

SESSION 1 SATAN'S LAST DECEPTION

White Out: Whatever Happened to the Spirit of Prophecy?

1) The Dragon is Enraged (Rev. 12:17)

- a) Our series this week is entitled “White Out: Whatever Happened to the Gift of Prophecy?”, specifically the ministry of Ellen White in the Adventist Church.
- b) Attacks on Ellen White and her ministry, both from outside and inside the denomination, are not new to Seventh-day Adventists. Her ministry has been under attack from the very beginning. Scripture foretold it would be so (Rev. 12:17). The devil is well acquainted with the prophetic gift and its purpose. He is well aware of the fact that

...[A]ll who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White, and has given her a message, will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days. 3SM 83 (1906)

- c) As a result, we're just plain confused about Ellen White's gift and its role in today's church. [Example of student who was sure Ellen White was expressing her opinion about Christ coming “ere this”]. The worst part is that some of this confusion is now being promoted and perpetuated by pastors, teachers and leaders in our own denomination who are claiming to be providing a defense of Ellen White.
- d) Today, I will be sharing some examples with a little bit of history, and as we progress throughout the week, I will attempt to provide clear answers from leaders, scholars, and more importantly, from Ellen White herself.
- e) I have shared some of what will be presented today in a message entitled “Betrayed With a Kiss,” in which I compared some of the modern defenses to the betrayal of Judas. I have chosen not to use that title because it infers that some of these men that I will be mentioning today had clear intent to betray. I do not believe that. I believe there are many Adventist leaders who are sincerely trying to help make Ellen White more relevant in today's church; I fear that in doing so, however, they are fulfilling prophecy in making her counsels “of none effect.”

2) Satan's Last Deception

- a) Today's presentation is entitled "Satan's Last Deception," and is actually taken from the following statement by Ellen White –

The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony. 2SM 78.2

- b) There are other statements that could be cited where Ellen White speaks of a last deception or delusion. The point is not to determine which one is "dead last". Furthermore, I don't believe she is speaking *chronologically* here (last in terms of time or order of events), but *effectively* – that once *this* "very last deception" takes hold, Satan's knows his cause is secure.

3) What Does She Mean by "of None Effect...?"

- a) This is a crucial point! As she so often does, Ellen White is here using the terminology of Scripture. Let's briefly consider two passages to gain a better understanding of this phrase.
- i) **Mt. 15:1-6** – Making the commandments of God "of none effect" (KJV)
- (1) "disregard" (GNB); "ignore" (CEV); "nullify" (NIV); "weasel around" (MSG)
- b) The Pharisees and scholars didn't **deny** the Word of God; they simply stripped it of its authority in their personal lives. In the same way, Ellen White points to "the very last deception of Satan", NOT as leading Seventh-day Adventists to **deny** or **openly oppose** her writings, but to **regard them in such a way that it nullifies the gift and robs the Testimonies of their authority**. Hold on to that thought!

4) Let's Talk About Prophetic Authority

- a) Until four years ago, Fundamental Belief #18, "The Gift of Prophecy," read
- i) "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, **her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction**. They also make clear that the

Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.).”

Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2005 ed., p. 247

- b) This was regularly attacked by critics, who claimed that “a continuing and authoritative source of truth” actually meant “Ellen White in the place of the Bible”.
 - i) In an article that appeared in *Proclamation* magazine, author Dennis Palmer said that Adventists have “Dual authorities” – Ellen White and the Bible. And that while her statements on the relationship of her writings to the Bible may “give the appearance of orthodoxy,” she really “takes away the Reformation teaching of *sola scriptura* by asserting her writings as authoritative.” Jud Lake, Ellen White Under Fire, p. 149
 - ii) D. M. Canright had argued that with Adventists “it is the Bible *and something else*; it is the Bible *and the writings of Mrs. White*.” Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted, p. 18
 - iii) When asked what it would take to re-classify Seventh-day Adventism as a cult, cult expert Dr. Walter R. Martin responded
 - (1) “...[T]here are people... [who] have specifically stated that she is the interpretive authority, and you involve yourself in circular reasoning, because if the Bible is supposed to be the judge of everything, and there is someone who judges the Bible or interprets the Bible for you, that’s the final court of appeal for you...” Seventh-day Adventist: Walter Martin vs. William Johnsson, Part 5 of 5, <https://youtu.be/Rc9h5xHGUCI>.
 - iv) Former Adventist minister and founder of *Life Assurance Ministries*, Dale Ratzlaff, wrote
 - (1) “Ellen White as a source of truth is perhaps the underlying error of the SDA church.... While the Adventist church claims to be a Bible based church, the leaders know very well that Bible study without Ellen White interpretation will lead members out of the church. Her writings serve as a prism through which Adventists interpret Scripture.” Dale Ratzlaff, the Truth About Adventist “Truth”, p. 6, 8
- c) To communicate our understanding more plainly, the wording was changed at the 2015 General Conference session. Fundamental Belief #18 now reads
 - i) “The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it

was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. **Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.** They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9).” Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2015 ed., p. 253

5) The New Improved Ellen White

- a) The above responses are what one might expect from critics outside the church. More recently, however, we’ve heard similar concerns expressed among an increasing number of Seventh-day Adventist church members and leaders.
 - i) At the Annual Council Session of October 7, 2002, the results of a survey conducted by the Strategic Planning Commission of Seventh-day Adventists were shared, indicating that 50% of Adventists felt a **reinterpretation** of Ellen White’s authority was needed for today.
- b) And so the “reinterpretations” have been coming, beginning on the edges and then marching into the mainstream. Allow me to demonstrate that with just two examples that cover a span of 13 years and are representative of a steadily-increasing segment of our church.

6) Less Than a Prophet

- a) In 2006 Graeme Bradford, a retired seminary professor from Avondale, published his book *More Than a Prophet*. The book was his attempt to help reclaim former Adventists who had become disillusioned with the ministry of Ellen White, and was widely (and freely) distributed among Adventist ministers and leaders as a help in re-educating people about Ellen White. A summary of the views shared in the book are as follows –
 - i) OT prophets are more authoritative than NT prophets
 - ii) NT prophets are more fallible; Ellen White was an NT prophet. In fact, in a very real sense we are all NT prophets.
 - iii) Prophets made theological mistakes in their counsel
 - iv) Prophetic utterances were often a mix of truth and error

- v) Prophets grew in their theological understandings, allowing for potential erroneous (false) theological ideas to be communicated in their earlier materials.
- b) Dr. Angel Rodriguez, then-director of the Biblical Research Institute, commented on Bradford's views in these words –
 - i) "If we consistently apply the hermeneutics found in this book to the Bible, its authority would be seriously affected. The drastic dichotomy between thought and word offered by Bradford and others is damaging to the biblical concept of inspiration." Dr. Angel Rodriguez, "An Evaluation on the Book Prophets Are Human Written by Graeme Bradford," Adventist Biblical Research Institute website.

7) The Wonderful World of George Knight

- a) Bradford, however, was not well known in the States, not well-published, and was also considered a more liberal scholar. Fast forward 13 years, and enter George Knight, very well known in the Adventist world, and one of the more widely-read authors in the church today, and a self-professed conservative. His most recent book is entitled *Ellen White's Afterlife*, in which he attempts to bring clarity to the prophetic gift in much the same way Bradford did. Although Dr. Knight does not share all the viewpoints of Bradford, the net effect is the same – making the counsels of Ellen White "of none effect" ...
- b) In his introductory chapter, "The Wonderful World of Ellen White in the 1960s", he characterizes most Adventists from that time period as an ignorant, gullible, do-as-you're-told class of people (my words, not his) who simplistically believed everything Ellen White said and never studied their Bibles for themselves, from the most common layperson to tenured professors of theology – Godly scholars like Leo Van Dolson, Robert Olson, Carl Coffman, and William Hyde – all of whom, according to Knight, held Ellen White to be "centrally authoritative"; "authoritative in every way"; "a deciding authority"; etc. (these expressions being used in a pejorative sense).
- i) "The Bible, of course, was important – most important theoretically – but in practice, Ellen White had the final authoritative word..." Knight, Ellen White's Afterlife, p. 15

- c) Knight concludes chapter one by saying
 - i) “The most remarkable thing about those early 1960s perspectives related to Ellen White is that she herself did not believe them nor agree with them. And neither did most of those of her contemporaries who worked closest with her.”
- d) In the chapter two, he proceeds to outline four areas of those “Wonderful World” years which He claims Ellen White did not believe or agree with –
 - i) Ellen White never claimed verbal inspiration. **[TRUE]**
 - ii) Ellen White did not believe her works should be viewed as a divine, inspired commentary on the Bible, or that they should be used to settle doctrinal issues. **[FALSE]**
 - iii) Not everything in Ellen White’s works came straight from heaven in the form as divine revelation. **[TRUE-ISH]**
 - iv) Ellen White was consistent that her works were not to be made prominent in sermons and other public formats. **[FALSE]**

8) Conclusion

- a) These claims of Dr. Knight, as with Bradford, and Ratzlaff, and Martin, and Canright, and the many others who might be named, both inside and outside the church, strike directly at Ellen White’s prophetic authority, making “of none effect” the Testimonies of the Spirit of God.
- b) Authority is what makes the prophetic ministry effective. Without it, everything the prophet says is at best “good advice,” or at worst the prophet’s own unenlightened opinion.
- c) It is also the underlying cause for contention among fallen humanity. It is this prophetic authority that demands submission of the will to Christ, and leads even the professed people of God to resist Him.
- d) In a telling statement, after Bradford has presented His “new view” of Ellen White’s gift, he expressed the real heart of the matter –
 - i) “The question must be asked, Are we a free people? Free to grow in our understanding of the Bible? Free to disagree with what she has written in the areas of science, health, history, prophecy and education, etc.?”

What should a person do if they find they have come to some other conclusion than what she has written? Do they surrender their private judgment? Bradford, *More Than a Prophet*, pp. 126-7

- e) To those who would have their own way, the counsel of God will always be too restrictive, whether found in His Word, or communicated through prophets, through pastors, teachers, parents, or friends.

(1) “Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint, but happy is he who keeps the law” (Pr. 29:18, NKJV, margin).

Many times in my experience I have been called upon to meet the attitude of a certain class, who acknowledged that the testimonies were from God, but took the position that this matter and that matter were Sister White's opinion and judgment... Everything that sustains their cherished ideas is divine, and the testimonies to correct their errors are human--Sister White's opinions. They make of none effect the counsel of God by their tradition. 3SM 68

The enemy has made his masterly efforts to unsettle the faith of our own people in the Testimonies, and when these errors come in they claim to prove all the positions by the Bible, but they misinterpret the Scriptures... And, after men have done their work in weakening the confidence of our churches in the Testimonies, they have torn away the barrier, that unbelief in the truth shall become widespread, and there is no voice to be lifted up to stay the force of error. This is just as Satan designed it should be, and those who have been preparing the way for the people to pay no heed to the warnings and reproofs of the Testimonies of the Spirit of God will see that a tide of errors of all kinds will spring into life. 3SM 83