

THE VISIONS OF MRS. E. G. WHITE

Introduction

People who do not know the difference frequently refer to members of the Church of God, as Adventists. Others, on learning that there is a difference, immediately wish to know what the differences are. For a full discussion of all differences, we refer the reader to the Church of God tract entitled "Doctrinal Differences Between the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Church of God." The purpose of the present tract is to discuss one of the very most important differences, and one which is perhaps a foundation point to all the others. This is the matter of the inspiration of the Seventh-Day Adventists' Prophets, and the Visions which she had and recorded.

The special work of the Church of God is to proclaim the everlasting Gospel of the Kingdom to all people. We believe that the words of Jesus to the disciples, just before His ascension, still apply to us today. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations..." and "...ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Our message is to be *positive*. There are a great many false teachings in the world, so many in fact that we could spend all our time and energy tearing them down. But that would not be carrying out the terms of our commission. And when we teach the great truths of God's

word, many of the false things are automatically refuted. And we wish to make it clear that the Church of God does not consider it its special work, to *tear down* any church organization, or to *disprove* any system of teachings. And that is not the purpose of this tract. But we do find it necessary to give reasons why we do not follow various teachings, especially those of organizations teaching many of the truths which we also teach. Such is the main reason for the present tract on the Visions of Mrs. E. G. White.

The "Advent" Movement

In the year 1840 a man by the name of William Miller began to preach that the end of the world and the coming of the Lord would be on October 22nd, 1844. He based his conclusions on his interpretation of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8th chapter. His message stirred the country and a very large following was attracted to this teaching. They preached with great confidence that Christ would come on the date appointed. As the time drew near, they made all preparations for the event, giving up all the things of the world, and finally ceasing to preach to others, believing that probation for sinners had ended. But the day arrived and passed and nothing happened. The disappointment was exceedingly great.

Among the followers of Wm. Miller was a young woman, Miss Ellen Harmon. When a young girl, she met with an accident which left her ever afterward in very poor health. At the age of 17, when among the so-called "Millerites" and about two months after the date set for the return of Christ, she had a peculiar experience,

which she termed a "vision." Through the remainder of her life she had many of these "visions", some when in the company of others, and some when alone, or at night. There is no question about the fact that she went into a trance-like state, when these experiences occurred in the presence of others. But during these times she claimed to receive direct revelation from God. Sometimes she spoke while in the trance, and more often she afterwards told or wrote out what she claimed to have seen in the visions—wonderful descriptions of angels and visions like those described by John in Revelation. Then at other times she claimed to have received revelation on doctrines, or special "testimonies" in regard to individuals. In fact, during her life she claimed revelations of this kind upon almost every kind of subject relating to the work and organization of the Seventh-Day Adventist church. Many of these "visions" are recorded in the volumes called the "Testimonies for the Church" which have become the basis for much of the work and teachings of that church. She also wrote a great many other books, all of which are claimed by her followers, to be inspired of the Lord. For them, a statement from any of her books, on any Bible subject, will immediately settle all argument on that subject, and they will refuse to study it any further or accept any different interpretation, no matter how plain it may be that her interpretation is in error.

Miss Ellen Harmon, was married in 1846 to James White and all her writings are thereafter referred to as the work of Mrs. E.G. White. After the great disappointment of 1844, the Millerites

began to cast about for a reason for their dilemma. Some continued to hold the same interpretation of the 2300 day prophecy, but decided that they were wrong in considering the earth as the Sanctuary. They decided that the Sanctuary was in heaven and that in 1844, Jesus entered that sanctuary to "cleanse" it, or make the atonement for the world. This view was arrived at by ministers and later endorsed by Mrs. White, saying that she was shown in vision that the view was correct.

Elder James White and Mrs. E. G. White may be termed the founders of the Seventh-Day Adventist church. Elder white was a strong leader, and the "visions" of his wife silenced all tendency to division or debate among those who believed in them. These soon became so numerous that belief in the "visions" was made a test of fellowship. No one who refused to believe and teach that the writings of Mrs. White are special instructions from the Lord, could long remain a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist church. We will later explain why this very fact makes it impossible for us to work with that church, or accept the visions.

When the claims were first made for the "visions," there were of course many who were opposed to accepting them. Those who believed in them, always pointed out the manner in which the experiences came about. Most of the so-called "open visions," that is, those given in the presence of others, came in church meetings. The meetings would be in progress, then suddenly Mrs. White would be "carried off in vision." She would appear to go into a trance. Her eyes

would remain wide open, but she apparently did not breathe, and seemed to receive unusual strength.

We might at this place, enter into a discussion of the cause of these trances and show that all the strange things she was able to do while in them, may be explained as natural to one in that state. Her general condition of poor health probably brought on these experiences. However, we do not feel it necessary to go into that at any length, as it is on the *teachings she claimed to receive in these visions*, and what the Bible has to say about them, that they must either stand or fall. Although her followers frequently refer to the unexplained phenomena which attended the giving of the "open visions," as a proof of their being genuine, such is really no proof at all. Sick people and others subject to attacks of delirium, often show the same effects. People near death, have been known to rise out of bed and for a time possess unusual strength. Sleep-often without falling or colliding with anything. walkers wander about in the most difficult places, Magicians have been able to go into similar trances. Yet none of these are considered to have any divine source.

Believers in Mrs. White's "visions" refer to Numbers 24:4 & 16, as an example of a Bible prophet who had similar visions. "He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling *into a trance*, but having his eyes open." The phrase in italics, is so printed in the King James version of the Bible, showing that it is supplied. The Revised Version reads, "Falling down, and having his

eyes open" which seems more likely to be the correct reading, and implies no trance. Present day "holiness" people claiming to be under the power of the Holy Spirit, often go into trances, fall down, with eyes open, claim revelations and speak in "tongues." Adventists reject all such manifestations as being of satan.

But as we have said, we will not enter into any attempt to further explain her trances as the real point at issue is the contents of the so-called "visions."

Errors in the "Visions"

We first wish to call attention to a number of her teachings which have since proved to be positive errors.

In the book, "The Great Second Advent Movement," pages 257, 258, is told the vision which Mrs. White had in Topsham, Maine in 1846. Joseph Bates, a former sea captain was present and up to that time was skeptical of her so-called "visions". In this particular one, she described the stars and planets. She gave a "glowing" description of the rosy-tinted belts she saw across the surface of some planet, and added, "I see four moons." "Oh," said Elder Bates, "she is viewing Jupiter!" Then, having made motion as though traveling through space, she began giving a description of belts, and rings in their varying beauty, and said, "I see seven moons." Elder Bates exclaimed, "She is describing Saturn." Next she said, "I see six moons," and at once began a description of the "open heavens," with its glory, calling it an opening into a region more enlightened. Elder Bates said that her description far surpassed any account of the opening

heavens he had ever read from any author. "Great Second Advent Movement," p. 258.

Mrs. White claimed to have never looked into an Astronomy book or to have had any previous knowledge of the subject. Elder Bates believed her to be entirely ignorant of the subject, and that therefore the things she had described must have been revealed by the Lord. From that time on he accepted the "visions." But the point which we now notice is that she "saw" *only what astronomers had discovered up to that time, and interpreted things as they believed them then.* Since then the science has progressed and many Telescopes far better than any they had at that time have been built. Photographs of the planets now show that Jupiter has nine moons and Saturn ten. The "opening heavens" is now simply referred to as the nebula in Orion and the larger instruments have revealed it to be much like other nebulae. The author of the work referred to above appends a note which admits that more moons were later discovered for the planets mentioned. But we believe we are justified in our contention that such an admission clearly shows that the "vision" was not a view of the heavens from God. He makes no errors. Popular magazines and newspapers of the time when this "view" was given, were filled with articles and pictures concerning astronomy, and Mrs. White "saw" exactly what they were teaching at that time.

Amalgamation of Man and Beast

In the volumes by Mrs. White, entitled "Spirit of Prophecy," the following is found in Volume 1, page 69: "But if there was one sin above an-

other which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God and caused confusion everywhere." And on page 78 of the same volume: "Every species of animal which God had created was preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood. Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men."

All scientists recognize that these statements are biologically absurd and impossible. Adventists often deny that they were ever written as the volumes in which they appeared have been long out of print and the statements are omitted in all later works.

A number of other errors in her writings might also be mentioned. But in works claimed to be inspired by God in a direct sense, one error is enough to disprove that claim. God makes no mistakes. If there was one statement in any part of the Bible which could be shown to be a positive error on the part of the writer, no one would accept the Bible as the inspired word of God.

We mentioned above that some statements are omitted in Mrs. White's later editions and writings. There have been a large number of these omissions and corrections. Mrs. White made many of them herself and since her death, the publishers have continued the policy. Some of these omissions have been defended on the ground

that they might be misunderstood — that those who bring them up against her writings, do misunderstand them. The oldest editions of some of the writings have been so rare, that many Adventists will deny that some of the statements they contain, were ever written. But all these things only add to the evidence against the inspiration of Mrs. White and the claims made for her. If the writings were claimed to be just like the works of others like Luther or Moody, or even of S. D. A. writers—just good writings about the Bible, no one would object to revisions of later editions. But *divinely inspired* writings could never be “revised.” God wastes no words. The last chapter of the book of Revelation warns of the penalty for in any way adding to or taking from the words of the Bible.

Adventists often point out how wonderfully good the books Mrs. White wrote, are—the inspiration to be gained from reading them and what a help they have been in their church. We wish to make it very clear that we are not here denying these points. But even if there were absolutely no errors in the books, we would still maintain that they are not divinely inspired; that they are not to be taken on a par with the Bible; and that *it is not necessary to read them, or believe in them in any way*, to be saved in the kingdom of God.

A Bar to All Advancement

Many Adventists will feel compelled to admit that it is *not necessary* to believe in the inspiration of Mrs. White to be saved. But they will argue that her works have done so much good and are still so good for everyone to read, that

it is the best thing to do to accept them as being from God. They admit that they are not absolutely necessary, but since they are altogether good and in their present form, as they view them, are altogether correct and do no possible harm, why not accept them? The writer has even heard the argument advanced that without the writings the church would always have been divided and could never have made the advancement that it has. Therefore they feel fully justified in demanding that all members of the S. D. A. church believe in, and uphold the "visions" and "writings" of Mrs. White. But this brings up perhaps one of the very most important reasons why the "Church of God" cannot accept them. The Bible tells us to "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18. Jesus is the living word of God. But a belief in the divine inspiration of her writings bars one from all further advancement in Bible knowledge, beyond what she taught. Among Adventists, whenever any Bible point comes up for discussion as to its meaning, if one can bring up any statement from Mrs. White on the subject, all further discussion or argument is immediately stopped. Her comment is not taken as a like statement from a Bible commentary would be—that is, as the opinion of the writer, but is taken as the word of God on the subject and therefore absolutely right. Once Mrs. White had written on any point of doctrine, and her writing had been published that point was considered forever settled. To the Adventists, the statements of Mrs. White are just as infallible as the statements of the Pope to the Catholics. And

both groups are proud of this, for they argue that it keeps out division and error. Both have been able to build up great systems of organization largely because of this fact.

We must admit that any dictatorship, any infallible voice certainly makes for unity. But it does not follow that such unity will advance the truth. Adventists might accept advanced light on the Bible, some points of which would be entirely to their advantage in proving the Sabbath, but they may not do so because they were not seen by Mrs. White.

The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church

One of the strongest arguments put forth by the S. D. Adventists for believing in the inspiration of Mrs. White is the thought that the Bible teaches that the "remnant church" is to have "the spirit of prophecy." The following texts are placed together to show this:

"Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Rev. 14:12. *"And 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. *"And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not; I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."* Rev. 19:10.

It is taught that these texts show that the "faith of Jesus" and the "Testimony of Jesus" are much the same; that the "remnant church" has the "Testimony of Jesus" and that the last verse

defines that phrase to be "the spirit of prophecy." And in all of this we will agree and will take the verses to mean just what they say. The Adventists go one step farther and define the "spirit of prophecy" to mean the spirit *which causes* one in the church to prophesy, or be a prophet, and further that these refer to the writings of Mrs. White. When an Adventist minister wishes to read from her writings, he will usually refer to them as "the spirit of prophecy" and will often say, "Let us hear what the spirit of prophecy has to say upon the subject..." and then read from one of her books. We absolutely and positively deny that there exists any scriptural authority for so referring to her works. The texts quoted do *not in any way* intimate that the "remnant church" is to have any *other prophet* than Christ. Rev. 19:10 clearly teaches just that. The term "testimony of Jesus" does not require defining—it is perfectly clear to all. Any person's testimony is his words and writings. The "testimony of Jesus" is found in the Bible, and most directly in the Gospels. The revelation to John simply tells us that the spirit, or inspiration or power of all "prophecy," which any dictionary defines as meaning preaching or exposition, as well as foretelling, is found in the words of Jesus. When John fell down to worship the one through whom the prophetic revelation was being given to him, that being forbade his doing so. And in explanation he declared that he himself was among those who had the testimony of Jesus, and further, that that testimony—those words of Jesus, were the spirit which was giving the prophecy. Therefore that being through

whom the prophecy was coming, was unworthy of any worship; God was the One to worship.

The words of Jesus, who was the living Word of God, will always be the true spirit of all true preaching and all true prophecy. We're told in the last days your "sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your old men shall dream dreams." Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17. Peter speaks of this as meeting fulfillment when the apostles preached on the day of pentecost. It may be that it is yet to find an added fulfillment, but if so, we note that it will be in *sons and daughters, young men and old men*, and not confined to one individual. Truly the spirit of prophecy is in the remnant church; whenever we read from the Bible, and especially from the recorded words of Jesus, we are truly reading from the spirit of prophecy.

The first two verses of the book of Hebrews are among the most inspiring in the Bible. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." We believe that we are still in the last days and that God has, through Christ, given us a complete guide-book to carry us through to the Kingdom. But note the following from the writings of Mrs. White:

"In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of the prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the Testimonies of His Spirit. There never was a time when God instructed His people more earnestly than He instructs them now concerning His will, and the

course that He would have them pursue." *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 661. And again, "Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God." *Test. Vol. 5*, p. 64. "In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own idea. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne." *Test. Vol. 5*, p. 67.

Notice how these last statements compare with the verses from Hebrews. We prefer to take the Bible word and feel perfectly safe in adding nothing to it. Often Adventists will say that her writings *do not add to the Bible* because they are merely *interpretations* and *comments* on the Bible — *divinely inspired comments*. However, we may note from the book called the "*Testimonies for the Church*" from which the above quotations were taken, that much of what is in these books relates to the *organization* of their *church*, the *location of schools* and *publishing houses*, the financial part of the work, besides a great many testimonies about what certain individuals were doing, or should or should not do. Divine inspiration is claimed for it all. Surely such is not merely Bible comment!

The Evidence of Plagerism

We have noted above that Mrs. White claimed divine inspiration for everything which she wrote. Adventists often speak of the fact that she was unlearned and had never read widely in histories

or books of science. They attribute all display of knowledge of these things, as an evidence of the direct inspiration of God.

In all the later editions of her works, there are numerous passages from other writings, enclosed in quotation marks and giving credit to the books from which taken. Our first thought would be that it would hardly seem necessary for her to even quote from others in writings inspired directly by the Lord. But when we examine early editions of her works, we find as many if not more quotations, but without quotation marks or any credit in any way. In fact, many paragraphs from her various books are found to be almost word for word copies of books on the same subjects by standard authors. The few changes do not conceal the fact that these books were freely used in her works. Her book, "Patriarchs and Prophets" contains many such paragraphs from Clark's Commentaries. "The Great Controversy" in the editions from 1884 to the 9th edition 1888, contains many passages from the "History of the Reformation" by D'Aubigne, and from "The History of Protestantism" by J. A. Wyle. In the year 1883, a book was published by Mrs. White, entitled "Sketches from the Life of Paul." The first edition was well received and there was great demand for it. It was planned to print another edition, when the book was suddenly taken off the market. The publishers of Conybeare and Howson's book "Life and Epistles of Paul" threatened to bring suit, if Mrs. White's book was not taken off the market, because in it was copied practically all of his work. Yet in the preface of this book, the

following sentence appeared: "The writer of this book, having received special help from the Spirit of God, is able to throw light upon the teachings of Paul, and their application to our own time, as no other authors are prepared to do."

The Church of God and the Bible

The "Church of God" believes that the Bible alone gives sufficient knowledge for our salvation. We believe that many godly writers have been inspired by the reading of the Bible to write good books about it, and that it is helpful to read these books. But there is no book in existence which has been inspired in the same way in which the Bible was; it alone is an infallible book. The only prophets of God who wrote books of prophecy are found in the Bible. It may be that in fulfillment of the words, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" that some special revelations for special times may be given, but these will never all be to only one person. The only group of 12 apostles was chosen by Christ, and with the prophets, their writings are a part of the foundation of the church. All true gospel preachers are apostles in the sense that they are teachers of the word, even as the original group of 12 were. And so the "Church of God" today, is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." Eph. 2:20-21. And the work of the church is to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4:2.