

Spirit of Prophecy Sabbath 2023

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Scripture Reading: *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21, NKJV).*

The entire Bible and the process of prophetic revelation is Christ-centered. Jesus, Himself the Word of God (John 1:1), pointed to the Old Testament Scriptures on the road to Emmaus as He spoke with two of His disappointed disciples: “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’ . . . And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25, 27, ESV). The apostles pointed back to the Old Testament as the anchor of their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. It is a characteristic of inspired writers to point to the Bible as the basis of all faith and experience and to connect people to Jesus through their prophetic work. We should expect the same attitude and practice from any person in these last days called by God to manifest the spiritual gift of prophecy (Rom. 12:6).

The Prophetic Gift Points Us to Jesus

Having a correct view of Jesus—His incarnation, life, death on the cross, resurrection, heavenly sanctuary ministry, and Second Coming—has been a significant factor in distinguishing between true and false teachers and prophets. In confronting false gnostic prophets who denied the full humanity of Jesus, the apostle John emphasized that “by this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2, ESV). He continued, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7, ESV).

The apostle Peter provided a similar emphasis as he reflected on seeing Jesus glorified on the “Mount of Transfiguration.” He wrote: “We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19). Jesus calls Himself the “bright morning star” (Rev. 22:16). Prophetic messages always seek to connect us to Jesus, resulting in the miracle of conversion and a life of consecration to God. Prophetic revelation and inspired writings bring light to our heart and mind through the personal presence of Jesus.

The Vital Need for the Prophetic Gift

Peter, quoting Joel 2, states that in the last days, God will pour out His Spirit, “and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17). The apostle Paul writes, “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White (1827–1915), one of the church’s founders, exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. She had many hundreds of prophetic visions and dreams that guided in the beginning and establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her constant focus was Scripture, Bible principles, and the love of God revealed in Jesus and His plan of salvation. The church believes her writings, guided by the Holy Spirit, are a true manifestation of the Spirit of prophecy, connecting us to Jesus in these last days of earth’s history before His second coming, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

Before the fall, Adam and Eve had open communion with God. After sin, the Spirit of prophecy became God's usual way of communicating new light and truth and re-connecting people to God. From Enoch, not long after creation, until the Apostle John and the end of the New Testament, God has provided special revelation to the world through the Bible. According to Scripture, Jesus is God's greatest revelation: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:1, 2).

God will continue to communicate with His people through the Spirit of prophecy until the end of time. "Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communion with his Maker; but since man separated himself from God by transgression, the human race has been cut off from this high privilege. By the plan of redemption, however, a way has been opened whereby the inhabitants of the earth may still have connection with heaven. God has communicated with men by His Spirit, and divine light has been imparted to the world by revelations to His chosen servants. 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' 2 Peter 1:21" (*The Great Controversy*, p. v.)

Through prophetic visions and dreams God has communicated with fallen humanity to impart light, reveal His will, and connect people to Jesus. The entire Bible came to us through the Spirit of prophecy as did biblical era and post-biblical non-canonical prophetic revelations throughout history. In these last days God has again spoken through the Spirit of prophecy in the ministry and writings of Ellen G. White. Revelation 12:17 makes clear that God's remnant church will both "keep the commandments of God" and "have the testimony of Jesus" (NKJV). Revelation 19:10 closely connects this "testimony of Jesus" to the prophetic gift. The angel told John that he was a "fellow servant" with John: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (NKJV). In Revelation 22:9 the angel declares "For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets" (NKJV).

Ellen White's Writings Connect Us to Jesus

Even though Ellen White passed away in 1915, millions are still blessed by her writings, and they continue to be translated into many new languages. People continue to know Jesus better and read their Bible more after reading her writings. Why is this so? Because Ellen White's writings and ministry were focused on bringing people to Jesus and the Bible.

Ellen White's first three major prophetic visions during 1844 and 1845 had Jesus at the center. In her first vision—Christ of the narrow way—it is Jesus that the Advent people were following on the path (*Early Writings*, pp. 18-19). When they were discouraged, Jesus raised His arm and a light "waved over the Advent band." In her second major vision—the Bridegroom—it was Jesus that led His people from the holy to most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary (*Early Writings*, pp. 54-56). In her third major vision—the New Earth—it was Jesus who personally showed Ellen White the future glories of the new earth (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, pp. 52-55). Each of these visions was Christocentric. Throughout her lifetime she continued to have this focus.

The Holy Spirit led Ellen White to frame the presentation of her lifelong Great Controversy theme, portrayed in the five-volume Conflict of the Ages series, in terms of the love of God. The first book, *Patriarchs and Prophets* begins with the words: "God is love. 1 John 4:16. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be." The last book, *The Great Controversy*, ends with the following words: "One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. . . . From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love." Her most translated and widely read book is *Steps to Christ* (1892). The first chapter of this book is on the love of God. Other Christ-centered books include *Thoughts from the*

Mount of Blessing (1896), *The Desire of Ages* (1898), *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900), *Education* (1903), and *Ministry of Healing* (1905).

One of the more compelling representations by Ellen White of her passion for Jesus and orientation toward the love of God in presenting her Great Controversy theme is in the form of a picture rather than with words. In 1873 M. E. Kellogg designed a graphical representation of the history of the world that he had published in lithographic form titled: *The Way of Life: From Paradise Lost to Paradise Restored*. Placed side-by-side in the center of the picture was the law of God hung upon a tree and Jesus hanging upon the cross.

After her husband's premature death in 1881, Ellen White carried out the plan that he and she had devised to have the picture redesigned. The new lithograph placed the cross of Christ central to the picture and removed the equal position of the law of God. She also retitled it *Christ the Way of Life*. This picture was published in 1883, five years before the 1888 General Conference session.

One of Ellen White's most touching and spiritually compelling letters is written to Elizabeth, her twin sister, who she called Lizzie. She wrote it in 1891 the year her sister died. Lizzie did not live as a Christian through most of her adult life. Ellen White never published the letter, intending it to be personal. It reveals Ellen's spiritual longing for her sister and her own love for Jesus.

I love to speak of Jesus and His matchless love and my whole soul is in this work. I have not one doubt of the love of God and His care and his mercy and ability to save to the utmost all who come unto Him. . . . Don't you believe in Jesus, Lizzie? Do you not believe He is your Saviour? . . . Will you give yourself in trusting faith to Jesus? I long to take you in my arms and lay you on the bosom of Jesus Christ.

Ellen White never knew for sure how her sister responded to this letter, but it opens a picture into her heart and the core of her life orientation. During the last year of Ellen White's life she was interviewed by one of her secretaries, C. C. Crisler: "I find tears running down my cheeks when I think of what the Lord is to His children, and when I contemplate His goodness, His mercy, [and] His tender compassion." The emphasis on the parental love of God that she first learned from Levi Stockman while still a young girl continued to pulse strongly in her soul, even as her heart pumped blood through her body. It was the fundamental touchstone of her life, Christian experience, and prophetic ministry. It truly fulfills what Peter wrote of the "prophetic word" as "a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star [Jesus] rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19).

Ellen White's Writings Connect Us to the Bible

The Bible was the basis of Ellen White writings and ministry and she believed it was her work to take people to the Bible. Near the conclusion of her first published tract in 1851, she declared, "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 for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth" (*Early Writings*, p. 78 from *Christian Experience and Views*, p. 64).

Ellen White affirmed the Protestant Reformation principle of Sola Scriptura. She would write dozens of times in support of this. Here is one example: "In our time there is a wide departure from their [the Reformers'] 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. . . . God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 204).

She viewed herself as a post-biblical, non-canonical prophet. Her writings were to “enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God” and “bring the minds of His people to His word” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 246). I want to read this longer quote because of its importance. It is from Ellen White’s introduction to her book *The Great Controversy*.

During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament 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. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue to work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God (*The Great Controversy*, viii).

Ellen White saw her work as the Lord’s messenger to take us to the Bible: “I have a work of great responsibility to do—to impart by pen and voice the instruction given me, not alone to Seventh-day Adventists, but to the world. I have published many books, large and small, and some of these have been translated into several languages. **This is my work—to open the Scriptures to others as God has opened them to me** [emphasis supplied]” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 236).

This was her work in her writings. Her book *Steps to Christ* illustrates this very well. It was first published in 1892 by Fleming H. Revell, a non-Adventist Christian publishing house. Through this book she simply does the work of opening the Scriptures to others as God had opened them to her. It is a powerful Bible exposition that recommends itself to the reader. She simply does the work of a true post-biblical non-canonical prophet. Her other major books and all of her writings do the same.

A significant example is the 5-volume *Conflict of the Ages* series that basically tracks the story of the Bible from beginning to end in a compelling and Christ-centered way. Her great controversy theme is based on and is an unfolding of Scripture.

Even in her personal testimonies for people that were given to her in vision by God, she is oriented toward Bible principles. She wrote: “**It is my first duty to present Bible principles** [emphasis supplied]. Then, unless there is a decided, conscientious reform made by those whose cases have been presented before me, I must appeal to them personally” (Letter 69, 1896).

Here is a classic example. During the 1890s there was a bicycle craze in the United State. It even affected some Seventh-day Adventists living in Battle Creek, Michigan, USA. Bicycles were very costly at that point and people diverted money from mission giving at a critical time. She would write emphatically: “I was directly in Battle Creek; the streets were alive with bicycles ridden by our people. There was a witness from heaven beholding our people indulging their desire for selfish gratification, and using the money that should be invested in foreign missions. . . . There was an infatuation, a craze, upon this subject” (Letter 23c, 1894).

Now Ellen White was not essentially opposed to bicycles, but the circumstances made it wrong at that time to buy a bicycle. In a letter to I. H. Evans she quoted from Matt 25:21, 23; Matt 5:14, 16; Gal 6:7; Luke 9:23 and gave the Bible principles on the use of talents, stewardship, responsibility, and self-denial, among others (Letter 23b, 1894). She applied Bible principles when she shared the prophetic messages God gave her for the church.

Years before, in 1871, she saw herself in vision saying these words to people:

You are not familiar with the Scriptures. 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." She continued, "The Lord designs to warn you, to reprove, to counsel, through the testimonies given, and to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol 2, p. 605).

The specific counsels were all based on biblical principles and if people had studied their Bible and applied those principles they would not have needed many of the specific counsels that God gave to Ellen White. She is not saying here that her prophetic ministry would not have been needed, but rather the specific "testimonies" regarding lifestyle issues that should be guided by Bible principles.

In 1909, during her last address to a General Conference Session of the church, she opened the Bible, held it up before the congregation, and said, "Brethren and sisters, I commend to you this Book."

God gave the precious gift of prophecy to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to the world to connect us more strongly to Jesus and His Word through Ellen G. White's writings and ministry. If you read her writings you will be connected to the Bible and to Jesus in a powerful and living way.

Conclusion

The writings of Ellen White are a precious gift from God and remain a particular blessing to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but also to the world at large. The identity of the church and its mission is closely tied to accepting the writings and ministry of Ellen G. White. We must faithfully heed the precious truth and guidance God has given through the Spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus. To the degree we follow God's truth in the Bible, and seek His guidance through the writings of Ellen White, to that degree we will be blessed and successful in reaching the world with the everlasting gospel. Ellen White wrote: "My books will testify when my voice shall no longer be heard. The truths committed to me, as the Lord's messenger, stand immortalized, either to convict and to convert souls, or to condemn those who have departed from the faith and have given heed to seducing spirits" (Letter 350, 1906). The light still shines into millions of hearts around the world through the working of the Holy Spirit, to those who read and connect to Jesus through the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

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