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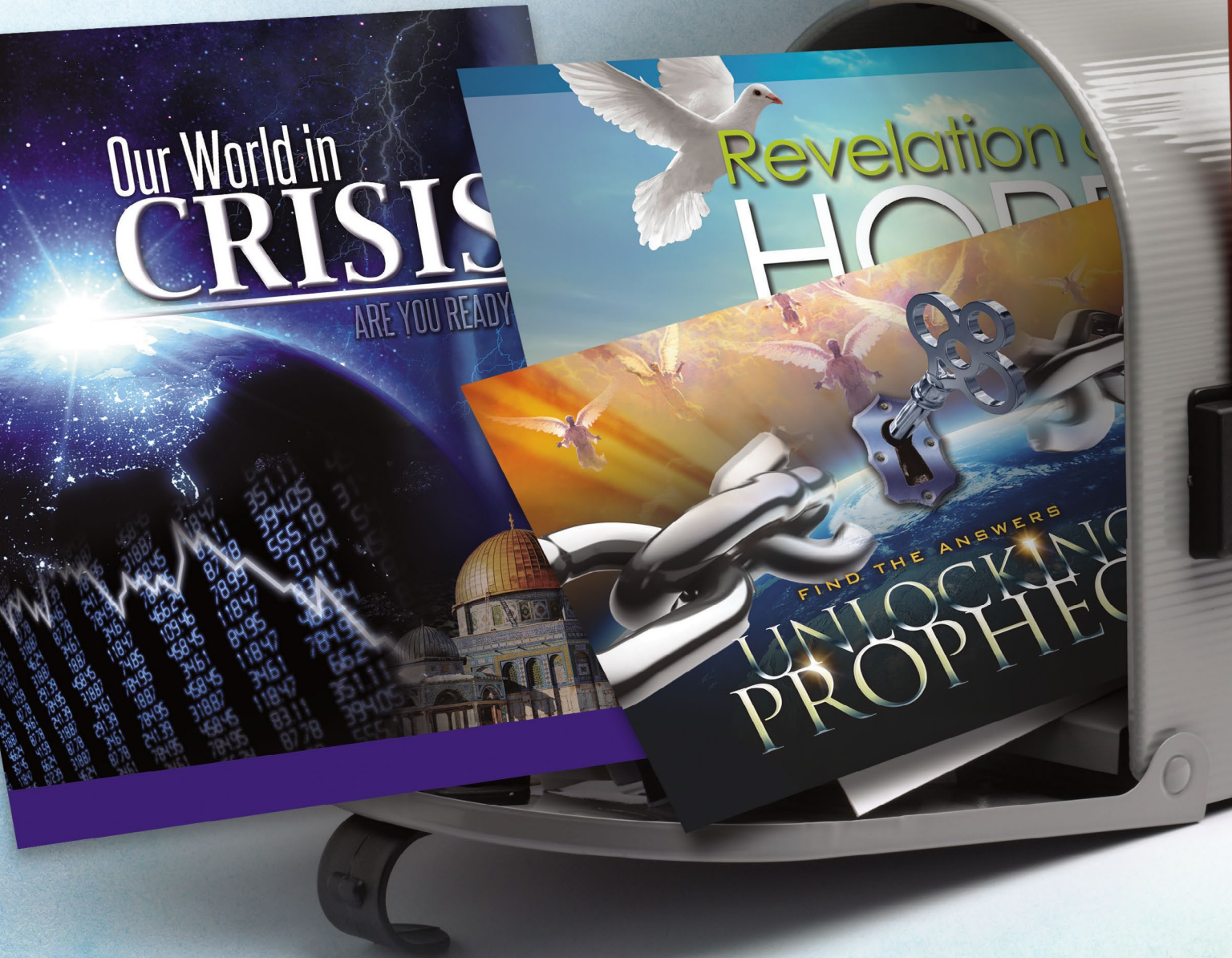


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“... if men become members of the royal family in heaven, it will be because heaven has begun with them on earth.”

Parables and principles

Regarding the article “Sheep, Goats, and Social Programs of the Church: An Interpretation of Matthew 25:31–46” (August 2016), the author says, referring to the more common literal interpretation, “Not rejecting this sound and plausible interpretation, let us look for another possible meaning of Matthew 25:31–46.” And, his other meaning has good spiritual meaning.

When we try to find the “possible meaning” of a Bible statement, we, of course, should seriously shy away from changing the Bible intent. Here are a few of Ellen G. White’s statements explaining this parable, none of which agree with Brother Petrishchev’s different interpretation. “‘And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats’ Matthew 25:32. The judgment scene will take place in the presence of all the worlds; for in this judgment the government of God will be vindicated, and His law will stand forth as ‘holy, and just, and good.’ Then every case will be decided, and sentence will be passed upon all. Sin will not then appear attractive, but will be seen in all its hideous magnitude.

“‘And before him shall be gathered all nations.’ . . . Every deed, small and great, is to be brought into recognition. That which has been considered trivial

here will then appear as it is. . . . And that unfulfilled duty, that selfish act, will not be forgotten. In the open court around the throne of God it will appear a very different thing from what it did when it was performed.

“The character which we now manifest is deciding our future destiny. The happiness of heaven will be found by conforming to the will of God, and if men become members of the royal family in heaven, it will be because heaven has begun with them on earth.”* I, personally, suspect that the opposition to the more literal meaning of the parable in Matthew 25:31–46 is due to the fact that it “sounds” very much like “salvation by works.” This introduces another serious issue.

Actually, the intelligent Christian will understand that, from God’s great insight, “works” only reflect the thoughts of the mind, which we can interpret as “character.” In fact, “deeds” are absolutely interconnected with the thoughts of the heart, and thus “connected” with salvation. And, only Christ can change these thoughts. Thus, in Matthew 25, it is only referring to those who have allowed Jesus to change their hearts. It is this change that is necessary for salvation.

Since Jesus does the changing, it cannot be called “salvation by our works.” So, this is talking about a change of heart by the Holy Spirit, as

is mentioned in John 3:5, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Jesus goes on to explain this change in verses 19 to 21. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

Since “deeds” only reflect the condition of the “heart,” Jesus could just as easily have said to the sheep in Matthew 25, “I see that you have allowed me to change your hearts so that you can do genuine good deeds, therefore, I now save you.” It is the “changed heart,” or “changing heart,” that Jesus chooses to save.

So, the “deeds” reflect the thoughts of the heart. That is why the “deeds,” or “works,” can be judged in the final judgment. They must, of course be “genuine” deeds, coming from a changed heart. And, we can add, if the “works” are not there, then the heart has not been changed. So, this “changed heart” will reach out and touch others of every walk of life.

—Fred Ellis, Vale, Oregon, United States

* Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), 361.

Author response

I appreciate your careful reading of the article and expressing your opinion, which I found very valuable. In fact, I agree with almost everything that you say.

As you noticed, and even quoted me on, the interpretation I suggested was not a different one—it was rather a complementary one. I did not invent

Continued on page 14

Dwain N. Esmond, MA, is an associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Calling All Shepherds

She approached with the piercing gaze of one who would not be denied. In my ministry I have met people who left indelible marks on me, for one reason or another. I was certain that another of these defining moments was in the offing.

“Pastor Esmond, may I have a word with you?” she began.

“Of course you may,” I warmly responded, while bracing myself for what might come next.

“We have a problem here in Africa. Extremism over the writings of Ellen White is causing major problems among church members.” With that statement she had my undivided attention.

I had traveled to Africa (July 2016) to attend a gift of prophecy symposium titled *The Bible, The Spirit of Prophecy, and the Church*, the first of its kind on the continent. The gathering was a monumental success, drawing leaders from every strata of the church in an effort to affirm and clarify the role of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in the liturgy and life of the church. It was here that I met this dear sister, who I later learned was a trained theologian and director of the women and children’s ministry departments for one of Kenya’s two populous unions.

Her story so affected me that I asked whether I could record her. “Absolutely,” she intoned. What followed was deeply troubling. She spoke of parents whose misunderstanding of the Nazirite vow found in Numbers 6:1–21 led them to restrict the diet and hygiene of their children; of people living in urban centers whose refusal to eat any processed foods had rendered them nutritionally deficient and sick. She lamented the plight of college students dropping out of school—in some

cases medical school—because they were “following Ellen White’s counsel.” Example after example highlighted gross misunderstandings of biblical and Spirit of Prophecy imperatives—especially those on health. Leaders from across the continent echoed this sister’s concerns and pled for some way to address them.


Lest we in the West look askance at fanaticism in pockets of Africa, we face the more sobering challenge of extreme apathy toward Ellen’s White writings. The 2013 Global Church Member Survey found that while many Adventists have a favorable view of Ellen White, few actually read her writings, especially Adventists in Western nations. A study of alumni from Seventh-day Adventist colleges in North America reported that 61 percent agreed that “The writings of Ellen White had been a positive influence in my life,” but only 21 percent were reading her writings more than once a week.¹ We have work to do, do we not?

It is undeniable that lack of access to translated materials has something to do with uniformed views of Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, but something else is afoot: Satan is determined to undermine confidence in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. He fans the flames of extremism while simultaneously blowing the zephyrs of indifference. Both extremes rob God’s church of His counsel at a perilous time in Earth’s history.

Many years ago Ellen White wrote, “Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions.”² Of his efforts against the Holy Spirit’s work, she added: “He will bring in spurious

Leaders from across the continent echoed this sister’s concerns and pled for some way to address them.

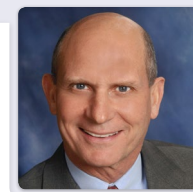
visions to mislead, and will mingle the false with the true, and so disgust people that they will regard everything that bears the name of visions as a species of fanaticism; but honest souls, by contrasting false and true, will be enabled to distinguish between them.”³ Thank God for the consolation that honest seekers of truth will be able to distinguish it.

As you read this issue, know that God is calling you to help make truth distinct and distinguishable. Let us embrace, live, and shepherd God’s truth so that His followers will know how to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). 

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- 1 The Global Church Member Survey (2013) was conducted by the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR). Dr. David Trim, director of ASTR, reported these and other findings at his 2013 presentation during the General Conference Annual Council.
 - 2 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1911), 593.
 - 3 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 78.

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Ted N. C. Wilson, PhD, is the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



Believe His prophets: Why I accept Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry¹

As we face the last days of earth's history, Satan will make a very determined effort to destroy the effectiveness of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. All around us we see the neutralization of God's authoritative Word. For example, note how the historical-critical method applied to the Word of God reduces its effectiveness at being authoritative. It is Satan's plan to undermine God's plain "Thus saith the Lord." We have seen and are seeing determined efforts on the part of individuals motivated by Satan to attack the Spirit of Prophecy and make it "of none effect." The Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy both are products of divine inspiration and are thus accurate accounts describing the great controversy between good and evil—between Christ and Satan. This is why Satan is determined to destroy the truth found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Thankfully, the devil will not succeed! However, in the process many will be deceived.

Against this background, God has given us a mandate to be defenders of His Word, which has been shown to be true and to change people's lives. We are to lead people back to the true worship of God, as the first angel of Revelation 14:6–12 emphasizes. It is our privilege to affirm God's wonderful truth through our witness and proclamation.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church accepts Ellen G. White as a modern servant of the Lord and as a prophet. This church would not be where it is without the special guidance God has given it through Ellen White in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy. The counsel given will help finish God's work on Earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is precisely why the devil is so intent on destroying the influence of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

In *Selected Messages*, book 2, we read: "The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. . . . Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony. He will bring in spurious visions to mislead, and will mingle the false with the true, and so disgust people that they will regard everything that bears the name of visions as a species of fanaticism; but honest souls, by contrasting false and true, will be enabled to distinguish between them."²

My testimony

Why do I accept Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry? Revelation 19:10 testifies that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. I believe that

the writings of Ellen G. White are the testimony of our Lord. They point us back to the sacred Word of God that assures us that Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, took on the form of a man and became the Word in flesh (John 1:1–3, 14; Phil. 2:5–11).

Seventh-day Adventists do not make the Spirit of Prophecy part of the Bible or equal to the Bible. As Ellen White herself indicated, the Spirit of Prophecy is to lead to the Bible. The Spirit of Prophecy is inspired by the same divine inspiration that inspired the Bible. Ellen White herself testifies: "Through His Holy Spirit the voice of God has come to us continually in warning and instruction, to confirm the faith of the believers in the Spirit of prophecy. Repeatedly the word has come, Write the things that I have given you to confirm the faith of My people in the position they have taken. Time and trial have not made void the instruction given, but through years of suffering and self-sacrifice have established the truth of the testimony given. The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days."³

I believe that the Spirit of Prophecy is one of God's greatest gifts to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It focuses on Christ and His Word, His

all-encompassing righteousness, His plan of salvation, His grace, and His ministry in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary. The Spirit of Prophecy portrays God's plan for His people living at this end time and points to Christ's imminent second coming.

Relevance of the Spirit of Prophecy today

The Spirit of Prophecy is as relevant today as it was when it was written. It is accurate, uplifting, instructive, and powerful as it points to Christ and the Holy Bible. It is truly the testimony of Jesus, and that's why I believe in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

Revelation 12:17 portrays the Spirit of Prophecy as one of the two character-

of Jesus. The fourth commandment identifies who God is and indicates our submission to our Creator, who in a recent act of creation, in six literal, consecutive days, created the earth by His word and then rested on the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is thus God's sign of authority and the seal of His people for eternity.

The first angel's call in Revelation 14:7 to worship God as the Creator places upon people the responsibility to observe the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial that honors His creative activity. A created being cannot honor the Creator while defying His command to keep holy the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath will be the focal point of conflict between good and evil during

the commandments of God, including the fourth, the second distinctive characteristic is that God's remnant church will have the testimony of Jesus, which is the "spirit of prophecy." The commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus, or the Spirit of Prophecy, come from the same source: God.

The Spirit of Prophecy was given to nurture and assist God's last-day movement with instruction from heaven. God used the Spirit of Prophecy to guide in the establishment of His remnant church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These people would love Him supremely and follow His commandments through His power. God is using the Spirit of Prophecy to prosper His last-day church into the growing



*The Spirit of Prophecy
portrays God's plan for His
people living at this end
time and points to Christ's
imminent second coming.*

istics of God's last-day, remnant church. "And the dragon [Satan] was enraged with the woman [God's church], and he went to make war with the rest [remnant] of her offspring [or seed—God's last-day people and church], who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."⁴

The two distinctive principles that characterize God's people are plain enough—keep the commandments of God, including the vital fourth commandment, and have the testimony

of Jesus.

the final time of trouble. "The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty; for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not."⁵ The Sabbath is a sign of our relationship with God and of our dependence on Him for creation and salvation.

If the first distinctive principle of the first angel's message is a call to obey

the commandments of God, including the fourth, the second distinctive characteristic is that God's remnant church will have the testimony of Jesus, which is the "spirit of prophecy." The commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus, or the Spirit of Prophecy, come from the same source: God.

The threat of indifference

One of the greatest threats against the Spirit of Prophecy today is not necessarily animosity but indifference. Today many members are unacquainted with it, do not read it, or just plain ignore it. In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 4, we read, "The volumes of the *Spirit of Prophecy* (forerunner of The

Conflict of the Ages series), and also the *Testimonies*, should be introduced into every Sabbathkeeping family, and the brethren should know their value and be urged to read them. . . . They should be in the library of every family and read again and again. Let them be kept where they can be read by many, and let them be worn out in being read by all the neighbors.”⁶ Similar instruction has been given that the Conflict of the Ages series “should be placed in every family in the land.”⁷

To accomplish this, various projects, including “Connecting With Jesus,” have been undertaken. They have circulated millions of Spirit of Prophecy books to the public and to church members around the world in printed and electronic form. We need to do much more. The rapid expansion of the Seventh-day Adventist Church demands that our members know in their own languages what Spirit of Prophecy counsel God has for His last-day church.

Growth and stability

The Spirit of Prophecy counsel has been instrumental in establishing publishing, health, education, humanitarian, and media institutions. It guides the pastoral, evangelistic, missionary, and administrative expansion of the church. It provides instruction in almost every aspect of life including theology, lifestyle, personal health, the family, the home, young people, interpersonal relationships, personal stewardship, and in many others. It is guiding God’s people and always will until the Lord returns. This is why I believe in Ellen G. White’s prophetic ministry.

Because of Spirit of Prophecy guidance, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just another denomination but a heaven-born movement with a special destiny—a mission and message to proclaim as found in Revelation 14:6–12—the three angels’ messages. *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, tells us: “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for

a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”⁸

No wonder Satan attacks the Spirit of Prophecy and its important counsel from God for His last-day remnant church. “There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them, for this reason: Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded.”⁹

Christ has called us to a prominent position as the “remnant,” a unique movement of destiny, standing firm for His truth, proclaiming the Advent message, bearing the testimony of Jesus, turning people’s eyes to Jesus who is the center of all truth, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, turning people back to the true worship of the true God.

Lifting up Jesus

I believe in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White because it lifts up Jesus: “Our faith increases by beholding Jesus, who is the center of all that is attractive and lovely. The more we contemplate the heavenly, the less we see desirable and attractive in the earthly. The more continually we fix the eye of faith on Christ, in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered, the more our faith grows.”¹⁰

Another powerful reason I believe in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White is its emphasis on unity. The devil knows that if he can get God’s people to look to themselves and their own opinions instead of looking to Christ that he will be able to bring in dissension, disunity, and tension. This has become one of his greatest tools against the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

God has called us to be participants in the greatest proclamation of truth in history—the culmination of the great

controversy between Christ and Satan. God has entrusted us with the task of sharing Christ, who lived a sinless life, died for us, rose again, is now interceding on our behalf as our High Priest, and is soon to return to take us to heaven. We are called to share the Word of God in all its power through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this heavenly calling, we will be confronted with people who will disagree with our message and mission. We may be tempted to become discouraged with the apathy of others within the church.

Whatever we may face, we should not be tempted to work independently and apart from the church. We are called to work within God’s last-day remnant church, not apart from it. Stay unified with your local church and with the worldwide church family. Stay close to the church regardless of its imperfections.

A compilation, *Counsels for the Church*, indicates, “God has a church upon the earth who are His chosen people, who keep His commandments. He is leading, not stray offshoots, not one here and one there, but a people.

“ . . . We are not to seek any strange, new message. We are not to think that the chosen ones of God who are trying to walk in the light compose Babylon.

“Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin. The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reprovved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon the earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard. . . .

“The church of God below is one with the church of God above. . . .

“ . . . God has bestowed the highest power under heaven upon His church. It is the voice of God in His united people in church capacity which is to be respected.”¹¹

The church is called to a great work—within and without. The shaking and sifting time is coming. The Lord will do His work. It is a preparation for

the loud cry that Christ has called us to proclaim. Lift up Christ and His Holy Word. Believe in the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy. As we do this under the Holy Spirit's guidance, we will be brought to complete humility at the foot of the cross and be involved in revival and reformation. God will do His work to fully prepare His people for the unbelievable events just ahead. This is why I believe in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

Practical reasons

A more practical reason why I believe in the Spirit of Prophecy is that I grew up in a home that held the Spirit of Prophecy in great respect. My father always spoke so positively and passionately about it. My mother gave such unflinching loyalty to God's Word and the Spirit of Prophecy. I never heard a scornful word or a disparaging remark from my parents about the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy. My wife, Nancy, grew up in a home with the same positive attitude. She loves to read daily the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy as do I. It has a tremendous influence in our home. I advanced from the early trust instilled in my heart by my parents to my own personal deep appreciation for the counsel, direction, and clarification in the Spirit of Prophecy. As I read the Spirit of Prophecy I accept its inspiration by God because it is the testimony of Jesus.


Let me share with you another practical reason why I believe in the Spirit of Prophecy. Around 1870, William immigrated to the United States from Ireland. He was of Scottish and Presbyterian background. He and his wife, Isabella, also from Ireland, lived for some time in Philadelphia, where he worked as an engineer building locomotives, and finally headed out west to the "big tree" area of northern California to do logging. He settled down near Healdsburg, becoming a fruit and cattle rancher, and ran a country store. He was not necessarily a highly religious person up to this time. William and Isabella had four sons. Isabella became a Seventh-day

Adventist, but William did not. In 1905, some tents were erected north of the Russian River near Healdsburg for a Seventh-day Adventist camp meeting. Isabella went to the camp meeting and invited her husband to come as well. As William sat under the tent, the speaker began to unfold the wonderful truth about Jesus, sharing the need of all sinners to have a Savior and allow Him to change their lives. The speaker made an earnest appeal, and much to the surprise of Isabella, William stood up and went to the front, giving his heart to the Lord. He studied this precious Advent message for a year. He closed his store on Sabbath and trusted God for the future. He was baptized, joining this remnant church, and later became the first elder of the Healdsburg Seventh-day Adventist Church, the forerunner location of Pacific Union College. Christ changed his life, and he became known as a generous man, helping people in need.

William and Isabella Wilson were my great-grandparents, and the speaker who preached so earnestly about Jesus at that camp meeting was Ellen G. White. She had purchased property in Healdsburg after James White died. My grandfather remembered Ellen White coming to their ranch home when he was a boy and how she lovingly told stories to him and his brothers as they sat at her feet. The Wilson family owes its knowledge of this precious Advent message to the direct practical and prophetic evangelistic activity of Ellen White. As a result, the Spirit of Prophecy takes on an even more personal value—another reason why I believe in the Spirit of Prophecy.

The writings of the Spirit of Prophecy are believable and true because Ellen White and her prophetic ministry pass the four biblical tests of a prophet. First, her writings agree with the Bible: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). Second, her life and works testify of her connection with God: "Therefore by their fruits you

will know them" (Matt. 7:20). Third, her prophecies have come to pass: "As for the prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent" (Jer. 28:9). Fourth, her writings lift up Christ and affirm Him as the Son of God who came to Earth to save us: "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). In addition, her life and work verified by physical manifestations during visions, the timeliness of her work at the end of time, the certainty and fearlessness of her pronouncements, the high spiritual plane of her work, and the practical nature of her explanations about multiple aspects of the Christian life stand out as testimony to the divine origin of her ministry.

It is, therefore, our responsibility to nurture and foster the belief in and the active use of the Spirit of Prophecy. God asks us to help people believe in the prophetic gift of the Spirit of Prophecy. Do not get discouraged by anyone deriding or mocking your belief in the inspiration of the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy. "Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20). 

- 1 Adapted from a sermon preached at the Spirit of Prophecy Symposium at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in October 2015 at Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 78.
- 3 White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 41.
- 4 All Scripture passages are from the New King James Version.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1907), 605.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 4:390, 391.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 479.
- 8 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:19.
- 9 White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 48.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1967), 127.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1991), 240-243.

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“My heart falters, fear makes me tremble” (Isaiah 21:4, NIV): Emotions and prophetic writings in the Bible

Emotions are an intricate part of what it means to be human. They are part of complex coping mechanisms installed by a Creator God whose own emotions are reflected in humanity’s creation in the *imago Dei*, the “image of God” (Gen. 1:27).¹ Joy, exuberance, anticipation, pleasure, delight, and happiness, must have all been part of God’s original make-up of humanity, for they characterize our existence today. We also experience, however, anger, sadness, sorrow, fear, depression, dejection, misery, and fury—emotions that became part of our emotive repertoire following the Fall in Genesis 3.²

Unfortunately, we have traditionally ignored the study of emotions in biblical research. As Paul Kruger puts it, “Emotions were for a long time regarded as part of the irrational, uncontrollable, and subjective aspects of humankind that do not justify serious study.”³

And yet, emotions are well worth a closer look. For, ultimately, they tell us about who we are, who God is, and how He deals with us. Let us take a look at this little-explored field of emotions by focusing on a special group of individuals, namely biblical prophets. We will use the biblical text and also

incorporate insights from cross-cultural psychology and the cognitive sciences as we explore the emotional world of biblical prophets.

God says “We are One”

As humans we were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26, 27).⁴ So we can assume that our emotions in some way reflect God’s emotions, even though ours are subject to sin while His are not. We do not believe in the duality of human beings, separating a body from an independent soul. Instead, we argue for a wholistic⁵ view of humanity, where emotions are an integral part of our overall existence.⁶ From the outset it would be important to reiterate the obvious: *prophets are and were people like you and me and brought all of their personhood into their prophetic office*. Before looking at the emotional involvement of the prophets in their ministry and writings, let us try to find out what emotions, in fact, are.

How emotions work

Emotions are intrinsically interconnected with our general make-up as human beings; thus, it can be difficult to define them. To complicate matters further, we experience emotions and

then also express emotions in the form of facial expressions as well as linguistic expressions—in verbal or physical expressions and in written forms.

Klaus Scherer provides a good working definition when he says an emotion is “an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism.”⁷

Let us unpack this working definition. Emotions are normally triggered by stimulus events. Sometimes another emotion is triggered or amplified by our evaluation of the event afterward. Emotions are also generated by thoughts and memories; these then react upon the mind processes and strengthen or inhibit certain mental process.⁸ It is even possible to generate an emotion by imagined representations.⁹

Emotions serve in a certain sense as relevance detectors. We generally get emotional about people and things that we care about. Emotions are also the biggest influence on behavior; they can interrupt a behavioral sequence and serve as the trigger for setting new goals and plans.¹⁰

Emotions impact communication and social interaction. The physical appearance, often involuntary, of facial expressions will lead to a reaction in one's conversation partner. Subtle changes in nonverbal expressions may indicate dissonance from verbal expressions and communication.¹¹

At this point it is important to distinguish between a mood and an emotion. Generally speaking, emotions are thought of as high intensity responses to stimulus events, whereas moods are "characterized by a relative enduring predominance of certain types of subjective feelings that affect the experience and behavior of a person."¹² It is normally difficult to identify a particular trigger for a mood.¹³ Often, combinations of physiological and environmental factors lead to a certain mood.

Finally, an emotion becomes more than a feeling. Emotions, while elusive and hard to define, do produce measurable differences in the central nervous system.¹⁴ Considering the close relationship between mind and emotions, let us now look at how emotions interact with inspiration.

Emotions and inspiration

A Seventh-day Adventist understanding of inspiration is based on the biblical evidence that God reveals Himself in a special way to certain individuals, who in turn, communicate His messages to others (1 Sam. 3:21-4:1; Isa. 22:14; Joel 2:28, 29; Matt. 11:27; Eph. 3:3, 4; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).¹⁵ The process of "divine self-disclosure encompasses a wide variety of revelatory experiences, such as visions and dreams, verbal communication, and panoramic views present 'past, present, and future.'¹⁶ Similarly, Peter van Bemmelen notes, "The biblical evidence . . . points to specific individuals, chosen by God, as the primary locus of the working of the Holy Spirit."¹⁷ Because we believe that the biblical authors were inspired (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17), the focus of the process of revelation and Inspiration is the prophet.¹⁸

Ellen White underlines this as well when she states that the prophet,

"under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind."¹⁹ Because of the close link between the mind and emotions, the emotions of a prophet play an important role in the inspirational process. Prophets are not passive mediums for the prophetic voice. They are emotionally involved in their calling and experience the full gamut of human emotions.

Expressions of emotions in the Bible

Although the Bible does not often directly address the thoughts and emo-

(Nah. 2:10, means literally "gathered paleness"); hair straightening (Job 4:14, 15); inability to move (Exod. 15:16); and inability to breathe (Dan. 10:17). Similarly, Kruger lists numerous metaphorical expressions involving anger, including the body as a container for anger (Isa. 30:27, Ezek. 38:18); increasing anger that produces steam (2 Sam. 22:9; Job 4:9); anger as fire (Isa. 30:27; Jer. 4:4; etc.); or anger as an opponent (Ps. 69:24) or a dangerous animal (Ezek. 43:8).²³ The positive emotion of joy can also be seen in distinct body parts. Joy makes a cheerful face (Prov. 15:13) and lights up the eyes (v. 30). Joy is also

When I do not care for my spiritual health, I am more easily discouraged and decreasingly optimistic about what God can accomplish. Pastors thrive on meaningful time rendered to the Lord.

tions of the prophets, their emotions are portrayed in a variety of ways. One of the most common ways of expressing emotions in the Bible is to speak of emotions as bodily occurrences.²⁰ Even in English, emotions are often talked of as "bodily" experiences. For example, we may say that on hearing bad news, "we went weak in the knees," or that a person's statement made "our blood boil."

Old Testament scholar Paul Kruger lists 19 physiological changes marking fear in the Hebrew Bible.²¹ They include physical agitation (such as "trembling"²² [Exod. 19:16]; "quivering" [Exod. 15:15]; "shaking" [Exod. 20:18]; or "quaking" [Exod. 15:14]); an increased heart rate (Ps. 38:10); blood leaving one's face

marked by a mouth filled with laughter (Job 8:21, Ps. 126:2).²⁴

Let us hone in and look at specific examples of how prophets reacted emotionally to their ministry by focusing on three distinct areas: (1) the divine call; (2) the divine message; and (3) the emotional involvement of the prophets in their messages.

Emotions and the call

Surprisingly, in most prophetic call stories in Scripture, the would-be prophet reacts negatively to God's call. Prophets normally felt unworthy, unprepared, or just plain afraid.

For example, when Isaiah sees God in vision, he uses the expression "Woe

to me!”—an expression of extreme negative emotion. Intriguingly, the particle *’ôy* is commonly used in laments and expressions of mourning (1 Sam. 4:7, 8). Isaiah seems to anticipate his own funeral when he considers God’s glorious appearance.²⁵ However, after having his lips touched in vision with a live coal from the altar (Isa. 6:6, 7), he seems to be animated, as he is the only prophet mentioned in Scripture to then volunteer for the job, saying, “Here am I! Send me.” (v. 8).

We see similarities in Jeremiah’s call (Jer. 1:4–10). Jeremiah does not feel up to the task and claims inability to speak because of his inexperience and youth (v. 6). God touches his mouth, and then the prophet participates in the vision of the almond tree and the boiling pot. However, unlike Isaiah, he still seems to be afraid—although more of delivering the message than of God, as we can see in God’s series of commands and warnings in Jeremiah 1:17–19.

Ezekiel’s calling also comes loaded with extreme negative emotions. The prophet-to-be falls face down after seeing a vision of God (Ezek. 1:28). The biblical text notes that Ezekiel left his first vision “in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit” (3:14, NIV).²⁶ There is no specific explanation as to the reason of this strong reaction. Perhaps, similar to Jeremiah or Isaiah, Ezekiel felt overwhelmed by the weight of the assignment. The emotional effect of the vision was so great that Ezekiel sat for seven days—overwhelmed and obviously too afraid to share the vision (v. 15).

Emotional involvement in divine vision

For the prophet a vision was never a detached academic exercise. The biblical prophets not only observed events and places and object lessons in vision, they were often active in the vision and became emotionally involved in the scenes portrayed.

A prophet’s emotions were not put on hold during vision. While in vision, prophets felt a range of emotions. When catching a glimpse of God’s glory, they often experienced the sensation of fear

and awe. After seeing someone “like the Son of Man” (Rev. 1:13), John falls at his feet “as though dead” (v. 17, NIV). Daniel’s experience is similar (cf. Dan. 8 and 10).²⁷ In his vision Daniel notices a ram and a goat, and when he is trying to make sense of what he sees, Gabriel approaches him to explain the vision. Daniel reports that he was “terrified and fell prostrate” (Dan. 8:17, NIV).

Fear, however, is not the only emotion experienced in vision. John becomes so involved in the vision of the scroll with the seven seals that he “wept much” (Rev. 5:4) when no one was found worthy to open the scroll.

And not all emotions are negative either. Zechariah becomes so enthused that he begins to actively engage in his vision. After witnessing the showdown between the angel of the Lord and Satan over Joshua the high priest, he watches as Joshua’s filthy garments are being replaced with clean ones. Zechariah seems to forget himself and joins the process by ordering a new turban for Joshua (Zech. 3:5). Zechariah’s wish is a clear expression of the prophet’s excitement as he becomes emotionally involved in the vision.

Emotional response to a divine message and its proclamation

Emotions do not stop after a prophetic message from God has been delivered. After a message has been delivered, prophets often experience various emotions. At times they are frustrated, or even angry, when they see that God’s message has been met with indifference or hostility (1 Kings 18:21, 22:28, 2 Kings 13:19).

An interesting example is the story of Jonah. The whole book of Jonah seems to be a case study of a prophet who refuses to share in God’s emotions. The first chapter gives little clues to Jonah’s emotional state. By his action of running in the opposite direction, we are left to conclude only that Jonah does not feel positive toward his call. We find the whole first chapter marked by a notable lack of reported emotion on Jonah’s part. The fact that the

sailors are “afraid” and “cried out” (1:5), “exceedingly afraid” (v. 10), or “terrified” (NIV), and “feared the Lord exceedingly” (v. 16) stands in dramatic contrast to Jonah, who seems to be emotionally aloof. Faced with the penetrating questions of the terrified sailors, he declares dispassionately that he should be thrown into the raging seas. His lack of emotion borders on apathy and contrasted the sailors’ desperate intent to row to land (v. 13) in order to save his life. Once the crew realizes that escape is impossible, their emotional prayer pleading for divine forgiveness and recognition of the circumstances (v. 16) is countered by Jonah’s silence. Jonah does not seem to feel anything at this point as he faces sure death.

We see emotions coming to the fore only in his prayer in chapter 2, in the belly of the fish, when he refers to his “distress” (NIV) or “affliction” (v. 2).²⁸ After his dramatic rescue, he becomes willing to experience and convey certain emotions, namely, God’s wrath (Jon. 3:4), but is not willing to sympathize with God. The fact that God has “compassion” on the city (vv. 9, 10, NIV) evokes a surprising emotional response in Jonah: he was greatly displeased and became angry (Jon. 4:1). Jonah then explains his actions in fleeing to Tarshish as a reaction to God’s emotions of compassion and abounding love (v. 2). The reader usually expects that a prophet would be very happy when a message from God is accepted. But Jonah is reported to be “very happy” (v. 6, NIV) only when a shady vine grows. When it withers, he expresses extreme emotion, being “angry enough to die” (v. 9, AMP). The book of Jonah ends with God indirectly inviting Jonah to share his emotions (or “concern,” NIV) for the people and even animals of Nineveh (v. 11).

Sometimes prophets struggled with making sense of what they had seen in vision and became so anguished as to even become physically ill. Following Daniel’s vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (Dan. 8:26), Daniel lay ill for several days. He was “appalled” by the vision because it was for him at that time “beyond understanding” (v. 27, NIV).

Elijah's story reflects the bandwidth of emotional responses—both his own as well as the response of leadership and general population. After God's demonstration of sovereignty and power on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), the emotional state of Elijah seems to move from a mountaintop experience of triumph and victory over Baal's prophets to terror at Jezebel's threat (1 Kings 19:2, 3). Following his hasty flight, his terror becomes a full-blown depression, ultimately leading the prophet to desire his own death (verse 4). God's patient dealing with the fragile emotive state of His messenger highlights God's understanding of emotional pain and His commitment to see His servants through the emotional shadowlands.

Prophets repeatedly made predictions of disaster and punishment for sin. Though these pronouncements were often met with indifference by the people, the prophet, as part of the group, knew that he, too, would suffer the results of the collective disobedience and was keenly aware of and afraid of the impending disaster. Jeremiah describes this poignantly in Jeremiah 4:19: "O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war."²⁹ Mentally and emotionally he pre-lived the destruction of Jerusalem many times.³⁰

Conclusion

Our brief review of the emotional involvement of biblical prophets in their prophetic ministry demonstrates that prophets were not simply a conduit for God's words. Emotions were a part of the vision experience and are part and parcel of the process of inspiration.

Recognizing insights from cognitive science research and psychology can help us understand different ways in which emotions contributed to the prophetic experience.

In view of the fact that emotions are normally triggered by stimulus events, experiencing God in vision triggered emotions in the biblical prophets during

and after the vision. These emotions would have been reinforced with each subsequent retelling or remembering of the occurrence. This helped keep the vision vivid in the mind of the prophet as well as the audience.


Emotions serve as relevance detectors. Thus emotional expressions in the prophetic books can serve to highlight certain themes or sections of a vision. Daniel's reaction to the 2,300 evening and morning prophecy serves to heighten the importance, build tension, and underline the later explanation of this prophecy (cf. Dan. 8:27).³¹

In a highly emotional moment, individuals will recall details they are not normally capable of remembering. For example, most people can remember where they were and what they were doing on hearing of the 9/11/2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City. Emotion serves as a snapshot and helps the prophet focus, order, and remember details of a vision. This may be a possible explanation of the vivid, yet often varying, prophetic descriptions of God, heaven, or heavenly beings.

The fact that emotions are the biggest influence on behavior and can interrupt a behavioral sequence as well as serve as the trigger for setting new goals and plans seems to be reinforced throughout the prophetic books. The goal of many of the prophetic messages was to bring a sense of the sinfulness and consequences of sinful behavior and inspire the audience to set new goals and make new plans. This represents in essence the biblical concept of repentance or "turning around." This goal is reflected most clearly in the choice of language in all prophetic writings, which is calculated to shock, startle, get attention, and trigger an emotion in the audience.³²

The prophetic process underlines the fact that God not only has thoughts and plans but feelings too. God's emotions stand in contrast to human emotions as being dependable and continually flowing out from who God is. After all, "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

Emotions generated in vision repeatedly lead to asking questions

and getting clarification from God. A prophet not only speaks for God but also often vicariously expresses the emotions of his audience. In a sense the prophet is called to incarnate the emotional responses of both the people and the Lord and use his (or her) emotions to better convey God's message. Part of the call of being a prophet is an invitation to view the world as God sees it and feel some of the emotions that God feels as He views human activity. Not only are God's words to be spoken by the prophet but God's emotions are to be felt and conveyed. 

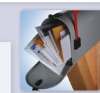
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- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations have been taken from the New King James Version.
 - 2 A significantly expanded version of this study has appeared as "My Heart Is Fainting in Me" (Jeremiah 8:18): Emotions and Prophetic Writings in the Bible," in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, eds. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2015), 137–151.
 - 3 Paul A. Kruger, "Depression in the Hebrew Bible: An Update," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 64 (2005), 187.
 - 4 In earlier research it was argued that the capacity to speak and express complex emotions in language was part and parcel of having been created in the image of God. Cf. Gerald A. Klingbeil, "He Spoke and It Was: Human Language, Divine Creation, and the *imago Dei*," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 36, no. 1 (2014), 42–59, esp. 45–49.
 - 5 Aecio E. Cairus, "The Doctrine of Man," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen; Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 212.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, 205–232.
 - 7 Klaus R. Scherer, "What Are Emotions? And How Can They Be Measured?" *Social Science Information* 44, no. 4 (2005), 697.
 - 8 Elizabeth Phelps, "Hold That Thought," *Discover* (July–August 2014), 31.
 - 9 Scherer, "What Are Emotions?" 700.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 701–702. Cf. Klaus R. Scherer, "Physiological Models of Emotion," in *The Neuropsychology of Emotion*, ed. Joan C. Borod; Series in Affective Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138.
 - 11 For facial expressions associated with certain emotions in the Old Testament, see Paul A. Kruger, "The Face and Emotions in the Hebrew Bible," *Old Testament Essays* 18 (2005), 651–662.
 - 12 Scherer, "What Are Emotions?" 705.
 - 13 For an intriguing discussion of one particular trigger, that is, phobias, and the role memory can play in the perpetuation or treatment of phobias, see Phelps, "Hold That Thought," 33.
 - 14 Scherer, "What Are Emotions?" 709.
 - 15 Note especially the important contribution of Fernando Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid; Biblical Research Institute Studies 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute/General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,

- 2005), 47–74. Canale has reminded Adventists that the theological models of verbal inspiration or thought inspiration carry inherent methodological shortcomings and thus should be replaced with a “biblical model of inspiration.”
- 16 Frank M. Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2013), 1088.
 - 17 Peter van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 39.
 - 18 See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 21.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 26.
 - 20 Strong emotions can be measured physiologically. Elevated blood pressure, sweating, increased heartbeat, and muscle spasms, among other physical phenomena, can indicate bodily emotive responses.
 - 21 Paul A. Kruger, “A Cognitive Interpretation of the Emotion of Fear in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 27.2 (2001): 79–87.
 - 22 Translations in this paragraph are the authors’ translation of the original text.
 - 23 More examples can be found in Paul A. Kruger, “A Cognitive Interpretation of the Emotion of Anger in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 26.1 (2000): 181–193.
 - 24 The Psalms are an emotional hotbed, expressing the full range of human and divine emotions. The issue of the imprecatory psalms (for example, 5, 17, 28, 35, 40, 55, 59, 70, 71, 79, 80, 94, 129, 137, 139, 140) and their relationship to biblical theology and ethics has engendered numerous monograph-length studies. See, for example, recently John N. Day, “The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 166–186; Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, “The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms,” in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 77–92, 176–178; Brent A. Strawn, “Sanctified and Commercially Successful Curses: On Gangsta Rap and the Canonization of the Imprecatory Psalms,” *Theology Today* 69, no. 4 (2013): 403–417. Space limitations will not allow an appropriate discussion of these challenging expressions of emotions of revenge directed toward enemies and adversaries. Considering the wholistic nature of biblical theology and inspiration, the evangelical argument that these emotions are consistent with an Old Testament covenant but inconsistent with the New Covenant must be dismissed. The existence of a full range of human emotions in the Psalms is a good reminder of the fact that all emotions can be brought to God and expressed to Him. Furthermore, one of the key motifs of the imprecatory psalms involves divine justice. Their existence in the Psalter points toward God’s judgment day when true justice will prevail. In the face of ever-increasing injustice and human suffering, this is a good reminder of divine justice transcending all evil powers. This justice is rooted in God’s character, His law, and His grace.
 - 25 John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary 24 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 74.
 - 26 The Hebrew text reads here literally, “and I went in bitterness and in the heat [or wrath] of my spirit” (Ezek. 3:14). Leslie C. Allen notes that “the language used evokes preclassical prophetic experiences and characterizes Ezekiel with authoritative credentials as an old-world prophet of the status of Elijah. . . . The supernatural phenomenon had an effect on his [Ezekiel’s] mind as well as his body, an emotional excitement that gripped him as the subjective effect of Yahweh’s strong hand upon him.” *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary 28 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 43.
 - 27 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 213, highlights the fourfold pattern involving observing a vision, falling on one’s face in fear, being strengthened by a heavenly being, and then receiving further revelation from that being.
 - 28 The Hebrew צָרָה, *zārā*, “distress, anxiety, need,” appears repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible and indicates affliction or distress caused by others (Gen. 42:21); it belongs to the standard vocabulary of the psalms (for example, Pss. 22:11; 78:49; 81:7; 91:15; etc.). Distress marks existential fears and anxieties.
 - 29 The literal translation of “oh my soul” would be, “oh my entrails (or belly).” The entrails were often considered to be the seat of all emotions. Cf. Barclay M. Newman Jr. and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on Jeremiah*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003), 136. The entire verse contains highly visual body part language that is difficult to translate into English.
 - 30 F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, New American Commentary 16 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 83.
 - 31 Note also John’s weeping in Revelation 5, which magnifies the importance of the eventual breaking of the seals and underlines the centrality and importance of the Lamb who is the only one worthy to break the seals.
 - 32 Choice of language is also closely associated with genre. For example, prophets often used laments (cf. Lamentations, Amos 5) or even a love song (Isa. 5), which would further trigger emotion. Some were even instructed to go further with acted object lessons (Ezek. 4:1–12; Jer. 13:1–11; 27:1–22; 28:10; 43:8–13; etc.).

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LETTERS

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any new light, and at the end of the article I am trying to reconcile the two views, saying that, on one hand, we all are part of this world’s society, and, on the other, there are “little ones” scattered all around this world. After reading meticulously the statements from the *Sons and Daughters of God* you are referring to, I do not see how any of them contradict what I wrote. They say that there will be judgment of all nations based on works of mercy—did

I ever say anything different? Yes, those passages lack some details that can be found in my article, but I do not think Ellen White ever believed she had an ultimate and exclusive understanding of every text in the Bible or intended her writings to prevent us from going deeper into the Scripture.

Also, the proposed interpretation even more supports the “salvation by works” than the traditional one, because it allows a possibility for

“Gentiles” to inherit the Kingdom because of their deeds for the sake of God’s people. But I completely agree with your explanation regarding how “deeds” and change of heart are related. I think the message of the parable is vital not only to our salvation (that is, of Christians) but also to salvation of every person in this world.

Thank you so much for letting me think more deeply about these issues.

—Anton Petrishchev

Gerhard Pfandl, PhD, now retired, served as an associate director, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



The testimony of Jesus

Commentaries throughout the centuries have wrestled with the Johannine expression *the testimony of Jesus*. Is it the general testimony of the Christian church concerning Jesus, or is it the testimony that Jesus Himself gave while here on Earth and later on through the prophets of the Christian church? The expression *testimony of Jesus* (*marturian lēsou*) occurs six times in the book of Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 [twice]; and 20:4). Two explanations concerning its meaning have been put forward by commentators.

The first view takes *marturia lēsou* as an objective genitive and interprets this as man's witness to Christ.¹ Thus, the war mentioned in Revelation 12:17 refers to the "persecutions against all individuals of the church who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."² The second view takes *marturia lēsou* as a subjective genitive and understands the testimony of Jesus as the self-revelation of Jesus—His own testimony.³

A study of the word *marturia* in the Johannine literature, where it occurs 21 times, indicates that this word has been used 14 times in a genitive construction that is clearly subjective (John 1:19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31; etc.) The objective idea of "witness about" or "witness to" in John's writings is consistently expressed by the preposition *peri* (about, concerning) with the verb *martureo* (to witness, testify.) He never uses the noun *marturia* (testimony, witness) with an objective, genitive

construction by itself. For example, John 1:7 (RSV), "To bear witness to the light" (*martureo + peri*); 5:31 (RSV), "If I bear witness to myself" (*martureo + peri*); 1 John 5:9 (RSV), "He has borne witness to his Son" (*martureo + peri*).⁴

The use of *Marturia* in Revelation

"[John] bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw" (Rev. 1:2, RSV).

The introduction to the book of Revelation sets forth the source, that is, God and the content of the book—the revelation of Jesus Christ. In verse 2, we are told that John bore witness to "the Word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus."

"The Word of God" is commonly understood to refer to what God says; and "the testimony of Jesus" in parallel to "the Word of God" must, therefore, mean the testimony that Jesus Himself gives. How did Jesus testify of Himself? While here on Earth, He testified in person to the people in Judea. After His ascension, He spoke through His prophets.

"I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (v. 9, RSV).

Before speaking in detail about his first vision, John introduces himself and states his credentials. He mentions who he is—John, "your brother," where

he is—on Patmos; why he is there—on account of "the Word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus;" and when he received the vision—"on the Lord's day."

The parallelism between the "Word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus" is again clearly discernible. "The Word of God" in John's time referred to the Old Testament, and the "testimony of Jesus" to what Jesus had said in the Gospels and through His prophets—such as Peter and Paul. Thus, both genitives can be taken as subjective genitives. They describe the content of John's preaching, for which he was banished.

"The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17, KJV).

The "remnant of her seed" includes the faithful members of God's church in the time of the end. The dragon that attempted to destroy the woman (the true church of God) throughout the 1260-year period (vv. 6, 14) now directs his anger against the remnant of her faithful believers. This remnant is identified by two specific characteristics: They "keep the commandments of God" and they have "the testimony of Jesus."

Whatever commandments we may want to include in the first mark, we must certainly include the Ten Commandments. Thus, the first identifying sign of the remnant church is their loyalty to God's commandments—all His commandments, including the fourth, the Sabbath commandment.

God in Revelation 12:17 says, essentially: At the end of time I will have a visible church—the remnant church—that will be recognized by the fact that they keep the commandments as I have given them in the beginning, including the Sabbath commandment.

We find the second identifying mark explained in Revelation 19:10: “Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (RSV).

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” However, what is “the spirit of prophecy?” This phrase occurs only once in the Bible, in this text. The closest parallel to it, we find in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. There Paul refers to the Holy Spirit, who, among other charismata, gives the gift of prophecy; and the person who receives this gift is called a prophet (1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11). Just as those who have the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10 are called prophets in verse 28, so, those who have the Spirit of prophecy in Revelation 19:10 are called prophets in chapter 22 verses 8 and 9.

identified by the phrase “who hold [have] the testimony of Jesus” (RSV). In Revelation 22:9 (RSV), the brethren are simply called “prophets.” If the Protestant principle of interpreting scripture by scripture means anything, this comparison must lead to the conclusion that “the spirit of prophecy” in Revelation 19:10 exists not as the possession of all church members in general but only of those who have been called by God to be prophets.

Others have seen this point too. The Lutheran scholar Hermann Strathmann, for example, says, “According to the parallel 22:9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general, but the prophets. Here, too, they are characterised as such. This is the point of verse 10c. If they have the *marturia Iesou*, they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets, like the angel, who simply stands in the service of *marturia Iesou*.”⁵⁵

Similarly, James Moffat explains, “‘For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ This prose marginal comment specifically defines the brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus as possessors of prophetic inspiration. The testimony of Jesus is practically equivalent to Jesus testifying.”⁵⁶

to the Holy Spirit, who imparts the prophetic gift to man. Rabbinic Judaism equated the Old Testament (OT) expressions *Holy Spirit*, *Spirit of God*, or *Spirit of Yahweh* with *the Spirit of prophecy* as can be seen in the frequent occurrence of this term in the Targumim (written translations of the OT in Aramaic):

Genesis 41:38:

Hebrew Old Testament

“And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?’ ”

Aramaic Targum

“And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find a man like this, in whom *is* the Spirit of prophecy from the Lord?’ ”

Numbers 27:18:

Hebrew Old Testament

“And the LORD said to Moses: ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom *is* the Spirit.’ ”

Aramaic Targum

“And the Lord said to Mosheh, ‘Take to thee Jehoshua bar Nun, a man upon whom abideth the Spirit of prophecy from before the Lord.’ ”⁵⁷

Commenting on this expression in the Targumim, J. P. Schäfer says: “An examination of the verses where TO [Targum Onkelos] uses the term ‘Spirit of prophecy’ shows that in almost all cases there is a direct relationship to the prophecy in the biblical context. The translation ‘Spirit of prophecy’, although not in the strictest sense literal, is almost always stipulated through the MT [Masoretic Text] (Gen. 41:38 - Joseph had the ‘Spirit of prophecy’ because he was able to interpret Pharaoh’s dream; Num. 11:25 - The Spirit that settled on the 70 Elders, according to the MT, brought about ‘prophesying’; Num. 24:2 - Bileam [Balaam] prophesied concerning Israel). In other words, the term ‘Spirit of prophecy’ describes a clearly delineated situation, namely, the Holy Spirit sent from God who imparts the prophetic gift to man.”⁵⁸

The English New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce comes to the same conclusion and says: “The expression ‘the Spirit

<p>19:10</p> <p>And I fell down at his feet to worship him,</p> <p>but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.</p>	<p>22:8, 9</p> <p>I fell down to worship him at the feet of the angel who showed them to me;</p> <p>But he said to me, “You must not do that! I am thy fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets,</p> <p>and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”</p>
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We find the situation in both passages the same. John falls at the feet of the angel to worship. The words of the angel’s response are almost identical, yet the difference is significant. In Revelation 19:10, the brethren are

The witness of the Targumim

The Jewish readers in John’s day knew what was meant by the expression *Spirit of prophecy*. They would have understood the expression as a reference

of prophecy' is current in post-biblical Judaism: it is used, for example, in a Targumic circumlocution for the Spirit of Yahweh which comes upon this or that prophet. Thus the Targum of Jonathan renders the opening words of Isaiah 61:1 as 'The Spirit of prophecy from before the Lord God is upon me.' The thought expressed in Revelation 19:10 is not dissimilar to that already quoted from 1 Peter 1:11 where 'the Spirit of Christ' is said to have borne advanced testimony in the Old Testament prophets. There too Jesus is the theme of the witness borne by the prophetic Spirit; the prophets did not know who the person or what the time would be, but at last the secret is out: the person is Jesus; the time is now. In Revelation 19:10, however, it is through Christian prophets that the Spirit of prophecy bears witness. What the prophets of pre-Christian days foretold is proclaimed as an accomplished fact by the prophets of the new age, among whom John occupies a leading place."⁹

Summary of Revelation 12:17

Returning now to Revelation 12:17, we can say that "the remnant of her seed . . . keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," which is the Spirit of prophecy or the prophetic gift. This interpretation is strengthened by a study of the Greek word *echo*, meaning "to have." This word indicates possession. They have a gift of God—the prophetic gift. If the testimony of Jesus were our testimony about Jesus, John would have written something like this: "They keep the commandments of God and testify about Jesus," or "they bear testimony to Jesus." But the Greek work *echo* is never used in the sense "to bear a witness."¹⁰

In summary we can say that the visible remnant church, which according to prophecy exists after the 1,260-day period (after 1798), has two specific identifying marks:

a. They keep the commandments of God, including the Sabbath command as God has given it.

b. They have the testimony of Jesus, which is the Spirit of prophecy or the prophetic gift in their midst.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, from its inception in 1863, has always claimed these identifying signs for itself. As Adventists, we proclaim the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath; and we believe that as a church we have the testimony of Jesus, that is, that God manifested Himself in the life and work of Ellen G. White. Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a church prophetically foreseen, not just one church among many. God has called this church into existence for a very specific purpose—to proclaim the three angels' messages.


Our pioneers were quite certain that the Seventh-day Adventist church had become the remnant church of Revelation 12:17. G. I. Butler, General Conference president from 1871 to 1888, wrote in an article titled "Visions and Dreams": "Is there then no people in whom these conditions combine in these last days? We believe they truly do in Seventh-day Adventists. They have everywhere claimed to be the 'remnant' church for the last twenty-five years. . . ."

"Do they keep the commandments of God? Every one knowing anything about this people can answer that this is the most important part of their faith. . . ."

"In regard to the spirit of prophecy, it is a remarkable fact that from the first of their existence as a people, S. D. Adventists have claimed that it has been in active exercise among them."¹¹

And we still believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists as the visible remnant church and that the Spirit of prophecy has become one of the identifying marks: "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White—the Lord's messenger. Her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth

which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."¹²

As Seventh-day Adventists, we are members of God's remnant church. However, this identification with the remnant church does not accord us an exclusive status with God. Salvation is not guaranteed through membership in any church, even the remnant church. We are saved as individuals, not as a church. But being a part of God's remnant church means that we have access to God's special messages through Ellen White and that we participate in proclaiming God's end-time message—the three angels' messages—to the world. 

- 1 M. E. Osterhaven, "Testimony," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 5:682; see also Petros Vassiliades, "The Translation of *Marturia Iesou* in Revelation," *Bible Translator* 36 (1985): 129–134.
- 2 Ray F. Robbins, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975), 154.
- 3 James Moffat, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. R. Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 5:465.
- 4 See G. Pfandl, "The Remnant Church and the Spirit of Prophecy," *Symposium on Revelation II*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 7:305–306.
- 5 Hermann Strathmann, "Martyrs," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 501.
- 6 Moffat, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," 465.
- 7 John W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch* (London, 1862), 1:131, 556; 2:442. Other occurrences are Genesis 45:27; Exodus 35:21, 31; Numbers 11:17, 25, 26, 28, 29; 24:2; Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 10:6; 19:10, 23; 2 Samuel 23:2; 1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 18:22, 23; 20:14; Psalm 51:13; Isaiah 11:2. See Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (München, 1965), 2:129.
- 8 J. P. Schäfer, "Die Termini 'Heiliger Geist' und 'Geist der Prophetie' in den Targumim und das Verhältnis der Targumim zueinander," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970): 310 (my translation).
- 9 F. F. Bruce, *The Time Is Fulfilled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 105–106.
- 10 Pfandl, "The Remnant Church," 312–313.
- 11 G. I. Butler, "Visions and Prophecy," *Review and Herald*, June 2, 1874, 193.
- 12 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 247.

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Sola Scriptura: The reformers and Ellen G. White

Post-apostolic Christianity lost much of its original biblical identity under the paganizing influence of Greco-Roman culture. In the Alexandrian allegorical method, many Christian interpreters found enough latitude for their syncretistic accommodation of Scripture to popular culture. The acceptance of this hermeneutical methodology began to erode several Bible doctrines from mainstream Christianity. By itself, the allegorical method would have driven the Christian church into such a pluralistic interpretation of the Scriptures that its religious identity would end up vanishing completely. But the Church of Rome took advantage of this religious hermeneutical subjectivism and the sociopolitical influence of the Roman Empire to establish herself as the only true interpreter of Scripture.

Gradually, many extrabiblical “apostolic traditions” reshaped the interpretation of the Scriptures and the teachings of the church. Augustine even confessed, “For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.”¹ Thomas Aquinas argued that “the formal object of faith is the First Truth, as manifested in Holy Writ and the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the First Truth.”² Later on, the Council of Trent in its fourth session (1546) would assert that all saving truths and rules of conduct

are contained “in the written books and in the unwritten traditions . . . preserved in the Catholic Church.” To the “holy mother Church” belongs the authority to judge the “true sense and interpretation” of the Holy Scriptures.³ Consequently, ecclesiastic interests overruled true faithfulness to the Word of God and built up a strong, nonbiblical hermeneutical tradition.

Already, in the Middle Ages, pre-Reformers such as John Wycliffe, John Huss, Jerome of Prague, and the Waldenses tried to restore the authority of Scripture above religious traditions and ecclesiastical decisions. Even though much limited in scope, those attempts helped pave the way for the great hermeneutical and ecclesiastical Reformation of the sixteenth century.

This article surveys, briefly, how the sixteenth-century Reformers used the *sola Scriptura* principle in response to the Roman Catholic claim of being the only true interpreter of Scripture and how Ellen G. White both reemphasized and applied this principle in her expositions of Scripture.⁴ Such concepts can provide a useful framework for understanding Ellen White’s crucial end-time role in uplifting the *sola Scriptura* principle.

The Protestant response: the *sola Scriptura* principle

The sixteenth-century Reformation was first and foremost a *hermeneutical*

reformation that generated an *ecclesiastical* reformation. One of the leading principles of the movement was the *sola Scriptura* principle, which implied (1) the *theoretical* acknowledgment of the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice on religious matters, and (2) the *practical* application of that principle in the actual interpretation of Scripture. From the theoretical perspective, Luther stated clearly: “Therefore, Scripture is its own light. It is good that Scripture interprets itself.”⁵ At the Diet of Worms (1521), Luther affirmed that he did “not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other.” Unless he was “convicted by Scripture and plain reason,” he would never recant his views.⁶

John Calvin argued more explicitly that “those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture,” and that “Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.”⁷ Likewise, article 6 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571) reads, “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”⁸

But from a practical perspective, the Magisterial Reformers did not

use the *sola Scriptura* principle as a reason to reject all other sources of religious knowledge. Luther not only accepted the first Ecumenical Creeds and much of the Church Fathers but also wrote *Luther's Small Catechism* (1529) and *The Large Catechism* (1529). Likewise, Calvin wrote his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536, revised in 1559) and his own Catechism (1538). Several other confessions and articles of faith were crafted, exposing a variety of Protestant beliefs and nuances. Furthermore, while Zwingli and Carlstadt rejected whatever the Bible did not endorse, Luther tended to allow whatever the Bible did not prohibit.⁹ Assuming that “whatever is not against the Scripture is for the Scriptures, and the Scriptures for it,”¹⁰ Luther kept several components of the Catholic mass in his own liturgical model.¹¹

Different attempts were made to define the relationship between the inspired Scriptures and other non-inspired Christian statements and writings. For instance, the Lutheran Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration (1577) suggested “a threefold tier of authority”¹² comprising (1) the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are “the only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged”; (2) “the true Christian doctrine” collected from God’s Word into the three ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Creed of Athanasius—and the early Lutheran confession and doctrinal articles; and (3) “other good, useful, pure books, expositions of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and explanations of doctrinal articles.”¹³

Luther emphasized the *unconditional* authority of Scripture in contrast to the *relative* and *conditional* authority of the theologians of the church. Only a derived authority was granted to those parts of the tradition of the church “which prove to be based on Scripture” and to the three ecumenical creeds, “because he was convinced that they conform to Scripture.”¹⁴ Consequently,

from a Protestant perspective, a creed is only a *norma normata* (secondary rule of faith) with “only ecclesiastical and therefore relative authority, which depends on the measure of its agreement with the Bible,” which is the *norma normans* (primary rule of faith).¹⁵

Nonetheless, Alister E. McGrath argues that “the only wing of the Reformation to apply the *scriptura sola* principle consistently was the radical Reformation, or ‘Anabaptism.’”¹⁶ But even the Anabaptists who subscribed to the seven articles of the Schleithem Confession (1527) did not go very far in the process of restoring biblical truths by means of the *sola Scriptura* principle. So the motto “the reformed church, always being reformed according to the Word of God” (*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda, secundum verbum Dei*)¹⁷ should remain the enduring principle of those who want to carry on the restoration process started by the Protestant Reformation.

Instead of carrying on such endeavors, many post-Reformation Protestants and Evangelicals began to embrace alternative hermeneutics that overshadowed the wide-ranging *sola Scriptura* principle and a more specific historicist interpretation of Bible prophecies. Those alternatives included the Roman Catholic futurist and preterist interpretations of Bible prophecy; the liberal historical-critical swiping away of the supernatural element of Scripture; and the dispensational fragmentation of the overall unity of the Scriptures. Each of these used a human principle in place of the Bible, thus distorting or even destroying the *sola Scriptura* principle. During the 20th century, several social-scientific hermeneutics would appear on the scene, challenging even further the *sola Scriptura* principle.

Ellen G. White's emphasis on the *sola Scriptura* principle

Many nineteenth-century North American restorationists and revivalists emphasized the need to rediscover some teachings of the apostolic church.

But no other contemporary religious movement so consistently applied the *sola Scriptura* principle for restoring Bible truth as did Sabbath keeping Adventists (founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church). Crucial in this process was the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White, which, without replacing or overshadowing the Bible (as some critics claim), actually leads people to an unconditional commitment to the Bible as its own expositor. This is evident in both her counsels on how Scripture should be interpreted and the way she actually interpreted it.

Without mentioning by name the futurist and preterist theories, White upheld the Protestant historicist identification of the papacy as the “little horn” of Daniel 7:8, 11, 21, 22, 24–26; 8:9–14, the antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, and the beast from the sea of Revelation 13:1–9.¹⁸ She also endorsed the view of the 1,260 symbolic days of Revelation 11:3 and 12:6 (cf. Dan. 7:25; Rev. 11:2; 12:14; 13:5) as the period of papal supremacy between A.D. 538 and 1798.¹⁹

On the other hand, Ellen White warned forcefully that faith in the Bible was “as effectually destroyed by the higher criticism and speculation . . . as it was by tradition and rabbinism in the days of Christ.”²⁰ She explained further, “The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives.”²¹

In contrast to the dispensationalist theory of splitting Bible history into several (usually seven) distinct dispensations, Ellen White spoke of two dispensations (the Old and the New Testaments), connected to each other by a typological interrelationship. She declared, “There is no such contrast as is often claimed to exist between the Old and the New Testament, the law of God and the gospel of Christ, the requirements of the Jewish and those of the Christian dispensation. Every soul saved in the former dispensation was saved by Christ as verily as we are

saved by Him today. Patriarchs and prophets were Christians. The gospel promise was given to the first pair in Eden, when they had by transgression separated themselves from God. The gospel was preached to Abraham. The Hebrews all drank of that spiritual Rock, which was Christ.”²²

Recognizing the existence of “different degrees of development” of God’s revelation to meet the needs of people in the different ages, White argues that in both dispensations “God’s claims are the same” and “the principles of His government are the same.”²³ “The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other.”²⁴

Besides disclaiming the hermeneutical alternatives mentioned above, Ellen White also provided other insightful hints for a *sola Scriptura* interpretation of the Bible. Speaking of the Bible as “its own expositor,” she highlighted that the Bible should be studied within the framework of the great cosmic-historical controversy between God and Satan.²⁵ She furthered also a proper balance between the exegetical study of a given passage²⁶ and its interpretation in the light of the analogy of Scripture.²⁷

Reiterating elsewhere her emphasis on the analogy of Scripture, Ellen White confirmed its positive outcome: “The Bible is its own interpreter, one passage explaining another. By comparing scriptures referring to the same subjects, you will see beauty and harmony of which you have never dreamed.”²⁸ These concepts informed the way she actually used the *sola Scriptura* principle to interpret the Bible.

Ellen G. White’s use of the *sola Scriptura* principle

The fact that Ellen White did not do a modern exegetical analysis of the Bible text should never be used to disclaim her expositions of Scripture. Her use of Scripture is indeed a *prophetic* one, unfolding in many cases the inner motivations of the individuals

involved and the spiritual struggles that were taking place behind the scenes. Furthermore, Ellen White’s own expositions of Scripture were in harmony with the *sola Scriptura* principle, allowing the Bible to be its own interpreter.


While many critics of the Bible questioned the historicity of Genesis 1–11 and denied its miracles, Ellen White remained in line with the Bible prophets who confirmed the historicity and reliability of those accounts. For example, as the historicity of the creation accounts (Gen. 1; 2) was confirmed by other texts of both the Old Testament (Ps. 33:6–9; 94:9; 95:4, 5; 121:2; 136:5–9; 146:5, 6; 148:1–5; Isa. 40:26) and the New (Acts 17:24–26; Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 4:4, 10; Rev. 14:7), Ellen White also confirmed it.²⁹ The Bible refers to the fall of Adam and Eve at the instigation of the serpent (Gen. 3) as literal (Rom. 5:12, 14, 18, 19; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9), and Ellen White understood it likewise.³⁰ Both the Old Testament (Ps. 104:6–9) and the New (Matt. 24:37–39; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:6), consider the story of Noah and the universal flood (Gen. 6–8) literal; so did Ellen White.³¹

As the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:23–29) was understood as a historical event by the Old Testament (Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11) and the New (Luke 17:28, 29; 2 Pet. 2:6–8; Jude 7), so did Ellen White.³² The historicity of the miracles related to the Exodus and the pilgrimage in the wilderness were confirmed by other passages not only of the Old Testament (Pss. 66:6; 78:10–55; 105:26–45; 106:7–33; 136:10–16; Mal. 4:4) but also of the New (Acts 7:17–44; Heb. 11:22–30); so did Ellen White.³³ The story of Jonah in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17; 2:10) really happened as recorded in the Bible, according to Jesus (Matt. 12:39–41) and as affirmed by Ellen White.³⁴

In contrast to the critical attempts to discover the “historical Jesus” (Albert Schweitzer) and to “demythologize” the four Gospels (Rudolf Bultmann), Ellen White recognized

the Gospel narratives and miracles as historical. Her classic book *The Desire of Ages*³⁵ builds up trust in the way Jesus and His ministry are portrayed in the canonical Gospels and provides many helpful insights into those narratives. This book is a good example of her commitment to the *sola Scriptura* principle in studying the Bible and expounding its message.

Concluding remarks

One should realize that Ellen White’s commitment to the *sola Scriptura* principle is not acceptable to those who read the Bible from any other hermeneutical perspective, who deny any post-canonical manifestation of the gift of prophecy or who even disagree with her expositions of Bible doctrines. But at a time when Christianity is divided into many conflicting schools of biblical interpretation and into 45,000 different Christian “denominations” (by mid-2014),³⁶ Ellen White’s writings function as “a divine prophetic filter,” able to remove false interpretations artificially imposed on the Bible,³⁷ allowing it to interpret itself and touch our lives with its transforming message. 

- 1 St. Augustine, “Against the Epistle of Manichæus, Called Fundamental,” ch. 5, sec. 6, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF)*, Series I, 4:215.
- 2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 5, a. 3, accessed Nov. 12, 2014, www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu.
- 3 Council of Trent, 4th session, in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1978), 17, 19.
- 4 This article is an abbreviated version of the chapter “*Sola Scriptura* and Ellen G. White: Historical Reflections” from *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, eds. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2015).
- 5 Martin Luther, WA 10/III: 238, lines 10, 11 (Also “ist die schriftt jr selbs ain aigen liecht. Das ist dann fein, wenn sich die schriftt selbs außlegt.” [original spelling]); WA 7:97, line 23 (“*scriptura . . . sui ipsius interpres*”).
- 6 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 144.
- 7 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.7.5, trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:80.
- 8 “The Thirty Nine Articles, 1571, 1662,” accessed on Nov. 16, 2014, www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1571-39articles.asp.

- 9 Roland H. Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and Its Impact on Western Civilization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 31.
- 10 Barnas Sears, *The Life of Luther; With Special Reference to Its Earlier Periods and the Opening Scenes of the Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: American Sunday-School Union, 1850), 370, 371.
- 11 See Luther's "The New Ecclesiastical System, 1523-4," in B. J. Kidd, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 121-133.
- 12 Robert D. Preus, *Getting Into the Theology of Concord: A Study of the Book of Concord* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977), 22.
- 13 *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd ed. (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2006), 508, 509.
- 14 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966), 6, 7.
- 15 *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 1:7.
- 16 Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 101 ("scriptura sola" in the original).
- 17 An insightful study on the origin of this motto and other similar expressions is provided in Michael Bush, "Calvin and the Reformanda Sayings," in Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Calvinus sacrarum literarum interpres: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 285-299.
- 18 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1911), 439, 443.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 439; see also 54, 55, 266, 267.
- 20 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), 142.
- 21 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 474; Ellen G. White, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), 227.
- 22 Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, rev. ed., (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 1061.
- 23 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1958), 373.
- 24 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 104.
- 25 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 462, 463.
- 26 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1896), 90.
- 27 Ellen G. White, "The Science of Salvation the First of Sciences," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 1, 1891, 737.
- 28 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), 499.
- 29 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 44-51.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 52-62.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 90-104.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 156-170.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 241-498.
- 34 Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), 265-278.
- 35 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898).
- 36 "Status of Global Mission, 2014, in the Context of AD 1800-2025," no. 41, accessed Dec. 1, 2014, www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/statusofglobalmission.pdf.
- 37 Alberto R. Timm, "Ellen G. White: Prophetic Voice for the Last Days," *Ministry*, February 2004, 20.

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Christ's incarnation: Testing the prophets

Conflicts between true and false prophets were common in biblical times, and the result was often confusion. In order to protect His people from deception, the Lord instructed them on ways to distinguish between the genuine and the false (for example, Deut. 13:1, 2; 18:22; Jer. 28:8, 9; Matt. 7:16, 17).

In this article, I will apply one of these tests to the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. I have chosen this particular one because of its unique theological emphasis on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation: “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:1–3, ESV). John refers to prophets who deny that the Son of God became flesh, or human.

The evaluating instrument is the apostolic teaching preserved for us in the New Testament. There are at least three elements of the doctrine of the Incarnation that we need to explore: its uniqueness, nature, and purpose. What does Scripture teach about these elements, and what does Ellen White say about them in harmony with the Word?

The uniqueness of the Incarnation

When the angel announced to Mary that she would conceive in her “womb and bear a son,” she immediately asked, “‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’” (Luke 1:34, NASB). She knew enough about the process of human procreation to perceive that such a thing was impossible. The answer of the angel appears enigmatic: The Incarnation is not about the biological laws of human conception but about the power of God working through the Spirit. God is going to perform within Mary a cosmic singularity. Inside her, the Son of God will be incarnated, becoming a human being.

The statement of the angel shrouded the Incarnation in a deep mystery. Thus, the question of Mary, *How can a virgin be pregnant?* becomes for us, *How could God become human?* The Bible does not attempt to answer that question. Indeed, John simply reaffirms the fact of revelation: “The Word [the Son of God] became flesh” (John 1:14). We face here what is probably the most daring statement ever found in the history of human thought. If it is true, and it is true, this changes everything on Earth and in the cosmos. The idea was inconceivable to the Greeks and for those influenced by their philosophy. Some Christians found the idea embarrassing and preferred to speak about a Christ that, in appearance,

became human but that, in reality, was not human (that is, Docetism). These are identified by John as false prophets. The rationalism of the Enlightenment found the idea of the Incarnation extremely offensive, even repulsive, and concluded that Incarnation was a remnant of the mythological thinking of the apostolic church. But the witness of the New Testament remains: “The Word became flesh.”

The New Testament clearly establishes that the incarnation of God in human flesh is a “mystery.” Paul looked into this topic and exclaimed: “Great is the mystery [*mustērion*, “secret” or “mystery”] of godliness: He . . . was revealed in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).¹ Ellen G. White, with prophetic authority, reaffirms the biblical teaching, saying, “The incarnation of Christ is the mystery of all mysteries.”² We find it incomprehensible to us that the Second Member of the Godhead would leave His glorious throne at the center of the cosmos to become a human being born of a woman. In a unique way, God indeed entered the world, the experience, and the life of a creature. He became an earthling.

White takes us inside the miracle itself and, with prophetic insight, emphasizes its cosmic incomprehensibility: “Christ, at an infinite cost, by a painful process, mysterious to angels as well as to men, assumed humanity.

Hiding His divinity, laying aside His glory, He was born a babe in Bethlehem.”³ No attempt exists to delve into the process itself; instead, with prophetic authority, she states that the process was painful to God. She adds that the Incarnation is “too deep for the human mind to explain, or even fully to comprehend.”⁴ Indeed, the incarnation of the Word remains a mystery, but its reality remains unquestionable and should be used to identify false prophecy.

The nature of the Incarnation

Although the mystery as such remains beyond our full comprehension, we can understand something about it.

First, in Christ we find two natures—the human and the divine. “For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col. 2:9, NASB). The human nature did not become divine, and neither did the divine nature become a human nature. There exists no communication of properties, or consubstantiality, in the two natures; each retained its distinctiveness. He remained divine and human as one person. This idea, widely affirmed by the Christian world, also is reaffirmed by Ellen White: “His finite nature was pure and spotless, but the divine nature . . . was not humanized; neither was humanity deified by the blending or union of the two natures; each retained its essential character and properties.”⁵ The mysterious union of the two natures makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19).

Second, because there were two natures, there were two wills in the one person of Christ—the human will and the divine will. But the human will was characterized by a constant disposition to submit to the divine one. In Gethsemane, Jesus speaks to the Father, saying, “ ‘My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done’ ” (Matt. 26:42, NASB). The human will expresses its full submission to the divine. The thought becomes trumpeted by Ellen White as she reaffirms the Incarnation: “In Christ

there was a subjection of the human to the divine.”⁶

Third, the union of the two natures in one person lives on as a permanent one. The Word became flesh and will remain human forever. He was born as a human being from a woman (Gal. 4:4) and lived His whole life in the flesh (Heb. 5:7). He was crucified and resurrected, and He ascended to heaven with our glorified human nature, and there He intercedes for us before the Father: “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men [*anthrōpōn*, “human beings”], the Man [*anthrōpos*, “human being”] Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV). John clarifies that, at His return, Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh (2 John 7).⁷ The Incarnation was never suspended and will never be suspended. Paul says that once the cosmic conflict is over, all things will be subjected again to the Father, and “the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28, NASB). Christ’s sacrifice remains an eternal one.

Ellen White, in support of the biblical teaching and as a true prophet of God, declares, “In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. . . . He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature.”⁸

Purpose of the Incarnation

Since the Incarnation cannot be separated from what God accomplished through it for us, it centers on the most majestic cosmic revelation of the love of God (1 John 4:8–11). He came into a world deeply damaged by sin and devoid of even one righteous person (Rom. 3:10, 11). He came into a house of bondage, evil, and corruption. To this despicable place the incarnate God came to live a life of absolute submission to the Father and did so in order

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to show us the goodness of God. White states, “To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love,—to be ‘God with us.’”⁹

According to Paul, through the Incarnation, the Son of God experienced the *kenosis*, but without losing any of His divine attributes, He became a servant of God. He who was God “emptied Himself [*kenoō*, ‘to make empty’], taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient” to God (Phil. 2:7, 8, NASB). In doing this, Jesus revealed that only in union with and in submission to

what would be good for humans. Since His will is summarized in the law of love, the Decalogue, Christ submitted to it.

When Satan attempted to get Jesus to worship him, the incarnated Lord immediately quoted the first commandment of the Decalogue (Matt 4:10). He obeyed all of them. This means, then, that the incarnated God worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath, calling us to follow Him in fellowship with Him and with the Father. In everything He did, He was our model for an upright and virtuous life. Because we should be baptized, He was baptized, because we should pray, He prayed, and because

it was on the cross that their defeat was final. He became human in order to die; not to die as we, naturally, die but to die in order to bring death to an end. He killed death through His death, and, in doing this, He revealed the magnitude of God’s love. “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). “Looking unto Jesus,” White comments, “we see that it is the glory of our God to give.”¹³

He died because He took upon Himself the sins of the human race and experienced our eternal death. Death prevails as essentially separation and brings with it intense pain. The Son of God, in human flesh, went up to the cross and experienced the divine abandonment that should be ours, and He did it in order for us to have fellowship with God. He experienced the inexpressible pain of God forsakenness: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). White unfolds some of the meaning of such a tragedy saying, “Christ’s heart was pierced by a far sharper pain than that caused by the nails driven into His hands and feet. He was bearing the sins of the whole world, enduring our punishment—the wrath of God against transgression. His trial involved the fierce temptation of thinking that He was forsaken by God. His soul was tortured by the pressure of great darkness, lest He should swerve from His uprightness during the terrible ordeal.”¹⁴ With penetrating prophetic insight she adds, “God suffered with His Son, as the divine Being alone could suffer, in order that the world might become reconciled to Him.”¹⁵

Only the incarnate God could accomplish this most amazing task as our substitute: “Justice demanded the sufferings of a man. Christ, equal with God, gave the sufferings of a God. He needed no atonement. His suffering was not for any sin he had committed; it was for man—all for man; and his free pardon is accessible to all.”¹⁶ This was indeed a majestic revelation of God’s self-sacrificing love. It is in the Cross that we reach the very heart of the incarnation of God; the fullness of divine *kenosis*.

“God suffered with His Son, as the divine Being alone could suffer, in order that the world might become reconciled to Him.”

God can humans achieve fullness of life and well-being, thus unmasking the damaging effect of Adam’s rebellion. The goodness of the divine will is substantiated by Ellen White: “The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness.”¹⁰

With Jesus coming to undo the rebellion of Adam, His whole life was one of submission to the Father: “‘Behold, I have come . . . to do Your will, O God’” (Heb. 10:7). John, referring to the exemplifying life of Christ, challenges believers to “walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6). White reaffirms John’s statement adding, “He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God’s Holy Law, and in this way He is our example.”¹¹ God’s will was of paramount importance for Jesus and He reveals that the divine will always seeks

we should serve God and others, He served God and others. Because we should love our enemies, He loved His enemies and prayed for them. Because we should rest on the Sabbath, He rested on the Sabbath. He became human to show us the goodness of God manifested in a life of submission to Him. White comments that “in His life on earth, Christ developed a perfect character, He rendered perfect obedience to His Father’s commandments. In coming to the world in human form . . . He did not become a sinner.”¹² Adam disobeyed God, but the new Adam submitted to Him and gives us the power to follow Him.

Incarnation and sacrifice

But the love of God was particularly manifested in Christ’s obedience unto death (Phil. 2:8). God became human in order to battle, on this planet, the forces of evil. He fearlessly faced and defeated them throughout His life, but



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Conclusion

Summarizing, we could say that a true prophet will confirm and even deepen the significance of the incarnation of the Son of God. This has become an inscrutable mystery about which we know little. He permanently became a creature, an earthling, to reveal to us the character of God. As a human, He lived the life that we should live in order for us to fully enjoy it. In His obedience we see our call to follow the incarnated Lord in order to make this planet a better place by loving Him and each other. In His obedience unto death on a cross we find our only way back to God through forgiveness. These biblical insights into the Incarnation are reaffirmed and deepened in the writings of Ellen G. White and give more evidence of her prophetic calling. 

1 In the New Testament, the Greek term *mustêrion*

refers to God's plan of salvation that had been hidden in God for ages (Eph. 3:9) but that now has been revealed in Christ who is Himself the "mystery of God" (Col. 2:2; 4:3). In 1 Timothy 3:16 the mystery of godliness "is the Christ-event, as it is described in the following hymn . . . from the cosmic perspective of the incarnation and exaltation and its proclamation." H. Krämer, "Mustêrion mystery, secret," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 448, 449. The fullness of the revelation and understanding of this transcendental mystery is for the believer a task to be accomplished (see Eph. 3:14–19).

- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1973), 48. She also wrote, "The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery." Ellen G. White, in Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1978), 1128, 1129.
- 3 Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 915; cf. *ibid.*, vol. 5, 1129; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 48. She also states that "it was the marvel of all the universe that Christ should humble Himself to save fallen man. That He who had passed from star to star, from world to world, superintending all, by His providence supplying the needs of every order of being in His vast creation—that He should consent to leave His glory and take upon Himself human nature, was a mystery which the sinless intelligences of other worlds desired to understand." Ellen G. White,

Patriarchs and Prophets (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 69.

- 4 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn, 1956), 106.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981–1983), 16:182.
- 6 Ellen G. White, "The Vine and the Branches," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 9, 1897, 705.
- 7 The meaning of the present participle, in contrast to the perfect in 1 John 4:2, has been a matter of debate among scholars but it could be understood as conveying a future meaning and therefore referring to the second coming of Christ; see Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3, John*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 232–236.
- 8 White, *The Desire of Ages*, 25.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), 493.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 140. She also wrote, "As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences." White, *The Desire of Ages*, 24.
- 12 White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, 133.
- 13 White, *The Desire of Ages*, 21.
- 14 White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, 132.
- 15 Ellen G. White, "Satan's Malignity Against Christ and His People," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 22, 1895, 674.
- 16 Ellen G. White, "Christ Our Sacrifice," *Review and Herald*, Sept. 21, 1886, 593.

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Total non-church member involvement

"LORD . . . give me an undivided heart"
(Psalm 86:11, NIV).

In the woods, near the top of one of Rwanda's thousand hills, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) staff cleared trees and built a simple structure where the people in the village of Mukuyu could come to learn about God's everlasting gospel. This structure was one of 2,227 Total Member Involvement (TMI) preaching sites throughout Rwanda in May 2016.

Down in the Batsinda sector of Kigali, ADRA workers prepared another preaching site. A call was made to ADRA Rwanda's staff for personal donations

to pay for preparing these two ADRA-managed sites. They raised \$4,000. Why did they give liberally out of their pockets? ADRA money could not be used to fund evangelistic meetings. These personal donations also paid for electrical equipment, sound systems, toilets, benches, Bibles, and other discipling materials.

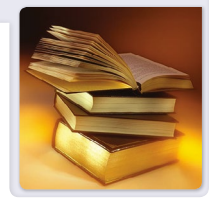
ADRA Rwanda has a total of 290 on staff, and less than 10 percent are Adventist Church members. Furthermore, 60 percent of the \$4,000 contributed came from the non-church members! During the meetings they were also heavily involved in presenting health talks, distributing shoes and scholastic materials, setting up

electronic equipment, and transporting baptismal candidates to the baptism sites. Most of the non-church member staff bought the TMI T-shirts as well.

As I observed the heavy involvement and whole-hearted service of these non-church members, I asked myself: Do I serve God with all my heart like they do? (Psalm 86:11). What about you?

—May-Ellen Colón, PhD, serves as director of Adventist Community Services, General Conference, and special liaison to ADRA International, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

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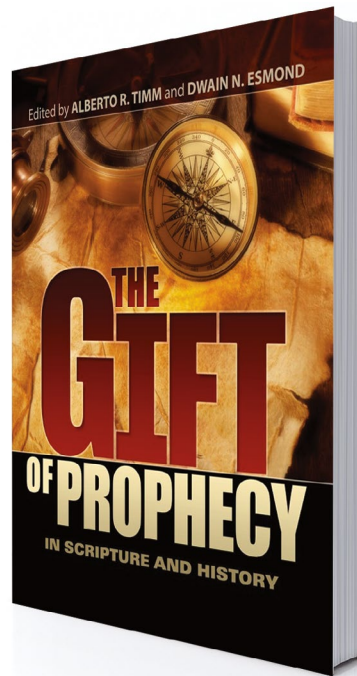
The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History

edited by Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond, Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2016

The editors of this volume are both associate directors of the Ellen G. White Estate, and the chapters were originally presented as papers during the International Gift of Prophecy Symposium held at Andrews University, October 15–18, 2015. In addition to the papers, the book includes four appendices that function as exhibits of the various officially voted and published historical witnesses to Seventh-day Adventism’s belief in the inspired, authoritative, prophetic writings of Ellen G. White and a sermon by the current General Conference president, Ted N. C. Wilson, who clearly affirmed his personal faith in the ministry of Ellen White.

This reviewer personally participated in the conference as a spectator and very much appreciated the thoughtful care and planning that went into the event, and these published papers reflect the same care of the organizers. This was a conference designed to reaffirm the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the validity of Ellen White’s prophetic ministry. The papers, presented by leading Adventist scholars (biblical, theological, and historical) and administrators, attempted to meet both the long-lingering and the more recent challenges to Ellen White’s “prophetic” claims and ministry.

The first two articles, presented by Jiří Moskala and Ekkehardt Mueller, set a serious, scholarly tone for the symposium and were challenging treatments of the phenomena of the “prophetic voice” in both the Old and New Testaments of the biblical canon. The interested reader is urged to persevere in reading through these important surveys regarding the way that canonical prophetic revelation




has been manifest. I was particularly impressed with Moskala’s treatment of the question, “Can an Old Testament prophet err?” (33–43). This nuanced and realistic essay is worth the price of the book.

There were two other presentations that were particularly helpful, at least for my interests: The first was Richard Davidson’s “Ellen White’s Insights Into Scripture in Light of the Original Biblical Languages” (155–170). Davidson’s own journey had been one of doubt in the prophetic reliability of Ellen White’s ministry, but seeing the manner in which she has demonstrated surprising exegetical insight into the meaning of Old Testament scripture has played an affirming role in his faith not only in Ellen White but also in the deeper meaning of Scripture. Davidson clearly made the point that Scripture does not

have to be read through Ellen G. White lenses, but it has certainly been a blessing in understanding the living Word.

The second presentation that caught my attention was Jud Lake’s “Ellen White’s Use of Extrabiblical Sources” (320–336). Lake has risen to prominence for his solid defense of the legitimacy of Ellen White’s ministry against a host of attacks by Ellen White’s detractors, and one of the key charges has been that she was a literary plagiarist. His piece exhibits a gracious but able summation of the nature of these charges and a collective, sensible response to them. One interesting insight that he made was the importance of the contribution that the late Roger Coon made in framing many of these responses and how they have been a key source not only for Lake’s own work but also for other key defenders of Ellen White (including Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, editors of *The Ellen White Encyclopedia* [Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2014]).

I would urge scholars, pastors, church administrators, and local elders to obtain a copy of this solid work for their personal libraries. In fact, it should take its place alongside not only the *The Ellen White Encyclopedia* but also the recently released symposium on Ellen White edited by Merlin D. Burt titled *Understanding Ellen White* (Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2015). If you are interested in substantive writings that address key issues but work affirmatively to vindicate the prophetic authenticity of Ellen White, these are three must acquisitions for your personal and church library.

—Woodrow W. Whidden, II, PhD, emeritus professor of religion, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. 

► Austria: Ellen G. White Research Center opens on anniversary of White's death

Bern, Switzerland—A new Ellen G. White Research Center opened at Bogenhofen Seminary in Austria, July 16, 2016, the 101st anniversary of the death of the cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The new research center is the 20th worldwide and the first for the German-speaking countries of Central Europe: Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Germany. It aims to help a new generation in Europe gain a greater appreciation for White and her ministry, church leaders said.

“The new research center will provide exceptional insights into our early Adventist history and will be an invaluable resource to strengthen our identity and foster a new sense for our unique mission,” said **Erhard Biró**, president of the church’s Baden-Wuerttemberg Conference in southern Germany.

The research center’s director is **Markus Kutzschbach**, who also holds

a position as an executive director of Adventist Heritage Ministry, an entity that works closely with the Ellen G. White Estate to secure the Adventist past for the future and maintain historic Adventist sites in North America, Europe, and elsewhere.

The opening of the new research center coincided with the first Gift of Prophecy symposium in the Adventist Church’s Inter-European-Division. For three days, nine scholars from the White Estate, the Biblical Research Institute, Andrews University, and Bogenhofen Seminary shared their research and insights into the theology, ministry, and life of White.

“The symposium was very valuable because of the excellent presentations and personal testimonies of the speakers,” said **Christian Grassl**, president of the Austrian Union of Churches Conference in Austria.

Attendees were able to purchase copies of two books—*The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, edited by Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond, and *Glimpses Into the Life of Ellen White*, by James Nix—that were newly translated into German from English and released by the seminary.

Participants expressed delight with the information that they learned. “I came to the symposium because in my home church I did not hear much about Ellen White, and if people talked about her, they did so in a very one-sided and critical manner or they used her in an extremist way,” said a participant from Germany. “I wanted to hear from people who are knowledgeable about Ellen White, and they did not disappoint me. My questions were answered, and I am returning to my home and church with joy, new enthusiasm, and a greater appreciation of Ellen White and her wonderful ministry.” [Frank Hasel/EUDNews]

► Totally blind professor helps make studying the Bible easier for the blind

Orlando, Florida—More and more blind people have dreams that involve studying the Bible in the original languages. Such a journey presents some most difficult obstacles. Developing ways to overcome these obstacles has been the work of the Semitic Scholars group, three blind or visually impaired individuals who have recently won the top prize in the 2016 Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards from the National Federation of the Blind.

In 2010, **Ray McAllister**, became the first totally blind person to earn a PhD in Hebrew Bible. To do this, I needed documents of the biblical text that a blind

person could read but that had more technical characters and markings than the standard braille Greek and Hebrew original language texts provided. After I had graduated, I turned my attention to solving this problem. I developed coding for the symbols not already set up in braille. Once I developed these symbols, I needed to have them peer reviewed.

Sarah Blake LaRose, a professional braille transcriber and professor of Hebrew, provided guidance to help me complete a system that I could use to prepare texts that the blind could use, converting the Aleppo Hebrew Bible, accents and all, into braille. I also



Matthew Yeater, Sarah Blake LaRose, and Ray McAllister

Photo credit: Suzanne Shaffer



converted many other Hebrew documents, Semitic inscriptions, and Greek documents into braille. Then, in 2014 I wrote a Hebrew course for the blind that addresses many difficulties the blind have in learning Braille Hebrew and what they should know about how Hebrew works for sighted eyes.

In 2014 I began collaborating with Duxbury Systems, a company that produces software, to convert documents of various languages into braille. I began working closely with **Matthew**

Yeater, the current president of the National Federation of the Blind of Michiana. Mr. Yeater and I set up the code for Syriac in braille, and I coded Coptic. Syriac is similar to Hebrew but uses a different alphabet. Coptic is a late form of Egyptian but has letters based on Greek.

It is now possible to use Duxbury to convert many ancient texts to braille. Recently I have begun converting public domain Greek works of Plato and Aristotle into braille.

My dreams for the future of this project are simple. I wish to have more texts in these and more related ancient languages in braille formats for the blind. I will be testing my Hebrew course this fall at Dubuque University in Iowa, teaching it by distance education. It is my prayer to negotiate with scholars around the world so I can have access to the text materials I need. For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/2bOGLnF>.
[Ray McAllister]

► In the Bahamas, former Adventist leader laid to rest in state-recognized funeral

Nassau, Bahamas—A former president of the former Bahamas Conference in the former West Indies Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Pastor **Silas N. McKinney**, was laid to rest in a state-recognized funeral. High-ranking government officials and church leaders were in attendance. Pastor McKinney died July 16, 2016, after battling an illness for several years. He was 89.

Prime Minister of the Bahamas Right Honorable **Perry G. Christie**

congratulated the Adventist Church for being a “major contributor in how the church should interact with the state and for being a strong advocate for religious liberty,” an accomplishment started by Pastor McKinney.

Known as a true evangelist, a champion for the cause of Jesus, and a vibrant church leader, McKinney was the first Bahamian president of the church in the Bahamas. McKinney served the church for more than 41 years as district pastor, mission

president, conference president, and union president. He also served as chairman of the West Indies College, now Northern Caribbean University (NCU), and Andrews Memorial Hospital in Jamaica.

Pastor McKinney is survived by his wife Ruth, whom he was married to for 60 years, and their four children, six grandchildren, and one great granddaughter.

[John Garcia/Inter-American Division Staff with Nigel Coke]

► Nationwide mourning for late leader of Adventist church in Papua New Guinea

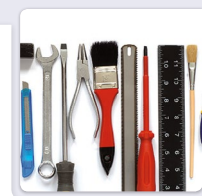
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—The death of the fifty-four-year-old president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Papua New Guinea Union Mission, **Geoffrey Pomaleu**, prompted nationwide mourning. Pomaleu’s body was flown around Papua New Guinea (PNG) for seven funerals over four days, the *Papua New Guinea Today* news site reported. “The people of PNG are very sad, and

the hope of the resurrection of all the believers when Jesus returns is very real to them,” said **Glenn Townend**, president of the Adventist Church’s South Pacific Division.

Pomaleu, a longtime church administrator who was elected president of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission in September 2015, died in a hospital in Lae on July 4, 2016, a day after collapsing at a camp for pastors’ children. The

cause of death was an internal infection complicated by heart trouble and other health issues, *Papua New Guinea Today* reported.

His first funeral service was held in Lae, followed by services in Port Moresby and the country’s third-largest city, Mount Hagen. After services in Madang, Hoskins, and Kavieng, the coffin arrived in Pomaleu’s home village on Manus Island for final burial. [Adventist Review staff] 



S. Joseph Kidder, DMin, is professor of Christian ministry, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

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The true measure of success

Church leaders love to create ministry events: small groups, programs, and other activities. Many of these programs do not get high attendance. Pastors feel a sense of failure because they often measure success by numbers, especially in attendance, baptisms, and giving.

Jesus invested most of His ministry in helping people grow spiritually. He called a small group to be with Him and enjoy His presence, and He equipped them for Spirit-led ministry (Mark 3:13–15). He taught them how to pray and have meaningful communion with the Father (Luke 11:1–13). He invested His life training them to preach, heal, and impact lives (Luke 9:1–27). He also shared many of His significant teachings one-on-one (John 3, 4) and His most precious spiritual moments in small group settings with His disciples (John 13–17, Mark 14:17–26) or in the company of Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1–13, 26:36–46).

Yet, at the climax of Jesus' ministry, when He died on the cross, He had been deserted by all. His church congregation was at its smallest, but under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the time He had spent with His close followers was not wasted. Later, these men and women transformed the world. The essential lesson is that Jesus was more concerned about a character than a crowd, a person than a program, a man than a multitude.

God has, at various stages of our ministries, struck us with the realization that spiritual growth prevails as the most important focus for the pastor.

I, Jonny, realized this when I worked with a summer camp. The church had been running the camp for


years, but I was tempted to shut down the program. Attendance was low and finances were tight, but we stuck it out one more summer, and I decided to approach it from a different angle. I would focus on the people. Each day, I met with a different staff member for 30 minutes to listen to and disciple them. The staff opened up about their failures, vulnerabilities, and needs. At the end of the summer, all of us reflected on the experience of how the staff had gone on a spiritual journey as individuals, and as a community, and been changed. A program I once thought a failure had transformed into a success because the emphasis was moved from the attendance to the growth of those attending.

One of the churches I, Joseph, pastored had dwindled from 100 to 40 people in attendance. I came to this church wanting to help the church grow. Over a period of three and half years, I worked 70 or more hours each week, implementing a myriad of strategies, techniques, plans, and programs to foster church growth. The amazing result was that the church attendance went from 40 to 30. I became a church *decline* expert. I was disappointed.

Then my wife challenged me to pray and attend to the spiritual needs of people. At first, I struggled to earnestly pray and care for the needs of others, but when I made this change, it altered the trajectory of the church. I grew. The members grew spiritually. And the membership grew numerically. Our church was transformed from a place of discord and dissonance to one of peace and harmony.

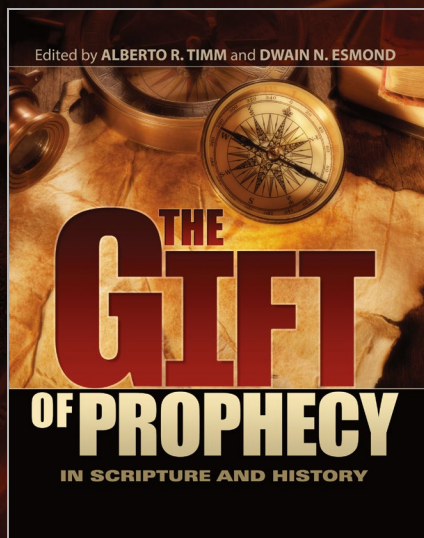
We discovered eight biblical practices that help church members grow spiritually:

- 1. Affirm God's love for them.** Explore what Jesus teaches about how God loves them and how they can love Him back.
- 2. Inspire them to live a life of worship.** Model and teach about the worthiness of God to be honored in every life circumstance.
- 3. Teach them how to discern God's voice.** Show them how prayer can be a two-way dialogue.
- 4. Show them how to study the Bible on their own.** Teach them how to read the Bible and where to find answers for their pressing life questions.
- 5. Demonstrate the value of Christian fellowship.** Help them discover the benefits, challenges, and responsibilities of belonging to a Christian community.
- 6. Encourage them to join God's mission.** Challenge them to find their part in God's purpose to save His children.
- 7. Discuss how to confidently talk about Jesus with others.** Help them figure out why and how to share their transformation stories in an appealing and sincere way.
- 8. Call them to make Holy Spirit-led changes in their lives.** Give examples of God working amazing changes in people's lives to remove harmful habits, mindsets, and behaviors, and process how God wants to transform them.

So what about you? If Jesus is our model, what changes do you need to make in your approach to ministry? God invites you to partner with Him to reorient your priorities in ministry and start focusing on the spiritual growth of those in your sphere of influence. 

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.

“And so we have the prophetic word . . . as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” 2 PETER 1:19 (NKJV)



The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History

Dwain N. Esmond and Alberto R. Timm, editors

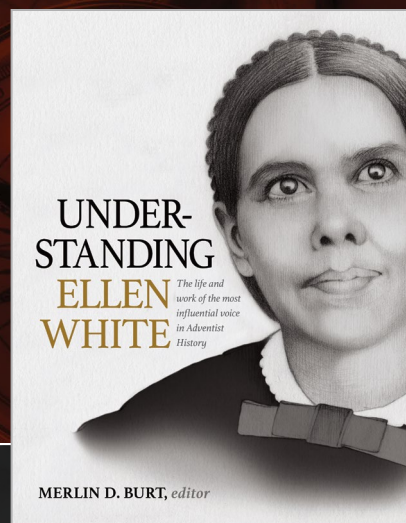
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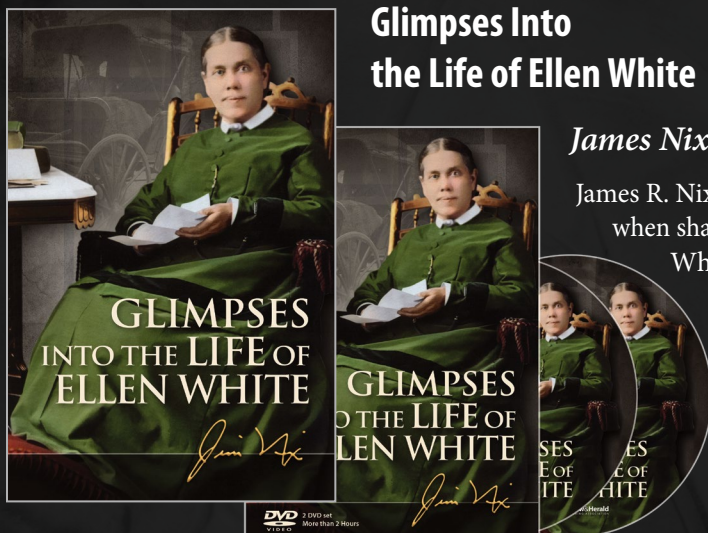
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