

THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETER'S USE OF THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

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Introduction

Adventist interpreters of Revelation share a deep appreciation of the writings of Ellen G. White. Her comments on the book of Revelation stimulate much productive insight, particularly with regard to the "big picture;" namely how the symbolic visions of Revelation contribute to the cosmic perspective often known as the "Great Controversy." She was well aware that Revelation brings together language, ideas, and types from throughout Scripture; forming a consummate conclusion to the Bible as a whole.¹ Thus, Adventist scholarship would be remiss to ignore her perspective on the symbols and theology of the Book of Revelation.

Having said this, interpreters need to be reminded that the writings of Ellen White can be used in such a way as to obscure the meaning of the Biblical text and make it serve the agenda of the interpreter.² Off-hand comments in various contexts can be universalized or

¹AA 585.

²"Those who are not walking in the light of the message, may gather up statements from my writings that happen to please them, and that agree with their human judgment, and, by separating these statements from their connection, and placing them beside human reasonings, make it appear that my writings uphold that which they condemn." Letter 208, 1906

applied in ways that run counter to the implications of the biblical text itself.³ Such use is really abuse and results in diminishing her authority rather than enhancing it.⁴

Inspiration is truly handled with respect when the intention of an inspired writer is permitted to emerge from the text in its original context (exegesis). We must avoid reading into the text our own interests and presuppositions (eisegesis). Messages from living prophets can easily be clarified upon request. But once the prophet has passed from the scene, we are on safest ground when the intent of each inspired text is allowed to emerge by means of careful exegesis.⁵ The interpreter's need to establish a particular position offers no license to do with the text whatever one wants.⁶

³The fact that Ellen White called for Daniel and Revelation to be published together without comment indicates the importance she attached to careful textual study and comparison. Cf. TM 117.

⁴A companion study on the use and abuse of Ellen White's reflections on Daniel and Revelation is published by the Biblical Research Institute (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists) in a pamphlet entitled "Ellen G. White and the Interpretation of Daniel and Revelation."

⁵Please see the Conclusion of the companion chapter "Breaking the Code" for further safeguards on the exegesis of inspired writings.

⁶"Many from among our own people are writing to me, asking with earnest determination the privilege of using my writings to give force to certain subjects which they wish to present to the people in such a way as to leave a deep impression upon them. It is true that there is a reason why some of these matters should be presented; but I would not venture to give my approval in using the testimonies in this way, or to sanction the placing of matter which is good in itself in the way which they propose.

"The persons who make these propositions, for aught I know, may be able to conduct the enterprise of which they write in a wise manner; but nevertheless I dare not give the least license for using my writings in the manner which they propose. In taking account of such an enterprise, there are many things that must come into consideration; for in using the testimonies to bolster up some subject which may impress the mind of the author, the extracts may give a different impression than that which they would were they read in their original connection."

The role of inspiration is particularly problematic with regard to Ellen White's use of Scripture. An interpreter with a strong preconceived idea can easily utilize Ellen White's Scriptural quotations in such a way as to overthrow the plain meaning of the text in its biblical context.⁷ Inferences drawn from the text of Revelation are at times creatively combined with inferences drawn from the Spirit of Prophecy to produce a result which cannot be plainly demonstrated by either a natural reading of the text of Revelation or of the writings of Ellen White.⁸

The Writing and Sending Out of the Testimonies for the Church," p. 26. Quoted in Ellen G. White, Messenger to the Remnant, by Arthur White, p. 86.

⁷When she applied the phrase "touch not, taste not, handle not" to the use of tea, coffee, alcohol, and tobacco (MH 335) she was certainly echoing the language of Col 2:21, but certainly not in the manner in which Paul used it! For her the phrase had a positive use in relation to a proper abstention from harmful substances, for Paul the phrase, in context, represented an unhealthy asceticism that diverted attention from Christ (Col 2:18-23).

When she applied the phrase "God made man upright" to the need for good posture (Ed 198) she never intended to imply that the author of Ecclesiastes was discussing posture in Eccl 7:27-29. In PP 49 she used the phrase in harmony with the moral intention of the biblical author.

⁸An excellent example of such "hybrid theology" can be found in the book "Give Glory to Him" by Robert Hauser (515 Pine Hill Rd., Angwin CA, By the Author, 1983), pp. 30-32. By comparing statements from the Bible and Ellen White Hauser seeks to demonstrate that Rev 4:1-5:6 takes place in the Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary, 5:8-14 takes place in the Most Holy Place and that in Rev 5:7 Jesus moves from the Holy Place into the Most Holy Place. As brilliant as this suggestion is, it is rendered extremely unlikely by the simple fact that no such movement between apartments is detectible in the text of Rev 4-5 itself, and Ellen White nowhere describes such a movement in terms of Rev 5. Hauser's suggestion transcends the intention of both John and Ellen White. Thus, Ellen White's use of Scripture is misused in order to demonstrate something neither she nor John the Revelator intended. Hauser's theology of the Heavenly Sanctuary may prove to be accurate, but his use of Rev 5 is misleading indeed. See the companion chapter on the interpretation of Rev 4-6.

Though usually well-intentioned, such sidetracks divert the people of God from careful attention to the plain meaning of the text, and thus encourage careless methods of interpretation that can damage the cause of God. With the goal of safeguarding her inspired intention, some tentative guidelines for the use of Ellen White in the study of Revelation follow.

Basic Principles

First, it is important to determine whether Ellen White was intending to cite a particular biblical text or was merely "echoing" it. The same procedure applied to the Revelator's use of the OT would be helpful here as well.⁹ When she merely echoes a text she is certainly not expressing a judgment on the biblical writer's intention for the use of that text. She may be drawing a valid spiritual lesson when she echoes Scripture, but it is not necessarily the same lesson the biblical writer sought to impress upon his readers.

Second, where Ellen White clearly refers the reader to a Scriptural passage, one should ask how she is using the passage. Is she using it exegetically--making a statement about the original meaning of the passage in the author's context? Is she using it theologically--discussing the implication that passage has for a larger theology based on Scripture as a whole and focusing particularly on God's will for the recipients of her writings? Is she using it homiletically--enjoying the effectiveness of the biblical language that moves people to action in a worship setting?¹⁰

To interpret a homiletical usage as though it were an exegetical statement will distort not only her intention in its use but the meaning of the biblical statement as well. While more study needs to be done on this question, it is my opinion that Ellen White rarely

⁹See the companion chapter "Breaking the Code."

¹⁰See the above illustration from her use of Col 2:21.

uses Scripture exegetically (i.e. being primarily concerned with the biblical writer's intent).¹¹ As was the case with the classical prophets of the OT, her main concern was to speak to her contemporary situation. This would generally cause her to use Scripture theologically and homiletically rather than exegetically.

To say this is not to limit Ellen White's authority. Her intention in a given statement should be taken with utmost seriousness. At the same time we must be careful not to limit the authority of the Biblical writer. We should not deny a biblical writer's intention on the basis of a homiletical usage of his passage. What I am pleading for here is that we respect Ellen White's own intention in her use of biblical material. Since she often uses Scripture in other than exegetical ways, statements quoting Revelation must be examined with great care before being dogmatically applied in the exegesis of the book.¹²

Third, Ellen White herself makes a distinction between her published writings and other material.¹³ We can best understand her theological intention in the writings that were most carefully written and edited by her. Off-hand comments in letters or stenographically reproduced from sermons may not reflect her settled opinion on timeless issues. Compilations of her writings by others need to be used even more cautiously, since the ordering of material

¹¹A high percentage of her exegetical statements are probably found in the book Acts of the Apostles which contains specific discussions of NT books in their original setting. Many exegetical statements are also found in Christ's Object Lessons and Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing. Cf. the comments by Robert Olson in Ministry, December, 1990, p. 17.

¹²Where she appears to use a text exegetically, yet a tension remains between her use of a text and the apparent intent of the author's language, two possibilities should be kept in mind. (1) It is possible that the interpreter has misunderstood the intent of either the biblical writer or Ellen White, or both. (2) An inspired person can apply a biblical passage to his/her contemporary situation in a local sense without exhausting the ultimate intention of the original writer. (Note Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:16-21 and Jesus' use of Dan 7:13,14 in Matt 9:6.)

¹³5T 696 cf. 1SM 66, TM 33.

can, in itself, make a theological statement. If something is found only in letters and manuscripts, particularly if it occurs only once, the interpreter needs to demonstrate that it is a true reflection of her considered and consistent intent.

Fourth, the question should be asked, is Ellen White's use of a given Scripture text critical to the conclusion she comes to in a given portion of her writings? If her use of a given Scripture is peripheral to her central theme it may not partake of a thought-out exegesis. As is the case with Scripture, we are on safest ground when we refer to passages where the specific topic we are concerned with is being discussed. Since much of Revelation is never made central to any of her discussions we must exercise great caution in applying peripheral statements to Revelation.¹⁴

Fifth, Ellen White's later writings should be allowed to clarify positions taken in earlier writings. As her skills as a writer increased, her ability to express accurately and clearly the thoughts she received from God correspondingly increased. And as earlier statements were opposed or became subject to controversy, she would offer clarifying statements to make her intention clear. A well-known example of this is found in EW 85-96 where she offers a series of clarifications of earlier statements and visionary descriptions.¹⁵

Finally, how often did she utilize a scriptural passage in a particular way? Generally speaking, the number of times a specific concept is repeated is in direct proportion to the writer's burden that the concept be clearly understood by readers. It is not normally wise to

¹⁴Revelation is central to her discussion in chapter 57 (pp. 579-592) of Acts of the Apostles and to much of the latter part of the book Great Controversy.

¹⁵A theological example of her maturing clarity of expression is her understanding of the deity of Christ. No one can mistake her clear belief in the full deity of Christ as expressed in later statements such as 1SM 296, DA 530, RH April 5, 1906, and ST May 3, 1899. But pre-1888 statements such as 1SP 17-18 are ambiguous enough to be read as Arian if the later statements are ignored (She updates and clarifies 1SP 17-18 in PP 37-38). To draw her view from 1SP 17-18 while ignoring the later clarifying statements is to hopelessly distort her intention.

base an interpretation on a single passage. An idea that is repeated in a variety of circumstances and by means of a variety of expressions is not easily misunderstood or misused.

The main reason for suggesting these basic guidelines for determining her intent is the problem of ambiguity in Ellen White's writings. Her statements are often susceptible of more than one interpretation.¹⁶ This is not due to confusion or lack of clarity on her part necessarily, it is due to the fact that she often did not address directly the questions that concern us most today. An unbiased reader will repeatedly find statements that answer our concerns with less clarity than we would prefer. The biased reader, on the other hand, when confronted with an ambiguous statement, picks the option out of several which best fits his/her preconceived ideas and hammers it home to those who might disagree.

The reality is that many exegetical questions cannot be clarified from Ellen White's writings. The wisest course is to avoid using ambiguous statements as definitive evidence to prove a point. It is always appropriate, of course, to point out the possibilities inherent in such statements.

The Principles Illustrated

To illustrate the use of these five principles it may be helpful to examine the statement in EW 279-280:

¹⁶An excellent example of an ambiguous statement can be found in TM 445. She states there that, "The sealing of the servants of God is the same that was shown to Ezekiel in vision. John also had been a witness of this most startling revelation." She follows with a number of items that are common to both books. Since the visions of John and Ezekiel are analogous, but certainly not identical, two possibilities of interpretation emerge. (1) The events of around 600 BC partook of the same principles that will manifest themselves in the final crisis portrayed in Rev 7. (2) Ezekiel describes not the events of 600 BC but the end-time. While one or the other interpretation will be considered more likely based on the prior assumptions a reader brings to the text, either is possible based on the language she chose to use in context.

"An angel with a writer's inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and sealed. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, **throw down the censer**. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, 'It is done.' And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, 'He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.'"

The context of this passage is the close of probation. Ellen White utilizes language reminiscent of Ezek 9,¹⁷ Rev 8:5,¹⁸ Rev 16:17,¹⁹ and then quotes Rev 22:11. Rev 16:17 and 22:11 clearly belong in a "close of probation" context. Our interest concerns the significance of her use of the language of Rev 8:5 in this context.

Does Ellen White understand the act of throwing down the censer depicted in Rev 8:5 to be a reference to the end-time close of probation? The five guidelines sketched above can be applied to this passage.

First, it is not clear that she intended the reader to perceive an allusion to Rev 8:5 in this passage. The phrase "throw down the censer" is certainly unmistakable. If there is an allusion to Scripture at all when she sees Jesus "throw down the censer" it is clearly an allusion to Rev 8:5. But a number of indications demonstrate that she is not alluding to Rev 8:5 in this statement. It is Jesus that ministers the incense, not an angel. He ministers before the ark, not the altar of incense. He throws down the censer in front of the ark not to the earth. The statement merely echoes the language of Rev 8:5 without referring the reader to that text. It is precarious to draw specific exegetical information from an echo of language.

Second, there is clearly no attempt to exegete Rev 8:5 in her statement. It is part of a visionary description of a future event, the close of probation. As such it is a theological or homiletical usage of Rev 8:5. The meaning of Rev 8:5 in the original context is not addressed.

¹⁷"An angel with a writer's inkhorn by his side . . . reported." Ezek 9:2,3,11.

¹⁸"Threw down the censer."

¹⁹"Loud voice . . . It is done."

Third, the statement occurs in a published work which was edited with considerable care. However, the reference is unique to this statement so it may not reflect a settled understanding that Rev 8:5 is to be associated with the endtime close of probation.

Fourth, as mentioned earlier, the exegesis of Rev 8:5 is not central to the issue in EW 279-280. The issue at hand is a description of the close of probation, not the context of Rev 8. The description of Jesus throwing down the censer could be left out without materially affecting the theological content of the statement.

Fifth, the statement is an early one, thus an interpreter wishing to understand her usage here should be prepared for the possibility that a later statement may decisively clarify this one. The possible implications of this statement should not be pressed in the face of a later one, particularly if the later statement significantly modifies the material at issue.

Finally, the allusion only occurs one time in all of her available works. Even if its meaning appeared clear to all interpreters it could be questioned whether Ellen White's intention in the allusion had been rightly understood. Certainly she has not gone out of her way in her writings to clarify the relation of Rev 8:5 to the close of probation.

To summarize, as much as we would like to have exegetical help in determining the meaning of Rev 8:5 and its context, EW 279-280, though it may well allude to Rev 8:5, should not be used for that purpose. It is not exegetical or central to the topic in its context, neither is it reasonably certain that Ellen White intended the reader to perceive an allusion to Rev 8:5.

Of great interest to this issue, however, is the fact that this statement is repeated (nearly in its entirety) in GC 613. That statement is quoted below with the underlining representing all words that are identical to EW 279-280.

"An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received 'the seal of the living God.' Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, 'It is done;' and all the angelic host lay off their crowns as He makes the solemn announcement: 'He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be

filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.' Rev 22:11.²⁰

The basic point of this passage and two-thirds of the wording are identical to EW 279-280. Even where the wording is changed the basic meaning is the same. But two significant changes in Ellen White's use of Scripture have taken place. The language of Ezek 9 and Rev 8:5 has been dropped. In place of Rev 8:5 is the statement that Jesus "ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above."

The Great Controversy passage clarifies the meaning of the earlier passage. She there used the language of Rev 8:5 as a graphic description of the end of intercession. But she apparently did not want to leaven the impression that Rev 8:5 (or Ezek 9 for that matter) was a description of "the" Close of Probation. Therefore, in GC 613, explicit terminology is used instead of an echo to Rev 8:5.

This illustration indicates that to carry out these guidelines takes patience and time. Where she makes an abundance of statements on a text or a topic, it may be impossible for most interpreters. In most such cases the flavor of her viewpoint can be obtained by a careful surface survey of her statements. It becomes essential to follow these guidelines carefully, however, whenever a particular statement or series of statements becomes controversial, usually due to ambiguity. In such a case the burden of proof is on the interpreter to demonstrate that, were Ellen White alive, she would support his/her use of her statement as proof of a point.

Conclusion

After thorough study of the text of Revelation it is helpful for an Adventist interpreter to examine Ellen White's use of Revelation for profitable. Her unparalleled grasp of the universal issues to which the book of Revelation points makes her statements about the book of enormous interest to Adventists. Nevertheless, her contribution to the discussion

²⁰GC 613.

must not be expanded beyond her own intention. To do so would be to distort both her intention and John's, thus undermining the authority of inspiration. The above guidelines can help provide safeguards against such unintentional misuse.

We will now turn our attention, by way of illustration, to a number of statements related to Rev 4-9. In the material that follows a shortage of time and space require that the survey method be used as often as not. Those who find a particular statement to be either "misinterpreted" or "ignored" should understand that the following is not written as "the final word," but is intended to stimulate discussion and encourage careful application of the method to controverted points.

ELLEN WHITE AND REV 4-6

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify, as far as possible, the views Ellen White held with respect to the visions recorded in Rev 4-6. All the statements in the available Scripture Indexes to the writings of Ellen White on this section of Revelation have been examined. However, space will permit discussion of only a few that are considered particularly pertinent to the Adventist interpretation of this passage.

Those who find a particular statement either "misinterpreted" or "ignored" in this chapter should recognize that this chapter is not written as "the final word," but is intended to stimulate discussion and encourage careful application of the method to controverted points.

The Broader Context

The closest thing to a major interpretive statement for the entire first half of the book of Revelation is found in the book Great Controversy, pages 414-415.²¹ There Ellen White offers a clear statement regarding the significance of the sanctuary material in Rev 4, 8, and 11:

The holy places of the sanctuary in heaven are represented by the two apartments in the sanctuary on earth. As in vision the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne." Revelation 4:5. He saw an angel "having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." Revelation 8:3. Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven; and he saw there the "seven lamps of fire" and "the golden altar," represented by the golden candlestick and the golden altar of incense in the sanctuary on earth. Again, "the temple of God was opened" (Revelation 11:19), and he looked within the inner veil, upon the holy of holies. Here he beheld "the ark of His testament," represented by the sacred chest constructed by Moses to contain the law of God.

²¹This statement is also found in PP 356. Both statements are an expansion and clarification of the earlier and more ambiguous SR 377.

There is no question that Ellen White had these specific Bible passages in mind as she wrote. The statement also appears to be an attempt to explain the significance of the author's original vision regarding these matters. It is drawn from one of her major works and is central to the discussion of the sanctuary in its context.²² The purpose of the chapter is not, however, to exegete the intention of the Revelator, so the passage may qualify more as a theological statement than an exegetical one. In any case, it is her most comprehensive statement on the meaning of Rev 4-11. Thus, it is of first importance for understanding her view of the meaning of this portion of the book. It seems evident from this statement that Ellen White understood the events of the seals and the trumpets to be taking place under the rubric of the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, while the second apartment ministry comes into view only in Rev 11:19.

While this may seem a major conclusion to draw from just a few words, Ellen White clarified this statement in a Review and Herald article published on Nov 9, 1905. There she repeats the above statement with the following addition:

The announcement, "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament," points to the opening of the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, at the end of the twenty-three hundred days,--in 1844,--as Christ entered there to perform the closing work of the atonement. Those who by faith followed their great High Priest, as he entered upon his ministry in the most holy place, beheld the ark of the testament.

The title of her article was "The Ark of the Covenant." If Ellen White had considered it appropriate to indicate that the ark could be equated with the throne in Rev 4-5, or with the activity in Rev 8:3,4, this would have been the ideal place to do so. Instead, she makes it clear that Rev 11:19 (the sanctuary introduction to chapters twelve through fourteen-- the section that features the three angel's messages) is the point at which the book of Revelation begins to concentrate on the end-time judgment.

²²Chapter twenty-three of Great Controversy, pp. 409-422, is entitled "What is the Sanctuary?"

These Ellen White citations call into question the assertions some make that the Ellen White writings can be used to support a Day of Atonement or end-time setting for the seals and trumpets as a whole. Such a position cannot be maintained in light of the fact that there are no clear and explicit statement from her pen to that effect, and the citations we have noted imply otherwise.

The End-Time Significance of Rev 5

There is only one statement that I am aware of that imputes unusual importance to any part of Rev 4-6 and 8-9. That statement is found in 9T 266-267.

Those who humble their hearts and confess their sins will be pardoned. Their transgressions will be forgiven. But the man who thinks that should he confess his sins he would show weakness, will not find pardon, will not see Christ as his Redeemer, but will go on and on in transgression, making blunder after blunder and adding sin to sin. What will such a one do in the day that the books are opened and every man is judged according to the things written in the books?

The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied. It is of great importance to those who shall act a part in the work of God for these last days. There are some who are deceived. They do not realize what is coming on the earth. Those who have permitted their minds to become beclouded in regard to what constitutes sin are fearfully deceived. Unless they make a decided change they will be found wanting when God pronounces judgment upon the children of men. They have transgressed the law and broken the everlasting covenant and they will receive according to their works.

The statement is part of an address read to the General Conference session of 1909 entitled "A Distribution of Responsibility."²³ The first half concerns the need to make wise choices where the leadership of the church is concerned. The latter half (pp. 265-269) is a series of warnings made up largely of quotations from Matt 11:20-30, Rev 6:12-17, Rev 7:9-17, Luke 21:33-36, and Matt 24:42-51. The above statement precedes the quotation of Rev 6:12-17.

The statement is more ambiguous than we would like. It is clear that Rev 5 is intended to play a significant role for those who are to act a part in the closing up of earth's history. But it is not clear what that role is. Does Ellen White understand the chapter itself to be end-time? Is there an event portrayed there that is of particular importance to those who live at the end? Are there timeless theological truths there that will play their usual role also at the end? Is the passage inspirational because of its clear depiction of heavenly praise and worship? She does not say. A blank space is left, to be filled in by the reader.

One possibility lies in the mention of judgment both before and after the reference to chapter five. But this section of the address (9T 265-269) is neither an exegesis of Rev 5 nor

²³The entire context takes up 9T 262-269.

a theology of judgment. The previous statement associates judgment with the opening of the books, while in Rev 5 the single book remains sealed until after the scene so there is no explicit connection there. The later statement leads into the quotation of Rev 6:12-17 where the Second Coming with its executive judgment is in view. Therefore, there is no explicit connection in her appeal to study Rev 5 with these two references to judgment.

The soundest way to determine the reason for Ellen White's emphasis on the importance of Rev 5 for those who live in the last days is to read all her statements regarding that chapter.²⁴ When this procedure is followed, the reader is impressed by her repeated use of the chapter as an inspiring vision of heaven that can have a motivating effect on those who live on the earth, encouraging them to look above what their eyes can see and contemplate the glories of an eternal world, thus becoming inspired to want to be there themselves.

"Who can be trifling, who can engage in frivolous, common talk, while by faith he sees the Lamb that was slain pleading before the Father . . ." "By faith let us look upon the rainbow round about the throne."²⁵ "Think of Jesus . . ."²⁶ "In view of the revelation made to John on the Isle of Patmos . . . how can those who claim to see wondrous things out of the law of God, be found in the list of the impure, of the fornicators and adulterers . . ."²⁷

After quoting portions of Rev 5 she says:

Will you catch the inspiration of the vision? Will you let your mind dwell upon the picture? Will you not be truly converted, and then go forth to labor in a spirit entirely different from the spirit in which you have labored in the past . . .,²⁸

and

²⁴I have learned from experience that it is unwise to say "Ellen White says" until one has read every statement she has made on a subject.

²⁵See context in TM 157.

²⁶See context in Letter 134, 1899 (quoted in 7 BC 933).

²⁷See context in TM 433.

²⁸See context in 8T44-45.

If we would permit our minds to dwell more upon Christ and the heavenly world, we should find a powerful stimulus and support in fighting the battles of the Lord. Pride and love of the world will lose their power as we contemplate the glories of that better land so soon to be our home. Beside the loveliness of Christ, all earthy attractions will seem of little worth.²⁹

In these kinds of statements we find, perhaps, the best clue to the significance of Rev 5 in the last days. It is the clearest and most exciting depiction of heavenly worship in all of Scripture. Those who meditate upon this scene will find encouragement and motivation to remain faithful to end, even as their spiritual forefathers in earlier times found encouragement and motivation in the same passage.

Did Ellen White associate the scene of Rev 5 with any particular event in history? Desire of Ages, pp. 833-835³⁰ ties the entire scene of Rev 4-5 to the event of Christ's ascension and his subsequent enthronement in the heavenly sanctuary. There is no question that Ellen White has Rev 4-5 in mind in this passage, and that this scripture plays a central role in the passage. Her statement is found in one of her major books, and it is in harmony with the most natural understanding of the biblical text.

Although the events of Rev 5 originally took place at a particular point in time, however, we should not insist that the three hymns of acclamation found in Rev 5:9-14 were only sung once. No doubt they enter the repertoire of the ongoing worship services in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, Ellen White can quote from this section in the context of what is happening in heaven now,³¹ yet also quote verses 9-13 in the context of the experience of the redeemed as they enter the heavenly courts after the Second Coming.³² This application is

²⁹See context in RH, Nov 15, 1887.

³⁰This statement is repeated more briefly in Review and Herald, July 29, 1890.

³¹7BC 933; COL 176; MH 417. Note that in PP 36 she quotes Rev 5:11 in a pre-creation context!

³²TM 433; GC 545, 647-648, 651-652, 671; 6BC 1083; 8T 44. GC 545 in particular appears exegetical with respect to Rev 5:13.

supported by the observation that the song of verse 13 presupposes the involvement of the entire creation, an event only fully realized after the destruction of sin and sinners at the close of the millennium.

Hauser, however, believes that a statement found in 7BC 967 suggests that Ellen White understood Christ's taking of the book to have occurred in 1844, not AD 31.³³ Let us examine this statement with some care.

John writes, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne." Angels were united in the work of Him who had broken the seals and taken the book. Four mighty angels hold back the powers of this earth till the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. The nations of the world are eager for conflict; but they are held in check by the angels. When this restraining power is removed, there will come a time of trouble and anguish.

The quotation in the initial sentence is clearly from Rev 5:11. According to Hauser, Ellen White's statement sets Rev 5:11 *after* the breaking of the seals. Since Rev 5:11 contains an allusion to Dan 7:9,10, Hauser argues that its location is in the Most Holy Place at the time of judgment. Thus, he argues that the taking of the book and the breaking of the seals take place in the Most Holy Place from 1844 on. When the Lamb "came and took the book" in Rev 5:7, he was moving from the Holy Place into the Most Holy.³⁴

While Hauser's reasoning at this point seems strained, the statement he has adduced is somewhat problematic and deserves investigation. It certainly associates Rev 5:11 with the events of Rev 7:1-3 which are end-time. However, her statement is a general description of the work of angels, and Ellen White repeatedly uses the language of Rev 5:11 in

³³Hauser, p. 31.

³⁴Ibid. Hauser has evidently overlooked the fact that the Lamb was already standing "in the midst of the throne" (Rev 5:6) before he "comes and takes the book." To assume a change of apartments in Rev 5:6-7 is to suggest that the "throne" is a way of speaking for the entire sanctuary, something found in neither the Bible nor the writings of Ellen White.

general descriptions of the work of angels.³⁵ Therefore, if the primary function of the statement has to do with the work of angels in general, we should not overstate its significance for the exegesis of Rev 5.

More problematic still is her second sentence: "the work of Him who had broken the seals and taken the book." This reverses the order of the Biblical text and seems to place the breaking of the seals in the past from her perspective.³⁶

The statement was taken from Letter 79, 1900, written on May 10 of that year. The letter is a rambling appeal to a William Kerr, calling for a fuller commitment to the gospel and to obedience to God's commandments. Ellen White's personal journal indicates that she was extremely weak and weary from overwork and sleeplessness on that day,³⁷ which would account for the rambling nature of the letter.³⁸ It nears its conclusion with a general description of the work of angels in helping God's people obey.³⁹ There is no reference to the investigative judgment.

The statement we are examining is found nowhere else in Ellen White's writings. Nor is it central to the point of the letter which is quite homiletical in its thrust. Such an isolated statement in an unpublished letter should not be used to overturn the impact of careful exegesis and such major published statements as GC 414-415 and DA 833-835.⁴⁰ The

³⁵Compare 7BC933; 7BC 967-968; GC 511-512; PP36; CH 32, among others.

³⁶The breaking of the seventh seal would appear to be at or after the Second Coming.

³⁷She had not had significant sleep for three days!

³⁸Although the letter is lengthy, there is little coherent flow of thought from one paragraph to another.

³⁹The section of the letter just previous to 7BC 967 is published in 7 BC 922 (quoting Rev 1:6; 5:9,10; 12:11).

⁴⁰There is not a single statement in her writings that specifically interprets Hauser's key passage (Rev 5:7), so it should not be assumed that she saw a significant change there.

fact that she was tired in the extreme on that day may account for her confusion regarding the timing of the breaking of the seals and the order in which the breaking of the seals and the taking of the book took place.⁴¹

⁴¹In the typewritten manuscript of the letter the original "angels are united" was replaced with "angels were united, as if she sensed a certain awkwardness in the statement.

The Sealed Scroll of Rev 5

Ellen White makes a handful of brief statements with regard to the sealed scroll of Rev 5. TM 115 appears to suggest that the sealed scroll is the book of Daniel. After quoting Dan 12:8-13 she says:

It was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who unsealed the book and gave to John the revelation of what should be in these last days.

After paraphrasing Daniel for some lines⁴² she states:

The book of Daniel is unsealed in the revelation to John, and carries us forward to the last scenes of this earth's history.

Her statement in COL 294, on the other hand, suggests that she understood the scroll of Rev 5 to contain much more than the book of Daniel:

Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

The scroll contains both the history and the destiny of the world:

The light we have received upon the third angel's message is the true light. The mark of the beast is exactly what it has been proclaimed to be. Not all in regard to this matter is yet understood, nor will it be understood until the unrolling of the scroll; but a most solemn work is to be accomplished in our world.⁴³

Both statements suggest that Ellen White understood the full unrolling of the scroll as a matter for the future, not the past (such as 1844).

More recently, a letter has come to light which contains a fairly clear statement on the identity of the scroll.⁴⁴ After quoting Rev 5:1-3 she states:

There in His open hand lay the book, the roll of the history of God's providences, the prophetic history of nations and the church. Herein was contained the divine utterances, His authority, His commandments, His laws, the whole symbolic counsel of the Eternal, and the history of all ruling powers in the nations. In symbolic language was

⁴²See in context, TM 115.

⁴³6T 17.

⁴⁴Letter 65, 1898. Manuscript release #667.

contained in that roll the influence of every nation, tongue, and people from the beginning of earth's history to its close.

This roll was written within and without. John says: (Rev 5:4-5; 6:8-11; 8:1-4).

This explicit statement about the scroll of Rev 5 indicates that it contains the entire sum and substance of the Great Controversy as it pertains to the earth, including the acts of both God and His created beings throughout history. There are only two points in human history which sum up all things. One is in Christ at the cross⁴⁵, the other is at the close of the millennium when all history is laid open to view.⁴⁶ Since the judgment associated with the year 1844 is limited in Ellen White's thinking to those who have professed Christ,⁴⁷ this statement does not pinpoint the year 1844 as the time when the Lamb took the book.

The most likely reference point for this statement is Christ's enthronement in heaven in AD 31. Note that the scroll contains "the roll of the history of God's providences," an appropriate designation for the Old Testament, and "the prophetic history of nations and the church," a statement most appropriate at the beginning of the Christian era, not near its close.

Combining all of the above, it appears that Ellen White understood the scroll of Rev 5 to be the sum and substance of history, prophecy, and the entire plan and purpose of God. As such it contains that to which both Daniel and Revelation point and more. As such it is not fully opened to view until the end of history. It is truly the "book of destiny."

The Breaking of the Seals

There is a paucity of statements associated with the seals of Revelation 6. Most of Ellen White's scriptural allusions to the seals have to do with the souls under the altar in the fifth seal and the heavenly signs mentioned in the sixth seal. There is, however, one most interesting reference to the horsemen of Rev 6:1-8.

⁴⁵At the cross Christ embodied in Himself both the character of God and the sins of a fallen creation.

⁴⁶GC 666-671.

⁴⁷GC 483.

The same spirit is seen today that is represented in Rev 6:6-8. History is to be reenacted. That which has been will be again. This spirit works to confuse and to perplex. Dissension will be seen in every nation, kindred, tongue and people, and those who have not had a spirit to follow the light that God has given through His living oracles, through His appointed agencies, will become confused. Their judgment will reveal weakness. Disorder and strife and confusion will be seen in the church.⁴⁸

This statement in its context is unquestionably a citation of the biblical text of the seals. The first two sentences imply that the third and fourth seals (Rev 6:6-8) refer to historical realities that are past, but the spirit of which continues in Ellen White's present and future. Her statement as a whole implies that the third and fourth seal represent spiritual confusion and perplexity in the church.

These seals have their primary historical fulfillment in the corrupted church of the Middle Ages, but the principle of confusion and apostasy is not limited to that period of history. As exegesis has demonstrated⁴⁹ the text of Revelation 6-7 points to an end-time consummation of the four horsemen in the four destroying winds of Rev 7:1-3.

In Testimonies for the Church, vol.6, p. 614 she alludes to the third seal.

In view of the infinite price paid for man's redemption, how dare any professing the name of Christ treat with indifference one of His little ones? How carefully should brethren and sisters in the church guard every word and action lest they hurt the oil and the wine! How patiently, kindly, and affectionately should they deal with the purchase of the blood of Christ!

This echo of biblical language suggests that the oil and wine represent those who believe in Jesus. If so, the command of Rev 6:6 not to hurt the oil and the wine symbolizes God's protecting care for His "little ones."

Of the roughly half-dozen statements alluding to the souls under the altar in the fifth seal, one applies the cry of the martyrs to the persecutions of the Old Testament era!⁵⁰

⁴⁸Letter 65, 1898; Manuscript Release #667.

⁴⁹See companion chapter on the seals.

⁵⁰Review and Herald, July 17, 1900.

Two apply the cry of the martyrs in a general sense.⁵¹ The cry represents God's continuing awareness of the injustice in the world. Other statements clearly imply an end-time setting, although even here (with the possible exception of MS 39, 1906) the usage is primarily in a general sense rather than as a specific exegetical interpretation.⁵²

This multiple focus and application is underscored by an exegesis of the passage.⁵³ The souls under the altar are the product of persecution throughout history leading up to the time of their cry. That cry is prior to the preadvent judgment (cf. Rev 6:10). The fact that the cry receives a partial response implies that the judgment has begun within the seal subsequent to the time of the cry. The last part of the seal has entered into the time of judgment and anticipates the final persecution of earth's history. So an end-time focus is not inappropriate within a broad historical perspective, but the seal as a whole covers a broader scope than just the end-time.

It is evident that Ellen White understands the fifth seal to be figurative. When she discusses the sixth seal, however, she sees it in literal terms. The earthquake of Rev 6:12 is identified with the Lisbon quake of 1755. The signs in the sun, moon, and stars are tied to those predicted by Christ (Rev 6:12,13; cf. Matt 24:29; Luke 21:25). These are identified with the Dark Day, May 19, 1780, and the meteoric shower of November 13, 1833, both occurring in North America.⁵⁴ The dramatic events of Rev 6:14, on the other hand, are associated with the

⁵¹"The voices of those under the altar. . . are still saying, . . ." Review and Herald, May 2, 1893. Cf. COL 179-180.

⁵²6BC 1081 (= RH Dec 21, 1897); 7BC 968 (= MS 39, 1906); 5T 451; RH June 15, 1897.

⁵³See companion chapter on the seals.

⁵⁴GC 37, 304-308, 333-334.

return of Christ.⁵⁵ The despairing cry of the wicked to be hidden from the wrath of God and the Lamb is likewise understood to take place at Christ's Second Advent.⁵⁶

Conclusion

While many statements by Ellen White that utilize language reminiscent of Revelation are fairly ambiguous, her clearest, most exegetical statements are supportive of the exegesis of the text itself.

⁵⁵ST April 22, 1913; SR 411; PP 340; RH Sept 22, 1891; RH Jan 12, 1886.

⁵⁶TM 444; PP 340-341; SR 411; RH Mar 18, 1880; RH Jan 12, 1886; RH April 28, 1891; RH June 18, 1901 (6BC 1070); 2T 41-42, etc.

ELLEN WHITE AND THE TRUMPETS

When it comes to the trumpets, unfortunately, Ellen White has very little to say. Only two statements are generally understood to offer meaningful comment on Rev 8:7 through 9:21, they are found in Letter 109, 1890 and GC 334-335. One is often used to support an end-time scenario for the trumpets, the other to support Josiah Litch's historicist account. Each will be examined briefly in turn. Four other avenues will also be explored. Statements regarding Rev 8:3-5 and 11:7 and 18 may shed some light on Rev 8:7-9:21, and statements regarding the sealing of Rev 7 are often understood to impact on the meaning of Rev 9:4.

The Trumpets and the End-Time

Until recently Adventist interpreters have rejected any futurist understanding of the first six trumpets. In the last few years, however, some have suggested that the seven trumpets have an end-time fulfillment, either in addition to or in place of the historical understandings of the past. This interpretation seeks support in Ellen White's statement in letter 109, 1890:

Solemn events before us are yet to transpire. Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded, vial after vial poured out one after another upon the inhabitants of the earth. Scenes of stupendous interest are right upon us.⁵⁷

The understanding of this statement, quoted in 7BC 982, is not aided by its context. The statement is very general and uses the term trumpet as part of a collection of statements concerning the terrors of the end. It is unlikely that this statement offers any guide to the exegesis of the seven trumpets. The only connection to Rev 8-11 is a single word "trumpet."

Quoted in 7BC 982.

There is no indication of an exegetical usage and it is the lone reference in all her writings. Since the comment is confined to a personal letter and is not intentionally included in her published works, she does not appear to be attaching any great significance to it. Therefore, rather than attempting to set the groundwork for future exegesis of the trumpets, Ellen White appears to be merely echoing the language of Rev 8-11 to heighten her description of future calamity. There are too many uncertainties with regard to her intention here for the passage to offer any conclusive guidance to exegesis of the trumpets. If the trumpets are to be interpreted as future, it will have to be demonstrated by exegesis of the text.

Ellen White and Litch's Historicism

An entirely different approach seeks support from the statement in GC 334-335. In this statement Ellen White gives apparent support to the view proposed by Josiah Litch and published by Uriah Smith in Daniel and the Revelation that the fifth and sixth trumpets portray the activities of the Saracens and Turks over a 1200-year period. While the SDA church holds the official view that doctrinal and exegetical positions should be based on the Bible and not on the writings of Ellen White, most SDAs would be uncomfortable rejecting a view that she stated clearly and unequivocally. Her endorsement in a major published work would have an almost overwhelming effect on interpretation of the trumpets.

Many E. G. White scholars, however, including Arthur White and Robert Olson, do not consider her language to be an endorsement of the Islamic view.⁵⁸ She uses such neutral terms as "according to his calculations," and "the event exactly fulfilled the prediction." This leads one to suspect that she was uncertain as to the true meaning of the passage and reported Litch's view because of its historical significance.⁵⁹ To compound the problem with

⁵⁸Cite Naden's work in Revelation Seminars.

⁵⁹She points out that as a result of the fulfillment of Litch's prediction multitudes were convinced of the correctness of the Millerite principles of prophetic interpretation, and many men of learning and position united with Miller.

the interpretation, Litch himself later repudiated that view because of, among other things, an error in calculating the supposed time period of Rev 9:15.⁶⁰ Since no one since has been able to salvage Litch's view in the form reported in GC 334-335, it is probably better to understand her account as a historical report and not a theological endorsement.⁶¹

The Activity of Rev 8:3-5

In the vision of Rev 8:3,4 an angel stands before the golden altar ministering incense before God. In many statements Ellen White appears to equate the angel with Christ.⁶² When she does so, she always speaks of the scene as a description of Christ's intercession.⁶³ Interestingly, however, she often describes the scene in terms of angels offering incense, but in those cases she never uses the term "intercession" reserving it for Christ alone.⁶⁴ In her clearest allusions to Rev 8:3,4, Ellen White relates this scene to the daily ministration in the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary.⁶⁵ Early in her ministry, however, she alludes to portions of the imagery with reference to the second apartment.⁶⁶ In all allusions to Rev 8:3,4, however, the ministration of incense is associated with Christ's work of intercession and not

⁶⁰He overlooked the effect of the calendar change in 1582 when he predicted that the supposed time period of Rev 9:15 would wind up on August 11, 1840.

⁶¹Assuming Litch was in error, it is not unlike God to preserve a threatened movement by providing the "fulfillment" it so desperately looked for.

⁶²EW 32 (= LS 100), 252; MS 142, 1899 (= COL 156 = 7 BC 931); MS 21, 1900 (= SD 22); MS 14, 1901 (= 6 BC 1078).

⁶³MS 14, 1901 (= 6 BC 1078); MS 142, 1899 (= 7 BC 931 = COL 156); SD 22.

⁶⁴MS 15, 1897 (= 7BC 971); RH July 4, 1893; ML 29.

⁶⁵GC 414-415; RH Nov 9, 1905; PP 353.

⁶⁶EW 32 [= LS 100], 252, 256.

with the Investigative Judgment.⁶⁷ The incense represents the "merit of Jesus"⁶⁸ or the "blood of the atonement."⁶⁹

Earlier in this chapter we made an extensive analysis of her single echo of Rev 8:5. She appears to understand the throwing down of the censer in terms of an end to intercession, but it is not clear if she understood it as "the" final close of probation.

Her use of the language of Rev 8:3-5 is remarkably compatible with the exegesis of the passage. The basic concept is the intercession of Christ. In some sense this is brought to an end by the act of throwing down the censer. Her writings make it unclear, however, whether that act occurs before the blowing of the trumpets chronologically, repeatedly during the trumpets, or at a specific point toward the end. In other words, she respects the ambiguity of the text and does not go beyond what is reasonably evident there.

The Sealing Work and Rev 9:4

A major issue in the Adventist interpretation of the trumpets is the significance of the sealing in Rev 9:4. Is it the end-time sealing of Rev 7? Or is it the ongoing sealing process of the NT? Does Ellen White have only one view of sealing in Revelation, or does she utilize the concept in the variety of ways in which NT writers used it?

One thing is perfectly clear, she never discusses Rev 9:4, not even in GC 334-335, the only place where she mentions the fifth trumpet at all. Therefore, her view of the matter is not explicit, it can only be inferred, if at all, from her view of the sealing in Rev 7.

⁶⁷MS 142, 1899 (= COL 156 = 7BC 931); MS 14, 1901 (= 6BC 1078)

⁶⁸RH July 4, 1893.

⁶⁹MS 15, 1897 (= 7 BC 971).

It may be helpful to briefly review the variety of meanings that pertain to the NT concept of sealing.⁷⁰ When a seal is placed on a document, message, or tomb its purpose is to conceal or to confine.⁷¹ An alternative meaning is to certify that something or someone is reliable.⁷² But the predominant meaning of sealing in connection with God's people is as an indication that one has been accepted by God.⁷³ In this sense it was a present reality already in the time of Abraham (Rom 4:11).

Ellen White has little to say about the NT passages which connect sealing to acceptance with God. Her primary interest is limited to the significance of Rev 7 which clearly focuses on the end-time. In spite of this, however, she does not limit sealing to a purely end-time setting. She repeatedly refers to her time as the time when the four angels are holding the four winds,⁷⁴ and to the sealing time as a present reality.⁷⁵ Therefore, while she normally refers to the sealing as a future, end-time event⁷⁶ (in harmony with the exegesis of Rev 7) she does not limit the process to the very end of time.

In terms of the meaning of sealing she once again is primarily interested in the meaning most appropriate to the situation of Rev 7. The concept of the seal of God has special significance in the antitypical Day of Atonement.

⁷⁰See the companion chapter "Historicism, the Seals, and the Trumpets" for a more complete summary.

⁷¹Matt 27:66; Rev 5:1,2,5,9; 6:1,3,5,7,9,12; 8:1; 10:4; 20:3; 22:10.

⁷²John 3:33; 6:27; Rom 15:28; 1 Cor 9:2.

⁷³"God knows them that are His" 2 Tim 2:19 cf. 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30.

⁷⁴5T 717-718, 6T 26,61,426, and some 18 statements in the Review and Herald from 1885-1912.

⁷⁵EW 43-44, Letter 270, 1907 (= 7BC 969), RH July 13, 1897, 1SM 66, 5T 50.

⁷⁶See RH Sept 23, 1873 and May 28, 1889 as examples.

Only those who, in their attitude before God, are filling the position of those who are repenting and confessing their sins in the great antitypical day of atonement, will be recognized and marked as worthy of God's protection. The names of those who are steadfastly looking and waiting and watching for the appearing of their Saviour--more earnestly and wishfully than they who wait for the morning--will be numbered with those who are sealed.⁷⁷

This end-time seal provides protection in the time of trouble.⁷⁸ It is placed upon those who prove loyal to the commandments of God⁷⁹ to the point of "perfection of character,"⁸⁰ "the likeness of Christ's character,"⁸¹ and genuine, conscientious Sabbath-keeping (including rejection of Sunday-worship).⁸² Such definitions, of course, are not appropriate to the more general NT understanding of sealing exhibited in passages such Eph 1:13; 4:30 and 2 Tim 2:19. Was she unaware of the more general meanings common to the NT? Would she have considered it inappropriate to apply them to Rev 9:4, for instance, a passage that she never quoted or discussed?

The reality is that, in spite of her overwhelming interest in the end-time concept of the sealing, in places she is quite capable of using the concept of sealing in ways more reminiscent of Paul than of Rev 7. In CT 459 the seal is a mark of God's approval of the message that Adventists were preaching:

Who among our teachers are awake, and as faithful stewards of the grace of God are giving the trumpet a certain sound? Who are voicing the message of the third angel, calling upon the world to make ready for the great day of God? The message we bear has the seal of the living God.⁸³

⁷⁷TM 445.

⁷⁸EW 67, 71.

⁷⁹GC 613, Letter 76, 1900 (= 7BC 970), 2T 468.

⁸⁰RH June 10, 1902 (= 6BC 1118), 5T 214, 216.

⁸¹EW 71, RH May 21, 1895 (= 7BC 970).

⁸²GC 605, Letter 76, 1900 (= 7BC 970), MS 27, 1899 (= 7BC 970), RH July 13, 1897, RH Apr 23, 1901, 5T 213, cf. 7BC 980 (= HS 213), GC 640, PP 307.

⁸³Compare with John 3:33; 6:27; Rom 15:28; 1 Cor 9:2.

In relation to people the seal of God is placed on those who possess "the sign of the cross of Calvary" and are wearing the wedding garment.⁸⁴ The seal is a "passport to the Holy City" which all must have in order to enter.⁸⁵ One is not saved without the seal.⁸⁶ It is placed on all who love God in the practice of everyday life.⁸⁷ The seal is placed on those who make their "calling and election sure" (cf. 2 Pet 1:10).⁸⁸

This brief survey indicates that with regard to the sealing, as in so many areas, Ellen White demonstrates a sensitive awareness of the full richness of the biblical language that she so readily adopts. Her grasp of the scriptural intent is far greater than that of most who quote her writings in relation to exegetical issues (including myself). Wisdom would indicate that it is unwise to assume exactly how she would have exegeted Rev 9:4 had she availed herself of the opportunity. Her lack of comment on Rev 9:4 may rather indicate that it does not concern her primary interest in the concept of sealing, the end-time sealing so clearly portrayed in Rev 7 and so oft quoted by her. To understand the seal of Rev 9:4 in terms of the general NT usage is not contrary to her understanding.

The Beast from the Abyss

In GC 265-288 Ellen White identifies the power which opposed the two witnesses as revolutionary France. She also believed that the ideological forces which shaped the revolution would have a powerful impact again at the end of time:

⁸⁴Letter 126, 1898 (= 7BC 968).

⁸⁵TM 444-445.

⁸⁶Letter 80, 1898 (= 7BC 969).

⁸⁷RH Oct 23, 1888.

⁸⁸EW 58.

... the world-wide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution--all are tending to involve the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France.⁸⁹

Since the power that opposed the two witnesses in Revelation is identified as the "beast which comes up out of the abyss" (Rev 11:7), it is intriguing to suspect that the fifth trumpet, which is concerned with the opening of the abyss and the tormenting powers that are thereby unleashed, may shed some light on the end-time manifestation of teachings that convulsed France some 200 years ago. While this pair of statements provided the intellectual stimulus for the historical application of the fifth trumpet that I currently favor, I must admit that the connections are far too tenuous to argue that Ellen White held any such view.

The Time of the Seventh Trumpet

Ellen White's perspective on the seventh trumpet is problematic at first glance. In EW 36 she alludes to Rev 11:18 as follows:

"I saw that the anger of the nations, the wrath of God, and the time to judge the dead were separate and distinct, one following the other, also that Michael had not stood up, and that the time of trouble, such as never was, had not yet commenced. The nations are now getting angry, but when our High Priest has finished His work in the sanctuary, He will stand up, put on the garments of vengeance, and then the seven last plagues will be poured out."

In this passage she "saw" that the anger of the nations is a developing process climaxing at the close of probation, which is followed by the seven last plagues (wrath of God) and the judgment of the dead. This statement appears to reject equating the "judgment of the dead" with the investigative judgment that begins in 1844. It is in harmony with her usual practice of placing the seventh trumpet in the future from her perspective.⁹⁰ While the nations "are

⁸⁹Ed 228

⁹⁰Cf. EW 85-86, 279-280.

getting angry" their angels is restrained by the four angels who hold the four winds in Rev 7:1-3.⁹¹

Some fifty years later, however, she seems to suggest that the "nations are angry, and the time of the dead has come, that they should be judged." (6T 14) Since the onset of the Investigative Judgment precedes both statements, they appear to be in tension with each other. The problem can be resolved, however, by a number of considerations. 1) The language of the first statement is more directly exegetical (she is unfolding the meaning of the text), while the latter is more an echo of the language of Rev 11:18. 2) The former statement clearly harmonizes with the close of probation language of Rev 10:7. 3) The context of 6T 14 expresses her expectation of an imminent conclusion of history. She uses such statements as, "We are standing upon the threshold of great and solemn events. . . . Only a moment of time, as it were, yet remains." Thus, an exegetical statement such as EW 36, describing events which are future in fulfillment, will naturally appear to be in tension with a statement of imminent expectation, where those events are described as "at hand."

⁹¹EW 85-86, RH Jan 28, 1909, RH Nov 17, 1910, 1SM 221-222, 6T 14.

Conclusion

The examination of these few avenues toward a clearer understanding of Ellen White's view of the trumpets well demonstrates the problem of ambiguity mentioned above. From our perspective it would have been extremely helpful had she clarified the issues regarding the timing and meaning of the trumpets which are of such interest today. But the Lord did not see fit to provide such information through her writings. If she had a view on those matters she has left no clear, unambiguous evidence of it. As has always been the case, revelation comes to a prophet within his/her time, place, circumstances, interests, and concerns.⁹² When the questions of a later period are addressed to an inspired text, the text is often silent or ambiguous regarding those matters. At such times the soundest approach is to avoid the use of ambiguous texts as "missiles" to confuse or confound the "enemy" (those holding a different view). With regard to the meaning of the seven trumpets of Revelation, most relevant statements are less than crystal-clear. The meaning of the trumpets must be established on the basis of careful exegesis of the biblical text. Somehow I get the feeling that Ellen White would have wanted it that way.

⁹²See early portion of the accompanying chapter "Breaking the Code."