

## Denton. E. Rebok on the Relationship of Ellen White to the Bible: 1956

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### *Believe His Prophets* (1956)

From chapter 10—"The Relation of Ellen G. White to the Bible"

The relation of Ellen G. White to the Bible is one of the most important of the studies in this series. We have tried to indicate in the studies that have gone before that our concern is over three fundamental points of faith: (1) that we thoroughly understand and believe that God is; (2) that we thoroughly understand and believe that the Bible is God's word; and (3) that we thoroughly understand, and have no question whatsoever, that in giving us this Book, God spoke through men called prophets.

If we are satisfied and convinced on these three facts of faith, then we have no reason to doubt anything else concerning the Spirit of prophecy for today. These three facts are absolutely fundamental, and we must have no question or uncertainty whatsoever regarding them. Having established these three facts in our own minds, and having come to a conclusion that they are indeed facts on which the Christian faith is established, then we cannot doubt that God did use men and women as His spokesmen, as His servants, as His messengers.

I take for granted that in the Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world most certainly no one would openly deny and defy God and His simple declaration of the fact that He has chosen to speak to men by His holy men called prophets. This is basic and fundamental. The question we have raised in this study is simply this: "Was Ellen G. White used by God as His prophet or messenger in the remnant church?" This we have studied, and we think sufficient evidence has been produced to satisfy every one of us that she was indeed chosen by God, and was for seventy years used by Him as His messenger, and that He gave her revelations, which she faithfully wrote out and which are now published for us to read.

Having accepted Ellen G. White as one of God's messengers, and believing that she manifested the gift of prophecy, then we must decide on the relationship of her writings to the Bible. And this, we say again, is a rather difficult question for some of our people. What position can we safely take? Some people tend to be away over on one extreme, while some tend to be over on the opposite extreme; and some like to follow far behind, while others try to run far ahead! The question for me is, Where shall I stand? I have already stated that I have taken my personal stand right beside Ellen G. White on all these questions. I do not intend to be too far to the right or too far to the left; neither do I wish to lag behind or to run ahead of her. I am determined to stand right beside her. Then I know I shall be safe on every issue.

A few Seventh-day Adventists are inclined to give the impression that Ellen G. White's writings are on a par with the Bible, and a very few tend to set the Scriptures aside and give first place in their study to the books written by Sister White. Without doubt the very free use we make of paragraphs and sentences from her writings in our sermons and Sabbath school lessons has given rise to the accusation from our critics that we make of these writings a second Bible. However, to properly understand how Seventh-day Adventists as a group or as a church regard the writings of Ellen G. White, we should turn first to Mrs. White herself and find out the relation she saw between her writings and the Bible, and then examine statements by the leaders

of the denomination as to the relation they see between the Bible and Mrs. White's writings.

### **Ellen G. White Exalted the Scriptures**

No clearer statement can be found from the pen of Ellen G. White concerning the relationship of her writings to the Scriptures than the words with which she closed her first book (*Experiences and Views*) in 1851:

“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.” *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, p. 64; reprinted in *Early Writings*, p. 78.

All through her life she exalted the Word of God. Her last words to the General Conference in session were spoken in 1909 as she held the Bible extended on her hands:

“I commend unto you this Book.” W. A. Spicer, *Certainties of the Advent Movement*, p. 202.

Again and again she reiterated the truth of the supremacy of the Word of God:

“I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible. Men arise who think they find something to criticize in God's word. They lay it bare before others as evidence of superior wisdom....

“Brethren, let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible.... Men should let God take care of His own Book, His Living Oracles, as He has done for ages.... Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the word, and not one of you will be lost....

“Men of humble acquirements, possessing but limited capabilities and opportunities to become conversant in the Scriptures, find in the Living Oracles comfort, guidance, counsel, and the plan of salvation as clear as a sunbeam. No one need be lost for want of knowledge, unless he is willfully blind.

“We thank God that the Bible is prepared for the poor man as well as for the learned man. It is fitted for all ages and all classes.” *Manuscript 16*, 1888, quoted in F. M. Wilcox, *The Testimony of Jesus*, pp. 13-15.

“God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired word to finite man. This word arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world; bequeathed to them, that by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven.” *Ibid.*, p. 13.

“The truth of God is found in His word. Those who feel that they must seek elsewhere for present truth need to be converted anew. They have wrong habits to mend, evil ways to be abandoned. They need to seek anew the truth as it is in Jesus, that their character building may be in harmony with the lessons of Christ. As they abandon their human ideas and take up their God-given duties, beholding Christ and becoming conformed to His likeness, they say: ‘Nearer, my God, to Thee; nearer to Thee.’” *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 192.

“Brother J would confuse the mind by seeking to make it appear that the light God has given through the Testimonies is an addition to the word of God, but in this he presents the matter in a false light. God has seen fit in this matter to bring the minds of His people to His word, to give them a clearer understanding of it.” *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 246.

“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.*, p. 323.

For further study on this phase of the topic, kindly read the following references:

*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 384; *Gospel Workers*, p. 249; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 392; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 77; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 454, 455, 605- 607; vol. 5, pp. 665-667, 674; vol. 6, pp. 402, 403; Introduction to *The Great Controversy*.

From her own statements we may conclude that Ellen G. White believed—

1. That the entire Bible is the Inspired Word of God.
2. That men should “cling” to their Bibles.
3. That men should believe and obey the Bible and “not one” of them would be lost.
4. That in the Bible is found “comfort, guidance, counsel, and the plan of salvation as clear as a sunbeam.”
5. That the Bible is fitted for the needs of all—rich and poor, learned and illiterate, “all ages and all classes.”
6. That the “truth of God is found in His Word.”
7. That no one need “seek elsewhere for present truth.”
8. That the Bible contains all that a man needs for salvation.
9. That the Bible sets forth the pattern for Christian living.
10. That the Testimonies were given only because man has neglected his Bible, and that the Testimonies will direct him back to his Bible. They are not given as “an addition to the word of God,” or to take the place of that Word of God.

These ten conclusions are all held by men of the past and men of the present who have been most diligent and serious students of the Spirit of prophecy. Now let me introduce one other thought: If all these conclusions are true, did Ellen G. White ever claim to have given Seventh-day Adventists their doctrinal teaching? their system of theology? Did she ever give us

our prophetic interpretations? Did she claim that her writings would supplant all other writings that had to do with the Scriptures and prophetic interpretations? The answer to all these questions is No.

The reason I think that you and I should know what she said, and how she related herself to our doctrines, is this: Too many people today are accusing us as Adventists of having a second Bible, or of setting the Bible aside and using only the red books, as her writings are sometimes called. That accusation probably comes from the fact that many of us, teachers and preachers, use the writings of the Spirit of prophecy in our Sabbath school teaching, in our Sabbath sermons, in much of our writings, because we love the way she expresses her thoughts and the beautiful language in which they are couched. Consequently, many people have taken the attitude that we are setting the Bible aside and using the writings of Ellen G. White in place of the Scriptures. This is not true. The denomination has never done it.

### **Spirit of Prophecy Relationship to Development of Doctrine**

Someone may say, "Is it not a fact that we Adventists got our fundamental doctrines and interpretations of prophecy from the writings of Ellen G. White?"

There is but one answer—No. We did not do so in the past and we cannot do so today. Our doctrines came from the Bible, and then were confirmed by God in the revelations given to Mrs. White. As to interpretations of prophecy, L. E. Froom, in his four volumes, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, has proved conclusively that Seventh-day Adventists have made but few contributions in this field. Nowhere does Ellen G. White claim the right or distinction to any original interpretations of prophecy. That was not her burden or her message.

In 1848 and 1849 the earnest group of Sabbath-observing Adventists came together in a series of Bible conferences. They met in such places as Rocky Hill, Connecticut, April 20-24, 1848; Volney, New York, beginning August 18, 1848, in "Brother Arnold's barn"; Port Gibson, New York, August 27 and 28, in "Hiram Edson's barn"; Rocky Hill, Connecticut, September 8 and 9; and Topsham, Maine, October 20-22, in "Brother Howland's house."

The record states that when they first came together for such study, "hardly two agreed. Each was strenuous for his views." *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 97.

Sister White says:

"I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the word.... When they came to the point in their study where they said, 'We can do nothing more,' the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively." *Special Testimonies, Series B*, No. 2, p. 57.

Of great significance are these words:

"During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the scriptures we were

studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I was in this condition of mind until all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds, in harmony with the word of God. The brethren knew that when not in vision, I could not understand these matters, and they accepted as light direct from heaven the revelations given.”*Ibid.*

Without a doubt God intended it to be that way, for the doctrinal truths held by Seventh-day Adventists thus come from the Bible and not from Ellen G. White.

Be not mistaken, dear friends, no Christian group in the world has a more closely knit, more carefully integrated, system of theology than do Seventh-day Adventists. Our doctrines come from the Bible. They came through men who diligently searched the Scriptures, and who put those doctrinal studies together in such a way that there seems to be no way of answering the argument. Did you know that Mrs. White kept the Sabbath for seven months before she had a vision relating to the Sabbath? And so it was with all our doctrines. They came from the Bible first, as noble men and women examined the Word of God. Visions were given which pointed out their errors in reasoning and confirmed their conclusions. Let it be clearly understood that Seventh-day Adventists did not get their system of theology from the writings of Ellen G. White. Our system of theology comes from the Scriptures alone.

### **The Greater Light and the Lesser Light**

In order that there may be no mistake in the relation of the writings of Ellen G. White to the Bible, God impressed this fact upon her mind by a dream that she had on April 3, 1871. Concerning it she wrote:

“I seemed to be attending an important meeting, at which a large company were assembled....

“I took the precious Bible and surrounded it with several Testimonies for the Church, given for the people of God. Here, said I, the cases of nearly all are met. The sins they are to shun are pointed out. The counsel that they desire can be found here, given for other cases situated similarly to themselves. God has been pleased to give you line upon line and precept upon precept. But there are not many of you that really know what is contained in the *Testimonies*. 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....

“The *Testimonies* are not to belittle the word of God, but to exalt it and attract minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all.”*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 664, 665.

There is one other statement that seems to set forth Mrs. White's own attitude and certainly leaves no room for doubt or uncertainty in the matter:

“Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.”— *The Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903, p. 15. (Italics supplied.)

We should close this section with the most solemn words she ever wrote on the subject:

“In the Bible the will of God is revealed to His children. Wherever it is read, in the family circle, the school, or the church, all should give quiet and devout attention as if God were really present and speaking to them.”*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 84.

### **What Others Have Said of the Relation of the Testimonies to the Bible**

Ellen G. White leaves us with no doubt as to her own attitude toward the Bible. Now it becomes necessary to discover the attitude of her brethren, and the relation they saw between those writings and the Bible.

James White reproduced in the *Review and Herald* of October 16, 1855, what he had first stated in a tract in 1847. He said:

“The Bible 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 fulfillment of his word, in these last days, by dreams and visions, according to Peter's testimony. True visions are given to lead us to God, and to his written word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the Bible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected.”Page 61.

He then quotes from another of his articles on the gifts of the gospel church:

“Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position.”*Ibid.*

In the February 28, 1856, issue of the *Review*, James White was laboring to correct the attitude of our people on the same topic. He stated his position and viewpoint in these words:

“The Word should be in front, and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom, from which to learn duty in ‘all good works.’ But if a portion of the church err from the truths of the Bible, and become weak and sickly, and the flock become scattered, so that it seems necessary for God to employ the Gifts of the Spirit to correct, revive and heal the erring, we should let Him work. Yea more, we should pray for Him to work and plead earnestly that He would work by the Spirit's power, and bring the scattered sheep to His fold. Praise the Lord, He will work. Amen.”Page 173.

J. N. Andrews was highly respected by our people in the early years of our work. He must have represented a prevailing attitude in 1870 when he wrote:

“1. We understand that the Holy Scriptures are divinely inspired, and that they contain the

truth of God which is able to make us wise unto salvation.

“2. But we do not understand that the gift of the Scriptures to mankind, supersedes the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God.

“3. On the contrary, we do believe that the Scriptures plainly reveal the office and work of the Holy Spirit; which office and work can never cease while man remains upon probation.

“4. This work is revealed to us in the Bible doctrine of spiritual gifts.

“5. While therefore we do heartily accept the Scriptures as teaching man's whole duty toward God, we do not deny the Holy Spirit that place in the church which the Scriptures assign to it....

“8. The work of the Holy Spirit may be divided into two parts: First, that which is designed simply to convert and to sanctify the person affected by it. Second, that which is for the purpose of opening the truth of God, and of correcting error, and of reproof and rebuking secret sins. This part of the work is wrought by what the Scriptures term spiritual gifts....

“13. Now the Bible expressly teaches that the existence of these gifts is as necessary to the church of Christ, as the different members are necessary to the well-being of the body. While, therefore, the Bible recognizes the gifts of the Spirit, these are not given to supersede the Bible, nor yet to fill the same place as the Bible....

“16. ... We hold that all the tests presented in the Bible should be applied to the gifts, and that they should be found to sustain the test of such examination....

“19. One of the chief gifts of the Spirit of God that he has placed in the New-Testament church is the gift of prophecy.”*The Review and Herald*, Feb. 15, 1870, pp. 64, 65.

In 1874 G.I. Butler wrote:

“They [the visions] everywhere direct us to the Scriptures as the great source of true instruction, and to the example of Jesus Christ as the true pattern. They never claim to be given to take the place of the Bible, but simply to be a manifestation of one of those spiritual gifts set in the church by its divine Lord; and as such should have their proper weight.”*Ibid.*, June 9, 1874, p. 202.

And again, in 1883, he said:

“The majority of our people believe these visions to be a genuine manifestation of spiritual gifts, and as such to be entitled to respect. We do not hold them to be superior to the Bible, or in one sense equal to it. The Scriptures are our rule to test everything by, the visions as well as all other things. That rule, therefore, is of the highest authority; the standard is higher than the thing tested by it. If the Bible should show the visions were not in harmony with it, the Bible would stand, and the visions would be given up. This shows plainly that we hold the Bible the highest, our enemies to the contrary, notwithstanding.”*The Review and Herald Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, p. 12.

By 1887, Uriah Smith spoke out with great positiveness on this subject. We do well to ponder his words and follow his reasoning:

“As to the relation of the visions to the word of God, our position is, and ever has been, the same as set forth in the work ‘Objections to the Visions Answered,’ published in 1868. In that work (p. 127) we said:

“Some one may say, Then you make the visions a second New Testament, a Mormon Bible in your system. We do not, as the following reason will show: We have ever held, as set forth in this work, that the word of God, the Bible, is the standard by which to test all these manifestations. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” All gifts of the Spirit in the church, must be thus tested. Now it is evident that that which tests occupies a higher position than that which is tested by it. This, in one word, expresses our view of the relative position which the Bible and the visions sustain to each other. But when a manifestation accords with the Word, and gives every evidence that it is a genuine manifestation of the Spirit of God, we submit it to the objector himself to say how far we may regard it lightly, or despise or transgress its teachings with impunity.”*Ibid.*, Oct. 1887, p. 649.

In March, 1888, G. I. Butler, still president of the General Conference, gave a series of talks to the students in Battle Creek College. As is our custom today in presenting the nature and work of the Spirit of prophecy in the remnant church, he gave an opportunity for questions. One of them had to do with the topic under consideration and expressed a denominational viewpoint in that year:

“Question 14. I have heard individuals say that if they were obliged to give up the Bible or the testimonies, they would give up the Bible. Is it right to make such statements, especially before those who have no knowledge of the visions?”

“Answer. I should say it is very unwise and very wrong to make such a statement as that. I believe that the testimonies are from God, because they agree with the Bible—with the rule it gives by which to test such things. I believe them, perhaps, as strongly as any one; but I have never said and never expect to say that the testimonies are to be placed superior to the Bible, or even equal to the Bible.... But the thing which tests is superior to the thing tested. The Bible is the standard. And that which comes up to the standard we ought to accept. But to go so far as to say, ‘I would give up the Bible before the testimonies,’ is a very wrong statement to make. And if any one says the testimonies contradict the Bible, I should advise him to cling to the Bible; for the Bible should be the test by which everything is tried.

“Our enemies make great cavil of this, just because of some such unguarded, foolish statements. Do not do it. Such persons are but little short of being fanatical.”Talks to the Students of the “Special Course” at Battle Creek College, White Publications Document File, 105ff.