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# **Ellen G. White and the Bible**

The Relationship of Her Writings to  
Scripture

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Denis Fortin

Writings of Ellen G. White



# The Issue

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The relationship of Ellen G. White's writings to the Bible is one of the most important questions raised in regard to her prophetic ministry.

Some believe that Adventists are setting the Bible aside and using the writings of Ellen White in place of the Bible.



# The Issue

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How are we to understand the proper relationship between Ellen White's writings and the Bible?



# The Issue

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Perhaps the best place to start to answer this question is with Ellen White's opinion on the subject.



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“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.” (Early Writings, 78)



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible. Men arise who think they find something to criticize in God's Word. They lay it bare before others as evidence of superior wisdom. These men are, many of them, smart men, learned men, they have eloquence and talent, the whole lifework [of whom] is to unsettle minds in regard to the inspiration of the Scriptures. They influence many to see as they do. . . . .



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“Brethren, let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible. It is a work that Satan delights to have any of you do, but it is not a work the Lord has pointed out for you to do.

Men should let God take care of His own Book, His living oracles, as He has done for ages. They begin to question some parts of revelation, and pick flaws in the apparent inconsistencies of this statement and that statement.



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“Men of humble acquirements, possessing but limited capabilities and opportunities to become conversant in the Scriptures, find in the living oracles comfort, guidance, counsel, and the plan of salvation as clear as a sunbeam. No one need be lost for want of knowledge, unless he is willfully blind. We thank God that the Bible is prepared for the poor man as well as for the learned man. It is fitted for all ages and all classes. (Ms 16, 1888 in 1SM 17-18)





# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired Word to finite man. This Word, arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them that, by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven.” (1SM 16)



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“The truth of God is found in His word. Those who feel that they must seek elsewhere for present truth need to be converted anew. They have wrong habits to mend, evil ways to be abandoned. They need to seek anew the truth as it is in Jesus, that their character building may be in harmony with the lessons of Christ.” (8T 192)



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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“In the Bible the will of God is revealed to His children. Wherever it is read, in the family circle, the school, or the church, all should give quiet and devout attention **as if God were really present and speaking to them.**” (5T 84)



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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- The entire Bible is the inspired Word of God.
- People should cling to their Bibles
- People should believe and obey the Bible and not one of them will be lost.
- In the Bible is found “comfort, guidance, counsel.”
- The Bible is fitted for all human needs: rich and poor, learned and illiterate, all ages, all classes.



# Ellen White Exalted the Bible

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- The truth of God is found in the Bible.
- No one need to seek elsewhere for present truth.
- The Bible contains all that a person needs for salvation.
- The Bible sets forth the pattern for Christian living.



# A Proper Relationship

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“Brother J would confuse the mind by seeking to make it appear that the light God has given through the Testimonies [i.e., Ellen White’s writings] is **an addition to the word of God**, but in this he presents the matter in a false light. God has seen fit in this manner to bring the minds of His people to His word, to give them a clearer understanding of it.” (4T 246)



# A Proper Relationship

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“The word of God abounds in general principles for the formation of correct habits of living, and the testimonies [i.e., Ellen White’s writings], general and personal, have been calculated to **call their [church members’] attention more especially to these principles.**” (4T 323)



# A Proper Relationship

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“The *Testimonies* [i.e., the writings of Ellen White] are **not to belittle the word of God**, but to **exalt it and attract minds to it**, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all.” (5T 665)





# A Proper Relationship

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“Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a *lesser light* [i.e., writings of Ellen White] **to lead men and women to the greater light** [i.e., Bible].” (RH, January 20, 1903)



# James White's position

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“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 [Acts 2:17-18]. True visions are given to lead us to God, and to 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.

# James White's position

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“Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a **perfect rule of faith and duty**. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. **He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the [spiritual] gifts**. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position.” (RH, October 16, 1855)



# G. I. Butler's position

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“They [the visions or writings of Ellen White] everywhere direct us to the Scriptures as the great source of true instruction, and to the example of Jesus Christ as the true pattern. They **never claim to be given to take the place of the Bible**, but simply to be a manifestation of one of those spiritual gifts set in the church by its divine Lord; and as such should have their proper weight.” (RH, June 9, 1874)



# Mrs. S. M. I. Henry's position

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Mrs. Henry saw the writings of Ellen White as “a telescope, a perfect, beautiful telescope, directed toward the field of the heavens [the Bible]; subject to all telescopic conditions and limitations. . . . in its proper office as a medium of enlarged and clearer vision, as a telescope, the Testimony has a wonderfully beautiful and holy office.”



# Mrs. S. M. I. Henry's position

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“The failure has been in understanding what the Testimonies are and how to use them. They are not the heavens, palpitating with countless orbs of truth, but they do lead the eye and give it power to penetrate into the glories of the mysterious living word of God.” (The Gospel of Health, January 1898)



# Primarily a Commentator

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Throughout her writings, but primarily in her Conflict of the Ages series, Ellen White ‘commented’ on the Biblical story from the origin of sin in heaven to its final eradication from the universe after the millennium. She articulated her thoughts around her major themes: great controversy, love of God, and salvation in Jesus.



# Primarily a Commentator

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In her commentaries on Scripture Ellen White opened the Word of God to her readers through a variety of ways.

Her ministry is often more pastoral, devotional, and homiletical. She never saw herself as a trained exegete or a historian. But on many occasions, she spoke with doctrinal and theological emphasis.





# Types of biblical interpretations

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- Typologies
- Moralisms
- Character sketches
- Biblical analogies and parallelisms
- Spiritual warfare
- Exegesis



# Typology

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- Moses is described as a type of Christ; his intercessory ministry on behalf of Israel parallels that of Christ (PP 330)
- Elijah the prophet is compared to God's remnant people at the end of time.



# Moralism

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- Weaving moral lessons from events that happen to biblical people.
- Aaron's behavior in the chapter "Idolatry at Sinai" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.
- The story of Nadab and Abihu a few chapters later is fraught with moral lessons for God's people.



# Character Sketches

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- Given the overarching theme of the great controversy in her writings, how people relate to God in this controversy between good and evil allows her to illustrate how one's life today should be lived in order to be victorious or to be defeated by the foe. Plenty of character sketches illustrate her narratives.
- Among her favorites in the Scriptures : Joseph, Daniel and the apostle John.



## Biblical analogy and parallelism

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- Ellen White draws parallels between various Bible stories, events, people, or texts.
- In the chapter “Idolatry at Sinai”, she draws a biblical analogy between God’s judgment of idolatry with what is predicted will happen at the end of time (PP 326).



# Spiritual Warfare

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- Ellen White presents to her readers the “behind the scenes” events, conversations between Christ and Satan, or between evil angels, how God interprets or reacts to events, etc. This approach is closely connected with her understanding of the great controversy.
- Chapter 29 in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, “Satan’s Enmity Against the Law”



# Exegesis

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- Although Ellen White was not a trained biblical scholar she nonetheless interpreted Scripture and in her commentaries expounded on its meaning.
- Books such as *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* and *Christ's Object Lessons* are genuine Bible commentaries.



# Ellen White's emphasis

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“The space she devotes to Biblical events and persons is not always proportional to the space given in the Bible. Her emphasis on certain events or persons depends on how she believes those events and persons contribute to the unfolding of the Great Controversy Theme.” (Messenger of the Lord, 419)





# Ellen White's emphasis

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Ellen White did not attempt to comment on every verse or story in the Bible. She wrote on those passages that had special significance in unfolding the working out of the Great Controversy. Nor did she exhaust the meaning of Scripture in her comments.