

# **EGW and Hermeneutics: Take ALL That the Prophets Says Before Drawing Your “Bottom-Line” Conclusion**

## **Introduction:**

The question often raised is how can EGW, who lived most of her life and did most of her writing in the 19th Century, be relevant to the 21st Century.

The solution to the problem is to apply the following rule: Take all that the prophet has said, upon whatever subject is under investigation, before drawing a “bottom-line” conclusion. This will help one to:

1. Achieve balance and avoid distortion--the guiding purpose of hermeneutics. (7BC 336, 337)
2. Avoid “going off on a tangent”: A single statement, taken alone, may lead only to an abstraction, thereby proving deceptive by not adequately explicating the prophet’s position and intended message.

## **I. Background:**

The Biblical precedent undergirding this hermeneutical principle is “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little.” (Isa. 28: 10, cf. v. 13)

### **A. Topics Upon Which EGW Was Totally Silent:**

1. **Cinema Films (Movies) and Videos:** The first Hollywood feature film produced was D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the year of EGW’s death.
2. **Radio Programs:** The first radio program broadcast was made on Nov. 2, 1920.
3. **Television Programs:** The first program broadcast on commercial television was made in 1939.
4. **Chemical/Mechanical Contraception (Birth Control):** Although the first serious scientific study of contraception was undertaken in 1882, commercially available products were not introduced until after 1960.
5. **Abortion:** This was not the pressing public-policy issue in her day that it has become today. There is only one reference to infanticide in her writing.
6. **Cremation:** The issue was not generally discussed in her day.
7. **Organ Transplants:** This surgery was not available in her day, and she had nothing to say concerning either the procedure or the bioethical considerations involved.

### **B. Topics Upon Which EGW Wrote Comparatively Little:**

1. **Life Insurance:** There is only one statement from her on this subject, written in 1867 (1T 549-51). The insurance industry in her day was corrupt and fraud-ridden, unregulated by any government agency. Today, it is probably the most regulated.
2. **Wedding Band:** There is only one statement, written in 1892, just after EGW arrived in Australia (TM 180, 181).
3. **The Two Special Resurrections of Jesus:**
  - a. On Easter Sunday (Matt. 27:51-53; Eph. 4:8; DA 785-87, 833, 834; EW 184, 185, 208; GC 18, 667; 1SM 304-8)
    - (i) Matthew and Paul give eight facts or identification concerning those who were raised.
    - (ii) EGW gives 10 additional facts. Her contribution is extra-Biblical information--in addition to that found in the Bible. It is not, however, contrary to what the Bible reveals.
  - b. Immediately prior to the Second Coming: (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 26:64; Rev. 1:7; 14:13; EW 285; GC 637). EGW identifies three categories of individuals, two of

which will be brought back to life only temporarily. (Two groups are identified in Scripture; one is extra-Biblical):

- (i) SDAs who had died since 1844, under the Third Angel's Message, keep the Sabbath.
- (ii) The unsaved crucifiers of Jesus.
- (iii) The most violent opposers of Christ and His kingdom in all ages.

**C. Topics Upon Which EGW Wrote Much:**

**1. The Holy Spirit**

The *Comprehensive Index* to the EGW writings lists 38 sub-categories, in 59 columns of references.

**2. Jesus Christ**

There are 50 different sub-categories, in 174 columns of references in the *Comprehensive Index*.

**II. Case Study Approaches**

**A. The Wrath of God (Does God Kill Sinners?)**

- 1. Some have claimed that God does not kill sinners, citing the following EGW references to support their views:
  - a. "God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself." (COL 84:4)
  - b. "Like Israel of old the wicked destroy themselves . . ." (GC 37:1)
- 2. The doctrine dealing with this subject is known among theologians as "The Wrath of God." The Bible clearly teaches that God has and will kill sinners.
  - a. Isaiah speaks of it repeatedly:
    - (i) "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it" (Isa. 13:9).
    - (ii) "For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity . . ." (26:21).
    - (iii) "For the Lord shall rise up . . . , He shall be wroth . . . , that He may do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act." (28:21).
  - b. Other Bible writers speak frankly and clearly about God's destruction of humans created in His image but who defied the Lord of heaven:
    - (i) The flood of Noah's day
    - (ii) The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
    - (iii) The breaking down of the walls and the destruction of the city of Jericho.
  - c. The Bible declares that He will destroy the living wicked at Christ's 2nd Coming and all of the wicked after the 3rd Coming (at the end of the Millennium), in the executive phase of His judgment.
- 3. EGW affirms the clear testimony of the Scriptures:
  - a. The flood: In 1876, the question of whether God was responsible for the death of the wicked antediluvians was raised in various SDA circles. EGW wrote a seven-page manuscript, "The Days of Noah," (MS 5, 1876) the last five pages of which have been compiled into "But God Drowned the Vast World".
  - b. Jericho: "God's judgments were awakened against Jericho . . . The Captain of the Lord's Host [Jesus] Himself came from heaven to lead the armies of heaven in an attack upon the city" (3T 264:1).
  - c. After the Close of Probation:

- (i) "The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits." (GC 614:2)
  - (ii) "Then I was shown that the seven last plagues will be poured out, after Jesus leaves the sanctuary. Said the angel, 'It is the wrath of God and [of] the Lamb that causes the destruction or death of the wicked.'" (*Present Truth*, Nov., 1850; cited in 1 Bio 189:4)
4. How then do we explain the seemingly contradictory statements in COL 84:4 and GC 37:1?
- a. An examination of the internal context of these two statements reveals that EGW was not there addressing the question of whether or not it is God who does the killing, but, rather, whether or not He can be considered guilty of murder, for doing acts that the Bible and EGW declare He has done before and will do again.
  - b. The thrust of her argument is: God is not guilty of murder, for in the case of murder the victim has no option, no choice, but to suffer the intent of the killer. But God freely offers life or death to each human being, upon certain clearly stated conditions: the sinner has an alternate choice, a way to avoid death.
  - c. If men deliberately embark upon a course of action which God has already decreed will bring them personal destruction, their punishment comes simply as a cause/effect consequence; in that sense, the sinners are themselves guilty of destroying themselves because, in the end, they reap what they have sown. "In the laws of God in nature, effect follows cause with unerring certainty. The reaping will testify as to what the sowing has been." (COL 84:2)

**B. Are Eggs To Be Excluded from the Diet of All SDAs?**

1. In a sermon in the Battle Creek Tabernacle on March 6, 1869, EGW raised the question of inconsistency in the practice of health reform as compared to the daily living of the Christian life:
- You place upon your table butter, eggs, and meat, and your children partake of them, . . . and then you come to meeting and ask God to bless and save your children. How high do [you think] your prayers go? (2T 362)
2. That same year she also wrote a letter to a "Brother and Sister E" in which she focused upon one particularly serious problem in the home involving their two adolescent sons. ("Sensuality in the Young," 2T 390-411)
- In it she stated: "Eggs should not be placed upon your table." Why? "They are an injury to your children." (2T 400)
3. This raises the question: Is "your table" to be understood in the singular, referring specifically to the table of Brother and Sister E, or does "your table" refer, collectively, to the tables of all SDAs?
4. An analysis of what she has said in other situations shows that at least for her day the use of eggs was not banned across-the-board by Ellen White, for elsewhere, she wrote of a "beneficial" use of eggs.
- (i) "In some cases the use of eggs is beneficial." (7T 135)
  - (ii) "In some cases of persons whose blood-making organs are feeble [e.g., anemia] . . . milk and eggs should not be wholly discarded." (MH 320)
  - (iii) "While warnings have been given . . . , yet we should not consider it a violation of principle to use eggs from hens that are well cared for and suitably fed. Eggs contain properties that are remedial agencies in counteracting certain poisons" in the body. (9T 162)
5. What then precipitated this 1869 warning to Brother and Sister E?
- (i) An examination of the internal context reveals that both of the adolescent sons in the "E" family were unable to keep their sexual passions under control and were practicing masturbation.
  - (ii) God had revealed to EGW, as today's sexual hygienists and sexual physiologists have since discovered, that eggs rank high in effectiveness on any scientifically-based inventory of aphrodisiacs (substances which tend to arouse human sexual desire).

(iii) What EGW was saying was, as far as the control of sexual appetite is concerned, if one has a problem here, he/she should not unnecessarily aggravate the situation by using substances which generally tend to do just that.

6. Attempting to bring in balance, EGW, while continuing to advocate the discontinuance of flesh-foods, tea, and coffee, nevertheless held that urging abstinence of dairy products (milk, cream, and butter) and poultry products (eggs) by all was still too far at that time. However, “the time will come” when we will need to exclude from the diet all animal products; but “when the time comes . . . God will reveal this. No extremes in health reform are to be advocated.” (Letter 37, 1901, in CD 358, 359)

### C. Is It a Sin to Eat Desserts?

Regarding the eating of desserts at a meal, many of EGW’s counsels focus upon two problems:

1. Excessive use of sugar:

- a. Far too much sugar is ordinarily used in our food preparation. (CD 113)
- b. Sugar, when used “largely,” is more injurious to the body than even ingestion of flesh meats. (2T 368-70)
- c. Because of the danger of excess sugar use, EGW was opposed to the use of many pastries, again indicating that a meat diet was the lesser of two evils because of potentially serious injury that could be caused by too-generous intake of sweet-cakes and pastries. (CD 334, 410, 411)

2. Undesirable Combination of Certain Foods:

Especially harmful, she added, were foods in which milk, eggs, and sugar were combined in preparation; and the “free use” of milk and sugar, especially, should be avoided. (CD 311)

3. However, a careful survey of all she wrote upon the subject provides a more balanced perspective:

- a. While EGW eschewed a large use of sugar, she did not ban it from her table. Her own dish of applesauce was artificially sweetened in the kitchen before it was brought to her table. (CD 330)
- b. A moderate amount of milk/sugar combinations is acceptable, as also plain cakes with raisins, and rice pudding with raisins, which she recommended as an acceptable dessert. (2T 383, 384)
- c. Lemon, pie, which requires an egg/sugar combination was not forbidden as a dessert for sanitarium-patient meals. (CD 334) EGW herself occasionally ate lemon pie. (CD 491)

4. She strongly recommended that desserts be placed on the family table at the same time as other main course dishes so that one can better gauge the total intake of food for the meal as a whole. (CD 334)

### III. Other Topics Suitable for This Hermeneutical Approach:

1. Was Christ’s human nature like that of Adam before or after the fall?
2. Was the atonement complete at the cross (31 A.D. or only the sacrifice of Christ)?
3. Is it permissible for SDA women to wear “slacks” on appropriate occasions, or do they come under the Mosaic ban against women wearing anything that “pertaineth to a man” (Deut. 22:5)?
4. Does God really desert the willful sinner?
5. Since “cooking” on the Sabbath is discouraged by EGW, is it permissible to warm up food on that day?