

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

WILL THERE BE ANOTHER SPECIAL MESSENGER?

ARTHUR L. WHITE

Will There Be Another Special Messenger?

Ellen G. White

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

Further Links

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by Arthur L. White

Question: Is Mrs. White the only one through whom God will speak to the remnant church through the Spirit of Prophecy, or may we look for another to fill that office?

Answer: The question of possible future manifestations of the gift of prophecy in the remnant church was one of interest at the time of Mrs. White's death. In fact, on several occasions during the last few years of her life Mrs. White, while visiting with our workers or in writing, spoke of her advancing age and the likely termination of her lifework.

Under these circumstances it was natural that inquiry should be made of her as to the future—"Would there be another special messenger? Would God speak to His people again through someone of His choice as He had spoken through her?"

In response to such inquiries Mrs. White invariably stated that the Lord had not given her light in regard to the future manifestations of the prophetic gift. She often added words of assurance that the light which had been given would guide and guard the church after her death.

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Claimants to the Prophetic Office

During the last ten years of her life a number of individuals felt called to be Mrs. White's successor. Some of these wrote to her; others came to see her. Each one was confident that approving word would be given which would establish him as her successor. W. C. White, who was for many years associated with his mother in her literary work, spoke of this in 1915:

“A dozen or more persons have presented themselves from time to time, some claiming that the time had come for Mrs. White to lay down her work, and for them to take it up; others claiming that they had been selected of God to be her successor. Some have traveled long distances to see Mrs. White, saying that it had been revealed to them that they had been chosen to act as her successor, and that when she saw them she would recognize them, and testify that they were the ones chosen of God to act in her place when she should die.

“When she has met these people, and listened to their claims, their proposals, their arguments, and their entreaties, she has said to them that she had no commandment, no instruction regarding them. Some of these goodhearted but misguided people have listened to their friends and have given up the claims based upon their fancies. Others have spent years writing and publishing fanatical expositions of scripture filled with denunciations of those who did not accede to their claims and expositions.”—Reported in *The Battle Creek Enquirer*, July 25, 1915.

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In 1912 while Mrs. White was still living, in replying to a letter on this point of a successor, W. C. White wrote:

“You may be interested to know that during the last five years Mother has received six or eight letters from individuals who feel as this sister, that God has placed upon them the Spirit of Prophecy, and that He will instruct Sister White to testify in their behalf. To all of these Mother has been obliged to send the same answer, that God has given her no instruction regarding their call to any special work....

“Sometimes our brethren ask Mother who will bear the burden of the special work which God has given her after her death, and she tells them she does not know. God has never revealed this to her, and she has no anxiety regarding the matter because God is fully able to instruct His servants and to manage His work according to His infinite wisdom and purpose.”—W. C. White Letter, October 6, 1912.

“My Writings Will Constantly Speak”

That Mrs. White had no forebodings in regard to the future is made clear by a statement she penned in 1907:

“Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the Lord will still have life and will speak to the people.”—[Selected Messages 1:55](#).

In this same line of thought Elder W. C. White, writing in 1922, reported that when questions would arise as to the future, Mrs. White would point to her published works and manuscript books, and state:

“Here are my writings. When I am gone they will testify for me.”—W. C. White Letter, July 9, 1922.

This testimony is also in full harmony with that which has come to us from others of our workers who heard Mrs. White make statements concerning the future. One of these was M. M. Campbell. Of this he wrote on February 3, 1943:

“Not many months before Sister White had her accident, Elder Montgomery and I, and one other brother, visited her at Elmshaven. Elder W. C. White and Sister McEnterfer were present at the interview. In the course of our conversation I asked Sister White if she had any light as to whether she would live until Jesus returned. She replied that she had no light as to whether she would or would not live till then.

[3]

“I expressed the earnest hope that the Lord would spare her to see the great controversy on the earth clear through to the second coming, for I said, ‘If you are laid away we shall be pestered with all sorts of fanatics arising, claiming to be your successor.’

“Her quiet reply was, ‘The Lord is perfectly able to take care of His cause.’

“Then I asked if, in the event of the Lord’s calling her to her rest, another person was likely to be raised up to take her place. Several of her books were lying on the writing table attached to her chair. She spread her hands over them and said that in those books was outlined the information needed by our people for the rest of the journey. That is as far as she felt free to go in answering my question.”

God Will Care for His Work

The question of a successor to Mrs. White naturally became even more acute upon her death in 1915. It was a matter of interest not only to the church, but also to the world. What would her death mean to her writings? Would someone else favored with the prophetic gift follow as a successor? On the day of her funeral at Battle Creek, Michigan, her son, W. C. White, was interviewed by a reporter from the *Battle Creek Enquirer*. We quote from the issue of July 25, 1915, under the bold-type heading: “*Mrs. White Had No Idea of Successor.*”

“William C. White, of St. Helena, son of the late Mrs. Ellen G. White, who for the last 34 years has been the manager of her business affairs, and who for a quarter of a century has been a member of the general or world conference committee of the Seventh-day Adventists, was interviewed yesterday as to the probable effect of Mrs. White’s death upon the denomination with which she was so closely connected. To the question, ‘Has Mrs. White chosen anyone to be her successor?’ he replied:

“‘No, she has never considered that that was a matter over which she had any control, and has never expressed herself with reference to any individual as a probable candidate for this work.’

“‘Did she know who her successor would be?’ he was asked.

“‘That is a question that has been asked her many times,’ continued Mr. White, ‘and she always has stated that it is a matter that has never been revealed to her, and that she had no knowledge and no information upon the subject to impart.’

“Does she know another person will be chosen to take up the work she lays down?”

“That is another question that has been asked her many times, and she always has said she did not know. At the same time she expressed full confidence that God would care for His work, and that there was no need for

[4] her or others to be anxious about this matter.’

“‘Will the leading men of the denomination select a person to take up the work she has carried?’ was the next question asked him.

“‘No. It is their belief that God will choose His messengers, and that it would be presumption for men to undertake to choose the persons through whom the Spirit of Prophecy should be manifested.’”—*The Battle Creek Enquirer*, July 25, 1915.

The understanding of W. C. White on this matter was in harmony with that of other of the contemporary workers. J. N. Loughborough was asked if Mrs. White knew who her successor would be. In reply he referred to an answer given by S. N. Haskell, who had reported a late conversation with Mrs. White in which she told him that it was her conviction that the denomination already had received instruction sufficient to guide them all the way through if they would follow it.

F. M. Wilcox, in an editorial in the *Review and Herald* shortly after Mrs. White’s death, dealt with this question of general interest, which was in the minds of so many, stating:

“This is a question which only the Lord Himself can answer, and so far as we know He has never given to anyone any intimation of His will in the matter.”—[The Review and Herald, August 19, 1915](#).

It is clear, then, that neither Mrs. White nor her contemporaries had any light as to just what the future might hold. The question was one which was left open. God might or might not choose to speak

again as He had through Mrs. White. We are no nearer to an answer to this question today than we were on July 16, 1915.

It is true that since then, as before, several have arisen claiming the prophetic office, but their work has not stood the test. We cannot give credence to just anyone who may present himself, claiming to have had visions or revelations from God. On this point we have been specifically warned and admonished:

“There will be those who will claim to have visions. When God gives you clear evidence that the vision is from Him, you may accept it, but do not accept it on any other evidence, for people are going to be led more and more astray in foreign countries and in America. The Lord wants His people to act like men and women of sense.”—[The Review and Herald, May 25, 1905 \(Evangelism, 610\)](#).

The Bible Tests of a Prophet

Since Mrs. White's death in 1915, Seventh-day Adventists have stood by their position that any claimant to the prophetic office must meet every Bible test of a prophet, as did Mrs. White. These basic tests might be enumerated as:

- [5]
1. "Ye shall know them by their fruits."—[Matthew 7:16](#).
 2. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—[Isaiah 8:20](#).
 3. The fulfillment of the predictions ([Jeremiah 28:9](#); [Deuteronomy 18:22](#)).
 4. The claimant's attitude toward Christ, His incarnation, and His work for us—([1 John 4:2, 3](#); [1 Timothy 3:16](#)).

There are also certain other evidences which are of importance. Among these are:

1. The way in which the revelations are received by the prophet.
2. The timeliness of the message.
3. The importance of the message.
4. The claimant's own personal life.

In bringing these tests and evidences to bear upon the claimants to the prophetic office, there is no danger of being misled. One thing is certain: Should the Lord choose to speak again through the prophetic gift, the messages will be in full harmony with that which has gone before in the Bible and in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

Conclusion

But, some ask, Why is it there has been only one prophet in the remnant church, while in Bible times there were many? In ancient times one after another was called to witness for God. Sometimes there were contemporaneous prophets. In this connection it is well to consider that in Bible times the prophet delivered his message orally. In some cases copies were laboriously made by hand, but even the scrolls were not generally available, and at times were even lost to the leaders of the people.

It therefore became necessary for the Lord to keep His message before His people through repeated oral testimony. The oral messages were soon forgotten, so another, and still others, would be called to testify for God.

In our day the Spirit of Prophecy messages have been printed not only in the English language, but in many other leading languages of the world. They have been distributed very widely. These books witness in the homes of all Seventh-day Adventists who care to secure them. They are read from the pulpits of our churches and reprinted in our journals. Thus Ellen White could truthfully declare:

“Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last.”—[Selected Messages 1:55](#).

If we heed these counsels, if we study these messages that we may know God’s will for us and His instruction for the church, it may be that God can accomplish His work through the witness of one chosen vessel fully as well as were He to raise up another.

In any case, we can rest in the same assurance which Ellen White had that God will take care of His work, and that He will be with His people “even to the end” ([Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 438](#)).

Among her last recorded words was an expression of confidence [6] in the leadership of the church. She said:

“I do not think I shall have more Testimonies for our people. Our men of solid minds know what is good for the uplifting and upbuilding of the work. But with the love of God in their hearts, they need to go deeper and deeper into the study of the things of God.”—[The Review and Herald, April 15, 1915](#) ([Fundamentals of Christian Education, 548](#)).

If in the closing days of the great controversy God chooses to speak to His people through another living messenger, He alone will select the one for that purpose, and it will soon be known in the church, “from Dan even to Beersheba” that such a one is “a prophet of the Lord” ([1 Samuel 3:20](#)).

Ellen G. White Estate

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