

Ellen G. White: Her claims and teachings

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Ellen G. White emerged as a visionary and prophetess in the mid-nineteenth century. She claimed to have the “spirit of prophecy” and wrote extensively. During her lifetime, she wrote more than 5,000 articles and 40 books. She was also a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. ¹



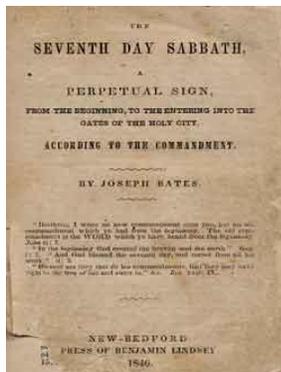
Ellen G. White was born on November 26, 1827 in Gorham, Maine. Her parents were Robert and Eunice Harmon. She had several siblings, including a twin sister named Elizabeth. At age nine, Ellen was struck in the face with a rock. This left her severely injured and disfigured. Ellen’s health was so impaired that she could not continue her formal education.

Though Methodists, Ellen’s family became involved with the Millerite movement when she was twelve. ² This movement was named after William Miller (1782-1849) and taught that the Lord’s return was imminent. In fact, they expected Him to come back on October 22, 1844. When that did not happen, thousands abandoned the movement. This became known as the “Great Disappointment.” ³ William Miller later admitted that he was mistaken and warned against “the spirit of fanaticism” which resulted from it. ⁴



Ellen was deeply disappointed when the Lord did not return, but she did not give up. Rather than admitting failure, she came to believe that they had the correct date, but had expected the wrong thing. ⁵ Ellen also claimed to have visions. The first came in December of 1844.

“From this time, up to December, 1844, my joys, trials, and disappointments were like those of my dear Advent friends around me. At this time I visited one of our Advent sisters, and in the morning we bowed around the family altar. It was not an exciting occasion, and there were but five of us present, all women. While I was praying, the power of God came upon me as I had never felt it before. I was wrapped in a vision of God’s glory...” (*Early Writings*, p. 13).



Ellen's visions breathed new life into the disillusioned movement. She was considered a prophetess and her writings inspired. She actually said that her work included "much more" than the term "prophet" signified (see "Her Claims" below).

Ellen married James White on August 30, 1846 in Portland, Maine. They had four boys, Henry Nichols (1847-1863), James Edson (1849-1928), William Clarence (1854-1937), and John Herbert (1860). John Herbert lived only a few months, and Henry Nichols died of pneumonia at the age of sixteen.

Ellen and her husband were both active in the Adventist ministry. Shortly after their marriage, the couple read a tract by Joseph Bates entitled, "The Seventh Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign." It had a profound impact on them and they became Sabbath keepers. Ellen later claimed to have seen a vision with a halo of light around the fourth commandment.

"Jesus opened them, and I saw the ten commandments written on them with the finger of God. On one table were four, and on the other six. The four on the first table shone brighter than the other six. But the fourth, the Sabbath commandment, shone above them all; for the Sabbath was set apart to be kept in honor of God's holy name. The holy Sabbath looked glorious—a halo of glory was all around it" (*Early Writing*, pp. 32-33).

Ellen claimed to have over 2,000 visions and dreams during her life. They varied in length and covered a wide range of issues, including physical health. This led to the establishment of the Western Health Reform Institute in 1866 at Battle Creek, Michigan, which provided care and education to the sick. Ellen was a strong proponent of vegetarianism.

James White died on August 6, 1881 in Michigan. After his passing, Ellen continued her work until she fell and broke her hip on February 13, 1915. She was confined to a bed and wheelchair for five months, and then passed away on July 16, 1915, in California. 6 Ellen was 87 years old.

Her Claims

Ellen G. White claimed to have the "spirit of prophecy." She said that her writings were divinely inspired and should be accepted as truth. Below are just some of the statements she and the church have made in this regard.

“In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper, expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne” (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 27).

“Why have I not claimed to be a prophet? — Because in these days many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes much more than the word ‘prophet’ signifies” (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 32).

“Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title... My work includes much more than this name signifies... My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there” (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 36).

“I saw that in striking against the visions they did not strike against the worm—the feeble instrument that God spake through—but against the Holy Ghost. I saw it was a small thing to speak against the instrument, but it was dangerous to slight the words of God” (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 40).

“Some are ready to inquire: Who told Sister White these things? They have even put the question to me: Did anyone tell you these things? I could answer them: Yes; yes, the angel of God has spoken to me... God has seen fit to thrust me into positions in which He has not placed any other one in our ranks” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, pp. 314-315).

“But the Spirit of God rests upon me with power, and I cannot but speak the words given me...I speak the words given me by a power higher than human power, and I cannot, if I would, recall one sentence” (*Diary*, January 10, 1890).

“Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her lifework God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given His servant to be given to the world” (*Colporteur Ministry*, p. 125).

“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” (28 *Fundamental Beliefs*, The Gift of Prophecy, 18).

Ellen G. White emerged as a visionary and prophetess at a time when published accounts of visions abounded. There were many people making similar claims. Why then should we believe her but not them? The only way we can know what to think about Ellen G. White is by comparing her and her teachings to the Bible.

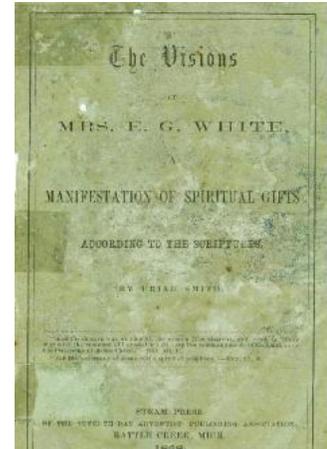
Her Teachings

This writer has spent countless hours scouring the writings of Ellen G. White. Below is a list of 30 teachings that seem most startling. The quotes have been carefully preserved and can easily be verified.

- (1) **The time of salvation for sinners ended in 1844:** “...for the time for their salvation is past” (*Early Writings*, p. 45). This view was later repudiated.
- (2) **Jesus was making final atonement in 1844:** “Jesus entered the most holy of the heavenly, at the end of the 2300 days of Daniel 8, in 1844, to make final atonement” (*Early Writings*, p. 253). Compare that to Hebrews 9:26-28.
- (3) **She was told when the Lord will return:** “...we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus’ coming” (*A Word to the Little Flock*, p. 14). Compare that to Matthew 24:36.
- (4) **Only a few months remained in 1850:** “My accompanying angel said, ‘Time is almost finished.’...Said the angel, Get ready, get ready, get ready” (*Early Writings*, p. 64). Time has continued for hundreds of years since then.
- (5) **The end of the world was imminent:** “But now time is almost finished, and what we have been years learning, they will have to learn in a few months” (*A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, p. 55). The world did not end in a few months.
- (6) **Some at the 1856 Conference would be alive when Jesus returned:** “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus’” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 131-132). They have all long died. 7

- (7) **She would be among the living saints when Christ returned:** “The graves opened, and the dead came up clothed with immortality...and in the same moment we were changed and caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air” (*The Day-Star*, January 24, 1846). She died on July 16, 1915.
- (8) **The blood of Christ was not to cancel sin:** “The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, was not to cancel sin” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 357). Compare that to Matthew 26:28 and Ephesians 1:7.
- (9) **Sickness is a sin:** “It is a sin to be sick” (*The Health Reformer*, Aug. 1, 1866). Compare that to upright Job.
- (10) **England would soon declare war on the (northern) States:** “This nation will yet be humbled into the dust...when England does declare war” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 259). That did not happen as she expected.
- (11) **Old Jerusalem would never be built up:** “I also saw that Old Jerusalem never would be built up...” (*Early Writings*, p. 75). Old Jerusalem has been greatly built up since Israel became a nation in 1948.

- (12) **Certain races are the result of amalgamation (interbreeding) of man and animal:** “But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere...Every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood. Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, pp. 64, 75). ⁸



Uriah Smith wrote a defense of Ellen G. White in 1868, in which he addressed her statement about amalgamation and put forth as examples “the wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country” (*The Visions of Mrs. E.G. White, A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures*, objection 39, pp. 102-105). James White reviewed Smith’s book and gave it a glowing endorsement in the “Review

and Herald” (August, 1868), and the White’s took 2,000 copies of it to camp meetings that year.

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- (13) **She met Enoch on another planet:** “The Lord has given me a view of other worlds...I was taken to a world which had seven moons. There I saw good old Enoch, who had been translated” (*Early Writings*, pp. 39-40). This is fanciful imagination, similar to Emanuel Swedenborg claiming to see Aristotle on Mercury.
- (14) **Noah and Enoch were Christians:** “Those who lived then were not without teachers to instruct them in the path of life; for Noah and Enoch were Christians” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 392). To be a Christian, one must believe in the death and resurrection of Christ, and be baptized into Christ, which they did not do.
- (15) **Enoch was taught by Noah:** “Enoch first received instruction from Noah, and he observed the law of God, and served him with singleness of heart” (*The Review and Herald*, April 29, 1875). Enoch was translated to heaven long before Noah was even born.
- (16) **Enoch was alive while the ark was being built:** “God determined to purify the world by a flood; but in mercy and love He gave the antediluvians a probation of one hundred and twenty years. During this time, while the ark was in building, the voices of Noah, Enoch, and many others were heard in warning and entreaty. And every blow struck on the ark was a warning message” (*Australasian Union Conference Record*, Sept. 15, 1902). Enoch was translated to heaven hundreds of years before the building of the ark.
- (17) **Jesus was not God:** “The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty” (*Letter 32, 1899, quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 1129). Compare that to Isaiah 9:6.
- (18) **Satan has a body:** “I was then shown Satan as he was, a happy, exalted angel. Then I was shown him as he now is. He still bears a kingly form. His features are still noble, for he is an angel fallen. But the expression of his countenance is full of anxiety, care, unhappiness, malice, hate, mischief, deceit, and every evil. That brow which was once so noble, I particularly noticed. His forehead commenced from his eyes to recede backward. I saw that he had demeaned himself so long, that every good quality was debased, and every evil trait was developed. His eyes were cunning, sly, and showed great penetration. His frame was large, but the flesh hung loosely about his hands and face. As I beheld him, his chin was resting upon his left hand. He appeared to be in deep thought. A smile was upon his countenance, which made me tremble, it was so full of evil, and Satanic slyness” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, pp. 27-28). Satan is a spirit being.

- (19) **The Father has a body:** “The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight” (*Evangelism*, p. 614). God is a spirit, which does not have flesh and bones (John 4:24; Luke 24:39). She inserted “The Father” in place of “Christ” (Colossians 2:9).
- (20) **Christ had to plead with God for our salvation:** “He then made known to the angelic host that a way of escape had been made for lost man. He told them that He had been pleading with His Father, and had offered to give His life a ransom...” (*Early Writings*, p. 149). This is fanciful imagination. The loving Father did not need to be pleaded with to make a way of escape for lost man.
- (21) **Paul learned the gospel from men in the church:** “Jesus directs him to His agents in the church for a further knowledge of duty. Thus He gives authority and sanction to His organized church. Christ had done the work of revelation and conviction, and now Paul was in a condition to learn of those whom God had ordained to teach the truth....The very men whom Paul was purposing to destroy were to be his instructors in the very religion that he had despised and persecuted” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 430). Compare that to Galatians 1:11-12.
- (22) **The plan of salvation was made after the fall:** “The kingdom of grace was instituted immediately after the fall of man, when a plan was devised for the redemption of the guilty race” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 347). Compare that to Ephesians 1:4 and 3:10-11.
- (23) **There is a temple in the Holy City:** “I saw an angel flying swiftly to me. He quickly carried me from the earth to the Holy City. In the city I saw a temple, which I entered” (*The Early Writings*, p. 32). Compare that to Revelation 21:22.
- (24) **Jesus is Michael:** “Michael, or Christ, with the angels that buried Moses...” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4a, p. 58). That was not the only time she used “Michael” and “Christ” interchangeably in her writings (see *Early Writings*, p. 164 and *The Desire of Ages*, p. 99). This idea is also seen in *The Clear Word* translation, which was written by Jack Blanco, former dean of the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University: “When Christ descends from heaven as the Archangel...” (1 Thessalonians 4:16); “...the Lord Jesus, also called Michael the Archangel” (Jude 9); “...God’s Son Michael” (Revelation 12:7). Many Adventists use this translation. ¹⁰
- (25) **Tall people live on other planets:** A dedicated Adventist recalled witnessing one of White’s visions. She wrote, “After counting aloud the moons of Jupiter, and soon after those of Saturn, she gave a beautiful description of the rings of the latter. She then said, ‘The inhabitants are a tall, majestic people, so unlike the inhabitants of earth. Sin has never entered here’” (*Mrs. Truesdail’s letter*, Jan. 27, 1891). This is fanciful imagination. Those planets do not have a solid surface to sustain life.

- (26) **Sunday worship is the mark of the beast:** “The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath...the mark of the beast is the opposite of this—the observance of the first day of the week” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 117). Compare that to Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.
- (27) **The same Herod that tried Jesus killed James:** “Herod’s heart had grown still harder; and when he heard that Christ had risen, he was not much troubled. He took the life of James, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he took Peter also, intending to put him to death” (*Early Writings*, pp. 185-186). They were not the same Herod (Antipas and Agrippa I).
- (28) **God sent an angel to talk with Cain:** “God condescends to send an angel to Cain to converse with him. The angel inquires of him the reason of his anger, and informs him that if he does well, and follows the directions God has given, he will accept him and respect his offering” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 48). Compare that to Genesis 4:6-7.
- (29) **In these last days God speaks through her Testimonies.** “In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these last days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 661). Compare that to Hebrews 1:1-2.
- (30) **There is no eternal torment for the wicked.** “It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment...The theory of eternal torment is one of the false doctrines that constitute the wine of the abominations of Babylon” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 536). Compare that to Matthew 25:41-46.

This is not an exhaustive list. There are many other startling (and false) teachings of Ellen G. White that could be noted. ¹¹ For instance, she taught that Satan deceived Adam (*Evangelism*, p. 598), which contradicts 1 Timothy 2:14, and that the Tower of Babel was built before the flood (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 301), which contradicts the Genesis record.

Though she boldly asserted that “the testimonies...never contradict His Word” (*Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 32), the honest heart knows better. She frequently did that very thing.

Disobedience

Ellen G. White’s actions betrayed her. She was blatantly disobedient. For instance, Paul said that women were not to teach in a way that exercises authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:11-12), yet she did so on a regular basis. ¹² Would a true prophetess led by the Spirit defy His teachings in Scripture? I think not. She also forbade certain foods, which Paul called the “teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1-5). ¹³

Self-Contradictions

Ellen G. White claimed to have divine guidance, yet she contradicted herself several times. For instance, in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, she said that Jacob knew it was the angel he was wrestling with and pled with him all night, as the angel continually called out his sins (Vol. 1, pp. 118-119). However, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, she said that Jacob did not know that it was the angel until about daybreak and that no words were spoken (p. 197). Which is it?

Furthermore, in *Christ Our Savior*, she said that Jesus' features were like those of other human beings and that nothing made Him stick out from others (p. 9). However, in *Questions on Doctrine*, she said that no one who saw His childlike countenance could say He looked like other children (p. 649). Again, which is it?

Endless Speculations

Ellen G. White had no problem going beyond and adding to the revealed Word. She indulged in endless speculations. For instance, she said that Adam was "more than twice as tall as men now living upon the earth" and that Eve's head "reached a little above his shoulders" (*Spiritual Gifts*, Volume 3, p. 34). She also said that angels had warned Adam and Eve "not to separate from each other in their employment, for they might be brought in contact with this fallen one" (p. 39). Obviously, none of this information is found in Scripture. It is pure speculation. Ellen simply added to the text.

The Sabbath

Ellen G. White taught that Sunday worship was the result of Roman Catholicism during the fourth century. This is contrary to Scripture (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) and to historical evidence:

- Barnabas (A.D. 100): "Wherefore also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose from the dead."
- Ignatius (A.D. 107): "And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days."
- Justin Martyr (A.D. 140): "On the day called Sunday all who live in cities, or in the country, gather in one place, and memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the

prophets are read...Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.”

- Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 174): “The old seventh day has become nothing more than a working day.”
- Tertullian (A.D. 200): “We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath.”
- Victorinus (A.D. 300): “On the Lord’s Day we go forth to our bread with the giving of thanks. Lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews, which Christ himself the Lord of the Sabbath in his body abolished.”

All of these quotes predate the time when this supposed corruption came about. They show that the early Christians worshipped on Sunday and did not keep the Sabbath (see Colossians 2:14-16). Sunday worship was not the mark of the beast! ¹⁴

Conclusion

As noted, Ellen G. White emerged as a visionary and prophetess at a time when published accounts of visions abounded. However, her false teachings and failed prophecies prove that she was not a true prophet.

“When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Ellen should be placed in the same category as Joseph Smith Jr., Mary Baker Eddy, and Charles Taze Russell. They were not what they claimed to be. And let us not forget that Ellen was part of a movement that started on a failed prophecy!

The Word of God was “once for all” delivered in the first century (Jude 3). It was a complete, perfect, and permanent deposit. That is why the miraculous gifts, including prophecy, ceased when it was “completed” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). There are no true latter-day prophets. ¹⁵

[Nearly all of the above quotes were taken from the official “Ellen G. White Estate” website].

- 1) William Miller is credited with beginning the Adventist movement in the 1830s and 1840s. However, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not formally established until May 21, 1863 in Battle Creek, Michigan. Joseph Bates (1792-1872), along with James and Ellen White, organized the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Prior to that time, the Adventist movement consisted of a small loosely knit group of people who came from many churches.
- 2) The family's association with the Millerites led to them being disfellowshipped by the local Methodists.
- 3) Many of the Millerites had sold their possessions and were up all night watching for the Lord to come back. They were bitterly disappointed when that did not happen. Some wept for hours.
- 4) William Miller declared, "We expected the personal coming of Christ at that time; and now to contend that we were not mistaken is dishonest. We should never be ashamed frankly to confess all our errors. I have no confidence in any of the new theories that grew out of that movement, namely, that Christ then came as the Bridegroom, that the door of mercy was closed, that there is no salvation for sinners, that the seventh trumpet then sounded, OR THAT IT WAS A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY IN ANY SENSE." He then warned against "the spirit of fanaticism" which resulted from it (*History of the Second Advent Message*, p. 412).
- 5) Ellen and others taught that on October 22, 1844, Jesus entered the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary to begin an investigative judgment of His people. This period would be a very short duration. Therefore, they anticipated His soon return. They initially believed that the door of salvation was shut to sinners on that date, though that was later repudiated.
- 6) Her home in California, called Elmshaven, is now an Adventist Historical Site.
- 7) After several embarrassments, Ellen finally stopped making specific predictions about the Lord's return. This was the last one.
- 8) These two paragraphs were removed when the same material was later republished (*Patriarchs and Prophets*). In an attempt to deny the obvious, modern Adventists say she was referring to intermarriages between either races or religions.
- 9) James White's review said, "While carefully reading the manuscript, I felt grateful to God that our people could have this able defense of those views they so much love and prize..." (*Review and Herald*, August, 1868).
- 10) *The Clear Word* is a biased translation designed to affirm the teachings of Ellen G. White, just like the *New World Translation* of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In both cases, they corrupt the true text.
- 11) She believed that Christ dropped His body at the ascension, that believers can become divine, that sisters should wash the brother's feet in communion service, etc.
- 12) Not only did Ellen defy God in this area, she encouraged other women to do the same. She wrote, "We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work" (*Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895).
- 13) She said that "cheese should never be introduced into the stomach" (*Testimonies*, 2, p. 68) and that "eggs should not be placed on your table" (*Testimonies*, 2, p. 400).
- 14) In A.D. 321, Constantine made Sunday the official day of rest for the Roman Empire. He issued a law prohibiting manual labor and judicial transactions. However, Christians had viewed Sunday as "the Lord's day" since the first century.
- 15) The charges of plagiarism and racism against Ellen G. White have not been pursued in this work, except for the brief reference to amalgamation. However, the reader should be advised that they exist.

