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Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation: A Survey of Early Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions

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THEOLOGICAL
FOCUS

Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation: A Survey of Early Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions

By Denis Kaiser

Introduction

The acceptance of Ellen G. White's modern-day prophetic gift naturally raises questions about the relationship between her writings and the biblical writings. If the same divine source generated both sets of writings, one may legitimately ask for the authority and finality of Ellen White's comments on biblical passages. In their history, Seventh-day Adventists have answered that question variously and those answers are paradigmatic for the divide that continues to exist in the Church to this day. Some ascribe to her comments a normative and final authority in biblical interpretation, whereas others deny them any privilege in that regard. Still others try to find some middle ground. The crucial issue is which approach is more loyal and truthful to Ellen White and her divine inspiration.

This article surveys the history of Adventist views on the role of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation from 1845 to 1930. While she evidentially played a major role in the development of the publishing work, the organization of the church, health institutions, educational institutions, mission work,

lifestyle principles, spirituality, and more, this article focuses specifically on the role and authority Adventists ascribed to her in the interpretation of the Bible.¹

Spiritual, Non-Normative Role (1845–1885)

Early Sabbatarian Adventists believed in the divine origin and authority of Ellen White's visions and writings, yet they felt their function and scope differed from those of the Bible. They believed that Scripture as the "only rule of faith and practice" was authoritative for all Christians throughout the Christian dispensation. Ellen White's revelations, however, were subject to the scrutiny of the Bible (1 Thess 5:19–20) and therefore derived their authority from Scripture. As a genuine manifestation of the modern-day gift of prophecy, her visions and writings addressed only a particular group of people at the time of the end (Rev 12:17; 19:10).²

In the late 1840s, Sabbatarian Adventists gained new insights through the study of the Bible on such matters as the heavenly sanctuary, the seventh-day Sabbath, the third angel's message, the sealing, etc. During that period, Ellen White was usually unable to comprehend the arguments on the subject under

discussion,³ yet her visions helped in that process in two distinct ways. First, they confirmed those insights of Bible study, strengthening the faith of the believers in God's leading. Second, when those involved in the study discussed conflicting views reaching a deadlock because both sides had apparently exhausted their arguments from Scripture, the visions pointed to relevant biblical passages not yet considered and thus brought about unity.⁴

To maintain appreciation for that divine guidance and the belief in the foundational role of Scripture was not always easy, however. The belief in Ellen White's divine revelations attracted criticism, incurring the charge of making them, rather than Scripture, the rule of faith. To avoid criticism and prejudice, James White and other leaders chose to refrain from publishing her visions in the columns of the *Review and Herald* in the early 1850s. Sensing that they had nevertheless inhibited the prophetic gift, they affirmed their belief in her visions at a conference in November 1855. They stated that it would be inconsistent to argue that these messages were irrelevant and not binding to those who believe in their divine origin.⁵ While they subsequently printed articles about the prophetic gift and material from Ellen White in the *Review*,⁶ they did not employ her writings to bolster points of biblical interpretation or theological belief.

Adventists were further aware that Ellen White's revelations offered partial rather than comprehensive insights into the truth. The discovery of the time to commence the Sabbath is a profound example. When, in 1847, several people debated about the proper starting time of the Sabbath, Ellen White received a vision that stressed that the Sabbath runs "from even unto even" (Lev 23:32). Instead of accepting this clue as a starting point to study the biblical meaning of "even," Joseph Bates mistakenly interpreted "even" to confirm his 6 p.m. position, and everyone else accepted his interpretation. Seven years later, James White recommended a biblical study of that particular aspect as it had been settled by "experience" rather than Bible study. At the above-mentioned conference in November 1855, J. N. Andrews demonstrated that "even" refers to sunset. Everyone accepted his conclusions except Bates and Ellen White, who struggled with that experience. A few days later, she had a vision. Using the opportunity, she asked the angel when the Sabbath begins, to which the angel replied, "Take the word of God, read it, understand, and ye cannot err. Read carefully, and ye shall there find *what* even is, and *when* it is." As Andrews' study was sufficiently clear, this problem was solved. Another question arose however. Ellen White wondered if God's "frown" was upon them as their Sabbath practice was not completely correct for almost nine years. The angel explained that God is only displeased when people consciously reject revealed light. They had accepted the message as they had understood it. God waited for a more opportune time to give them a better understanding through the Bible.⁷ Thus, He did not use Ellen White's visions to

supersede Scripture but He used them to point Adventists to the Bible.

From the late 1850s to the 1880s, Ellen White wrote several sets of books and multiple articles that commented on biblical and Christian history.⁸ When, in the early 1880s, the Sabbath School quarterly dealt with Christ's life and the Book of Acts, church members were recommended to consult, among others, her books *Spirit of Prophecy*, volumes 2 and 3, and *Sketches from the Life of Paul*.⁹ Thus far, her publications primarily addressed members of the denomination. Nevertheless, Adventist writers consistently based their biblical interpretations and doctrinal views on pertinent Bible texts. They occasionally utilized other sources such as newspaper reports, historians, and other theologians in case they confirmed their interpretations. They refrained from using her writings to support their views, a custom that was not so much a sign of lacking trust in her prophetic ministry—quite the opposite was true—but of deep commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.

Final, Normative Arbiter (1885–1903)

Several early leaders of the church, such as James White and J. N. Andrews who had participated in discovering the Adventist doctrines, passed away in the early 1880s. Afterwards a new generation of ministers and church leaders felt that Ellen White's writings could, or in some cases should, be utilized to determine the correctness of a given interpretation. Such a use of her writings became more prevalent in North America by the second half of the 1890s.

In 1886, readers of the *Review and Herald* could observe a unique change in the articles of one author. Unlike other Adventist writers, D. M. Canright began to frequently quote Ellen White's writings in support of matters of practice, implying that her writings were equal to Scripture.¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, he separated from the church and accused Adventists of employing her writings exactly in that manner, a claim that Uriah Smith vehemently denied.¹¹ Both Smith and George I. Butler continued to uphold that Ellen White's visions were not on par with or above Scripture.¹² She herself wrote in the preface to the *Great Controversy* that the gifts of the Spirit do not supersede the Bible but were subject to the Bible, the standard and test for all teaching and experience.¹³ The discussion between Butler and E. J. Waggoner on the nature of the law in Galatians 3 (the ceremonial law vs. the moral law) tempted Butler, however, to look for a statement from Ellen White in support of his position—a request she denied him.¹⁴ Years later, she would suggest a complementary view that combined the apparent contradictory positions, showing the depth of thought in that passage.¹⁵ Meanwhile, when she lent her support to Waggoner and A. T. Jones in the wake of the Minneapolis Conference in 1888, both Smith and Butler questioned her and singled out allegedly unreliable statements from her writings as they seemed to conflict with their perception of the controversy.¹⁶ They fell somewhat

into disgrace when they opposed the reform efforts of those younger ministers who, in turn, came to be viewed as loyal to Ellen White.

During her stay in Australia (1891–1900) and Waggoner's missionary work in England (1892–1903), Jones became perhaps "Adventism's most influential preacher," and spokesperson for Ellen White in North America.¹⁷ At the General Conference Session in 1893, he stressed the verbal inspiration and absolute clarity of inspired writings, suggesting that Scripture's meaning is clear and beyond the need of interpretation. Attempting to interpret or explain a given biblical text is a usurpation of Christ's place because He is the author of Scripture and He alone through His Spirit can explain its meaning. Jones argued that "the Spirit of Prophecy," the testimony of Jesus, is "the means through which Christ himself gives the true understanding and right interpretation of his word." As Christ possesses infallibility, His interpretation is "infallible" and "absolutely sure." Thus, Ellen White's writings are the final infallible interpreter of Scripture. Subjecting Scripture to her writings, Jones wrote, "the right use of the Testimonies . . . [is] to study the Bible *through them*, so that the things brought forth in them [the Testimonies] we shall see and know for ourselves *are in the Bible*."¹⁸ Similarly, W. W. Prescott stated that Jesus through the Spirit of Prophecy gave an infallible interpretation of Scripture.¹⁹ By 1896, the Sabbath School quarterly began to contain statements from Ellen White's writings as comments on particular biblical passages. Interestingly, it was Prescott who had written that quarterly.²⁰ As influential Adventist writers led by example, others adopted the practice of using Ellen White's writings in interpreting the Bible.

Divided Positions (1903–1920s)

Ellen White's return to the United States in 1900 brought American church leaders once again in direct contact with her and with the dynamics of her inspiration. Those dynamics conflicted with the assumptions that A. T. Jones and John Harvey Kellogg had concerning her inspiration and, as a result, they rejected her inspiration and ministry altogether. Subsequently, some turned the acceptance of Ellen White's role as a final arbiter in matters of biblical interpretation into a test of orthodoxy, much to the chagrin of those who had worked closely with her during her Australian years, such as her son W. C. White and A. G. Daniells.

Relations between Kellogg and church leaders became increasingly strained by 1903, a circumstance that drove Jones closer to Kellogg and further away from Ellen White, Daniells, and others. Jones maintained his belief in verbal inspiration but he eventually questioned Ellen White's divine inspiration and claimed that he had "never . . . put them [her writings] in the place of the Bible,"²¹ although evidence from the 1890s suggests otherwise. Jones' open rejection of Ellen White and his separation from the church naturally generated fears whenever someone would express similar ideas. Meanwhile, W. W. Prescott, who had

previously shared Jones' conviction that Ellen White's writings were an infallible commentary of Scripture, had come to the conclusion that her writings were not to be used to settle exegetical discussions.²² Later, he explained that it was through particular experiences with her writings—his editorial work with her articles for the *Review*, and his assistance on historical matters for the *Great Controversy* (1911) and *Prophets and Kings* (1917)—that he came to the conclusion that they could serve as a guide or pointer in study but that it was necessary to "develop directly from Scripture the full meaning" of a passage. Scripture itself was to be the central study.²³ He was impressed by Ellen White's guidance in the early history of the church and her masterful advice during the Kellogg crisis, circumstances that strengthened his trust in "the reliability of the Spirit of Prophecy."²⁴ However, Prescott's refusal to grant Ellen White the role of a final interpretative arbiter seemed to resemble the position that Jones had adopted. Anyone who refused her that authority was subsequently in danger of being associated with Jones' apostasy.

The dispute, starting around 1908, over the interpretation of *hatāmīd* (the daily, continual, regular) in Dan 8:11–13 laid bare the divergent preferences and presuppositions concerning the use of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation. S. N. Haskell, J. N. Loughborough, J. S. Washburn, and others, who held the traditional view of *hatāmīd* (pagan Rome), felt her remarks in *Early Writings*²⁵ strongly endorsed their particular definition of the term. Prescott, Daniells, and others who advocated a new view (the heavenly ministration of Christ) nevertheless preferred to factor in the Old Testament use of the term and refused to employ her writings as the final word.²⁶ Those who held the traditional view interpreted that refusal to utilize Ellen White's writings as the final, infallible arbiter as a clear rejection of the divine inspiration and authority of her writings.²⁷ Ellen White herself repeatedly urged individuals involved in the dispute to stop using her writings because she had not seen anything on the particular point under discussion.²⁸ W. C. White concluded that God desired to have this matter settled through "a thorough study . . . of the Bible and history" rather than "by a revelation."²⁹ Public discussions on the *tāmīd* eventually ceased, yet the differences, prejudices, and recriminations continued in private.

In the next two decades, those who had been involved in the conflict continued to express their convictions on the role of Ellen White's role in biblical interpretation. Haskell stated, "A living prophet is an inspired commentary upon what God has previously spoken. He develops and applies the words inspired before."³⁰ "The living prophet, therefore, becomes an infallible guide to the correct conclusion of what the dead prophet has said."³¹ As Ellen White was a "living prophet," this interpretative authority applied particularly to her.³² Haskell thought that her refusal to place her writings on par with Scripture resulted from her

fear to be lumped together with false prophetic claimants. For Seventh-day Adventists, her writings had the same authority as the biblical writings, he argued, yet when sharing their beliefs with non-Adventists, they were to prove everything from Scripture.³³ Similarly, J. S. Washburn viewed her writings as a final, infallible interpreter of Scripture; interpretations that seemingly contradicted statements from Ellen White were to be disregarded and rejected. To say that her writings were not on par with Scripture because they had to be tested by Scripture was, in his view, “simple Higher Criticism.”³⁴

At the 1919 Bible Conference, Daniells had made several significant remarks on that subject. He felt that Ellen White’s explanations of biblical passages were “dependable,” although in a few cases “there may be some difficulties.”³⁵ Scripture was to be interpreted “primarily” through Scripture.³⁶ To argue, however, that her writings were “the only safe interpreter of the Bible” was “a false doctrine, a false view.”³⁷ He rejected the assumption that her writings were to Adventists “the only infallible oracle” as Joseph Smith had been to the Mormons.³⁸ Prescott stressed that her writings were not to substitute serious Bible study.³⁹ He appreciated the spiritual and practical value of her writings and although he felt that she had been mistaken on some matters of biblical interpretation, he disliked the practice of some to contrast her writings with Scripture in public.⁴⁰

In the 1920s, F. M. Wilcox, W. C. White, and a few others sought to bridge the gap by outlining the purpose and scope of Ellen White’s writings. In W. C. White’s view, the quoting of his mother’s writings in sermons was not necessarily a problem. Yet when some people felt it was easier to make particular matters clear by use of the *Testimonies* rather than the Bible, he felt that they were putting her writings before the Bible. He said, “These things have grieved mother, and she has often advised our ministers to use the Bible first in presenting truths that were of a character to call for decided reforms, then to read the Testimonies as another witness to the same truths.”⁴¹ Wilcox stressed the role of Scripture as “the rule of faith and practice”⁴² and “the great test book, or standard, of every claim in doctrine and in revelation.”⁴³ Thus, Ellen White’s writings had to be tested by Scripture, and as they were in harmony with the Bible and exalted it “as the one rule of faith,” they were to be accepted as coming from God.⁴⁴ Referring to Ellen White’s own view on the role and function of her writings, Wilcox emphasized that they were “in no sense . . . to take the place of the Bible”⁴⁵ and were not “an addition to the canon of the Bible”⁴⁶ or on “a parity with the Bible.”⁴⁷ Instead of viewing her writings as the final authority in matters of interpretation, he portrayed them as “a spiritual commentary” on the Bible and the plan of redemption because they helped to comprehend the “great principles” of the Bible. They provided practical spiritual guidance in a believer’s life.⁴⁸ Some scholars perceive Wilcox as “the personification of Adventism”

and the “great mediator” in the 1920s because he tried to formulate positions that all parties in the church could accept.⁴⁹ His long-running editorial work for the *Review* (1909–1944) had a huge impact on the church, yet he was apparently unable to bridge the gap between the different positions on the role of Ellen White’s writings in the interpretation of the Bible as tensions continued to exist along these lines.

Summary

From the beginning, Seventh-day Adventists generally adhered to the position that Scripture interprets itself, while maintaining that Ellen White’s writings contained beneficial spiritual advice and inspired insights. By the 1890s, some leading ministers introduced the idea that Jesus had given the visions and writings of Ellen White to function as a final, infallible interpreter of Scripture. Both assumptions continued to coexist and compete with one another. Some considered the exalting of Ellen White’s writings to the position of an infallible commentary as a functional abandonment of the principle of *sola scriptura* while others felt a refusal to ascribe to her writings that role was a practical denial of her divine inspiration and authority. Inner-denominational theological controversies gave rise to hypersensitivity, keeping watch for giving Ellen White either too much or too little authority. The result was a rift in matters of biblical interpretation that continues within Adventism to this day.

Toward a Holistic View

The different perceptions of the role of Ellen White’s writings in biblical interpretation uncover varying assumptions concerning the relationship between and the functions of canonical and post-canonical revelation. However, a prevalent underlying assumption seems to be the unwitting idea that the final meaning of a text can be deduced either from a surface reading or from the commentary of an inspired writer. That assumption does not seem to factor in the following realities. The biblical text contains (divine) thoughts of eternal depth and their meaning is probably deeper than a surface reading might suggest. The text may contain different nuances and aspects that only come into view through deep study. Ellen White used different biblical passages in various ways. Scholars have detected in her writings exegetical, theological, typological, parenthetical, and other uses of Scripture.⁵⁰ In her effort to instruct, admonish, and encourage individuals, Ellen White occasionally applied biblical principles to particular circumstances without intending to establish a universal rule for all and every situation. Sometimes she used one particular passage in different ways at different points in her life. In other cases, she saw the complementarity of seemingly contradictory interpretations (e.g., on the law in Galatians). There are further many biblical passages she never used, leaving them unexplained. We believe that divine revelation presents us with truth, yet revelation is evidently also progressive and partial

because it never presents all there is to know. Thus, Ellen White may have commented on a particular aspect in a given passage without exhausting the depth of its meaning. We may value the beneficial insights and spiritual truths brought out in her comments on Scripture without limiting the meaning of Scripture and the discovery of biblical truth by making her the final word and thus functionally a part of the canon. We should consider how we use her writings in our sermons and research without giving the impression that we read Scripture only through the lens of her writings or that we think little of them and can virtually ignore them. Resolving the dilemma of the proper use of Ellen White's writings in that way allows Bible students to appreciate her comments, to discover for themselves the richness of Scripture, and to yearn continually for growth in understanding the deep things of God.

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¹ This article is based on relevant information concerning this subject from Denis Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880–1930)," PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016.

² See, e.g., Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, American University Series, Series 7, Theology and Religion, vol. 12 (New York: Lang, 1985), 45–46; Zoltán Szalos-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality: The Impact of the Charismatic Guidance of Ellen G. White*, Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 1 (Cernica: Editura Institutului Teologic Adventist, 2005), 64–68, 71–83.

³ Ellen G. White, "The Work for This Time," *Review and Herald*, May 18, 1905, 17.

⁴ Alberto R. Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines*, Adventist Theological Society Doctoral Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1995), 166–169, 390, 393–396.

⁵ Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell, "Address of the Conference Assembled at Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 16th, 1855," *Review and Herald*, December 4, 1855, 79.

⁶ James White, "A Test," *Review and Herald*, 16 October 1855, 61, 62; James White, "The Testimony of Jesus," *Review and Herald*, December 18, 1855, 92–93; Ellen G. White, "Communication from Sister White," *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1856, 118.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:116; James White, "Time to Commence the Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, February 25, 1868, 168.

⁸ See, e.g., *Spiritual Gifts*, vols. 1 and 3; and *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols.

⁹ Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt," 461 fn. 486.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 171 fn. 255.

¹¹ Uriah Smith, "A Miracle Called for," *Review and Herald*,

October 18, 1887, 649.

¹² George I. Butler, "The Visions: How They Are Held Among S. D. Adventists," *Review and Herald*, August 14, 1883, 12; Uriah Smith, "Mrs. White and Her Work," *Review and Herald*, Extra, November 22, 1887, 10–11.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1888), e.

¹⁴ Denis Fortin, "Galatians, Law in," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 830.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, "The Law in Galatians," [1900], Ms 87, 1900, EGWE; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, June 6, 1896, Lt 96, 1896, EGWE.

¹⁶ Gary Land, *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator*, Adventist Pioneer Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 178–182; Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal, eds., *The Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 801–802.

¹⁷ George R. Knight, "Jones, Alonzo Trevier (1850–1923)," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 429.

¹⁸ A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message—No. 1," *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, January 27, 1893, 9–11; A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message—No. 15," *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 23, 1893, 361; A. T. Jones, "The Gifts: Their Presence and Object," *Home Missionary*, Extra, December 1894, 12; A. T. Jones, "The Sure Interpreter," *Bible Echo*, February 11, 1895, 44.

¹⁹ W. W. Prescott, "The Word of God—No. 4 [cont.]," *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 326–327.

²⁰ See [W. W. Prescott], *International Sabbath School Quarterly* 1, no. 5, quart. 3 (1896): passim. I thank Melissa Cooke for pointing out this detail.

²¹ A. T. Jones to A. G. Daniells, January 26, 1906, EGWCF, EGWE.

²² W. W. Prescott to R. A. Underwood, August 2, 1908, PIC box 3090, GCA.

²³ W. W. Prescott to I. H. Evans, February 15, 1933, Richard Hammill Collection, bx 22, fld 8, CAR.

²⁴ W. W. Prescott to S. N. Haskell and E. W. Farnsworth, September 4, 1904, Richard Hammill Collection, box 22, fld 9, CAR.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1882 [1945]), 74–75.

²⁶ Denis Kaiser, "The Word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and Mutual Love: Lessons from the 'Daily' Controversy for Conflict Resolution," *Ministry*, December 2014, 16–19.

²⁷ J. S. Washburn to Claude E. Holmes, April 18, 1920, WCWCF, EGWE.

²⁸ Kaiser, "The Word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and Mutual Love," 16.

²⁹ W. C. White to P. T. Magan, July 31, 1910, WCWCF, EGWE.

³⁰ S. N. Haskell, "A Living Prophet," *Bible Training School*, August 1912, 42.

³¹ S. N. Haskell, "Resurrection Taught by Writings of Moses," *Bible Training School*, July 1911, 13.

³² S. N. Haskell to John N. Loughborough, October 19, 1912, EGWCF, EGWE; S. N. Haskell to W. W. Prescott, November 15, 1907, William Warren Prescott Papers, Col. 143, bx 1, fld 1, CAR.

³³ S. N. Haskell to W. C. White, November 21, 1912, EGWCF, EGWE.

³⁴ J. S. Washburn to A. G. Daniells, May 1, 1922, WCWCF, EGWE.

³⁵ "Report of Bible Conference Held in Takoma Park, D.C., July 1–19, 1919," unpublished manuscript, GCA, 1194.

- ³⁶ Ibid., 1194–1195.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 1195–98.
- ³⁸ A. G. Daniells to F. E. Dufty, [1920], WCWCF, EGWE.
- ³⁹ *Report of Bible Conference*, GCA, 1919, 1252, 1254.
- ⁴⁰ W. W. Prescott to W. W. Fletcher, June 28, 1929, WCWCF, EGWE; *Report of Bible Conference*, 1198, 1252, 1254.
- ⁴¹ W. C. White to D. D. Voth, September 22, 1921, WCWCF, EGWE.
- ⁴² F. M. Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church [No. 7]: Relation of Mrs. E. G. White’s Writings to the Bible,” *Review and Herald*, September 27, 1928, 17.
- ⁴³ F. M. Wilcox, “The Holy Scriptures: Their Divine Origin,” *Review and Herald*, August 9, 1928, 3.
- ⁴⁴ F. M. Wilcox to L. E. Froom, August 5, 1928, L. E. Froom Reference Files box 3874, fld “Tests of Fellowship,” GCA; F. M. Wilcox, “The Editor’s Mail Bag,” *Review and Herald*, January 19, 1922, 5; F. M. Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church [No. 2]: The Work and Writings of Mrs. E. G. White,” *Review and Herald*, August 23, 1928, 9.
- ⁴⁵ F. M. Wilcox, “The Study of the Bible: Aided by the Writings of the Spirit of Prophecy,” *Review and Herald*, February 3, 1921, 2.
- ⁴⁶ Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church [No. 7],” 17; F. M. Wilcox, “The Testimony of Jesus [No. 9]: Not an Addition to the Bible,” *Review and Herald*, September 7, 1933, 5–6.
- ⁴⁷ Wilcox to Froom, August 5, 1928.
- ⁴⁸ Wilcox, “The Study of the Bible,” 2, 6.
- ⁴⁹ LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 417–418; Jeffrey A. Gang, “F. M. Wilcox and the Spirit of Prophecy: A Study of His Teaching Concerning the Authority and Role of Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy from 1915 to 1930,” Research paper, Andrews University, 1994, 20.
- ⁵⁰ Jon Paulien, “The Interpreter’s Use of the Writings of Ellen G. White,” in *Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 7, *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Vol. 2, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 163–174. See also Gerhard Pfandl, “Ellen G. White and Hermeneutics,” in *Biblical Research Institute Studies*, vol. 1, *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 309–328; Frank M. Hasel, “Ellen G. White’s Use of Scripture,” in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, eds. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 297–315.

Worship: The Center of the Three Angels’ Messages

Part 1

By Kwabena Donkor

Introduction

Why is it that in the Bible creation and worship themes often appear together? (See Exod 20:1–17; Job 38:7; Ps 33:6–9; 95; 104; 115; 139:1–9; Isa 40:12–31; Amos 5:8; Acts 17:22–30; Rom 1:18–25; Rev 4:11.) And why are the two themes often set in conflict? It is not only the commandment to have no other God before Yahweh in Exodus 20:3 that is set in the context of the risk of idolatry (Exod 20:4–5). Psalm 95’s impassioned plea to Israel to worship (Psalm 95:1–5) shifts to a rather somber mood in the subsequent verses. Obviously, the shift in mood reflects the psalmist’s sense of the danger of the community turning to worship competing gods (Psalm 95:3). It has been said that “the battle for worship lies at the heart of the very meaning of the biblical narrative itself.”¹ At an existential level, worship decisions have consequences, and why should that be the case? We wish to explore these questions by examining Revelation 14:6–12 in the context of worship, noting that an objective reading of the passage raises the fundamental questions about worship mentioned above. Our thesis is that only creation

theology satisfactorily answers these questions. Thus, our focus will be on the theological relationships among creation, worship, and judgment—not on controverted interpretational details. Our approach will simply assume the broad contours of interpreting the passage as generally understood among Seventh-day Adventists.

The Message of the Three Angels of Revelation 14:6–12

The message of the three angels is found within the larger context of Revelation 12–14. Although much of the Book of Revelation involves controversy, chapters 12–14 in particular are so conflict-centered that this larger context must be explored in order to obtain a proper understanding of the message of the three angels.

The Context of Revelation 12–14

Chapter 12 opens with a dramatic vision involving characters who clearly point to a struggle between the forces of good and evil. John depicts a pregnant woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and in labor ready to give birth to a male