

The Role of Ellen G. White within Seventh-day Adventism

By Terry Hill

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“God is either teaching His church, reproofing their wrongs and strengthening their faith, or He is not. This work is of God, or it is not. God does nothing in partnership with Satan. My work for the past thirty years bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil. In arraying yourself against the servants of God you are doing a work either for God or for the devil.” (Ellen G. White, 4th Volume Testimonies page 229, ‘Opposition to Faithful Warnings’)

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Section one

The Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White

Throughout the various presentations found on this website, which in the main deal with the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism, there are many quotations given from various sources. Two of these sources this author regards as authoritative. These are (a) the Scriptures and (b) the writings of Ellen White, both of which he believes were given by inspiration of God although for two different purposes.

The reason why he believes these writings are authoritative is because he accepts that they were written by those who were given the gift known in Christianity as the spirit of prophecy (see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). This is why their writings can be said to be inspired.

The motivation behind this three-section series is to help explain the role that Ellen White played within Seventh-day Adventism, also how her writings should be regarded in relation to the Scriptures. We will see later that Ellen White said that what she wrote was not to be 'placed in front' of the Bible neither take the place of it but rather point people to what it says - even at times in explanation of it. Certainly her writings are not to take the place of Bible study. In fact to see if what she wrote was true, her writings should promote a study of the scriptures. Certainly they should not depreciate it.

Ellen White also said that one of the purposes of the gift was to correct people when they erred from the true meaning of Scripture. We shall see this as we progress through this study.

One brief statement

On December 6th 1902, Ellen White wrote an open letter to the church. This letter was then published in the Review and Herald of January 20th 1903. In one brief statement she tells of the purposes of her calling. She wrote

“The Lord has sent his people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” (Ellen G. White, letter to the church, written from Elmshaven St. Helena, December 6th 1902, published in the Review and Herald of January 20th 1903)

This simple statement summarises the overall purpose of the work of Ellen White. It was to **lead** people to what God had already said in the Scriptures. This was God's intention for calling Ellen White. It was His way of enlightening and

leading His people. It was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Ellen White and the Scriptures

One of the major concerns that people often have with the writings of Ellen White is in the understanding of how they should be regarded in relation to the Scriptures. Perhaps a word from her writings will serve to show us what she believed on this matter. To do this we shall quote from the introductory notes to one of her most well known books - 'The Great Controversy'. This will reveal how she regarded her own writings in relation to the Scriptures. It will also give us a firm platform from which we can continue our study. In this introduction Ellen White wrote

"The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language" (*Ellen G. White, 'The Great Controversy' 1911 edition, 'Introduction'*)

Ellen White is saying here that whilst human hands actually wrote (penned) the Scriptures, meaning that the truth contained within them is expressed in human words, she also says that "the thought" (inspiration) behind these words is divinely inspired.

This is in keeping with what the apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 concerning the Scriptures. This was that

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" 2 Timothy 3:16 (KJV)

Some translations, instead of using the word "inspiration", say 'God breathed'. As Green's literal translation translates puts it

"All Scripture *is* God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" Timothy 3:16 Green's Literal Translation

This is much the same as other translations like the 'New International Version' and the 'Complete Jewish Bible' put it. They say

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," 2 Timothy 3:16 New International Version

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth,

convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living;" 2 Timothy 3:16
Complete Jewish Bible

In speaking of what she was shown and wrote, Ellen White penned these words

"And here I would state that although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation."
(*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 8th October 1867, 'Questions and answers'*)

In continuing her reasoning in the introduction to 'The Great Controversy', Ellen White wrote

"God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth" (*Ellen G. White, 'The Great Controversy' 1911 edition, 'Introduction'*)

Note particularly the way that Ellen White describes the actual method used by God to convey "His truth" to the inhabitants of this world.

She says that God "guided" the human mind to **select the words** the Bible writers spoke and wrote. She does not say that He gave them the exact words. This is why she says that although the Bible is the testimony of God, the truth contained in it is conveyed in the "imperfect expression of human language". Is it not reasonable therefore, seeing that Ellen White was given the same gift of inspiration as the Bible writers, to say that this is how God guided her regarding the words that she wrote? When reasoned through, it would be inconsistent not to say so.

The Scriptures therefore, although 'inspired' by God, are not 'verbally inspired'. By this it is meant that generally speaking, God did not dictate to the writers the exact words they were to write but that they were allowed to select the words for themselves. Ellen White then says of the Scriptures

"In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will." (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that Ellen White does not say that in themselves the words of the Bible are perfect but that the Bible reveals to humanity "the knowledge necessary for salvation". She also said it should be accepted as "an

authoritative, infallible revelation of His will". She continues by saying of the Scriptures

"They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, R.V." (*Ibid*)

In agreement with the Bible, Ellen White conveys the thought that the Scriptures are given for a variety of purposes. These are the means through which God reveals not only what He wants known of Himself but also His will for humanity. It is the means through which He brings people to the knowledge of Himself **through His Son** and offers freely to each and everyone the opportunity of eternal life. The Scriptures urge themselves as being of supreme authority.

In passing, it is interesting to note that in this introduction when quoting 2 Timothy 3:16, Ellen White did not use the King James rendering of this verse which says "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" but quoted instead the Revised Version which says "Every scripture inspired by God".

Regardless of any implication in the use of this version, Ellen White does conclude that the Scriptures themselves contain the very knowledge "necessary for salvation", also that they are to be accepted as "an authoritative, infallible revelation" of God's will. This is as well as being the "standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience" (see above). These are all embracing statements.

In summary, the author of these notes believes, as was said by Ellen White, that the Bible is **the** standard by which all beliefs and all experiences must be tested. We shall see this more fully now. As A. G. Daniells in his book 'The Abiding Gift of Prophecy' put it

"The Bible is the supreme, infallible revelation of God to all men in all nations, and for all time. By this book all theories, teachings, and doctrines are to be tried. By it all men's characters are to be weighed, and their destiny decided. Next to the gift of Christ to redeem the human race, the Bible, God's holy word, is God's best gift to instruct and guide mankind through the journey of life. Theories, whether of religion, science, or morals, that plainly contradict this divine Book are false. They are not of God. They must, therefore, be rejected." (A. G. Daniells 'The Abiding Gift of Prophecy', page 281)

The Bible the standard – the gift a continuing revelation

It must not be thought that with the closing of the canon of Scripture that God had finished speaking to His people. On the contrary - and through His Holy Spirit - He continues to speak. This He does in any way and by any means that He sees fit but it must not be forgotten that the Bible is always to be regarded as **the** final test of all things.

In this same introduction to 'The Great Controversy' from which we have just been quoting, also with respect to this very principle, Ellen White wrote

"Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word." (*Ellen G. White, 'The Great Controversy' 1911 edition, 'Introduction'*)

This same author concluded

"The Spirit was not given -- nor can it ever be bestowed -- to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1. And Isaiah declares, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20." (*Ibid*)

Here again we can see that Ellen White concludes that the Bible is "the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested". Note she adds that when God wills, through His Holy Spirit, He will **continue** to illuminate the minds of His people. This must obviously be with respect to the meaning of Scripture also as revealing His will for His people. This must be accepted as God's divine prerogative. As Ellen White said in 'Early Writings'

"I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the "last days"; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth. Thus God dealt with Peter when He was about to send him to preach to the Gentiles. (Acts 10)" (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 78, 'Experience and views, 1882'*)

Again Ellen White points her readers to the Bible as the Christian's rule of "faith and practice". Notice she did say that the visions promised in the Bible for the last days, although "not for a new rule of faith", were designed by God to comfort His people. She said it was also "to correct those who err from Bible truth".

After receiving visions and revelation from God for almost 63 years, Ellen White could still say

"The Bible must be your counselor. Study it, and the Testimonies God has given; for they never contradict his word." -- Letter 106, 1907, p. 1." (*Ellen G. White, letter to Sister Rasmussen, March 19, 1907. Manuscript*

Summary - a gift from God

Seventh-day Adventists believe that it was God Himself who brought their church into existence. They also believe that He gave to Ellen White the gift known in Scripture as the 'gift of prophecy'. As well as this they believe that this is one of the identifying marks of His 'final' or 'remnant' people that He ordained should exist in the latter days of this earth's history. They also believe that through them, in heralding the soon return of Jesus, He is giving His final message of salvation (see Revelation 12:17 and 19:10). This is why Seventh-day Adventists often term Ellen White as 'God's messenger to His remnant people'.

This 'gift of prophecy' is the very same gift that God gave to **all** of the writers of the Scriptures. Its recipients therefore are deemed to be 'God inspired' whilst their writings are described as 'God breathed'. Remember here that Ellen White had said that in this respect, God had 'guided' the inspired writers of the Bible in the selection of things to write (see above). As we said above, it is only reasonable to believe that He did the same with her.

Whilst Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White received from God the very same gift as the Bible writers, it does not recognise that in every respect her writings are on a par with (equal to) the Scriptures. Allow me to briefly explain.

Not above the Scriptures

As we have seen in the above quotations, Seventh-day Adventists regard the Scriptures as being the inspired Word of God. They also regard them as the **final test** of all doctrine as well as the **final test** of all those who purport to have a message from God. The Bible therefore, according to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, must always be **the final and ultimate test** for the genuineness of any Christian belief or experience.

This means that any belief regarding any topic must **always** have the testimony of the Holy Scriptures as its **final authority**. This does not undermine the value or authority of the writings of Ellen White but sets them in a correct perspective of their relationship to the Scriptures. This means that the 'experiences' of Ellen White, which includes her revelations in dreams and visions etc that she purported to have received from God, as well as what she wrote, are all to be tested by the Scriptures.

This latter conclusion has always been the consistent view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As George Butler, General Conference President once put it

"We do not hold them [the writings of Ellen White] to be superior to the Bible, or in one sense equal to it. The Scriptures are our rule to test everything by, the visions as well as all other things." (G. I. Butler, Review and Herald supplement August 14th 1883)

Note first of all that Butler said that as a denomination we do not regard the

writings or the visions of Ellen White as being “superior to the Bible”. He also said that the Scriptures themselves are to be the test of “everything”. This particular belief of our church has since remained unchanged. It applies to the writings of Ellen White just as it applies to everything else. Butler also said

“That rule therefore, is of the highest authority: the standard is higher than the thing tested by it. If the Bible should show the visions were not in harmony with it, the Bible would stand, and the visions would be given up. This shows plainly that we hold the Bible the highest, our enemies to the contrary, not withstanding.” (*Ibid*)

Note that Butler said that “in one sense” Ellen White’s writings are **not equal to the Bible**. As he explains, this is in the sense that the ‘rule’ or ‘standard’ is always deemed higher than the thing that is being tested by it. Obvious to relate, whatever it is that is being tested cannot in every respect be equal to that by which it is being tested else the ‘tester’ would not be the superior of the two. Four years later Uriah Smith said the same as did Butler. He wrote

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." All gifts of the Spirit in the church, must be thus tested. Now it is evident that that which tests occupies a higher position than that which is tested by it. This, in one word, expresses our view of the relative position which the Bible and the visions sustain to each other." (*Uriah Smith, Review and Herald, October 18, 1887*)

Both Butler’s and Smith’s remarks were no different in principle than that which was said almost 40 years later by F. M. Wilcox. This was when as editor of the Review and Herald he said (note the title of the article)

“As God has spoken to His church in past ages by prophets and special messengers, so to the remnant church He has sent by His own chosen servant many special messages of warning, reproof, instruction, and exhortation. These messages are contained in the writings of Mrs. E. G. White. In visions and dreams God revealed to her deep mines of spiritual truth, and she was bidden to make known to others that which had been shown to her. Next to the Scriptures of Truth, these messages should have earnest and faithful study” (*F. M. Wilcox Feb 3rd 1921 Review and Herald February 3rd 1921, ‘The study of the Bible - aided by the Spirit of Prophecy*)

This same editor then went on to say concerning the writings of Ellen White

“They do not constitute for the remnant church a new Bible, as our opponents sometimes charge. In no sense are they to take the place of the Bible, by which their character is judged and their source determined; nor are they given as an addition to the Bible. Rather, they constitute a spiritual commentary upon the Scriptures, a divine illumination of the word, expressing in detail many of its great principles. Indeed, they themselves continually direct the reader to the Bible as the source of his hope and faith, as his spiritual guide and counselor. They never exalt the messenger who

bears them, but rather the Source of all truth and revelation, the Lord Jesus. Like the forerunner of the Messiah, they point men to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (*Ibid*)

The Scriptures, being the ‘tester’, are, according to the beliefs and teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, always the **final test** of authority for **all things** but this does not mean that God cannot raise up a messenger for His people whenever He deems it necessary. It is His prerogative to do as He sees fit to do. After making reference to a number of Ellen White’s books, this same editor concluded

“No one can read these messages without recognizing that they were written by one taught of God. They are given the believers in these days of special peril to save them from the snares which encompass them about. Those who have these volumes possess instruction of priceless value, to which they do well that they take heed. Those who have never read them do not recognize their great loss. May God enable us to give diligent heed to His word, and to avail ourselves of every aid which will bring to us a deeper knowledge of its life-giving truths.” (*Ibid*)

As Ellen White herself said

“God has given me a marked, solemn experience in connection with His work; and you may be assured that so long as my life is spared, I shall not cease to lift a warning voice as I am impressed by the Spirit of God, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. I have no special wisdom in myself; I am only an instrument in the Lord's hands to do the work He has set for me to do. The instructions that I have given by pen or voice have been an expression of the light that God has given me. I have tried to place before you the principles that the Spirit of God has for years been impressing upon my mind and writing on my heart.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 5, page 691, ‘The nature and influence of the testimonies, 1889*)

She added

“And now, brethren, I entreat you not to interpose between me and the people, and turn away the light which God would have come to them. Do not by your criticisms take out all the force, all the point and power, from the Testimonies. Do not feel that you can dissect them to suit your own ideas, claiming that God has given you ability to discern what is light from heaven and what is the expression of mere human wisdom. If the Testimonies speak not according to the word of God, reject them. Christ and Belial cannot be united. For Christ's sake do not confuse the minds of the people with human sophistry and skepticism, and make of none effect the work that the Lord would do. Do not, by your lack of spiritual discernment, make of this agency of God a rock of offense whereby many shall be caused to stumble and fall, "and be snared, and be taken” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White did say this about those who would be led astray by Satan

“One thing is certain: those Seventh-day Adventists who take their stand under Satan's banner will first give up their faith in the warnings and reproofs contained in the Testimonies of God's Spirit.” (*Ellen G. White, letter to Brother Magan, No. 156, July 27th 1903, Manuscript Releases, Volume 1, Manuscript No. 29*)

A humble and obedient servant

Although so blessed by God in receiving the gift of the spirit of prophecy, Ellen White ever remained a humble servant.

During her ministry she was often met with ridicule and false accusations. Some claimed that her inspiration was all of her own imagining. Some even claimed it was mesmerism. She did make it very clear that she never had any control over whether she would have a vision or not. On one occasion she said

“It is utterly false that I have ever intimated I could have a vision when I pleased. There is not a shade of truth in this. I have never said I could throw myself into visions when I pleased, for this is simply impossible. I have felt for years that if I could have my choice and please God as well I would rather die than have a vision, for every vision places me under great responsibility to bear testimonies of reproof and warning, which has ever been against my feelings, causing me affliction of soul that is inexpressible. Never have I coveted my position, and yet I dare not resist the Spirit of God and seek an easier position” (*Ellen G. White, Letter to J. N. Loughborough, August 24th 1874, Letter No. 2 Manuscript Releases, 3MR, No. 192*)

She also said of her own work

“The testimonies of Sr. White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. Great care should be exercised by all believers to advance these questions carefully, and always stop when you have said enough. Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1890, as quoted in Evangelism page 256*)

There can be no mistaking what Ellen White is saying here. It is not her writings that are to be the final authority for our beliefs but the Scriptures. If regarding any belief that we hold we cannot substantiate it from the Scriptures, we should not urge it upon others to be believed. This does not mean that we are not to use the writings of Ellen White in determining what is true or false but that they must remain the ‘lesser light’ to lead us to the ‘greater light’ (the Bible).

Ellen White’s writings are to be heeded not ignored. This is why God gave them to His people.

The gifts of the Spirit not redundant

Whilst some may believe that with the closing of the canon of Scripture the gifts of the Holy Spirit were made redundant, which would of course, if true, include all the other gifts such as the gift of healing and the gift of tongues etc, this view is rejected. This is not only by the Seventh-day Adventist Church but also by the author of these notes. On the contrary, what is believed is that even today, through His Holy Spirit, God will distribute these gifts to those whom He wills, when He wills and as He wills. After all, He is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Who can argue with Him? As the Scriptures say of spiritual gifts (see also Romans 12:5-8 and Ephesians 4:10-16)

“For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

If God is to be accepted as the Sovereign Ruler of this universe, then it must be accepted that through His chosen vessels, also in any way that He chooses, He will speak to His people. With Him there are no restrictions or limitations. As Nebuchadnezzar said when his senses returned to him after seven years of what can only be described as ‘insane’ behaviour

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”
Daniel 4:35

For obvious reasons, it must not be concluded that an individual is sent of God simply because of his or her own personal testimony. On the contrary, to see if their claims are true, each who purports to have a message from God must be thoroughly investigated. This is because as we have already noted, the Bible must not only be the final test of any doctrine but it must also be the final test of any messenger or message that is purported to be from God.

James White, the husband of Ellen White, once said (this was the first tract he brought out in 1847)

“The Bible is a perfect and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice. But this is no reason why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfillment of His Word, in these last days, by dreams and visions, according to Peter's testimony.” (*James White, A Word to the Little Flock – thoughts on Revelation 14, page 13*)

Just as has been concluded in this paper - so too concluded the husband of Ellen White. This is that with respect to what God can and will do, there are no restrictions, or, to put it another way, God will do what He wants, when He wants and in the very way that He wants to do it – and no one can argue with Him

about it. James White concludes

“True visions are given to lead us to God, and His Written Word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the Bible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected.” (*Ibid*)

James White makes it clear that the visions his wife received were not for “a new rule of faith and practice” but were to lead us to what God says in the Scriptures. If we bear this in mind then with regards to the relationship between the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White, a balanced view will be maintained.

Never must we expect anyone who has been given the gift of prophecy to say anything contrary to that which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. As A. G. Daniells in his book ‘The Abiding Gift of Prophecy’ concluded

“We have a right to expect, then, that if Mrs. White had the prophetic gift, her life and her teachings should be in full accord with the Bible on all matters vital to salvation.” (A. G. Daniells ‘The Abiding Gift of Prophecy’, page 281)

Even after saying all of this, the burning question still remains. How can we know for sure if Ellen White was given the gift of prophecy? It is obviously one thing for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to make this particular claim but an entirely different matter to prove it.

The fact of the matter is that it is not up to the Seventh-day Adventists Church to prove it. It is a case of **personal responsibility**.

Personal responsibility

In keeping with the viewpoint that the Bible is always the final authority for a Christian’s beliefs, it must be concluded that when a person is confronted with these types of claims (such as made here regarding Ellen White), it is each individual’s personal responsibility to check them out for him or her self.

I say this because as Christians and through the Scriptures, we have received from God the council to always investigate the claims of those who say that they have a message from Him.

When reasoning with certain Jews at Thessalonica, the apostle Paul explained that the sufferings and death of the long awaited Messiah had been necessary to the fulfilment of God’s purposes. In response to his words, also supposedly to do him harm, these same Jews sought him at the place where he was staying. To save him from what these Jews intended to do, the church removed Paul to safety. The Scriptures say of this experience

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Acts 17:10-11

At Berea, those who listened to both Paul and Silas obviously had a different attitude than the Jews of Thessalonica. Those who dwelt in Berea listened carefully to what these two men were saying and then, to see if it was true, checked it out for themselves from the Scriptures.

It appears that later when writing his first letter to the believers in Thessalonica, which was probably one of the first (perhaps even the very first) New Testament Scriptures to be written, Paul still had this same experience in mind. I say this because he wrote to them saying

“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

To discover whether God has spoken through any particular individual does necessitate the heeding of this council. It also necessitates having the attitude of the believers at Berea. If we fail to check out the message of those who say that God has sent them, whether it is Ellen White or anyone else, or if we do not have the attitude of those at Berea, then quite obviously we shall never know whether their message was from God.

This divinely inspired council is not to be considered an ‘optional extra’ to our salvation. It is a responsibility that God places upon each and every individual that becomes aware of this claim. This means that no one person can shoulder this responsibility for another. It will also be true to say that if we fail to take the time and effort to check out those who say they have a message from God, then we would have also failed to do what through the Scriptures that God has specifically told us to do in these circumstances (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Certainly it could not be said of us that we have ‘proved all things’ and were holding fast ‘that which is good’.

In conclusion, it can only be said that whether or not Ellen White was given the gift of prophecy, it is the responsibility of each individual to prove it for him or herself. They are then to act in accordance with their findings, also take full responsibility for their actions. God will hold each responsible for his or her personal responses.

Section two

The role of Ellen G. White and her visions

It was in the December of 1844 that Ellen White (then Ellen Harmon) was called to the prophetic office. This was before she became a seventh day Sabbath (Saturday) keeper, also before she married James White.

At this time, she was only seventeen years of age and had received by then very little formal education. This was due to an accident she had that had left her far too weak to attend school. This happened when she was 9 years of age.

In 1842, also at her own request, Ellen had been baptised by immersion. She had then been accepted into the membership of the same Methodist Church to which her own family belonged. It was around this time that along with some in her family, Ellen heard and accepted the message of William Miller. Unfortunately, because of how the Methodist's regarded his message - which was that that Jesus was returning around 1843 - the family's name was removed from the Methodist's membership roll. This happened the year following her baptism.

The great disappointment

Ellen White was amongst those who in 1844 were disappointed that Jesus did not then make His promised return but she did not give up the hope that the Saviour was returning soon. Along with a small group of like-minded others, she prayed earnestly for the fulfilment of this gospel promise. She also prayed for an understanding of its delay.

It was when Ellen White (then still Ellen Harmon) prayed at the home of a friend with four other ladies that she received her first vision. This was just two months following the 'great disappointment'. More visions followed which, by those who had stayed together after the great disappointment, were accepted as being from God. This same group concluded that in this very marked way, God was leading them.

It is said that during her lifetime, Ellen White received something like two thousand visions and dreams. This gave her ample material to draw upon which in itself formed the basis for her writings. Obvious to relate, it also gives us ample evidence on which to judge her claims.

A prolific writer

At the very least, it can only be said that Ellen White's literary output was prolific. As it says in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia

"At the time of her death her literary productions consisted of well over 100,000 pages: 24 books in current circulation; 2 book manuscripts ready for publication; 4600 periodical articles in the journals of the church; 200 or more out-of-print tracts and pamphlets; 6000 typewritten manuscript documents consisting of letters and general manuscripts, aggregating approximately 40,000 typewritten pages; 2000 handwritten letters and documents and diaries, journals et cetera, when copied comprising 20,000 typewritten pages." (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, 1966 edition page 1413)

It can clearly be seen that the writings of Ellen White were voluminous. We shall also see later that much of what she wrote was based on what God had shown her in visions and in dreams.

As we noted in the previous section, whether her visions and writings were of

God is entirely for each individual to decide but we need to remember that as always, God will hold us responsible for the decision that we make. With this in mind we shall proceed with this study.

Keen Bible students

It cannot be doubted that our pioneers were keen Bible students. In seeking an understanding of the Scriptures, they spent many hours together in study and prayer. When explaining to the delegates of the 1905 General Conference how things were at the beginning of our movement (1844) Ellen White said

“After the passing of the time in 1844 we searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with the brethren, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference, Review and Herald 25th May 1905 ‘The Work for this Time’*)

Bible study was of the highest priority to this little group of once disappointed believers. They spent entire nights together in prayer and study. All of our pioneers, including Ellen White, were very keen students of the Scriptures. In this respect I believe that today we would all do well to emulate them. Ellen White continued

“When they came to the point in their study where they said, “We can do nothing more,” the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me. I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the Scriptures in regard to Christ, his mission, and his priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.” (*Ibid*)

When the pioneers had exhausted their study of the Scriptures, God, through a vision, would give Ellen White a clear understanding of what they had been studying. In this way, He not only honoured these pioneers in their quest to understand the Scriptures but in a very marked manner also bestowed His approval on them. Note that the pioneers did not believe that the revelations that Ellen White received from God made Bible study unnecessary.

In passing, I would ask you here to note particularly that Ellen White said that through her, God gave to the pioneers “light” in regard to “Christ, his mission, and his priesthood”. This she said was not ‘light’ that would be of a temporary nature which sometime in the future would be superseded or nullified by further revelation but was ‘light’ that would extend from the time that it was given “to the time when we shall enter the city of God”. This light therefore was permanent light. Ellen White further explained

“During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the Scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I was in this condition of mind until all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds, in harmony with the Word of God. The brethren knew that, when not in vision, I could not understand these matters, and they accepted, as light directly from heaven, the revelations given.” (*Ibid*)

Note very importantly that according to the testimony of Ellen White, by 1905, ***all*** the principle points of our faith had been established.

In regards to the Scriptures that the pioneers were studying, Ellen White says that her own mind was ‘locked’ to the meaning of them until “***all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds***”. Note that this was not just some of the principle points but ***all*** of them. Note also that the things that Ellen White told the pioneers she had seen in vision, they (the pioneers) did not accept as being her own interpretation of Scripture but accepted it as light given to them “***directly from Heaven***”.

Note now how the next year (1906) Ellen White wrote of the early experiences of the pioneers. She said

“In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied diligently to understand the meaning of many Scriptures. At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study, came to a point where they could go no farther, and had recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th June 1906 ‘Notes of Travel No. 1 (Journey to Southern California)’*)

She then added

“These experiences were repeated over and over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see again, as she did the previous year, that Ellen White retold the past experiences of the pioneers. Note now though that with reference to understanding the Scriptures they had been studying she said, “***At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given***”. This was obviously when the pioneers had said, “***We can do nothing more***”. It was at that point said Ellen White that she would be taken off in vision and given an understanding of these Scriptures. Note she says that in this way, “***many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point***”. Thirteen years previous to this Ellen White had said

"We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for. If we walk in the light as it shines upon us from the living oracles of God, we shall have large responsibilities, corresponding to the great light given us of God. We have many duties to perform, because we have been made the depositories of sacred truth to be given to the world in all its beauty and glory." (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin, 29th January 1893, 'We had a hard struggle'*)

In 1893, whilst the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still strictly non-trinitarian, Ellen White maintained that our denominational teachings were "the mighty truths of the word of God" and the "sacred truth". Today this should be saying something very important to those who say that our once non-trinitarian beliefs were error.

The role of Ellen White – an intermediary

Before passing on from these statements about how God helped the pioneers in their understanding of Scripture, consider for a moment the role that Ellen White says she took in the formation of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine.

Through her ministry – and relating to the third angel's messages - God obviously helped our pioneers understand certain passages of Scripture. These were Scriptures that of themselves our pioneers could not understand. She actually said that after the brethren had studied the Word of God but could not do any more, God would then give her a clear explanation of what they had been studying. She said that in turn, she would pass on this explanation to the other pioneers. This was obviously the way that through the Holy Spirit, God enlightened the minds of our early leaders.

We need to ask a question here. That question is - could God have illuminated the minds of the pioneers regarding these scriptures without using Ellen White? The obvious answer to this question is 'yes' He could but He chose not to do so. Instead He chose to reveal it **through** Ellen White.

From all of this we can only conclude that it was not Ellen White's own understanding of Scripture that she contributed to the formulation and confirmation of Adventist doctrine but was revelation from God. Ellen White also said that until **all** the principle points of our faith were made clear to the minds of all concerned, her own mind was 'locked' to the meaning of Scripture that the pioneers had been studying.

No dissention

Regarding the experience of the pioneers and her visions, Ellen White wrote

"In 1844, when anything came to our attention that we did not understand, we knelt down and asked God to help us take the right position; and then we were able to come to a right understanding and see eye to eye. There was no dissension, no enmity, no evil-surmising, no misjudging of our

brethren. If we but knew the evil of the spirit of intolerance, how carefully would we shun it." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 27th August 1889, 'The Test of Doctrine, see also Gospel Workers, page 302, 'Dangers'*)

Here we can see one of the clear evidences that our pioneers allowed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. This is inasmuch as they were in harmony with each other and that there was not amongst them any dissention. This was the very same experience of the disciples at Pentecost. This was when they received the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:1-3). Notice Ellen White said that when there was anything that the pioneers did not understand, they would kneel down and pray that God would show them the correct position to take. These were obviously amongst the times when God would show Ellen White in vision the truth about what they had been studying.

Note also she said that the pioneers shunned what she termed "the spirit of intolerance". We should regard this today as being a very important prerequisite to understanding what is true. Certainly it is a prerequisite to God revealing the truth. In *Gospel Workers* it says

"We are to be established in the faith, in the light of the truth given us in our early experience. At that time one error after another pressed in upon us; ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds. Sometimes whole nights would be devoted to searching the Scriptures, and earnestly asking God for guidance. Companies of devoted men and women assembled for this purpose. The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error." (*Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, Page 302, 'The Test of New Light'*)

Notice here that Ellen White said that in the "early experience" of establishing the truth, there were attempts by ministers and doctors to inculcate into the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism "one error after another". These errors she said was in the form of "new doctrines".

She also said that it was the Holy Spirit that had brought the truth to the minds of the pioneers who sometimes would spend whole nights in study and prayer. She also said that in particular, the power of God would come upon her and she would be able to "define what is truth and what is error". Ellen white continued by saying

"As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me. I was given illustrations of heavenly things, and of the sanctuary, so that we were placed where light was shining on us in clear, distinct rays." (*Ibid, see also Selected Messages book 3 page 31*)

Once again we can see that at times through visions during the course of their

Bible studies, God would give Ellen White explanations of Scripture which they the pioneers accepted in the spirit of meekness as being from God. This was as the different points of our faith were being established.

Open visions

Ellen White was seen in open vision many times by many people. In this next statement, we shall see that when in vision, even though it was proven that she was not breathing, she could still talk of the things that God was showing her.

“Sometimes while I was in vision, my friends would approach me, and exclaim, "Why, she does not breathe!" Placing a mirror before my lips, they found that no moisture gathered on the glass. It was while there was no sign of any breathing, that I kept talking of the things that were being presented before me.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th June 1906 'Notes of travel No. 1 (Journey to Southern California)'*)

James White in ‘Life Incidents’ wrote of the physical phenomena of his wife in vision

“1. She is utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her, as has been proved by the most rigid tests, but views herself as removed from this world, and in the presence of heavenly beings.

2. She does not breathe. During the entire period of her continuance in vision, which has at different times ranged from fifteen minutes to three hours, there is no breath, as has been repeatedly proved by pressing up in the chest, and by closing the mouth and nostrils.

3. Immediately on entering vision, her muscles become rigid, and joints fixed, so far as any external force can influence them. At the same time her movements and gestures, which are frequent, are free and graceful, and cannot be hindered nor controlled by the strongest person.

4. On coming out of vision, whether in the day-time or a well-lighted room at night, all is total darkness. Her power to distinguish even the most brilliant objects, held within a few inches of the eyes, returns but gradually.” (*James White, Life Incidents p 272, 1868*)

Whilst in vision, the only word that satisfactorily describes the physical condition of Ellen White is ‘supernatural’. None of these things mentioned above could have been of human devising.

In 1860, certain of our ministers held evangelistic meetings at Parkville, Michigan. This was 30 miles from Battle Creek. During these meetings, those who attended were told of Ellen White’s visions. One particular person, a physician and spiritualist by the name of Dr. Brown who lived at Parkville, claimed that he could explain all of this in terms of spiritualism. He said that all the visions came through a spirit-medium and that within one minute he could ‘bring her out’ of any vision.

Needless to say, there is a sequel to this story

The very next year (1861), Ellen and James White, along with J. N. Loughborough, Uriah Smith and others, went to Parkville to dedicate a Seventh-day Adventist church that had been erected in this town the previous year. At the afternoon meeting, Ellen White was taken off in vision and as usual, whilst in vision, permission was given for her to be examined. On this particular occasion, the aforementioned Dr. Brown was in the congregation. In consequence of his previous boast he was urged to carry out an examination. Arthur L. White (grandson of Ellen White) wrote of this experience in his book, 'The Ellen G. White Writings'. He said

“Dr. Brown began to examine Ellen White but soon turned deathly pale and began to shake all over. Elder White asked, “Will the physician please report to the congregation concerning his findings?”

“Oh,” he said, “she does not breathe,” and he started for the door. When he got near the door, the brethren blocked it and said, “Go back and do like you said you would. You said you could stop the vision in one minute.”

“Oh no” he replied. “Well what is it?” they asked. “God only knows,” he replied. “Let me out of this house.” He jerked the door open and ran.” (*A. L. White, 'The Ellen G. White Writings', chapter 3, 'The Integrity of the Prophetic Message or Who Told Sister White' page 79*)

Under these circumstances, no one could possibly doubt that Ellen White's experience, whether it was from God or some other source, was of a **supernatural nature**.

To this same effect there are other signed statements recorded in a textbook called 'The Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest', one of which reads

“The following statements relate to an examination made whilst Ellen White was in vision in Waldron's Hall, Hillsdale, Mich., in the month of February 1857. Doctor Lord, a physician of Hillsdale of fifty years practice, made a most careful examination, concerning which I present the following testimonials:” (*The Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest, 'Testimony of Eyewitnesses to the Visions' John Loughborough, The Great Second Advent Movement pages 205-210*)

Here is the signed testimonial

“We were present when (in February 1857) Sister E. G. White had a vision in Waldron's Hall, Hillsdale. Dr. Lord made an examination and said, ‘Her heart beats but there is no breath. There is life, but no action of the lungs; I cannot account for this condition’” Signed “A. F. Fowler, Mrs. A. F. Fowler, Hillsdale, Mich., Jan. 1, 1891” (*Ibid*)

There were also other 'happenings' in the life of Ellen White that can only be described as supernatural. These were such as she recorded in *Spiritual Gifts Volume 2*. This is where she recalls the time when she had planned to go to Boston but the Lord showed her that she was to go to Randolph. She wrote of this experience

“Accordingly we designed to visit Boston, but in the evening, at the commencement of the Sabbath, I was shown in vision that we must not go into Boston, but in an opposite direction to Randolph; that the Lord had a work for us to do there. We went to Randolph, and found a large room full collected, and among them those who said they would be pleased to hear my message in Boston. As we entered, R. and S. looked at each other in surprise, and began to groan. They had promised to meet me in Boston, but thought they would disappoint us by going to Randolph, and while we were in Boston, warn the brethren against us.” (*Ellen G. White, Spiritual Gifts Vol. 2 page 76, 'Meeting at Randolph' 1860*)

Obviously their subterfuge backfired on R & S (their real names are protected). Such is God's leading.

Ellen White went on to say that during the afternoon meeting, she was taken off in vision in which she saw that R. and S, as well as others, were not honest people. She also said that she saw that these same people would not prosper but that the truth would triumph. She then said

“A chain of truth was presented to me from the Scriptures, in contrast with their errors. When I came out of vision, candles were burning. I had been in vision nearly four hours” As I was unconscious to all that transpired around me while in vision, I will copy from Bro. Nichols' description of that meeting.. (*Ibid*)

Here now is that which Ellen White said that Nichols saw happen.

"Sister Ellen was taken off in vision with extraordinary manifestations, and continued talking in vision with a clear voice, which could be distinctly understood by all present, until about sundown. S., R. and F. were much exasperated, as well as excited, to hear sister E. (Ellen) talk in vision, which they declared was of the Devil; they exhausted all their influence, and bodily strength, to destroy the effect of the vision.” (*Ibid page 77*)

Ellen White then explained that Brother Nichols went on to say that by singing very loudly and reading from the Bible in a loud voice, E. and R. tried desperately to stop people from hearing what she was saying when in vision but all efforts to do this failed. Ellen White records that Nichols also said

“The opposition of these men continued as long as they could talk and sing, notwithstanding some of their own friends rebuked them, and requested them to stop. But says R, 'You are bowed to an idol; you are worshiping a golden calf.' (*Ibid*)

Ellen White then reports Nichols as saying that the owner of the house, a Mr. Thayer, was far from being satisfied as R. had declared that the vision was of the devil. Nichols then said that Thayer, because he believed that this would 'arrest' any satanic power, asked S. if he would lay an open Bible on Ellen White. Nichols said that R. declined to do this so Thayer did it himself. Nichols reported concerning this incident

"Immediately after the Bible was laid upon her, she arose upon her feet, and walked into the middle of the room, with the Bible open in one hand, and lifted up as high as she could reach, and with her eyes steadily looking upward, declared in a solemn manner, 'The inspired testimony from God,' or words of the same import. And then she continued for a long time, while the Bible was extended in one hand, and her eyes looking upwards, and not on the Bible, to turn over the leaves with her other hand, and place her finger upon certain passages, and correctly utter their words with a solemn voice."
(Ibid page 78)

Nichols went on to say

"Many present looked at the passages where her finger was pointed, to see if she spoke them correctly, for her eyes at the same time were looking upwards. Some of the passages referred to were judgments against the wicked and blasphemers; and others were admonitions and instructions relative to our present condition."
(Ibid)

Here we can see that without being able to visibly see the verses, Ellen White was quoting passage after passage of Scripture to which her finger was pointing. Nichols concluded his report by saying

"In this state she continued all the afternoon until near sunset, when she came out of vision. When E. arose in vision upon her feet, with the heavy open Bible in her hand, and walked the room, uttering the passages of Scripture, S., R. and F. were silenced. For the remainder of the time they were troubled, with many others; but they shut their eyes and braved it out without making any acknowledgement of their feelings."
(Ibid page 79)

Once again we can see here that all of this was 'supernatural' and could not have been human devising but does this in itself show that the visions were of God? The answer to that question of course is "no it does not" but as Ellen White said herself

"God is either teaching His church, reproofing their wrongs and strengthening their faith, or He is not. This work is of God, or it is not. God does nothing in partnership with Satan. My work for the past thirty years bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil. In arraying yourself against the servants of God you are doing a work either for God or for the devil. *(Ellen G. White, 4th Volume Testimonies page 229,*

'Opposition to Faithful Warnings'

Here again is the challenge! Is the work of Ellen White a manifestation of the power of God or is it a manifestation of the power of the devil? Whilst none of the aforementioned events is proof of in itself that Ellen White's work is of God, it does show that her work was of a 'supernatural' source. So what are the criteria for 'proving' a purported messenger of God?

A personal testimony

At a General Conference Session in 1893, J. N. Loughborough gave a series of studies on the Testimonies to the Church. On January 20th in the 2nd of these studies he said

*"I have seen Sister White in vision about fifty times. The first time was about forty years ago, when Brother Oswald Stowell was very sick, and expected to die. It was on the Sabbath, the first Sabbath I ever kept. Brother Stowell wanted his case commended to God, and desired the brethren to pray for him. In answer to their prayers he was healed and went to work again two days later. Brother White, who was present at the time, said to me, "Ellen is in vision." I looked at her and saw her kneeling by the bed and looking up toward heaven, and she soon began to shout praises to God. Brother White said, "There is no breath in her body." Eyes open, no breath, yet her pulse beating naturally, and everything else in a normal condition! Her eyes seemed intently fixed upon something off at a great distance." (J. N. Loughborough, *General Conference Bulletin, January 20th, 21st 1893, 'The Study of the Testimonies No. 2)**

John Loughborough was the longest serving of the pioneers. Born in 1832, he joined the Sabbath-keeping Adventists in 1852. He died in 1924. He obviously had a great knowledge of the history and experiences of Seventh-day Adventists. He later said (remember this was in 1893)

"Her last open vision was in 1884, on the camp ground at Portland, Oregon. She has visions at the present time, but they are not open visions in a public assembly. It is a heavenly place to be in, where there is an open vision, as some of those here who have seen her at such times, can testify." (Ibid)

There can be no doubt that many times Ellen White was seen in vision but the question still remains. Was she called of God or was she a false prophet?

Called of God or a false prophet?

We have duly noted that the onus on 'proving' whether or not a person has a message from God belongs with the individual who hears the claim. It is not a work that can be done by someone on behalf of another. We need to 'prove' these things for ourselves although it must be said that as in all things of a spiritual nature, it will be a matter of faith.

'Proving' that a person has a message from God is not always an easy thing to do. This is because a number of things need to be taken into consideration. Whilst I do not admit here to listing all of the criteria to test a supposed prophet or messenger from God, here are some points that need to be seriously considered.

1. No messenger of God seeks to exalt him or herself. If the messenger is genuine and the Holy Spirit is guiding, then the name of God and what He has accomplished through His Son will alone be exalted. As was said by the apostle Paul

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 1 Timothy 1:15

This is something we should all say of ourselves. Humility is the hallmark of those who are being led by the Holy Spirit

2. The Bible alone will be the final authority for the believer. As the Scriptures say

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20

3. In keeping with this, each messenger of God will be in harmony with the one preceding. As the Bible says

"And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." 1 Corinthians 14:32-33

We are told here that all who say they have a message from God will need to be in harmony with the Bible writers. Any message contrary to what the Bible says must not be accepted as coming from God. A classic example of this is where people today are saying that we should keep Sunday sacred whereas God says through the Holy Scriptures, "Remember my Sabbath day (Saturday) to keep it holy" (see Exodus 20:8-10).

4. Does the purported messenger of God uplift the name of Christ and say that faith in Him is the only way of salvation?

Any message that says we need to 'contribute' works for our justification with God must be counted as error. In the acquisition of our salvation there is no place for 'human works'. Rather, works are the *fruitage* of our salvation. As the apostle Paul put it

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Galatians 2:20 -21

5. The Bible also says

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.”
Matthew 7:15-16

Fruitage - meaning the end result of heeding a person's message - is always a very important test. We must ask therefore, does the message uplift Christ and through this uplifting tell of God's love for a world lost in sin? Does it lead us to study and pray more than we did previously? Does it encourage us to lay aside habits that are harmful? Does it make plain that the way of salvation is only through Christ and no other means? Does it uplift the Bible as the unerring rule of faith for every Christian? Is the message in harmony with the Scriptures? Does it lead us to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as our self?

These and many more questions could be asked but these are enough to show what is meant by the fruitage of heeding someone who purports to be a messenger of God.

More also could be said about the criteria that is needed to be met by all those who claim to have a message from God but I believe that enough has been said here to make the issue clear. Those who purport to have a message from God must not be rejected simply because they make this claim, rather, they must ***always be tested*** to see if they really are who they claim to be. This should be very important to us. If we are serious about our salvation, then none of us can afford to miss out today on listening to the voice of God as it comes to us through His chosen servants.

A belief in Ellen White – not a test of fellowship

A belief in Ellen White was never meant to be a test of fellowship. As she explained herself in the 1st Volume of Testimonies

“There should be no trial or labor with those who have never seen the individual having visions, and who have had no personal knowledge of the influence of the visions. Such should not be deprived of the benefits and privileges of the church, if their Christian course is otherwise correct, and they have formed a good Christian character.

Some, I was shown, could receive the published visions, judging of the tree by its fruits. Others are like doubting Thomas; they cannot believe the published Testimonies, nor receive evidence through the testimony of others; but must see and have the evidence for themselves. Such must not be set aside, but long patience and brotherly love should be exercised toward them until they find their position and become established for or against. If they fight against the visions, of which they have no knowledge; if they carry their opposition so far as to oppose that in which they have had no experience, and feel annoyed when those who believe that the visions are of God speak of them in meeting, and comfort themselves with the

instruction given through vision, the church may know that they are not right.” (*Ellen White, Testimonies to the Church, Volume 1, page 327-8, ‘North Wisconsin’*)

She also counselled

“God's people should not cringe and yield, and give up their liberty to such disaffected ones. God has placed the gifts in the church that the church may be benefited by them; and when professed believers in the truth oppose these gifts, and fight against the visions, souls are in danger through their influence, and it is time then to labor with them, that the weak may not be led astray by their influence.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White recognised a difference between those who did not accept the visions and those who fought against them. The latter she recognised as endangering the faith of those who did believe. She also recognised her own work as the leading of the Holy Spirit and not something that she was doing of herself. She therefore recognised the danger of speaking out against it.

Speaking out against the work of the Holy Spirit is a very dangerous thing to do. It could eventually lead to the unpardonable sin. Jesus was accused of doing His work by the power of Satan. He answered in reply to these accusations

“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” Matthew 12:26-32

Speaking out against the work of God has always been a perilous thing to do. This is why we need to be very careful in checking out those who claim such as Ellen White claimed.

Ellen White's work – Either from God or from Satan?

In conclusion, I can only say that in my 36 years of studying the writings of Ellen White, she did indeed meet all the above criteria for being a messenger from God but this is just a personal opinion. Let's now consider for a moment the claims of those who say that her visions and writings were of Satan.

If this were the case, then what is the end result of his deception?

The end result is that through Ellen White, Satan has lifted up the Bible as the only unerring rule of faith for the Christian. He has also pointed out and uplifted Christ as the only way of salvation for the sinner. Through the exultation of Christ, Satan has also shown that God loves the sinner supremely, even to the extent of giving the life of His only begotten Son for the salvation of mankind. If Satan inspired Ellen White then he has also uplifted the law of God as supreme

by showing that God requires of each of a supreme love for Him as our Creator as well as for us to love others as ourselves.

We can also conclude that if Satan did inspire Ellen White, then he would have shown that his own end is nigh and that the blessed hope of the Christian, namely the return of Jesus is also very near. To cap it all, if Ellen White's work is of Satan, then Satan himself is promoting the hope of eternal life through love, faith and trust in God through Jesus Christ.

The question must be asked then "Is Ellen White's work the work of Satan?"

Well, if it is then I would say that for someone who is supposed to be extremely intelligent, Satan has done something that can only be described as being highly unintelligent. This of course is unless all this uplifting of God through His Son is only a subterfuge for some great coming deception which I and many others have not yet had the insight to recognize.

Obvious to relate, that which we have just overviewed concerning the dreams, visions and experiences of Ellen White is but just a very small sample of her lifetime's work as the messenger of the Lord to the remnant.

Whilst much more could have been said about the role of Ellen White and her visions, this author hopes that by reading this section, you the reader will be inspired enough to study these things further for yourself.

Section three

Ellen G. White – past and present perspectives

It was during the summer of 1973 that I first attended worship services at a Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was also here for the very first time that I encountered the name of Ellen White. At that time, preachers during family worship services, also authors of our Sabbath School lessons (our weekly Bible studies), frequently quoted from her writings. Needless to say, I soon began to question **who** this lady was and **why** her writings were used so regularly.

I was told of course that the Seventh-day Adventist Church believed that God had blessed Ellen White with the gift of prophecy and for this reason she was regarded as 'God's messenger to the remnant'. This claim took me completely by surprise. I was more than happy to accept that all the Bible writers had been inspired by God - but a 'modern day' prophet? That was something entirely different! Nevertheless, with encouragement from those around me - also with an open mind - I began to read her books.

Eventually I did come to believe that Ellen White was who the church claimed her to be although I must admit that this aspect of my faith grew only gradually. It did take time - and it did take a great deal of reading. This was only to be expected.

Having accepted that Ellen White had been given the gift of prophecy, her writings became to me a source of both authority and encouragement. They have also helped me to grow to the spiritual maturity that I enjoy today.

This claim I make without reluctance or embarrassment. This is because it is my belief that in these last days immediately prior to the return of Jesus, God has chosen this way to enlighten and encourage His people. It is only fitting therefore, particularly as this website is primarily for Seventh-day Adventists, that along-side Scripture I also use as authoritative these spirit of prophecy writings.

Lack of knowledge

As it was in Bible times, so it is today. A person who either ignores or rejects the council of God will ultimately reap the consequences. Certainly God will hold us responsible for our responses to His leading.

Whilst at times God does overlook ignorance that is not wilful (Acts 17:30), there is an ignorance that He does not overlook. This is the ignorance that comes through a **conscious and deliberate** act to be in – also remain in - that condition. As the Scriptures say

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” Hosea 4:6

This is a fearsome realisation. This is why any knowledge that God imparts, regardless of the way that He chooses to impart it, must be regarded as of the utmost importance. Certainly it must not be taken lightly.

Having a lack of knowledge is not something that should be said of Seventh-day Adventists. This is because through the Scriptures, also through Ellen White, God has given to His remnant people an almost overwhelming wealth of revelation. The ‘problem’ is, if it can be called as such, knowledge never comes without responsibility. As Ellen White once put it

“It is not the lack of knowledge and understanding that at the last day will condemn Seventh-day Adventists, and banish them from the presence of the Lord; but it is the truth that has reached the understanding, the light that has illuminated the soul, which will witness against us, if we turn away and refuse to be led by it. (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 27th September 1883 ‘Walk in the Light’)

If we knowingly reject or ignore what God has revealed, whatever way that He chooses to reveal it, none of us can consider ourselves as being on safe ground. Our only safety is in believing what He has revealed. It is also in acting accordingly.

Note here that Ellen White makes particular reference to Seventh-day Adventists

saying that the rejection of light by them (refusing to be led by the light) will “condemn” them “and banish them from the presence of the Lord”. This is obviously something of which we should all be very aware. Ellen White continued with reference to Seventh-day Adventists

“If we were blind, we would have no sin; but the Lord has given us great light, sacred truth has been unfolded to our understanding; yet we have not been wise unto salvation, we have not advanced in knowledge and true holiness according to the light and truth which has been bestowed upon us.”
(Ibid)

According to what is said here, Seventh-day Adventists in 1883 were not walking in the light that God had given. They were not advancing in their spiritual experience. It is as Jesus said, as recorded in John 9:41

“If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth”.

No one will be held responsible for the light that was impossible for them to receive but if we say “We see” then God will hold us responsible for the light that we claim to have seen. Confessions of receiving light must not be carelessly made. They are of great consequence.

Again as Ellen White said in an article appropriately called ‘Man’s Responsibility’

“Justice requires that man shall have light, and it also requires that he who refuses to walk in this heaven-sent light, the giving of which cost the death of the Son of God, shall receive punishment.” *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 27th May 1903, ‘Man’s Responsibility’)*

She then added

“It is a principle of justice that the guilt of the sinner is proportionate to the knowledge given him, but not used, or used in a wrong way.” *(Ibid)*

Again this is a very serious realisation.

Current perspectives

Some Seventh-day Adventists have sought to ‘play down’ the work that God has accomplished through Ellen White. This I believe can be seen in a statement made by George Knight - professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Berrien Springs in Michigan. In referring to the role of Ellen White in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church he said in his book ‘A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists’

“Before moving away from this section on the gift of prophecy, we should note that Ellen White’s gift did not play a prominent role in the development of Adventist doctrine” *(George R. Knight, A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists, page 37 1999 chapter, ‘Era of Doctrinal Development’)*

This statement is not in harmony with the way that Ellen White described her role within Seventh-day Adventism (see previous section). This is where she said that when the pioneers came to the point where they said they could do nothing more in understanding the Scriptures they were studying, God would show her the meaning of them in vision. She would then share this revelation with the other pioneers.

It appears to me that George Knight is trying to convey the thought that through Ellen White, God did not help Seventh-day Adventists in compiling their doctrines, or to put it another way, that the pioneers compiled doctrine without the consideration (use) of the visions that God gave to Ellen White. Perhaps I am reading this the wrong way but this is how it appears to me.

Seventh-day Adventists should not be ashamed of how God has chosen to enlighten His people. Whatever way He does this, meaning through dreams and visions or in some other way, this is His divine prerogative. If God did use visions to help us to understand the Scriptures then we must see this as the work of the Holy Spirit and not the work of Ellen White. She was only an instrument in the hands of our Creator.

Visions and dreams from God will never invalidate the need for Bible study. In fact it will necessitate it to see if the vision or dream is in accordance with the Scriptures (if you remember in section one we said that the Bible is the ‘tester’ whilst all dreams, visions, beliefs and experiences etc are the ‘tested’).

It must also be said that neither does this kind of revelation from God mean that our doctrines should not be fully supported by Scripture. It is only as we come to diligently study the Scriptures, as did the pioneers, that God will give light to their true meaning. It must be accepted that God will send this light in any way that He chooses.

Unquestionably, all of the doctrines that we hold, including the one concerning the trinity, should be able to be supported by Scripture alone. This means ***without the writings of Ellen White***. Apart from any other reason, we need to do this when explaining our beliefs to those who have not yet ‘experienced’ (or do not yet have confidence in) the writings of Ellen White. On the same page in his book George Knight continues says

“The same could be said of each of the great doctrinal positions of Adventism. The primary method used by the pioneers in their doctrinal formation was to study the Bible until a general consensus developed.”
(*Ibid*)

George Knight then explained

“At that point, Ellen White would sometimes receive a vision on a topic already studied, primarily to reaffirm the consensus and to help those who were still out of harmony with the majority to accept the correctness of the

group's biblically derived conclusions. Thus we can best view Mrs. White's role in doctrinal development as confirmation rather than initiation." (*Ibid*)

This statement does not appear to be in keeping with that which Ellen White said when the pioneers came together to study (refer to [previous section](#)). She said that the visions given to her of God were often **explanatory** of Scripture rather than as George Knight is saying here, **confirmatory** of previously arrived at conclusions. George Knight then says of Ellen White

"As we shall see in chapter 4, however, she sometimes played a more prominent role in the development of positions in the area of Adventist lifestyle than she did in doctrinal formation." (*Ibid*)

This I believe is a misunderstanding of the work of God through Ellen White.

Through revelation He gave to Ellen White, God desired to enlighten His people. This was particularly so in regard to the relevant points of the third angel's message and the work of Jesus as our High Priest in the Heavenly sanctuary - which as we know included the heavenly judgement begun in 1844 (see previous section).

Ellen White also said that part of her work was to correct those who hold error in Bible doctrine As we noted in section one she said

"I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the "last days"; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth. Thus God dealt with Peter when He was about to send him to preach to the Gentiles. (Acts 10)" (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 78, 'Experience and views, 1882*)

This appears to be different than what George Knight is saying above.

Contradictory views?

In these statements of George Knight, it can be seen that the work of God in Ellen White's role in Seventh-day Adventism is somewhat undermined. At least, this is the way it seems to me in comparison to how it was described by Ellen White.

Strange to relate is that in my studies of the 'trinity' issues in Seventh-day Adventism, I have found that the **major reason** given by the leadership of our church, for the changeover from anti-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, **is the writings of Ellen White**. They usually say that it is what she wrote in her book 'The Desire of Ages' that brought about this change.

What seems even stranger is that in a 'Ministry' magazine article called 'Adventists and Change' (this was when attempting to justify our denominational changeover to trinitarianism), George Knight says that it was the writings of Ellen

White that brought about this change. Under the sub-heading “Ellen White and Change” he says

“By now it should be obvious to our readers that Adventism has experienced major theological change across the course of its history and that Ellen White had a role in that change.” (*George Knight, ‘Ministry’ magazine October 1999, Adventists and Change*)

Note that George Knight says that our changeover to trinitarianism was a “major theological change”. He also claims that Ellen White played her part in it.

This appears to be a complete reversal of what he wrote in his book ‘A Brief History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’. This is when he said

“Ellen White’s gift did not play a prominent role in the development of Adventist doctrine” (*George R. Knight, A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists, page 37 1999 chapter, ‘Era of Doctrinal Development’*)

He also said in his article ‘Adventists and change’ (which remember he wrote to justify and support the bringing in of the trinity doctrine)

“The renewed emphasis on Jesus and His saving righteousness, however, called for views of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, and the divine nature of Christ adequate to serve as a theological basis for the new soteriology. It was Ellen White whose writings led the way in the theological shift.”(*George Knight, ‘Ministry’ magazine October 1999, Adventists and Change*)

This again seems to be in contradiction to what he said about her role as God’s messenger in his book, ‘A brief History of Seventh-day Adventists’ (see above). Note again that he also calls this changeover to trinitarianism ‘the new soteriology’ of Seventh-day Adventism and says that it was a “major theological change”. George Knight continued

“Unlike her experience in the post-1844 period, during which she followed the lead of her husband and Bates in the formulation of the distinctively Adventist doctrines, in the 1890s she was at the forefront of the action, related to theological re-formulation, through her major writings on Christ and His teachings.” (*Ibid*)

It appears to me that the contradictions regarding the usage of Ellen White’s writings are becoming more and more blatant but there is also the allegation that during the first decades of our movement of people, Ellen White was led in doctrinal formulation by the two other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, namely her husband James White and Joseph Bates. This we have seen is far from true because she said that in regard to understanding Scripture her mind was ‘locked’ until God Himself gave her revelation (see previous section).

Here it must be said again that if God did use Ellen White in the formation of Adventist doctrine then this was indeed His divine prerogative. As we have

already noted that was said by Nebuchadnezzar when his senses were returned to him after seven years of insane behaviour

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”
Daniel 4:35

Degrees of inspiration

After Ellen White had died (1915) there was by some within the Seventh-day Adventist Church a move to ‘play down’ her writings. This was done by saying that there were ‘degrees of inspiration’. John Loughborough (often considered the last of the pioneers to die) addressed this issue by saying

“This idea of “degrees of inspiration” is a new idea to me. I never heard of any such position held by those in the work in early times. Those believing the truth, and joining in the work from the first were in accord with Sister White’s testimonies and received them as direct inspiration from the Lord. If there were any that thought there were “degrees” in the testimonies, it was those who objected, and took liberty to refuse the light and left the truth.” (*J. N. Loughborough, letter to E. E. Andross, Sept 25th 1921 as quoted in ‘The Ellen G. White Writings page 55 by A. L. White)*

John Loughborough (1832-1924) had joined the Seventh-day Adventist movement in 1852. This means that by the time that he wrote this letter to Andross, he was almost 90 years of age and by then had almost 70 years of experience of Seventh-day Adventism.

As a matter of passing interest here, Andross was once president of both North England and British Union Conferences and was - when Loughborough wrote this letter to him - the vice-president of the General Conference for North America.

John Loughborough knew exactly how the pioneers regarded Ellen White’s writings. Here he is saying in 1921 that the pioneers did not regard these testimonies as having “degrees of inspiration” but were, “direct inspiration from the Lord”.

Ellen White herself had something to say on this same subject. This is when she said

“Brother B. is on the wrong track. God has not given the work into his hands to set up his human wisdom to put his hand on the sacred ark of God. When sitting in judgment upon the living oracles of God, did he consider that God had placed upon him the work to pass judgment as to what is inspired in the Word of God and what is not inspired? Has God committed the work to him to state what sort of degrees of inspiration attend some utterances and what is wanting in others? Whatever may be his thoughts in these things, if they are kept to himself they will not harm other souls.”

(Ellen G. White, The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, chapter 28 'The Discernment of Truth' MS 16, 1889)

She also applied this same reasoning to her own writings. This can be seen when in reply to articles that appeared in the 'Review and Herald' of January 15th 1884 saying that there were degrees of inspiration she said

"Both in the tabernacle and in the college, the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say [that] some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some were not. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the Review, neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college. When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way, but God is not in this." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 22 1889, to R. A. Underwood, January 18th 1889)*

The originator of Ellen White's writings

In 1903 when referring to the books that she had written, Ellen White made this statement

"Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her life-work God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given his servant to be given to the world. From their pages this light is to shine into the hearts of men and women, leading them to the Saviour" *(Ellen G. White, The Review and Herald 20th January 1903 'An Open Letter')*

In urging that she was not the originator of her writings, Ellen White sought no credit for what she had written. She said that it was specifically the work of God. She then continued

"The Lord has declared that these books are to be scattered throughout the world. There is in them truth which to the receiver is a savor of life unto life. They are silent witnesses for God. In the past they have been the means in his hands of convicting and converting many souls. Many have read them with eager expectation, and, by reading them, have been led to see the efficacy of Christ's atonement, and to trust in its power. They have been led to commit the keeping of their souls to their Creator, waiting and hoping for the coming of the Saviour to take his loved ones to their eternal home. In the future, these books are to make the gospel plain to many others, revealing to them the way of salvation." *(Ibid)*

'Silent witnesses' for God! This is how Ellen White described her own books. She said that these same books were the means that God is using to draw

people to Himself and thus reveal to them the way of salvation. Notice in particular that she said that her books would lead people to “see the efficacy of Christ's atonement, and to trust in its power.”

Notice too the ultimate purpose of God in calling Ellen White to the prophetic office and thus inspiring her to write. She said this of her own work

“The Lord has sent his people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light. O, how much good would be accomplished if the books containing this light were read with a determination to carry out the principles they contain! There would be a thousandfold greater vigilance, a thousandfold more self-denial and resolute effort. And many more would now be rejoicing in the light of present truth.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White referred to her own writings as being “a lesser light” to lead people to “the greater light”. This puts her work into a correct perspective with the Scriptures. Her writings were to **lead** people to the Bible and not take the place of it. In calling her to the prophetic office, this was indeed the purpose of God. After urging Seventh-day Adventists to circulate her books she then says

“Take the books to business men, to teachers of the gospel, whose minds have not been called to the special truths for this time. The message is to be given “in the highways,”--to men who take an active part in the world's work, to the teachers and leaders of the people. Thousands can be reached in the most simple, humble way.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from all of this that the books written by Ellen White are of vital importance in the work of God. We will also see now that she said that what she wrote was in accordance with what God had shown her in visions. In respect of this she wrote in 1906

“Early in my public labors I was bidden by the Lord, “Write, write the things that are revealed to you.” At the time this message came to me, I could not hold my hand steady. My physical condition made it impossible for me to write. But again came the word, “Write the things that are revealed to you.” I obeyed; and as the result it was not long before I could write page after page with comparative ease. Who told me what to write? Who steadied my right hand, and made it possible for me to use a pen? -- It was the Lord. When we come into right relation with him, and give ourselves wholly to him, we shall see the miracle-working power of God in word and deed.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th June 1906 ‘Notes of Travel No. 1 (Journey to Southern California)’*)

Ellen White clearly says here that it was the Lord that gave her the words to write. She then went on to say

“In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied

diligently to understand the meaning of many Scriptures. At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study, came to a point where they could go no farther, and had recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture. These experiences were repeated over and over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point. Think you that my faith in this message will ever waver? Think you that I can remain silent, when I see an effort being made to sweep away the foundation pillars of our faith? I am as thoroughly established in these truths as it is possible for a person to be. I can never forget the experience I have passed through. God has confirmed my belief by many evidences of his power." (*Ibid*)

Notice particularly that Ellen White said that through the instruction God had given to her after the pioneers could go no further in their understanding of the Scriptures and had prayed to God for light, that "many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point". Notice too she said that this happened only **after** her and the other pioneers had come together to study the Bible diligently.

Note too that Ellen White said that she was "as thoroughly established in these truths as it is possible for a person to be".

This was written in 1906, which was 8 years after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'. This was when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination. This is probably one of the reasons why these trinitarian denominations regarded us – during the time that Ellen White was alive - an anti-Christian cult. Ellen White then went on to say

"The light that I have received, I have written out, and much of it is now shining forth from the printed page. There is, throughout my printed works, a harmony with my present teaching. Some of the instruction found in these pages was given under circumstances so remarkable as to evidence the wonder-working power of God in behalf of his truth." (*Ibid*)

I would specifically point out here (and this is very important) that Ellen White made a particular point of saying that throughout her writings there was a harmony with her present (1906) teaching. There is definitely no intimation here that any of her early writings were later invalidated (nullified) by further visions or revelation from God. She also said regarding this same issue

"When the power of God testifies to what is truth, the truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions, contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time, God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise and still another with new light which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit. A few

are still alive who passed through the experience gained in the establishment of this truth. God has graciously spared their lives to repeat and repeat till the close of their lives, the experience through which they passed even as did John the apostle till the very close of his life. And the standard bearers who have fallen in death, are to speak through the reprinting of their writings. I am instructed that thus [their] voices are to be heard. They are to bear their testimony as to what constitutes the truth for this time. We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories. This has been done over and over again during the past fifty years. And while the Scriptures are God's Word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar of the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake. He who makes such an application knows not the wonderful demonstration of the Holy Spirit that gave power and force to the past messages that have come to the people of God." (*Ellen G. White, Extract from a Letter to Elder Burden, of Loma Linda, California, December 14th 1905*)

Ellen White also maintained

"The leadings of the Lord were marked, and most wonderful were His revelations of what is truth. Point after point was established by the Lord God of heaven. That which was truth then, is truth today.--Manuscript 31, 1896." (*Ellen G. White, Ms 31 1896, Testimony Concerning the Views of Prophecy Held by Bro. John Bell, No. 1, November 8th 1896*)

Past held positions – the truth or not the truth?

Truth can never become error and error can never become the truth, therefore what was true yesterday must still be true today. It also follows that what was error yesterday is still error today. Like truth - error never changes.

7 years ago, Reinder Bruinsma who is the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Netherlands made this observation

"The past has passed. We must accept the simple truth that the past has gone. Even if we want to we can't, in fact, turn the clock back. Life has changed, along with all its circumstances. We ourselves have changed. Those who want to call us back to the past must realize that in itself such a desire is futile. And would we actually take the past back, if it were possible? (*Reinder Bruinsma, 'Ministry' October 2001, 'Looking Back and Moving Forward'*)

This same author then asks

"Would we really want to relive the nineteenth century? Would we want to return to a period when many were not clear on such basics of Christianity as the Trinity and the full divinity of Christ?" (*Ibid*)

Here we see allegations against the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, even to the point of saying that they did not have clear the “basics of Christianity”. Note though what constitutes these ‘basics’. It is said here to be “the Trinity and the full divinity of Christ”.

As is seen in the history of the trinity studies on this website, we shall see that these allegations are based solely on the reasoning that only a trinitarian view can express the reality of the full divinity of Christ. We shall see though that Ellen White was not always in agreement with certain trinitarian conclusions. It will also be seen that during the early part of the 1900’s (this was when the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists was still strictly non-trinitarian), Ellen White said that we should not change our beliefs. She did warn though that some would attempt to do so. Reinder Bruinsma then asks a very important question which is

“Would we be happy to freeze our theology in the writings of J. N. Andrews, Joseph Bates, and Uriah Smith, or even in Ellen White's Early Writings?”
(Ibid)

This really is an extremely important question. It is also one that needs a great deal of serious thought and consideration - else wrong conclusions can easily ensue. No one should desire to ‘freeze’ theology, not even theology that was expressed by Ellen White but having said this we must not attempt to bring in doctrines that nullify what God has already established as truth. As we have seen that Ellen White once said

“When the power of God testifies to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained.” *(Ellen G. White, Extract from a Letter to Elder Burden, of Loma Linda, California, December 14th 1905)*

Ellen White also said of the messages that she had received from God

“These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the spirit of prophecy. I thank God that he has preserved my voice, which in my early youth physicians and friends declared would be silent within three months. The God of heaven saw that I needed to pass through a trying experience in order to be prepared for the work he had for me to do. For the past half century my faith in the ultimate triumph of the third angel’s message and everything connected with it, has been substantiated by the wonderful experiences through which I have passed. This is why I am anxious to have my books published and circulated in many languages. I know that the light contained in these books is the light of heaven.” *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th June 1906 ‘Notes of travel No. 1 (Journey to Southern California)*)

She added

“I ask you to study the instruction that is written in these books.” *(Ibid)*

From all of this, we can see that concerning the third angels message, God Himself gave **specific revelation** to Ellen White. This was particularly so with regard to His Son and the work that He would accomplish within the heavenly sanctuary.

Ellen White included this very same revelation in her books. She said it was also the truth for this time that was to be taken to the world to prepare it for the return of Jesus. This was obviously a very important work that God did through Ellen White so who are we to put on trial His purposes.

Very interesting is something she wrote in 1905. In a letter written to her granddaughter she said

“I am now looking over my diaries and copies of letters written for several years back, commencing before I went to Europe, before you were born. I have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in testimony form. While I am able to do this work, the people must have these things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written.”
(Ellen G. White, Letter to Mabel White, Letter 329a, pages 1 and 2, November 16th 1905, Manuscript Releases MR No. 532)

A correct usage of the writings of Ellen White

There are those who will say that in the establishing of doctrine, we should only use the writings of the Bible but this would immediately prohibit God to enlighten His people in the way that **He chooses**. As we have said already, if the way that God chooses to enlighten His people is through dreams and visions then this is His prerogative.

It is quite easy to misapply and misuse the term ‘Scripture only’. Some mistakenly use it to try to invalidate the work that God does through those other than the Bible writers. Correctly understood, this term must be used to **include** all those to whom He has given the gift of prophecy.

If we conclude ‘Scripture only’ to mean to exclude that which is ‘outside’ of the Bible, then no other writings should be accepted as being inspired. We then ignore the Scripture that says that God will give the gift of prophecy to those whom He chooses. Thus by saying that no other writings outside of the Bible should be considered to be inspired then we actually deny the term, ‘Scripture only’.

It is true to say that ultimately, all of what we believe as Seventh-day Adventists must be in accordance with Scripture. Of this there is no doubt. As the Scriptures say

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah 8:20

Ellen White said herself of the relationship between her writings and the Bible

“The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. Great care should be exercised by all believers to advance these questions carefully, and always stop when you have said enough. Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Evangelism, page 256.*)

It is very important that we understand this statement correctly. If we do not, then it can be misused.

Ellen White is not saying here that we should ignore what God through her has so graciously revealed because obviously this would be both contradictory and self-defeating. She simply said that her writings should not, as she put it, “**be carried to the front**”. This means of course that whilst God in any way that he chooses can illuminate the minds of His people as to regards the meaning of Scripture, in the finality, it is by Scripture alone that all of our doctrine should be supported. I believe that if we as Seventh-day Adventists are to have a correct understanding of the work of God at this time, then this must be duly recognised.

It can only be said that as to the final authority for their beliefs and teachings, Ellen White constantly pointed God’s people to the testimony of the Scriptures. She did say though in Early Writings (as we noted in section one)

“I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the “last days”; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth. Thus God dealt with Peter when He was about to send him to preach to the Gentiles. (Acts 10)” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 78, ‘Experience and views, 1882*)

As can be seen here again, Ellen White points her readers to the Bible as the Christian’s rule of “**faith and practice**”. Notice though she did say that the visions promised in the Bible for the last days, although they were not for a new rule of faith, they were designed by God to comfort His people “**and to correct those who err from Bible truth**”. She also added

“To those who may circulate this little work, I would say that it is designed for the sincere only and not for those who would ridicule the things of the Spirit of God.” (*Ibid*)

Perhaps here in this section we should let Ellen White speak about what would happen to her work if she died before Christ returned.

"Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the

office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the lord will still have life and will speak to the people. But my strength is yet spared, and I hope to continue to do much useful work. I may live until the coming of the lord; but if I should not, I trust it may be said of me, "blessed are the dead which die in the lord from henceforth: yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin, 1st June 1913*)

She had also said 30 years previously

"The same enemy that is ever on my track, will be on yours also. He will suggest, conjecture, fabricate all sorts of reports, and those who wish them true will believe them. But be assured that the attacks of Satan will not turn me from the path of duty. The work committed to me forty years ago I must carry forward as long as life shall last. I will not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. Unpleasant as it may be, I must warn, reprove, rebuke, as God bids me, whether the carnal heart will accept or reject the words of warning. For forty years, Satan has made the most determined efforts to cut off this testimony from the church; but it has continued from year to year to warn the erring, to unmask the deceiver, to encourage the desponding. My trust is in God. I have learned not to be surprised at opposition in any form or from almost any source. I expect to be betrayed, as was my Master, by professed friends" (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 16th October 1883, 'Notes of Travel. At the Sanitarium and the Office'*)

Never should we wonder at the attacks that Satan is making on the precious gift that God gave to Ellen White – even by those who have been long-time Seventh-day Adventists. The spirit of prophecy always has been and ever will be hated by our adversary. This is because it exposes him for what he is and exposes his ways to deceive. Let us therefore seek to be faithful to the faith.