibid*, 19,20).

There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures..... Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge,.... talk of the contradictions of the Bible (*Ibid*).

The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language..... Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea (*Ibid*).

The attitude with which we come to the study of God's messages to us is extremely important. Ellen White makes this sobering comment to ministers:

The spirit in which you come to the investigation of the Scriptures will determine the character of the assistant at your side. Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance. But if the Bible is opened with irreverence, with a feeling of self-sufficiency, if the heart is filled with prejudice, Satan is beside you, and he will set the plain statements of God's Word in a perverted light (*TM* 108).

#### 2. 1888—Introduction to *Great Controversy*, v-xii.

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This author's introduction might properly be titled "How God Speaks to Man." Moses is pictured as "the historian of creation and the law." The Bible is said to point to "God as its author" and yet "written by human hands." This is stated as a representation of "such a union [that] existed in the nature of Christ."

There is comment on the diversity in the Bible with its many writers as causing trouble for the "superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader," while the "thoughtful, reverent student" will see the "underlying harmony."

The Scriptures are characterized as an "authoritative, infallible revelation of His [God's] will." They are said to be "the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience."

But the Bible's presence does not preclude the continued work of the Holy Spirit. It is stated that Jesus promised that after He returned to heaven the Holy Spirit would "open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings." But even while the Scriptures were being given "the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon." Ellen White points out that "men received warnings, reproof, counsel, and instruction [from the Holy Spirit], in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures."

Now, note an interesting sequence. (1) She speaks of the special outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Next, (2) she speaks of the need of the church as it approaches its “final deliverance” with Satan working feverishly “with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9). She says: “For six thousand years that master-mind that once was highest among the angels of God, has been wholly bent to the work of deception and ruin.” (3) She speaks of a message the church has to bear to the world that has need of “the special endowment of divine grace and power” as in the “apostolic days.” (4) Then these words about her work: “Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages.” Finally, (5) she expands this thought:

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His Word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed (GC xi).

She then explains her use of secular sources in the account:

In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject (*Ibid*, xii).

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The prophetic messenger concludes the introduction with a statement of purpose for the book:

To unfold the scenes of the great controversy between truth and error; to reveal the wiles of Satan, and the means by which he may be successfully resisted; to present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil, shedding such a light upon the origin and the final disposition of sin as to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with His creatures; and to show the holy, unchanging nature of His law, is the object of this book (*Ibid*).

3. 1888—“*The Inspiration of the Word of God*” (ISM 15-18). (Prepared at the 1888 General Conference Session.)

Writing about “shepherds.....of the flock” she says:

There are men who strive to be original, who are wise above what is written; therefore their wisdom is foolishness.....In seeking to make plain or to unravel mysteries hid from ages from mortal man, they are like a man floundering about in the mud, unable to extricate himself and yet telling others how to get out of the muddy sea they themselves are in. This is a fit representation of the men who set themselves to correct the errors of the Bible. No man can improve the Bible by suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said (ISM 16).

She goes on to discuss “probable mistakes” of copyists of the Bible, but observes that “all the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”

Some further bits from this statements:

I take the Bible as it is, as the inspired Word (*Ibid*, 17).

Brethren, let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible (*Ibid*).

Beginning at Genesis, they [critics] give up that which they deem questionable, and their minds lead on, for Satan will lead to any length they may follow in their criticism, and they see something to doubt in the whole Scriptures (*Ibid*, 18).

And then she makes a rather unusual statement. Speaking to one who is “possessed of large talents of mental powers” she says he “will also find difficulties and secrets and wonders which will give him the highest satisfaction to study during a long lifetime, and yet there is an infinity beyond” (*Ibid*).

4. 1889—“*The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration*” (5T 698-711).

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This statement was printed in 1889, the year after the historic 1888 General Conference. The following words sum up the thrust of the material:

The difficulties of Scripture have been urged by skeptics as an argument against the Bible; but so far from this, they constitute a strong evidence of its divine inspiration (5T 700).

Speaking of skeptics and infidels she says, “Because they cannot fathom all its mysteries” they “reject God’s Word.” But she warns: “Not all who profess to believe the Bible are secure from temptation on this point.” She continues:

It is Satan’s work to prevent the investigative powers of the mind. A certain pride is mingled with the consideration of Bible truth, so that men feel defeated and impatient if they cannot explain every portion of Scripture to their satisfaction (*Ibid*, 701).

Talking further about “the difficulties in the Bible” she says they “do not reflect upon the wisdom of God.” Then she pointedly says:

They will not cause the ruin of any who would not have been destroyed if no such difficulties had existed. Had there been no mysteries in the Bible for them to question, the same minds would through their own lack of spiritual discernment, have found cause of stumbling in the plainest utterances of God (*Ibid*, 702).

After reminding her readers that Bible study without prayer and a submission to God’s will, can actually produce skepticism, she says: “It is only those who are following the light already given that can hope to receive the further illumination of the Spirit” (*Ibid*, 705).

Further on in this article she suggests that the absence of “controversy or agitation among God’s people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine.” In fact, she infers the exact opposite:

When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what (*Ibid*, 707).

She goes one step further:



God will arouse His people; if other means fail, heresies will come in among them, which will sift them, separating the chaff from the wheat (*Ibid*).

5. 1889—“*The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies*” (5T 654-691).

Ellen White here reviews her personal experience and how we should regard

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her writing. She was instructed to publish personal testimonies because of their *general* value:

I was then directed to bring out general principles, in speaking and in writing, and at the same time specify the dangers, errors, and sins of some individuals, that all might be warned, reprov'd, and counseled (*Ibid*, 660).

She considered her writings as from the same Source as Scriptures:

In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit (*Ibid*, 661).

She further clarifies her role:

The Word of God is sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it. But notwithstanding all this, some who profess to make the Word of God their study are found living in direct opposition to its plainest teachings. Then, to leave men and women without excuse, God gives plain and pointed testimonies, bringing them back to the Word that they have neglected to follow. The Word of God abounds in general principles for the formation of correct habits of living, and the testimonies, general and personal, have been calculated to call their attention more especially to these principles (*Ibid*, 663,664).

She pursues further the purpose of the testimonies:

The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed (*Ibid*, 665).

Again:

God has through the testimonies simplified the great truths already given (*Ibid*).

Still again:

The testimonies are not to belittle the Word of God, but to exalt it and attract minds to it (*Ibid*).

The Lord told her:

Your testimony .... is to come down to the minutiae of life (*Ibid*, 667).

Speaking directly to the place of her writings—often called the testimonies—she marks out the steps many take in apostasy:

It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the testimonies.... [1] He works upon minds to excite jealousy and

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dissatisfaction toward those at the head of the work. [2] The gifts are next questioned, [3] then, of course, they have but little weight, and instruction given through vision is disregarded. [4] Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, [5] then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition (*Ibid*, 672).

We are reminded of how God deals with us regarding what he makes plain and what He leaves unresolved:

Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence (*Ibid*, 675).

It is clear that not every question is answered by God—on purpose. He tests us to see if we will look at problems or the “weight of evidence.” She speaks about critics who “seize upon everything which they can use as a peg to hang a doubt upon.” Then quoting the angel, she continues:

The Lord Jesus shall rise up from His mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary and shall clothe Himself with the garments of vengence and surprise them at their unholy feast.....Their taste has been so perverted, that they would be inclined to criticize even the table of the Lord in His kingdom (*Ibid*, 690).

Ellen White concludes this compilation as follows:

I have no special wisdom in myself; I am only an instrument in the Lord's hands to do the work He has set for me to do. The instructions that I have given by pen or voice have been an expression of the light that God has given me (*Ibid*, 691).

We observe a few other statements on inspiration made during this period in sermons, letters and manuscripts. Writing about the diversity of Bible authors she likened them to “the testimonies in a social meeting.” She strongly opposed the idea that Scripture had degrees of inspiration as advocated in a series of articles on inspiration that appeared in the *Review* (see *RH* January 15, 1884). She said:

Both in the Tabernacle and in the college the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say that some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some were not. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration in the *Review*, neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college (*Letter 22, 1890; 1SM 21,22*).

In a sermon at the 1891 General Conference she compared the Scriptures with human philosophy in this way:

Some sit in judgment on the Scriptures, declaring that this or that

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passage is not inspired, because it does not strike their minds favorably. They cannot harmonize it with their ideas of philosophy and science, “falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20).....It is not the province of any man to pronounce sentence upon the Scriptures, to judge or condemn any portion of God’s Word.

She then comments on how some treat her writings. Remember, she is speaking to church leaders:

When it suits your purpose, you treat the testimonies as if you believed them, quoting from them to strengthen any statement you wish to have prevail. But how is it when light is given to correct your errors? Do you accept the light? When the *Testimonies* speak contrary to your ideas, you treat them very lightly (*GCB* April 13, 1891; *1SM* 42,43).

While in Europe she was asked to preach less about duty and more about the love of Jesus. Here is her comment:

Brother A suggests that it would please the people if I speak less about duty and more in regard to the love of Jesus. But I wish to speak as the Spirit of the Lord shall impress me. The Lord knows best what this people needs. I spoke in the forenoon [Sabbath, October 17, 1885] from Isaiah 58. I did not round the corners at all (*Ms* 25, 1885).

Writing to one who wanted to divide her messages, Ellen White stated:

This is one of Satan’s hooks to hang your doubts upon to deceive your soul and the souls of others who will dare to draw the line in this matter and say, this portion which pleases me is from God, but that portion which points out and condemns my course of conduct is from Sister White alone, and bears not the holy signet. You have in this way virtually rejected the whole of the messages which God in His tender, pitying love has sent to save you from moral ruin (*Letter* 16, 1888; *3SM* 69).

Sometimes when she preached, Ellen White did not plan her words:

Frequently I do not anticipate saying the things I do say when I am speaking before the people (*Letter* 3, 1889; *3SM* 81).

Speaking of the scribes and pharisees of Christ’s time, she said they “interpreted what they read to sustain their tradition.” Then, when “Christ came, they refused to receive Him, because He was different from their idea of what the Messiah should be. Divided on most points, they were united on one point—opposition to Christ” (*Ms* 22, 1890).

Ellen White actively resisted the role of mediator, urging others to go directly to Jesus for themselves. She said: “I am riding in the same boat with yourself trusting for salvation in the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour” (*Ms* 83, 1891).

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When in Australia she was held back by God in delivering a certain message to a man by the name of Faulkhead until he was ready to listen. It proved to be his salvation. (*Letter* 46, 1892, *Letter* 55, 1894, and *Letter* 124, 1902.)

Ellen White often was given knowledge by the Lord of secret sins. It is of interest that she exposed the sins of those who openly opposed truth, but was cautious about revealing the sins of those who professed loyalty. Here is what she said to one man:

Your brethren, or many of them, do not know that which you yourself and the Lord know. I have determined that I will not confess the sins of those who profess to believe the truth, but leave these things for them to confess (*Letter 113, 1893*).

She urged one minister to get his proofs from the Bible, not from her writing alone:

In public labor do not make prominent and quote that which Sister White has written as authority to sustain your positions. To do this will not increase faith in the testimonies. Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God. A thus saith the Lord is the strongest testimony you can possibly present to the people. Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White (*Letter 11, 1894; 3SM 29,30*).

Ellen White often expressed dissatisfaction with her ability to express in words what God had shown her. In a letter expressing dismay over poor picture illustrations that had been submitted to her for one of her books, she wrote to the publishing house:

That which is holy and elevated in heavenly things, I scarcely dare represent. Often I lay down my pen and say, Impossible, impossible for finite minds to grasp eternal truths, and deep holy principles, and to express their living import. I stand ignorant and helpless. The rich current of thought takes possession of my whole being, and I lay down my pen, and say, O Lord, I am finite, I am weak, and simple and ignorant; thy grand and holy revelations I can never find language to express (*Ms 23, 1896*).

The control of the Lord over her work she stated interestingly:

In the night I am aroused from my sleep, and I write in my diary many things that appear as new to me when read as to any who hear them. If I did not see the matter in my own handwriting, I should not think my pen had traced it (*Letter 118, 1898; 3SM 57*).

Ellen White saw difficult days ahead regarding confidence in her work:

The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. “Where there is no vision, the people

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perish” (Prov. 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God’s remnant people in the true testimony (*Letter 12, 1890; 1SM 48*).

### **3. 1900-1915—The Crowning Years**

In 1900, when Ellen White returned from nine years in Australia and New Zealand, she was 72 years of age. It might be expected that she would go into quiet retirement. But such was not the case. During the last fifteen years of her life she worked diligently in perfecting and preparing some of her most important books. *Education, Ministry of Healing*, the last four volumes of the *Testimonies*, and final revision and expansion of the Conflict of the Ages books, are a few of the major projects she worked on.

Though she was in the waning years of a full ministry, she also actively participated in several developments in the church. More visions were given, again in private. She gave direct counsel at the

1901 General Conference for reorganization. (She was 73). She actively supported the opening of work among the blacks in the United States by her son, Edson, and others. She helped to establish Loma Linda in 1905, when she was 77. And so it went.

These last years should have been a time when the fruits of her long years of labor would bring universal acceptance of her prophetic role. But such was not the case. She continued to have to reaffirm her prophetic mission by public pronouncement and private letters. These comments provide us with a rich source of information as to her work as she perceived it. For example, in commenting on the preparation of *Testimonies*, Volume 6, she wrote:

I must select the most important matters for the testimony and then look over everything prepared for it, and be my own critic; for I would not be willing to have some things which are all truth to be published because I fear that some would take advantage of them to hurt others....

I try to bring out general principles, and if I see a sentence which I fear would give someone excuse to injure someone else, I feel at perfect liberty to keep back the sentence, even though it is all perfectly true (*Letter 32, 1901*).

Writing to Doctor Kellogg she did not hesitate to hold back certain counsel till a more opportune time:

I must not write more now, although there is much more that I shall write when I know that the time has fully come (*Letter 124, 1902; 3SM 56*).

We noted earlier that Ellen White used her own words largely in the presentation of her subjects. But she makes the following comment:

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He [God] works at my right hand and at my left. While I am writing out important matter, He is beside me, helping me. He lays out my work before me, and when I am puzzled for a fit word with which to express my thoughts, He brings it clearly and distinctly to my mind (*Letter 127, 1902*).

Commenting on her books at age 75 she said:

Physically, I have always been as a broken vessel, and yet in my old age the Lord continues to move upon me by His Holy Spirit to write the most important books that have ever come before the churches and the world. The life that He spares I will use to His glory. And when He may see fit to let me rest, His messages shall be of even more vital force than when the frail instrumentality through whom they were delivered, was living (*Ms 122, 1903; 3SM 76,77*).

Little insights into how inspiration occurred come up in letters:

When, as I write, a new thought comes into my mind, I reverentially thank God for the appropriate word or sentence brought to my mind (*Letter 260, 1903*).

Again:

I am trying to catch the very words and expressions that were made in reference to this matter, and as my pen hesitates a moment, the appropriate words come to my mind (*Letter*

123, 1904; 3SM 51).

Sometimes her message was given in symbols. Writing to a minister who presented truth in an obnoxious way, she said:

Your work has been presented to me in figures. You were passing round to a company a vessel filled with most beautiful fruit. But as you offered them this fruit, you spoke words so harsh, and your attitude was so forbidding, that no one would accept it. Then another came to the same company, and offered them the same fruit.....So courteous and pleasant were His words and manner as He spoke of the desirability of the fruit, that the vessel was emptied (*Letter 164, 1902; 3SM 44,45*).

The last years of Ellen White's ministry were often lonely years. Referring to earlier times she wrote:

Since twenty-one years ago, when I was deprived of my husband by death, I have not had the slightest idea of ever marrying again. Why? Not because God forbade it. No. But to stand alone was the best for me, that no one should suffer with me in carrying forward my work entrusted to me of God. And no one should have a right to influence me in any way in reference to my responsibility and my work in bearing my testimony of encouragement and reproof. My husband never stood in my way to do this, although I had help and encouragement from him and oft his pity (*Ms 227, 1902; 3SM 66,67*).

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Another unusual insight into her experience as a speaker and a special messenger of God, comes from these later years:

I am never left alone when I stand before the people with a message. When before the people there seems to be presented before me the most precious things of the gospel and I participate in the gospel message and feed upon the Word as much as any of the hearers. The sermons do me good, for I have new representations every time I open my lips to speak to the people. I can never doubt my mission for I am a participant in the privileges and am nourished and vivified, knowing that I am called unto the grace of Christ (*Ms 174, 1903; 3SM 75,76*).

Still another interesting fact is that she did not always understand at first what the message was or its significance. Writing about the use of salt in the diet, contrary to urgent teaching by a respected authority, she said that a little salt was to be used—"The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me" (*CD 344*).

In later years she emphasized the same thing:

Often representations are given me which at first I do not understand. But after a time they are made plain by a repeated presentation of those things that I did not at first comprehend, and in ways that make their meaning clear and unmistakable (*Letter 329, 1904; 3SM 56*).

Was she a prophet? Some have made a great deal of her disclaimer to the title "prophetess." In these later years she spoke to this point:

To claim to be a prophetess is something that I have never done. If others call me by

that name, I have no controversy with them. But my work has covered so many lines that I cannot call myself other than a messenger, sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people, and to take up work in any line that He points out (*RH* July 26, 1906; *1SM* 34).

The messenger felt a special burden that her books be published in other languages. This conviction was stated in her last will, prepared in 1912, three years before her death. Writing in the *Review*, June 14, 1906, she said:

My faith in the ultimate triumph of the third angel's message and everything connected with it, has been substantiated by the wonderful experiences through which I have passed. This is why I am anxious to have my books published and circulated in many languages. I know that the light contained in these books is the light of heaven (*3SM* 39).

Looking down to our day, and reflecting as one aged person (78) on the counsel of another, she said:

I ask you to study the instruction that is written in these books. To John, the aged apostle, came the message, "Write the things which thou

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hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." The Lord has bidden me write that which has been revealed to me. This I have done (*Ibid*).

To the very end of her life, Ellen White was clear as to the source of her message:

Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her life God has been giving her....In my books the truth is stated, barricaded by a "Thus saith the Lord." The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God upon the tables of stone (*CM* 125,126).

In a very comprehensive statement made in these last years of her life., she defined revelation and how we are to relate to it:

Revelation is not the creation or invention of something new, but the manifestation of that which, until revealed, was unknown to human beings. The great and eternal truths contained in the gospel are revealed through diligent searching and humbling of ourselves before God. We have a divine Teacher who leads the mind of the humble searcher for truth; and by the Holy Spirit's guidance, the truths of the Word are revealed to him. And there can be no more certain and efficient knowledge of the truth than to be thus guided into all truth. Through the impartation of the Holy Spirit, we are to understand God's Word. We are admonished to seek the truth as if searching for hidden treasure. The Lord opens the understanding of the true seeker. The Holy Spirit enables the mind to grasp the facts of revelation, and divine light communicates with the soul (*Ms* 59, 1906).

## Some Conclusions

God has revealed Himself to us. But He is not just imparting knowledge. It is knowledge that is to be put to use—yes, even to lead us to eternal life. The revelation has come to us in three ways: (1) The written Word, (2) The Living Word, and (3) The book of nature.

We believe that through the writing of the modern messenger, Ellen G White, the written

revelation of God has been made more clear for today. But this is not enough. If we had only what God has said through His prophets—either ancient or modern—there still would be no hope for a better life in eternity.

The Living Word brings it all together. Jesus, the One who came to “save His people from their sins,” is the great Center. A personal acceptance of His life and death and resurrection for our salvation is absolutely necessary. It makes it possible for us to look forward to something better, but also to establish a personal relationship with Him here and now. Really, what more could God do for us?

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**Abbreviations used:**

CM	Colporteur Ministry
EW	Early Writings
GC	The Great Controversy
GCB	General Conference Bulletin
PP	Patriarchs and Prophets
RH	The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald
1SM, etc.	Selected Messages, Book 1, etc.
1SG, etc.	Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1, etc..
1T, etc.	Testimonies for the Church, Volume 1, etc..
TM	Testimonies to Ministers