



Sola Scriptura and ELLE W

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Scriptures are the all-sufficient revelation of God's will. Because we also subscribe to the motto of the Reformers, "*The Bible, and the Bible only*," many logically ask, "If all I need is found in the Word of God, why should I take any special interest in the writings of Ellen White?"

Adventists maintain that adhering to *sola scriptura* means accepting all that the Bible teaches—including the promise of the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit through the gifts, especially in the last days. So we might ask the question another way: If the Bible is all-sufficient, what need is there for the special guidance of the Holy Spirit?

Jesus Himself presents the answer, as recorded in John 16:12, 13: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . . And he will tell you what is yet to come."* We can see how this promise was fulfilled in the ministry of the apostles, but we also know from the Scriptures that the Spirit's guidance was not to end in the first century (see Joel 2:28-32; Eph. 4:11-13; Rev. 12:17 and 19:10).

The Bible records how God instructed His people through special messengers who, though they wrote no part of the Scriptures (we call them "noncanonical"), were inspired to confront injustice, warn of coming dangers, or predict the outcomes of misdirected choices. In the days of

the kings of Israel, we read of such messengers as Ahijah, Shemaiah, Huldah, Nathan, and unnamed men of God who saved the nation from defeat and brought conviction to erring rulers. In the New Testament church we learn that the apostles were directed by the prophecies of Agabus, among others (see Acts 11:27-30).

Consider how the following purposes and blessings of the prophetic gift demonstrated in Scripture are paralleled in the ministry and counsels of Ellen White.

1. Unmasking the enemy's strategies

The king of Syria was convinced that Israelite spies had infiltrated his army because their leaders seemed to know in advance when and where he would attack. The king was told, however, that it wasn't human intelligence—it was Israel's prophet, Elisha, to whom the Lord was giving "inside" information (2 Kings 6:8-12).

The premier theme in Ellen White's writings is that of the great controversy being waged between Christ and Satan. Her Conflict of the Ages Series shows how the conflict that began in heaven continues on our planet and in each person's heart. We are given "behind the scenes" views of the issues at stake in this cosmic battle, including insights into Satan's strategies for his war against the remnant—the war predicted by John in Revelation 12:17. Through the gift of prophecy the devil's deceptions are unmasked so that we can be more fully equipped to follow Peter's admonition to "resist" the enemy and remain "alert" (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

2. Illuminating God's hand in history

The biblical prophets interpreted events of their day in the light of God's dealings with His people and the surrounding nations. Similarly, in Ellen White's writings we find surprising descriptions of God's intervention. A notable example is her explanation for the sudden retreat of the superior Union army in the first Battle of Manassas during the U.S. Civil War. What was inexplicable in human terms was shown to Ellen White to be the work of angelic intervention (see *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 266, 267).

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We have the Bible—Do we need Ellen White?

By
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3. Foretelling outcomes of our choices

When the Babylonian army surrounded Jerusalem, King Zedekiah called Jeremiah from prison and promised to spare his life if only he would tell him the truth about the future of his kingdom. Jeremiah laid out two options: Surrender to the king of Babylon and live; or fight, and the city would be destroyed—along with his own life (Jer. 38:14-23). Ultimately Zedekiah made the wrong choice, and Jeremiah's unpopular words were proven true.

Even though God's will is broadly revealed in His Word, there are times He provides specific guidance to keep His people on the right course. Ellen White's instruction on healthful living illustrates such guidance. Study after study has confirmed the positive results of living according to the principles of health outlined in her writings. If left only to our own inclinations or the changing and often contradictory advice of "experts," we might choose a different lifestyle. Even though Scripture describes Eden's diet and our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, it is unlikely that we would give the same attention to such passages if the principles inherent in them were not spelled out in practical terms through the gift of prophecy.

4. Convicting of sin

King David was not ignorant of the seventh commandment, or the sixth—he knew the writings of Moses. Yet, in mercy, God sent His noncanonical messenger to bring home the truth that David was trying to disregard. Simi-

larly, in the Bible we have God's standard for character and His truth detector—just as David had the Torah. But God reaches out still further when He appeals to His modern-day people through the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of prophecy. He knows how well we can rationalize our behaviors and close our eyes to where we miss the mark (Rev. 3:19). By lifting up the holy principles of God's Word, Ellen White leads us to sense our deficiencies, recognize our sinfulness, and prayerfully accept the forgiveness and righteousness that Christ offers us.

5. Applying Scripture to present-day circumstances

When contrasting the righteousness of faith with the works of the law, Paul was led by the Spirit to interpret the experience of Abraham and Hagar as an allegory (Gal. 4:21-31). Even though the early Christians could study the writings of the Old Testament for themselves, this did not preclude the Holy Spirit from directing their minds to a deeper understanding of particular passages.

Today, although the Scriptures remain our source of truth and test of experience, one of the blessings of the Holy Spirit's instruction is His application of the Word to our unique circumstances. In the Conflict of the Ages Series Ellen White selects and applies biblical narratives illustrating the great controversy theme—showing how the past instructs us about the future. She was also led to highlight specific passages especially relevant for the last-day church. Speaking of Isaiah 58, for example, she wrote, "The whole chapter is applicable to those who are living in this period of the earth's history. Consider this chapter attentively; for it will be fulfilled" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 4, p. 1149).

In summary, the Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide God's people until the end of time. While the canon of God's Word is closed, He has not closed off communication with His church through the prophetic gift—particularly as the church confronts the deceptions of the end-time.

It is no wonder that Paul wrote to the early Christians, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thess. 5:19, 20). And in the words of Jesus to the Laodicean church—our church: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:22). ●

* All Bible references in this article are taken from the New International Version.



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